



**MARINE FISHERIES ADVISORY COMMISSION
BUSINESS MEETING AMENDED AGENDA**

9:00AM

Thursday, December 18, 2025

Via Zoom

Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88347190604>

Call In: 1-646-931-3860

Webinar ID: 883 4719 0604

1. Call to Order and Routine Business (9:00 AM)
 - a. Introductions and Announcements
 - b. Review of December 2025 Business Meeting Agenda
 - c. Review and Approval of November 2025 Draft Business Meeting Minutes
2. Agency Updates (9:15 AM)
 - a. Office of Law Enforcement: Personnel, Recent Operations & Marine Fishery Incidents
 - b. Department of Fish and Game: Recent Meetings and Events and Department-wide Activities and Projects
 - c. Division of Marine Fisheries: Personnel, Recent Meetings and Events, and Agency Activities and Projects
3. Action Items (9:45 AM)
 - a. In-Season Adjustment to 2026 Period I Summer Flounder Trip Limit
 - b. Recommendation to Adopt Regulatory Framework for Derelict Gear Removal
4. Final Decision on Commercial Striped Bass Permitting Emergency Regulations (10:30AM)
5. Future Public Hearings Proposals (10:45AM)
 - a. Horseshoe Crab Quota Management
 - b. Sea Scallop Dredge Width Definition and Update on Potential North Shore Sea Scallop Pilot Program
 - c. Overview of Wintertime Public Hearing Agenda and Rule Making Schedule
6. Discussion Items (11:30AM)
 - a. Interstate Fisheries Management Update
 - i. American Lobster Stock Assessment
 - ii. Joint ASMFC-MAFMC on Black Sea Bass, Scup, and Summer Flounder
 - b. Federal Fisheries Management Update
 - i. NEFMC December 2025 Meeting Update
 - ii. MAFMC Decisions on Atlantic Mackerel
7. Other Business and Public Comment (12:30PM)
8. Adjourn (12:45PM)

All times provided are approximate and the meeting agenda is subject to change. The MFAC may amend the agenda at the start of the business meeting.

Next Meeting Date

TBD

Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission Draft Business Meeting Minutes

November 18, 2025

1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA

Attendees

Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission: Shelley Edmundson, Clerk; Chris McGuire; Eric Nelson, Ray Jarvis; and Sooky Sawyer. Absent: Raymond Kane, Chair; Bill Amaru; Bill Doyle, Vice-Chair.

Division of Marine Fisheries Staff: Dan McKiernan, Director; Story Reed, Deputy Director; Jared Silva; Nichola Meserve; Anna Webb; Kelly Whitmore; Derek Perry; Micah Dean; Ben Gahagan; Bradlie Morgan.

Department of Fish and Game Staff: Commissioner Tom O'Shea; Sefatia Romeo-Theken, Deputy Commissioner

Massachusetts Environmental Police: Lieutenant Matt Bass

Members of the Public: David Meserve; Brett Hoffmeiser; Jamie Bassett; and Theodore Glenn.

Call to Order and Routine Business

Chairman Ray Kane and Vice-Chair Bill Doyle were absent during the meeting. Shelley Edmundson assumed the duties of the Chair. Edmundson called the meeting to order.

Review of November 2025 Business Meeting Agenda

Edmundson asked for amendments to the November 2025 MFAC business meeting agenda. Director Dan McKiernan requested that the discussion on the lobster stock assessment and the review of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Lobster Board meeting be postponed to the December meeting. There were no objections. **Edmundson called for a motion to approve the amended November 2025 business meeting agenda. Sooky Sawyer made the motion. Ray Jarvis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.**

Review and Approval of October 2025 Draft Business Meeting Minutes

Edmundson asked for amendments to the draft October 2025 Business Meeting Minutes. There were no amendments. **Edmundson called for a motion. Chris McGuire made a motion to approve the October 2025 business meeting minutes as drafted. Ray Jarvis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.**

Agency Updates

Office of Law Enforcement: Personnel, Recent Operations & Marine Fishery Incidents

Lieutenant Matt Bass provided comments for the Massachusetts Environmental Police (MEP). On personnel, MEP anticipated that despite state-wide funding and hiring limitations, MEP should be able to backfill seven existing vacancies. Regarding marine fisheries enforcement, MEP was monitoring reported shore-based shark fishing activity along the Outer Cape and was addressing gear conflicts near Stellwagen Bank. Lastly, a deceased sperm whale recently washed up on a Nantucket beach — the cause of death was under investigation but was not thought to be entanglement related.

Sooky Sawyer asked for additional information on a recent lobster gear compliance issue in Ipswich Bay where a dual state-federal permit holder was found fishing untagged gear. Bass noted that this was a cooperative effort among DMF, MEP, and NOAA Office of Law Enforcement. Untagged traps were found and DMF subsequently required the permit holder haul-out their gear for MEP inspection. The case has been handed over to NOAA Fisheries Office of Law Enforcement.

Department of Fish and Game: Recent Meetings and Events and Department-wide Activities and Projects

Commissioner Tom O'Shea provided an update on recent events relevant to the Department of Fish and Game (DFG). Seafood Day was held at the State House and Governor Healey was presented with an award from the Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership. This past weekend, the Commissioner presented a TEDx Talk as part of a group speaking on extinction prevention and biodiversity. He also described other talks relevant to marine fisheries — including a presentation from the Executive Director of the Billion Oyster Project in New York Harbor and a presentation on toxicity in the food environment. Lastly, an event was held to celebrate the dedication of a boat ramp in Fall River to former State Representative Manuel Raposa.

The Commissioner then shared that DFG's Assistant Commissioner Jen Ryan, Mass Wildlife's Dave Puter, and DFG's Julia Hopkins received the Manuel Carballo

Governor's Award for Excellence in Public Service for their work executing on the Governor's executive order on biodiversity through the development of DFG's Biodiversity Report and Strategic Plan. He applauded their hard work and appreciated the administration's recognition of this initiative.

Tom anticipated state-wide budget issues as a result of revenues falling short of projections and reduced federal funding. This has led to a hiring freeze across the executive branch, including DFG and its agencies. However, the development of DMF's Marine Restoration Center at its Cat Cove Marine Laboratory in Salem continues through funding from the capital budget. Commissioner O'Shea advocated for a presentation on this effort at a future MFAC meeting.

Sooky Sawyer noted that while many expected lower than normal lobster prices this year due to limitations on international trade, the industry was experiencing prices that were even lower than expected. He was interested in what DMF and DFG may be able to do to address this. Director McKiernan responded that DMF would investigate these concerns.

Division of Marine Fisheries: Personnel, Recent Meetings and Events, and Agency Activities and Projects

Director Dan McKiernan began by updating the MFAC on the status of various lawsuits involving state and interstate fishery management. The courts ruled against numerous charter boat organizations in a suit brought against the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC and Atlantic coastal states (including Massachusetts) regarding the implementation of Addendum II to the Interstate Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan. Additionally, there are two ongoing lawsuits against DMF and the ASMFC regarding addenda to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Lobster and v-notch possession standards for the Outer Cape Cod (OCC) Lobster Conservation Management Area (LCMA). One case is in federal court and the other in state court. Lastly, there are three ongoing court cases involving vessel tracking in the lobster fishery — a case in federal court against the ASMFC and Maine, a case in Massachusetts' state court against DMF, and a case in Rhode Island (RI) state court against RI Department of Environmental Management.

The Shellfish Advisory Panel (SAP) recently met. Dan noted that Bill Doyle sits on the SAP as a member of the MFAC. The SAP does not have regulatory authority but is instrumental in advising DMF on shellfish issues, including municipal and public health concerns.

On recent events, Director McKiernan noted that Massachusetts' first Aquaculture Month was announced at an event in Boston.

Lastly, DMF is scheduled to hold two virtual public hearings in December. On December 2, DMF will take public testimony on emergency regulations implementing permitting changes for the commercial striped bass fishery in 2026, including limiting entry. These emergency regulations are likely the first in a series of regulatory changes affecting the striped bass fishery to enable DMF to implement a commercial harvester tagging program by 2029, as required by Addendum III to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Striped Bass. Then on December 15, DMF will hold a virtual public hearing on a draft framework to permit and authorize the removal and disposal of fishing gear debris. DMF will likely present final regulatory action on both items to the MFAC at their December business meeting.

Discussion Items

Striped Bass

Review of ASMFC Board Meeting and Final Addendum III, and Outlook on State Rule Making and Convening MFAC Focus Groups

Nichola Meserve provided an overview of the October ASMFC Striped Bass Management Board (“Board”) meeting. The Board reviewed and approved Addendum III to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Striped Bass. The Board opted not to reduce fishery removals beginning in 2026 as part of the addendum. However, two coastwide measures were approved. First, a standard coastwide total length measurement definition was established for states to implement by January 1, 2027. Massachusetts is already compliant with the new total length definition and no regulatory change is required. Second, states are to adopt commercial harvester tagging by January 1, 2029. DMF will have to amend its tagging program to move it from dealer tagging to harvester tagging. This is a significant departure from current practices and will require substantial changes to how the fishery is permitted and the program is administered. The previously discussed emergency regulations are the first step in this exercise. However, additional action will be needed. Meserve anticipated the MFAC’s Striped Bass and Permitting Focus Groups will convene this winter to assist DMF in developing potential activity criteria to further reduce the number of permits issued for 2027. This will allow DMF to potentially implement the harvester tagging program by 2028, one year ahead of the ASMFC’s implementation deadline.

Meserve discussed why the Board did not approve proposed actions to reduce removals in the commercial or recreational fishery to support stock rebuilding. There were concerns that these actions would produce negative economic impacts and a hesitancy to pursue the actions due to uncertainty. Specifically, preliminary 2025 MRIP data seemingly indicate that harvest has continued to decline in contrast with the projections that suggested cuts were necessary; the 2027 benchmark stock assessment is on the horizon and management could benefit from its findings; and there was an

interest in doing additional outreach and investigations to ensure better management and science going into the benchmark assessment. To this last point, the Board established a working group to consider how to update the FMP's goals, enhance striped bass management moving forward, address reduced reproductive success in the Chesapeake Bay, and work with stock assessment scientists to address emerging data (e.g., MRIP recalibration, discard mortality assumptions).

Chris McGuire asked about the timing and content of the striped bass benchmark assessment. Meserve confirmed that the stock assessment is on track to be reviewed by the ASMFC Striped Bass Board in spring 2027 and released in 2028. Given this timeline, Meserve anticipated that it will not be used in management until 2029. Further, as the assessment will only include data through 2025, additional updates may be necessary to encourage management action. McGuire and Meserve discussed the inclusion of new data (e.g., discard mortality, MRIP recalibration, year-class strength and spawning stock productivity). Meserve noted that the stock assessment committee and Board's working group will discuss the stock assessment model and how to best incorporate these emerging elements.

Commissioner O'Shea asked how conflicting findings—such as lower harvest estimates and reduced release mortality rates—may impact modeling. Director McKiernan and Meserve remarked that there was substantial uncertainty on how these new elements will impact the assessment and it was difficult to project outcomes until the model is run.

Eric Nelson commented on the various challenges to rebuilding the striped bass population particularly given year-class strength and spawning stock productivity is largely influenced by environment. He expressed some disappointment in the decision not reduce removals and voiced concern for the stock. Meserve echoed Nelson's concerns and acknowledged that the prevailing challenge facing striped bass is continued low recruitment from Chesapeake Bay. Meserve was hopeful that this additional time would allow the ASMFC to respond to the various concerns and sources of uncertainty that came up in the public process for Addendum III.

Nelson and Meserve discussed the influence of different sectors in management decisions and the wider socioeconomic impacts on communities.

Edmundson asked to clarify the target number of striped bass commercial permits to implement harvester tagging. Jared Silva responded that DMF anticipated the target number of permits to be around 500 based on experience with harvester tagging in the tautog fishery. Director McKiernan emphasized the importance of working with the MFAC and stakeholders to determine renewal criteria to achieve this substantial reduction.

Presentation on Recreational Release Mortality

Micah Dean presented on DMF research on striped bass release mortality. In 1996, a study led by DMF researchers showed that the release mortality of striped bass was ~9%. However, DMF wanted to revisit this study given changes in the fishery, improvements in scientific techniques, and the importance of better understanding the factors influencing release mortality as it was recently modeled to be the single largest source of fishing mortality. In response, DMF and its partners developed a three-phased study design: (1) use acoustic telemetry to monitor and estimate mortality of caught and released fish according to release condition of the fish, (2) pair release conditions with different environmental or fishing variables through citizen science, and (3) assemble fishery scale datasets to represent different predictors.

Phase one used acoustic telemetry to understand how mortality rate vary based on release condition and hook types. Telemetry tags were attached to released fish throughout Salem Sound to monitor swimming speed. This phase found a correlation between the condition of fish released and their mortality, but there was no significant difference in mortality across hook types.

Ben Gahagan noted that circle hooks may have conservation benefits in other fishing settings beyond what was examined in this phase of the study. Nelson echoed Gahagan's comment, noting that he has experienced greater survivorship using circle hooks. Nelson, Dean, and Gahagan discussed the study's protocol for gut-hooked fish and the use of anglers with a range of experience. Dean explained that the size of the gape in circle hooks has increased in the years since the preliminary research suggested lower mortality rates using circle hooks and these larger gape hooks may not provide the same conservation benefits. Dean opined that additional research into terminal tackle was warranted.

Lieutenant Matt Bass asked about the range of acoustic receivers used in the study. Dean explained that their range was about 1 km, and fish were either released in the range of the receivers or would likely be brought close to one in the surf.

Phase two incorporated citizen's science to understand which variables influence release condition and mortality (e.g., tackle, fight time, handling time). Across New England, 362 anglers participated and 8,349 fish were caught. Results showed that handling time was the most influential predictor of release mortality.

Phase three then used a coastwide angler survey on angling behavior and experience. DMF received nearly 5,000 responses.

The data from these three phases was then modeled and it was determined that the release mortality in the recreational striped bass fishery is about 4.2% — about half of what it was previously estimated. Dean noted that model found the rate varies across

region and is higher among larger fish (up to 6%) likely due to handling time. These findings have a variety of potential consequences. First, release mortality is likely contributing less to overall mortality than previously thought and removals likely remain the leading source of fishing mortality. Second, the higher release mortality rate among larger fish is of importance as recreational catch is likely concentrated on the 2015 and 2018 year classes due to year-class strength and poor recruitment from 2019 to present. These factors will likely impact the upcoming assessment, but the exact consequences are unclear.

Nelson and Jarvis applauded DMF and their partners for this work. Director McKiernan and Dean discussed how the research was funded.

McKiernan then asked about data sources for size distribution across years. Dean responded that this information comes from ASMFC compliance reports. Different states approach this in different ways, creating inherent assumptions.

McGuire asked whether charter boats record length of releases, and Nelson responded that they do not. Gahagan, Nelson, McGuire, Jarvis and Dean discussed potential efforts to increase reporting requirements to capture this information for charter vessels in Massachusetts and collect more comprehensive data. Director McKiernan and Jarvis discussed differences in Rhode Island's permitting and reporting process from Massachusetts.

Jarvis suggested additional angler education to further share best practices to increase survivorship. Gahagan and Dean discussed current outreach plans, such as collaborations with On the Water Magazine, and future education. McGuire suggested quantifying impacts of best practices, such as reduced handling time, on the overall population as an angler education strategy. Dean, McGuire, Nelson, and Gahagan discussed how this could be implemented in the future.

Sefatia Theken-Romeo applauded the presentation and asked that DMF make the presentation widely available. Silva noted it is on the agency's YouTube channel.

ASMFC Menhaden Board Decision

Meserve presented the results of the 2025 single-species and ecosystem reference point stock assessment for menhaden and the ASMFC Menhaden Board's management decisions.

The assessment revealed a significant change in menhaden natural mortality estimates, impacting the time series of biomass and decreasing overall biomass estimates. Meserve shared the ASMFC's FAQ page that had been released following the Board Meeting.

In considering how to set the total allowable catch (TAC) for 2026 – 2028, the Board ultimately opted to set the TAC for 2026 only and revisit the catch limits for 2027 and 2028 in the fall of 2026. The TAC for 2026 will be 186,840 metric tons (mt), a 20% reduction from the 2023 – 2025 level of 233,550 mt. This 20% reduction provides a TAC that has 0% risk of exceeding the ecosystem reference point fishing mortality threshold but falls short of achieving the ecosystem reference point fishing mortality target. Achieving the ecosystem reference point fishing mortality target would have required a near 50% cut in the TAC. As a result, Massachusetts' 2026 quota will be reduced from 10.8 million lbs. to 8.73 million lbs. However, DMF retains the ability to access additional quota through state-by-state transfers and the Episodic Event Set Aside.

The Board will meet again in October 2026 to determine coastwide quota for 2027 – 2028 and discuss potential reallocation. During the interim, Meserve expected there will be robust stakeholder engagement along the coast.

Sawyer asked if there are size restrictions in the menhaden fishery. Micah Dean described the practical and management challenges related to size restrictions in a high volume pelagic fishery. Further, menhaden typically mature around two years old and the fishery (on a coastwide basis) generally only harvests adults and fishery in New England (at the northern extent of the species range) tends to target older and larger fish due to life history and migratory patterns. Sawyer and Dean discussed the presence of smaller fish near the Commonwealth this year. Dean noted that the exact reasoning for this is unknown, but that the stock assessment does not suggest issues with age structure within the population.

McGuire asked about size distribution of menhaden in Chesapeake Bay. Dean responded that size distribution follows latitudinal patterns, and the Bay fishery likely targets adult populations of fish similar to fisheries occurring at similar latitudes (e.g., ocean fishery elsewhere in the mid-Atlantic).

McGuire and Meserve discussed the process for and impact of potential actions to reallocate quota. Meserve explained that states are allocated quota by the ASMFC, not fishery sectors (e.g., bait, reduction). The states then may manage their quotas among various sectors. As for process, changes to quota allocations requires an addendum process that would take a least six months. McKiernan and Meserve expected reallocation discussions would be challenging and complicated.

Recent Inshore Dragger Meeting

Director McKiernan shared that DMF recently invited the inshore dragger fleet to a meeting in New Bedford to discuss recent fishery performance, the pending quota increases for 2026 and 2027 and resulting management proposals.

Jared Silva presented background information on fishery performance and management. Silva then looked ahead to 2026 and 2027 and the pending 75% increase to the state's quota resulting in an expected ~1 million lb. quota for these years. To encourage quota utilization, DMF was proposing to:

1. Establish quota-based triggers for Period 1 and Period 2 allocations whereby if the quota exceeds 750,000 lbs., the split will be 30/70, but if quota is 750,000 lbs. or less, the split will be 15/85.
2. Establish quota-based trip limits for the Period 1 fishery whereby if the quota exceeds 750,000 lbs. trip limits will be 5,000 lbs., otherwise it will be 2,000 lbs.
3. For the Period 2 summertime fishery, DMF was proposing to roll back last year's amendments and reinstate Saturdays as an open fishing day and increase trip limits to 600 for net fishers and 400 for hook fishers.

Industry expressed overall support for these initiatives. There was some interest in increasing the lower limit for Period 1 trip limit to increase profitability, reinstating the multi-state program, and reducing the fall trip limits. While Massachusetts previously participated in the multi-state program—which allowed permit holders from New York, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts to land fish during multi-day trips in multiple states—the program was halted in the Commonwealth last year because of concerns that Massachusetts vessels were not adequately benefiting from it due to permit restrictions in other states. Dan noted his interest in speaking with his counterparts in the other northeast states about his concerns that their permitting programs may be overtly discriminatory based on state of residency.

Dan added that there was some interest in reducing the standard of fishing activity to transfer limited entry permits such as the Coastal Access Permit for mobile gear (e.g., fishing two of the past five years rather than four of the last five). He noted he is interested in this approach, as it would benefit permit holders of this fishery who participate in multiple fisheries and allow for greater opportunities for participants. Silva added that a similar approach was taken in rod and reel fisheries to increase ease of permit transferability.

Sawyer asked about the number of fluke permit holders that are inactive. DMF did not have this information on hand.

Update on Horseshoe Crab Fishery Management

Silva then provided an update on horseshoe crab fishery management. He outlined the House Bill 898 – An Act to End the Taking of Horseshoe Crabs for Bait – and DMF's analysis that found: (1) the claims in support of the action are not supported by the best available science; (2) the fishery is strictly managed at the state and interstate level; (3)

populations are generally increasing in Massachusetts; and (4) banning bait harvest will have direct and cumulative indirect impacts on the state's working waterfront.

Silva then reminded the MFAC that representatives from the biomedical fishery have requested DMF consider reallocating quota from the bait fishery to the biomedical fishery. DMF was in the process of analyzing this request and would likely provide the MFAC with a memorandum for the December 2025 business meeting.

Jarvis expressed support for the current management practices in reflection of the good standing of the fishery's stock. Director McKiernan and Jarvis discussed the importance of interstate and state management efforts.

Sawyer asked about migration patterns of horseshoe crabs. Dan explained that there is some known migration, but he hopes to better understand this through tagging studies.

Nelson thanked DMF for providing background information to the MFAC on this issue.

Silva and Edmundson discussed research into alternative bait options for the whelk fishery. Edmundson explained that alternative baits like clams and green crabs showed some success but were less preferred than horseshoe crabs. Propeller clams showed promise as a potential alternative; however, these are native to Canada and present potential cost and supply issues.

Edmundson asked about the quantity of horseshoe crabs being exported to other states. DMF does not collect this data.

A discussion followed between Silva, Edmundson, and Sawyer on the mismatch in demand between the biomedical and bait quotas.

McGuire and Director McKiernan discussed bills similar to this.

Other Business and Public Comment

Sawyer asked about addressing gear conflict between buoyed and on-demand gear when whale closures reopen. Dan said that DMF will look into the issue and perhaps discuss it with the industry at the Massachusetts Lobstermen Association's Annual Weekend in January.

With no further business from MFAC members, Edmundson invited public comment.

David Meservey cautioned against reallocating bait quota to the biomedical quota in order to protect the future of the conch fishery. Instead, he preferred DMF taking an adaptive approach to reallocating available quota between the bait and biomedical fisheries on an annual as needed basis towards the end of the season.

Director McKiernan commented on the significant decline of conch pots landed in Massachusetts since the fishery's peak in 2012. He did not anticipate the fishery would

soon return to peak levels due to declining abundance and macroeconomic issues impacting markets.

Brett Hoffmeister, from the Associates of Cape Cod, Inc., voiced support for an adaptive management approach and increased dealer control in determining whether horseshoe crabs are used for bait or biomedical quota for each vessel trip. He was concerned about increased fishing pressure over a shorter season and suggested reopening the fishery in April – June. Director McKiernan voiced concern that allowing dealers this control could risk using the biomedical quota early in the season, leaving bait fishermen with less stability later in the season.

Jamie Bassett echoed the points raised by Mesurvey and Hoffmeister and the desire to see DMF consider an adaptive management approach to quota allocation.

Edmundson sought a motion to adjourn the meeting. Sooky Sawyer made the motion to adjourn the November business meeting. Ray Jarvis seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.

Meeting Documents

- November 18, 2025 MFAC Business Meeting Agenda
- October 21, 2025 MFAC Draft Business Meeting Minutes
- ASMFC 2025 Annual Meeting Summary
- Memorandum on Next Steps for Striped Bass Management after the Approval of Addendum III
- DMF Presentation on Revisiting Recreational Release Mortality of Striped Bass
- Memorandum on 2026 Commercial Menhaden Fishery
- Memorandum on Analysis of House Bill 898 — An Act to End the Taking of Horseshoe Crabs for Bait
- DMF Presentation on 2025 Nantucket Sound Inshore Dragger Fleet Meeting

Next Meeting Date

December 18, 2025

Via Zoom



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

(617) 626-1520 | www.mass.gov/marinefisheries



MAURA T. HEALEY
Governor

KIMBERLEY DRISCOLL
Lt. Governor


REBECCA L. TEPPER
Secretary

THOMAS O'SHEA
Commissioner

DANIEL J. MCKIERNAN
Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC)

FROM: Daniel J. McKiernan, Director 

DATE: December 12, 2025

SUBJECT: Recommendation to Enact In-Season Adjustment to Increase Period I Summer Flounder Trip Limits for 2026

Recommendation

I recommend the MFAC vote in favor an in-season adjustment that would increase the Period I (January 1 – April 22) summer flounder trip limit from 2,000 pounds to 4,000 pounds for 2026.

Rationale

The Commonwealth's commercial summer flounder quota will increase by 75% for 2026, moving from roughly 600,000 pounds in 2025 to just over 1 million pounds. This responds to the most stock assessment's indication of increasing biomass, as well as a larger share of the coastwide quota for Massachusetts¹. DMF is moving forward proposed regulatory adjustments² to enhance quota utilization for 2026 and 2027. However, these adjustments will not likely proceed to public hearing until late-winter 2026 and DMF does not expect final rules to be promulgated in time to affect the 2026 Period I fishery. Therefore, in order to enhance quota

¹ State-by-state quota shares are established in the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's federal fishery management plan for summer flounder. The historic quota shares are based on state landings during the period of 1980 – 1989, and under this allocative program, Massachusetts receives 6.82% of the annual coastwide quota. This was modified under Amendment 21, which sought to increase equity across state quota allocations when stock conditions are strong, by allocating all additional quota about a 9.55 million pounds in equal shares of 12.375%. With the 2026 and 2027 coastwide quota being set at 12.78 million pounds (a 45% increase from 2025 coastwide), Massachusetts will receive a higher annual quota share resulting in state quota increase of 75%.

² This includes proposals for Period I and Period II. For Period I, DMF is proposing a quota-based threshold of 750,000 pounds whereby if the quota is above that level the Period I fishery receives 30% of the quota and has a trip limit of up to 5,000 pounds, however, if the quota is at or below that threshold the Period I fishery receives 15% of the quota and has a trip limit of 2,000 pounds. For the Period II summertime fishery, DMF is proposing to reinstate Saturdays as an open fishing day increase summertime trip limits from 500 pounds for net fishers and 325 pounds for hook fishers to 600 pounds and 400 pounds respectively. Lastly, for the Period II fall fishery, DMF is proposing to adjust the trip limit to 3,500 pounds should more than 10% of the quota remain available on October 1. See DMF's [September 12, 2025 memorandum](#) to the MFAC for more details.

utilization this coming year, DMF is seeking to use its in-season adjustment authority to increase the 2026 Period I trip limit. Using this process to adjust the coming year's Period I trip limit in response to pending quota changes, which DMF cannot timely respond to through the normal rule-making process, is consistent with what has occurred in recent years.

At a 1-million pound quota, the Period I fishery will be allocated about 150,000 pounds (15%). In 2025, under a 2,000-lb trip limit, the Period I fishery landed about 45,000 pounds. Therefore, if this trip limit is maintained, it is likely that the Period I quota allocation will be underutilized. Further, if past performance is indicative of future performance, the Period II fishery (April 23 – December 31) is not likely to land more than 500,000 pounds, resulting in a likely underage of the annual quota. Such an underage would be to the detriment of Massachusetts seafood industry and should be avoided. By increasing the trip limit to 4,000 pounds³, larger vessels fishing offshore in federal waters during the winter period will have greater access to the available quota. This should increase the utilization of the Period I fishery's quota allocation, leave sufficient quota for the Period II fishery (particularly the inshore summertime small boat component), and benefit our seafood industry at large.

Nearly all of the written public comments received to date⁴ have come from recreational fishing interests who oppose this action. Their rationale is two-fold. First, poor local fishing conditions suggest a stock condition that does not support a substantial quota. Second, commercial effort both inshore and offshore is contributing to poor local stock conditions. While I understand the frustration that inshore summertime recreational fishing conditions for this species have become diminished over the past twenty years, I do not think this is a simple cause and effect attributable to commercial fishing activity and support moving this action forward. However, in acknowledgement that this public comment period remains ongoing, I reserve the authority to adjust this recommendation should DMF receive compelling testimony in support of such an action.

The quota adjustments are supported by the most recent stock assessment, and therefore, the best available science. Other states will take advantage of these quota increases, diminishing the potential conservation benefit of Massachusetts taking any unilateral action to limit access to our state's quota while putting our seafood and fishing industry at a distinct competitive advantage. Further, local fishing conditions may not be indicative of broader-scale stock trends. Poor recreational fishing conditions in Buzzards Bay and the Sounds may instead be driven by environmental factors (e.g., water temperature and quality) along with the documented north and eastward shift of the range of this species affecting the times and areas where these fish occur.

³ This 4,000-pound limit will also match the anticipated bi-weekly trip limit for neighboring Rhode Island.

⁴ Note DMF regulations at 322 CMR 6.41 provide the agency with the authority to make in-season regulatory adjustments. This authority affords DMF and the MFAC the ability to take such an action concurrent with a public comment period, rather than at its conclusion. This is done to provide the flexibility to make these adjustments in a timely fashion based on our collective experience managing fisheries. Therefore, while the public comment period remains open through December 19, 2025, I am making this recommendation now.

Enclosed:

Public comment as of December 12, 2025

From: [Mark Mattson](#)
To: [Marine Fish \(FWE\)](#)
Subject: Comment on commercial summer flounder limits
Date: Sunday, December 7, 2025 8:53:21 AM

CAUTION: This email originated from a sender outside of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts mail system. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Director McKiernan,

I have written several comments in the past asking Fisheries to reduce, not increase commercial limits on various species. Each time you choose to stay with limits even if stock is projected to be overfished or you increase the limits. Summer flounder used to be abundant around Marthas Vineyard. Twenty years ago I would take my children out and catch many fish within 1/2 mile of the dock. Now, and for the past 5 years I have caught only 1 or 2 legal fish all season long! Even the black sea bass are hard to find legal size. Please stop the slaughter.

Sincerely,

Mark D. Mattson PhD

From: [Paul Gasek](#)
To: [Marine Fish \(FWE\)](#)
Subject: Fluke quota increase for 2026 is too big.
Date: Saturday, December 6, 2025 4:22:03 PM

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Just a year ago, we had a 50% reduction in the fluke quota, the assumption being the stock was smaller than it was thought to be.

Next year we have a 75% increase, because the stock is larger than we thought it was (?)

Which is it? The huge increase for next year doesn't make sense - no stock rebounds like that in one year.

Can we increase the 2026 quota by just 25% and see how we go at first?

That feels more realistic - err on the side of caution.

Thank you - Paul Gasek



From: [Richard Pouder](#)
To: [Marine Fish \(FWE\)](#)
Subject: Summer flounder regulations
Date: Saturday, December 6, 2025 1:12:46 PM

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I was shocked to read that commercial summer flounder harvests may increase. As an avid fluke fisherman on Cape Cod for many years, I have seen a steady decline in legal sized fluke over the past ten years. The population of fluke does indeed appear to be increasing, but so few fish landed are keepers. This suggests to me and many of my fellow fishermen that the commercial fleet is harvesting a high proportion of legal fish, leaving few for the recreational fishery. I suspect that the commercial fleet is harvesting larger fish offshore before they migrate inshore for the summer. If regulatory changes are made, I would argue for a reduction in commercial quotas to help rebuild the recreational fishery.

From: [Joseph Gomes](#)
To: [Marine Fish \(FWE\)](#)
Date: Saturday, December 6, 2025 8:26:52 AM

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Regarding the raising of the flounder limit, I STRONGLY disagree with the move. We have a historic and persistent habit of abusing our resources and OVERFISHING, basically All of our fisheries and species. So now by your perceived recruitment success and alleged population increase you have decided to SLAM the flounder recovery by massively increasing the harvest. Do we NEVER learn.

I often wonder, when I walk through a supermarket seafood department, how much that fish in the case Doesn't get sold and WHAT happens to it? I assume that a Shameful amount of it gets thrown out.

So, I stand FIRMLY in the camp of keeping the catch limits the same for the upcoming season and taking a serious look at the harvest, the recreational catch and finally the END USE of this fine resource .

I suspect the only reason flounder may be increasing is because they generally do not rely on MENHADEN, which you are also allowing for the EXTREME OVERFISHING of that CRUCIAL food source for many species.

Joe Gomes

From: [Richard Vincunas](#)
To: [Marine Fish \(FWE\)](#)
Subject: Director mckiernan fluke limit increase
Date: Friday, December 5, 2025 8:37:05 PM

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I think the increase in commercial fluke limit should be delayed for 2-3 years to confirm an increase in biomass. I also think that an increase in revenue for fluke should be offset by a decrease in revenue for cod since that species has been under “management” for 50 years and has not recovered enough for a reasonable recreational fishery . Less commercial pressure on cod could improve the recovery of this species

From: [WILLIAM GRAHN](#)
To: [Marine Fish \(FWE\)](#)
Subject: Summer flounder.
Date: Friday, December 5, 2025 6:47:44 PM

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With the additional commercial limits on summer flounder, the recreational fishery for fluke would be eliminated totally. there will be no inshore fluke left to blame recreationals for the shortfall. May as well eliminate striped bass, tautog black sea bass recreational fishing for the same reason. I'm sure that the state won't miss the millions of dollars lost from men and women fishing with their kids and grandkids. I think bait and tackle stores would close due to lack of customers buying their products. Personally, I have stopped saltwater fishing 2 years ago because of the state's indifference of recreationals and have given all of my fishing gear away. Thousands of dollars of gear and I will not spend 1 cent in tackle stores anymore. (Red Top, Goose Hummock. Bass Pro and Cabala's)Good luck explaining what has happened to all of the stocks, WITHOUT LYING through your teeth!

From: [Paul Tokarz](#)
To: [Marine Fish \(FWE\)](#)
Subject: Summer flow adjust
Date: Friday, December 5, 2025 5:54:08 PM

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With the recent closures of some of our fisheries in the limits in some of our fisheries, I think it would be an excellent opportunity to open up the permitting process on a limited basis to attract new commercial fisherman to this industry who been kept out of business due to the high monopolized fishing boat

Sent from my iPhone

From: [Clegganman](#)
To: [Marine Fish \(FWE\)](#)
Subject: Proposals Affecting Period 1 Flounder Fishing Quotas
Date: Friday, December 5, 2025 5:17:42 PM

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Dear Director McKieran,

I strongly urge you not to allow this Quota increase. We need to conserve this resource and push back against unbridled consumption.

From: [Ken Frasier](#)
To: [Marine Fish \(FWE\)](#)
Subject: Summer flounder quota increase
Date: Friday, December 5, 2025 5:12:34 PM

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I don't agree with a quota increase because of a possible slight increase in biomass given that there have been significant increases in biomass catch allotment at the same time I would think a possible multi year reassessment would be more prudent as a local fisherman and the allotment increase that was allowed in manhadden catch and now the lack of these fishes in the coastal area I typically fish is very concerning. I also understand people make a living off fishing.

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

From: [Phyllis Bly](#)
To: [Marine Fish \(FWE\)](#)
Subject: Increase in flounder fishing
Date: Friday, December 5, 2025 2:18:15 PM

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What does this do to the everyday sport fishermen , have you tried flounder fishing lately it's impossible to catch a limit.

Dennis **Bly**

From: [Dan Pope](#)
To: [Marine Fish \(FWE\)](#)
Subject: Re: Proposals Affecting the Period I Commercial Summer Flounder Fishery
Date: Friday, December 5, 2025 2:16:24 PM

You people should be removed from managing this fishery...

Dan Pope
USCGAUX
Flotilla 65
DSO-VE District 1 NR past
Chief of Staff 06 past
Division Vice Commander 06 past

On Dec 5, 2025, at 1:39 PM, MA Division of Marine Fisheries
<marine.fish@notice.mass.gov> wrote:

Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries



December 5, 2025

DMF Proposals Affecting the Period I Commercial Summer Flounder Fishery

The Division of Marine Fisheries is accepting written public comment on a proposal to use the agency's in-season adjustment authority to increase the 2026 Period I (January 1 – April 23) commercial summer flounder trip limit from 2,000 pounds up to 4,000 pounds. **Please submit written comment by e-mail (marine.fish@mass.gov) to the attention of Director McKiernan. DMF will accept written comment through 5PM on Friday, December 19, 2025.**

The Commonwealth's commercial summer flounder quota will increase by 75% for 2026, moving from roughly 600,000 pounds in 2025 to just over 1 million pounds. This responds to the most stock assessment's indication of increasing biomass, as well as a larger share of the coastwide quota for Massachusetts. At this quota level, the Period I fishery will be allocated about 150,000 pounds (15%) in

2026. In 2025, under a 2,000-lb trip limit, the Period I fishery landed about 45,000 pounds. Accordingly, the proposed trip limit increase will provide larger vessels fishing offshore in federal waters during the winter period with greater access to the available quota and support its utilization to the benefit of our seafood industry at large.

For more information, please visit our website:

www.mass.gov/marinefisheries

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Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries | 30 Emerson Ave. | Gloucester, MA 01930 US



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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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KIMBERLEY DRISCOLL
Lt. Governor

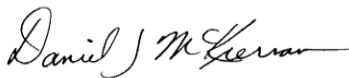
REBECCA L. TEPPER
Secretary

THOMAS O'SHEA
Commissioner

DANIEL J. MCKIERNAN
Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC)

FROM: Daniel J. McKiernan, Director 

DATE: December 12, 2025

SUBJECT: Public Hearing Proposal on Horseshoe Crab Quota Management

Proposal

This memo serves to inform the MFAC that I intend to go out to public hearing later this winter to reduce the bait crab quota from 140,000 crabs to 100,000 crabs and reallocate these 40,000 crabs to the biomedical sector at a 1:2 ratio thereby increasing the biomedical quota from 200,000 crabs to 280,000 crabs.

Rationale

This proposal responds to increasing demand for horseshoe crabs from the biomedical sector coupled with decreasing effort in the state's conch pot fishery reducing the local demand for bait crabs. These dynamics have produced a situation whereby biomedical demand is driving bait harvest through the rent-a-crab program even when there is limited concurrent demand for bait crabs. This speaks to a misalignment in the quantity of horseshoe crabs allocated to each fishery that may be corrected by transferring quota between the sectors to better match demand. Further, this action will reduce overall mortality to the horseshoe crab stock.

DMF has analyzed effort trends in the state's conch pot fishery (Figure 1) and determined that the current local bait crab demand approximates 75,000 – 90,000 horseshoe crabs annually. Accordingly, reducing the bait quota from 140,000 crabs to 100,000 crabs will provide a more than sufficient supply of crabs for the state's conch pot fishery. Given the poor status of the channeled whelk resource in Massachusetts, DMF does not anticipate the conch pot fishery will rebound to prior peak effort levels (e.g., 2012), but it is conceivable this fishery could nominally rebound should market conditions improve and the proposed quota would provide bait at levels sufficient to meet such demand. See section below titled "Overview of the Conch Pot Fishery" for more information.

The 40,000 horseshoe crabs taken off the bait quota will be reallocated to the biomedical fishery at a ratio of 1:2. This will result in the biomedical quota increasing from 200,000 horseshoe crabs annually to 280,000 horseshoe crabs annually — a net increase of 40,000 horseshoe crabs potentially available to the biomedical industry¹. When developing the biomedical quota in 2023, DMF used a 1:6 ratio when reallocating bait quota for biomedical purposes. This conversion factor was based on the estimated 15% mortality rate for the biomedical fishery. At present, I propose using the more conservative 1:2 conversion factor because there remains some uncertainty around the recapture² of these animals and the sublethal impacts of biomedical processing on horseshoe crabs. Finally, there is an undeniably strong public interest in managing horseshoe crabs for abundance, and if DMF is going to increase overall harvest, then it should be done in a manner that will not increase overall mortality. In this instance, the proposal will actually reduce overall mortality by about 28,000 crabs annually, assuming a 15% biomedical mortality rate.

DMF has heard from industry on a variety of potential alternative or additional management changes for 2026 and have spent the last several months engaging stakeholders in the interest of due diligence. Ultimately, I have decided to move forward to rulemaking with only the most straightforward option — the proposed quota reallocation — as it is the simplest way to address current market misalignment, is beneficial to conservation, and provides the various industries involved in the horseshoe crab fishery with the greatest amount of certainty for expectations in 2026. I worry that trying to address too many concerns or taking increasingly novel approaches to management will ultimately create additional issues. Instead, my preference is to make this single change and analyze its performance and then consider additional or alternative approaches only if warranted. See section titled “Additional Considerations” for more details.

Background

Development of Biomedical Quota

In 2023, DMF established a first ever biomedical horseshoe crab quota of 200,000 horseshoe crabs annually to be split evenly among permitted biomedical processors. This was done in response to concerns about increasing horseshoe crab mortality driven by growing biomedical demand in Massachusetts. The adoption of this quota effectively allowed DMF to cap overall mortality at 2022 levels, which the available data suggests would allow horseshoe crab abundance to continue to increase. Since the adoption of the biomedical quota, DMF has

¹ At present, the biomedical industry has access to 340,000 horseshoe crabs annually through the 200,000 crab biomedical quota, as well as the 140,000 crab bait quota through the rent-a-crab program. The proposed adjustment would provide the biomedical industry access to 380,000 horseshoe crabs through a 280,000 crab biomedical quota and a 100,000 crab bait quota.

² Note that biomedical harvest is primarily occurring within the northeastern portion of Nantucket Sound by mobile gear vessels. Fishery participants have expressed concern to DMF that there may be an over-reliance on this small area. As the biomedical crabs are released alive and are marked to identify it as a bled crab in season, future at-sea monitoring to determine the recapture of bled crabs would tell us if removals from this area become excessive.

received persistent comments from biomedical processors, dealers, and fishers requesting DMF increase the biomedical quota.

Demand for Horseshoe Crabs as Bait

Horseshoe crabs are the preferred bait in the conch pot fishery. Therefore, bait demand is a function of bait use per pot haul. DMF's understanding is that conch pot fishers generally mix between one-quarter and one-third of a horseshoe crab³ with other bait per pot haul. Accordingly, with the state's conch pot fishery conducting fewer than 300,000 pot hauls annually since 2020 (Figure 1), DMF estimates the bait need for this fishery to be in the range of 75,000 to 90,000 horseshoe crabs annually.

This level of estimated bait demand is substantially lower than the current bait quota of 140,000 horseshoe crabs. Despite this, Massachusetts' routinely approaches fully utilizing its horseshoe crab bait quota (Table 1). This is occurring because biomedical demand for these crabs — through the rent-a-crab program — is driving bait harvest. As a result, DMF is receiving reports that crabs harvested against the bait quota often do not have a viable bait market and several whelk processors who provide bait to their conch pot fishers already have an ample quantity of horseshoe crabs in frozen storage. This speaks to a misalignment that could be remedied through a reduced bait quota and enhanced biomedical quota.

Overview of Conch Pot Fishery Performance

Effort in the conch pot fishery increased in the mid 2000s — in response to environmental related declines in the abundance of Southern New England lobster and displacement from the that fishery — before peaking at about 600,000 pot hauls annually in 2012 (Figure 1). Effort has steadily declined since then and for the past six years (2019-2024) it has been at or below 300,000 pot hauls annually⁴. This decline is likely driven by several factors — reduced abundance of channeled whelk, regulations to raise the size-at-harvest to protect spawning stock biomass, and more recently, unstable domestic and international market conditions.

Even within the context of this recent period of reduced productivity, 2024 was an extremely challenging year for the conch pot fishery (Table 2). Market conditions constrained effort and landings and our fishery conducted just over 200,000 pot hauls and the fishery landed only about 700,000 pounds of channeled whelk valued at about \$2M. While market conditions reportedly remain tenuous, 2025 landings data suggest the fishery has nominally rebounded. As of December 11, 2025 almost 820,000 pounds of channeled whelk have been landed this year with an ex-vessel value of nearly \$2.6 million. Assuming fairly static catch per unit effort this year compared to the past five years, DMF estimates the fishery will likely conduct about 250,000 pot hauls in 2025.

³ The amount of horseshoe crab used per pot haul is generally dictated by the size of the horseshoe crab. This is informed by a 2015 DMF survey, observations of bait use while sea sampling, and informal conversations with bait dealers and conch pot fishers.

⁴ 300,000 trap hauls annually is also consistent with where effort was in this fishery prior to the spike in the mid-2000s.

There is some tempered optimism among whelk dealers and processors that the market can support 2025-levels of effort and landings moving forward. However, I am skeptical that the fishery will soon return to prior peak levels — not just because of market conditions — but because the resource is depleted throughout its range within Massachusetts waters, as evidenced by a lack of larger whelk in the observed catches. Accordingly, I anticipate the conch pot fishery will continue to operate around (and more likely below) 300,000 pot hauls annually for the foreseeable future. The bait demand for this level of activity will be sufficiently met by the proposed quota, notwithstanding any improvements in the development and availability of alternative bait sources that may further reduce bait demand moving forward.

Additional Considerations

As a matter of routine due diligence, DMF networks with stakeholders to inform the development of regulatory proposals. This fall, DMF heard extensive concerns regarding a variety of issues related to the performance of the horseshoe crab fishery and the bait market. I do not intend to address these concerns and frustrations through regulatory actions at this time. However, I do want to acknowledge these issues to benefit of the MFAC's deliberation on this subject.

Eliminating the Rent-A-Crab Program

It has been suggested that DMF should prohibit the rent-a-crab program. Proponents argue this program has evolved beyond its intended function (i.e., use crabs harvested as bait for biomedical purposes) and is now driving bait harvest and warping the relationship between bait demand and bait harvest. This is further complicated by the fact that the rent-a-crab program is primarily pursued during the early summer months⁵ — a time of year when the conch pot fishery is less active. This creates a further disconnect between bait harvest and bait demand and results in product being placed in frozen storage.

I support the continuation of the rent-a-crab program as it allows nearly all Massachusetts bait crab harvest to be repurposed for biomedical use thereby supplementing biomedical demand and optimizing the utility of each crab harvested. Eliminating this program would be wasteful and would likely also increase demand for additional biomedical quota. Further, biomedical demand has elevated the ex-vessel value of horseshoe crabs to the benefit of all bait fishers. If this value were to be lost, vessels may not target horseshoe crabs for bait purposes thereby reducing the overall supply of horseshoe crabs to market. Reduced profitability may lead to vessels leaving inshore mobile gear fisheries impacting the supply of other locally caught fish (e.g., squid, summer flounder, black sea bass, scup, quahogs).

⁵ DMF has observed that it is common for inshore draggers to pursue the bait quota during the summer months when other profitable species like summer flounder are targeted on the same trip. This allows these boats to make profitable trips combining their summer flounder limit with the 300 horseshoe crabs bait fishery trip limit. Then in the fall, when summer flounder migrate out of the Sounds, some draggers switch over to target the biomedical horseshoe crab quota at the higher 1,000 crab biomedical trip limit.

Constraining Commercial Fisher Access to Participating in this Quota Managed Fishery

As the management and performance of the horseshoe crab fishery has evolved in recent years, there are persistent concerns about access. Historically, the fishery was prosecuted by hand harvesters and required limited capital investment. Over time, changes in management and fishery economics shifted harvest towards mobile gear fisheries. With the adoption of the spawning closures in 2025, hand harvest opportunities are now extremely limited, and bait harvest is almost exclusively conducted by mobile gear fishers. Additionally, the 2023 adoption of the biomedical processor quota further shifted the use of this resource towards more capitalized entities. These concerns persist as DMF is now proposing to allocate additional quota to the biomedical processors.

Given the biomedical fishery is catch and release, I think it is critical for participants to have working relationships with biomedical dealers and have their vessels outfitted in a manner that maximizes the survival of horseshoe crabs. I also recognize the logistical benefit provided to biomedical dealers and firms by working with a smaller number of reliable harvesters. However, I do think it is beneficial to have the economic benefits derived from the biomedical use of horseshoe crabs extend along the waterfront. To this goal, I continue my support for the rent-a-crab program and encourage biomedical dealers and processors to accommodate the greatest number of harvesters as practical. However, access remains a concern, and I anticipate further rule making may be warranted in the future to address it.

Dynamic Quota Adjustments and Trip Limit Management

As heard at the November MFAC business meeting, there is interest among the regulated community to have DMF adopt “dynamic management” program to address horseshoe crab quotas. My understanding is that there are several ways DMF could accommodate dynamic management. First, are in-season transfers of quota from the bait fishery to the biomedical fishery based on quota usage by a date certain. Alternatively, DMF could allow horseshoe crabs to be harvested for either purpose by any permitted commercial holder and then grant the purchasing dealer the discretion to determine their fate of each crab and which quota the crab counts against.

There has been some interest in reducing bait fishery trip limits or implementing additional in-season quota use triggers to reduce trip limits. The perceived benefits of these adjustments would be to slow bait quota usage to prevent market gluts. Lastly, there was some discussion of reducing the biomedical trip limit (particularly for trawlers) from 1,000 crabs to a lower number in line with the bait fishery limit. The argument for this is that it would force biomedical dealers to work with more vessels thereby addressing access concerns.

These are interesting concepts that may merit future analysis. However, at present, I worry they would introduce too many new variables to the management program for 2026, will further complicate management, and may contribute to or exacerbate existing fishery management challenges.

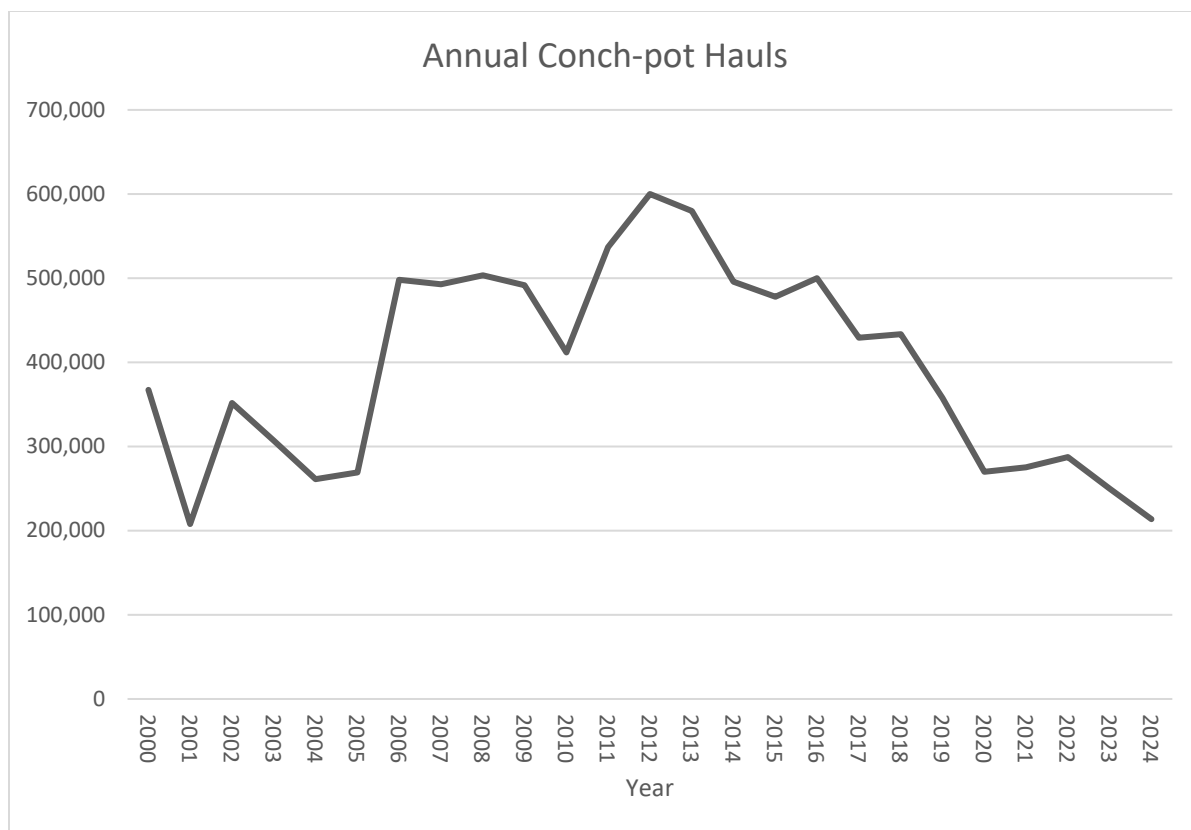


Figure 1. Annual Pot-Hauls in the Massachusetts Conch Pot Fishery, 2000 – 2024.

Data Source: Massachusetts commercial catch reports and federal vessel trip reports as of October 2025. Data for 2024 is preliminary and subject to change. Data for all years may be inflated as permit holders do not distinguish between conch pot and lobster trap hauls and lobster traps may produce some bycatch of channeled whelks.

| Year | Bait Crabs Landed | Total Ex-Vessel Value | Average Ex-Vessel Price per Crab |
|-------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| 2022 | 134,753 | \$287,347 | \$2.13 |
| 2023 | 139,846 | \$335,386 | \$2.40 |
| 2024 | 139,970 | \$404,331 | \$2.89 |
| 2025* | 137,171 | \$446,853 | \$3.26 |

Table 1. Dealer reported Massachusetts horseshoe crabs landing by count, total annual ex-vessel value, and average price per crab, 2022 – 2025. Data source: SAFIS Dealer Database as of December 11, 2025. *Data for 2025 is preliminary and subject to change. Only includes landings reported through December 11, 2025.

| Year | Channeled Whelk Landings | Total Ex-Vessel Value | Average Ex-Vessel Price Per Pound |
|-------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| 2022 | 917,700 | \$3,803,336 | \$4.14 |
| 2023 | 919,284 | \$2,993,633 | \$3.26 |
| 2024 | 718,156 | \$2,041,735 | \$2.84 |
| 2025* | 818,906 | \$2,599,282 | \$3.17 |

Table 2. Dealer reported Massachusetts channeled whelk landings, total annual ex-vessel value, and average ex-vessel price per pound. Data source: SAFIS Dealer Database as of December 11, 2025. *Data for 2025 is preliminary and subject to change. Only includes landings reported through December 11, 2025.



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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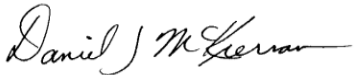
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Secretary

THOMAS O'SHEA
Commissioner

DANIEL J. MCKIERNAN
Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC)

FROM: Daniel J. McKiernan, Director 

DATE: December 12, 2025

SUBJECT: Public Hearing Proposal to Modify Sea Scallop Dredge Width Definition and Update on Potentially Opening Additional Areas South of Gloucester

Proposal

This memo serves to inform the MFAC that I intend to go out to public hearing later this winter to modify the state's maximum sea scallop dredge width from 10-feet to 10.5-feet. This minor technical amendment will bring the state regulation [\(322 CMR 4.06\(6\)\(a\)\)](#) in-line with the federal small-dredge gear requirements [\(50 CFR 648\(D\)\(e\)\(1\)\)](#).

Rationale

This proposal responds to comments made at an August 26, 2025 meeting¹ with North Shore sea scallop dredge fishers. Industry noted that DMF's rule was out of phase and more restrictive than the federal rule affecting the Limited Access General Category (LAGC) Northern Gulf of Maine (NGOM) and Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) permit holders, and for small vessels participating in the Limited Access Small Dredge Program. As such, it complicates enforcement and compliance for dual state-federal permit holders who may be fishing in the same jurisdiction on a single trip, particularly when the NGOM fishery is open.

DMF reviewed these concerns and confirmed that there was a discrepancy between state and federal rules. The state regulation establishes a maximum effective fishing dredge width of 10-feet, whereas the federal maximum effective fishing dredge width is 10.5-feet for their small dredge and LAGC programs. I have determined that this regulatory discrepancy is unintended and it creates an unnecessary enforcement and compliance challenge. Therefore, I am moving forward this proposal to update state regulations to complement the federal rule.

¹ See DMF's September 2025 meeting materials for a [summary](#) of this industry meeting.

Update on Opening Additional Areas South of Gloucester

At the same August 26 meeting, industry representatives encouraged DMF to consider seasonally opening areas within the year-round North Shore Region Mobile Gear Closure south and southwest of Gloucester. This proposed seasonal access would occur concurrent with the winter/early spring trap gear closure to protect right whales so as to prevent gear conflicts. Further, this would provide small scale scallopers (including some who fish lobster traps in the remainder of the year) with Coastal Access Permits additional seasonal fishing opportunity to pursue when state and adjacent federal waters are closed to trap fishing (Figure 2).

DMF has analyzed this request and supports the development of a pilot program to provide the requested access for February 2026. We are currently working with industry and other stakeholders — including scallop divers and the Bureau of Underwater Archaeology — to refine the spatial parameters for a potential access area and consider criteria for participation (e.g., scallop landings from state waters in recent years and installation of a cellular-based tracking device). At this juncture, my goal is to continue to communicate details of this pilot program with the MFAC and with your support announce a pilot program by mid-January and begin issuing Letters of Authorization to initiate the fishery by mid-February. DMF will then evaluate this program in 2026 to determine if it should be continued or modified for 2027 or adopted as a permanent regulatory allowance.



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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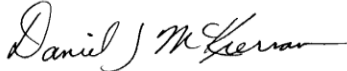
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Secretary

THOMAS O'SHEA
Commissioner

DANIEL J. MCKIERNAN
Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC)

FROM: Daniel J. McKiernan, Director 

DATE: December 12, 2025

SUBJECT: Rule Making Outlook for 2026

Overview

Over the past half of year, DMF and the MFAC have reviewed several draft regulatory proposals for public hearing. This memorandum serves to provide you with an update on the status of these proposals and the anticipated timeline for final rule making, as well as a preview of additional anticipated regulatory actions for 2026.

Ongoing Rule Making Initiatives

Commercial Striped Bass Permitting

On November 21, 2025, DMF filed emergency regulations affecting commercial striped bass permitting in 2026. Specifically, these regulations limit the issuance of the regulated fishery striped bass endorsement ("endorsement") in 2026 to only individuals who held the endorsement in 2024 or 2025; establish the endorsement as non-transferable while DMF develops an exit-entry program; establish the endorsement as owner-operator, requiring the named permit holder be present when commercial fishing activity is occurring; and update the striped bass control date from June 14, 2022 to December 31, 2025. Limited exemptions apply to owner-operator rules for immediate family, military service, death or disability, or other good cause. See DMF's [September 12 memo](#) for more details.

DMF held a public hearing on these emergency regulations on December 2, 2025. A final permitting memo is expected to be provided to the MFAC for their consideration and discussion at the December 18, 2025 MFAC business meeting. DMF anticipates filing final regulations before the expiration of the emergency regulations after 90-days in late February 2026.

Framework to Authorize and Permit the Clean Up of Fishing Gear Debris

In early 2025, Governor Healey signed into law an amendment to G.L. c. 130, §31 that authorized DMF—through the MFAC and the Department of Fish and Game—to authorize and permit the clean-up of fishing gear debris from the Commonwealth’s shoreline and waters. In response, DMF developed draft regulations that would: (1) authorize DMF and OLE to remove and dispose of any and all fishing gear debris; (2) enable any person to remove, possess, or dispose of fishing gear debris located above mean-low tide; (3) allow commercial mobile gear fishers to possess and dispose of fishing gear debris incidentally taken during lawful fishing operation, while maintaining the existing prohibition on injuring fishing gear; (4) provide DMF the discretion to permit entities and persons to remove, possess, and dispense of fishing gear debris below mean-low tide under certain specific circumstances that ensure the project is likely to be successful and will not affect intact fishing gear; and (5) reinforce municipal requirements that all aquaculture gear be sufficiently tagged and marked with information that makes the aquaculture gear identifiable to a permit holder so as to enable municipal authorities to address the recovery of derelict aquaculture gear. See DMF’s [May 23 memo](#) for more details.

This draft regulatory proposal will go to public hearing on Monday, December 15, 2025. DMF anticipates providing the MFAC with a final recommendation for the permitting and management framework for a vote at its December 18, 2025 business meeting. If the vote is favorable, DMF anticipates final rules will be implemented by late-winter 2026.

Pending Rule Making Initiatives

Modernizing Spatial Management of Surf Clam and Ocean Quahog Dredge Fishery

The 2017 decision in *Aqua King Fishery, LLC v Conservation Commission of Provincetown* determined that the surf clam and ocean quahog dredge fishery was subject to both DMF regulations, as well as those promulgated by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and local conservation commissions under the Wetlands Protection Act. [Section 136 of the Acts of 2024](#) resolved this by amending [G.L. c. 130, §1A](#) and grant unilateral authority to the management of this fishery to DMF and preclude it (and other fishing activities authorized by DMF under Chapter 130) from being subject to DEP’s Notice of Intent requirements under the Wetlands Protection Act, licensing requirements under Chapter 91, and water certification requirements under Chapter 21.

In response, DMF worked with the industry to modernize the spatial management of the surf clam fishery. At present, DMF has proposed draft regulations that would eliminate contour line management in favor of a single boundary line that approximates the 12’ contour and provides a 200-foot buffer zone around all eelgrass beds mapped by DEP. This boundary line creates a geofence that will be enforced through the mandatory use of vessel trackers and can be uploaded to chart plotters. Further, DMF is considering maintaining the existing seasonal (May 15–October 15) closure of Manomet to protect new shell lobsters and adopting a similar closure off Sandy Neck Beach; closing Herring Cove seasonally to prevent gear conflicts with the lobster fishery; allowing night fishing during the winter months; and creating a process to open up areas north of Hull (which have been historically closed).

DMF anticipates this will go out to public hearing this winter with the goal of implementing final regulations by May 1, 2026. See DMF's [May 23 memo](#) for more details.

Omnibus Amendments to Fishing Regulations for 2026

DMF annually adjusts fishing regulations in response to changes in quotas, new requirements of interstate or federal fishery management plans, recent fishery performance, enforcement and compliance challenges, and industry requests. For 2026, DMF is proposing to: (1) adjust recreational bluefish limits consistent with action by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission; (2) adjust commercial summer flounder and black sea bass limits in response to quota increases; (3) reallocate horseshoe crab quota from the bait fishery to the biomedical fishery in response to fishery performance; (4) update the effective dredge width definition for the state waters sea scallop fishery to better match the federal rule; (5) eliminate various sub-endorsements for the Coastal Access Permit and eliminate the sea scallop shucking endorsement to simplify permitting; and (5) allow Coastal Lobster Permit holders with an appurtenant federal lobster trap permit to permanently surrender their Coastal Lobster Permit for an Offshore Lobster Permit and convert their trap tags from dual "MA-EEZ" to "EEZ-Only" in response to industry requests. DMF anticipates this will go out to public hearing this winter with the goal of implementing final regulations by May 1, 2026. See the [May 2025 MFAC meeting materials](#), as well as this [month's meeting materials](#) for additional information.

Other Anticipated Rule Making Initiatives

Recreational Black Sea Bass, Scup, and Summer Flounder

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission will meet in mid-December to establish the approach for setting recreational summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass measures for 2026-2027 (i.e., harvest liberalization, reduction, or status quo). Additional state proposal development guidance may not be established until the February 2026 ASMFC meeting. Accordingly, DMF anticipates using emergency regulations to adjust these species' recreational fishing limits if needed. A stakeholder comment period and virtual public meeting may be held during the late winter to discuss potential management options. More information will be made available to the MFAC over the course of its December 2025 and early 2026 business meetings.

Striped Bass Permitting

Over the course of the next year, DMF will be working on developing two regulatory proposals regarding access to the commercial striped bass fishery. First, DMF seeks to develop an exit:entry program for the commercial striped bass fishery. At present, DMF intends to use this opportunity to diverge from its long-standing permit transferability program and look to develop a new program (for this fishery) that could potentially force the turnover of latent permits and allow new entrants based on exit:entry ratios and eligibility criteria. This is being considered to prevent high costs of entry into the striped bass fishery and allow it to maintain some of its historic cultural aspects as a gateway to the marine economy. Second, in order to

execute a harvester tagging program for the commercial fishery by 2029, DMF is considering action to further limit entry into this fishery using performance criteria and the new December 31, 2025 control date. Over the course of this winter, DMF intends to convene the MFAC's Striped Bass and Permitting Focus Groups (as well as industry advisors) to provide their initial guidance on the development of these proposals. DMF anticipates summertime or early fall public hearings on each item with the goal of having new rules on the book prior to the start of the 2027 permitting season in late 2026.



DECEMBER 2025 NEFMC MEETING SUMMARY

The [New England Fishery Management Council](#) (NEFMC) met [December 2-4 in Newport, RI](#). The Council addressed several major actions and prioritized its work planning for 2026. Below, find meeting highlights with Council **motions denoted in bold** and embedded links to relevant documents. The NEFMC will meet next [January 27-29](#), virtually.

COUNCIL ACTIONS

SEA SCALLOPS – The Council **approved scallop fishery specifications for Fishing Year (FY) 2026 and default measures for FY2027, via [Framework 40](#)**. For this, the Council **adopted [updated catch limits](#)** based on best available science (i.e., Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) of 15,412 metric tons for FY2026). The Council **allocated, to the Limited Access fishery, 36 Days-at-Sea (DAS) for Full Time vessels and 14.4 DAS for Part Time vessels**. This marks the first fishing season with no Access Area trip allocation for the Limited Access fishery since implementation of rotational area management (2004). The Council **adopted closures of the Nantucket Lightship (North & South) and Georges Bank Area II rotational areas to protect small/recruit scallops, and indicated the 60-day carryover period for remaining FY2025 Access Area trips to fish in Area I will begin April 1, 2026** (rather than delayed until May 15) (vote 15/2/0). For the Northern Gulf of Maine (NGOM) management area, the Council **set the NGOM area Total Allowable Landings (TAL) at TAL of 482,753 pounds using a fishing mortality (F) rate of $F=0.21$ and considering exploitable biomass from Stellwagen Bank, Ipswich Bay, Jeffreys Ledge, and Machias Seal Island** (vote 14/3/0). This results in a FY2026 Set-Aside for NGOM of 437,867 pounds. All vessels on an NGOM trip have a 200-pound possession limit; most fishing takes place on Stellwagen. The scallop fishery has never exceeded its ABC and the unit stock is considered healthy (2025 assessment: not overfished, overfishing not occurring). However, 2025 survey biomass was the lowest since 1999, catch rates have been in decline, and the Mid-Atlantic is much less productive. The majority of scallops are in the Georges Bank area (71% abundance, 54% biomass), followed by the Mid-Atlantic (27% abundance, 38% biomass), and Gulf of Maine (2% abundance, 8% biomass). The Council received and **approved the [Scallop Long-Term Strategic Plan](#)** defining a 3-5 year vision for the fishery developed through extensive stakeholder outreach. Work on several of the Strategic Plan's priorities will begin in 2026.

TRANSBOUNDARY GROUNDFISH STOCKS – The Council **approved the [Transboundary Management Guidance Committee's \(TMGC\) recommendations for Eastern Georges Bank \(GB\) cod at a total allowable catch \(TAC\) of 473 mt, Eastern GB haddock at a TAC of 4,750 mt, and GB yellowtail flounder at a TAC of 57 mt](#)**. Members commented on the importance of the updated biomass apportionment of GB haddock within the Eastern GB management area to the U.S. offshore groundfish fleet for 2026, where 75% was determined to be distributed in the EGB and 25% in the Western GB management area (U.S.) versus 100% to EGB in FY2025 (metric determined by NOAA Fisheries NEFSC, to align apportionment with survey footprint). The follow-on domestic processes resulted in a significant increase in GB haddock quota for FY2026 relative to FY2025 (+184%; see Groundfish Framework 72 below).

GROUNDFISH – The Council **set specifications and management measures for groundfish stocks for FY2026-2030, via [Framework 72](#)**. The Council **approved revised annual specifications for FY2026-2030 for Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine (GOM) yellowtail flounder, Southern New England (SNE)/Mid-Atlantic (MA) yellowtail flounder, GB winter flounder, GOM winter flounder, SNE/MA winter flounder, redfish, ocean pout, and Atlantic wolffish**. And, **revised annual specifications for FY2026 for GB cod, GB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder** (Table 1). This included the updated sub-component analysis for several stocks. The Council treated white hake slightly differently, where it **preliminarily approved white hake specifications for FY2026-2030 but requested the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) consider catch advice resulting from [projections](#) using 75% F_{MSY} rather than 70% F_{MSY} and taking into consideration the Council's Risk Policy and white hake rebuilding plan** (vote 12/4/1). Several Council members expressed concerns around the lack of rebuilding progress and noted that additional SSC review could delay FW72 submission. Other members and public emphasized white hake as a highly constraining stock for access to other groundfish stocks. The Council **agreed to remove the management uncertainty buffer for white hake if the At-Sea Monitoring target coverage rate is set at 90% or greater for FY2026-2030**.

| Draft revised specifications – groundfish sub-ACLs | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| Stock | Commercial groundfish sub-ACL | | |
| | FY2025 (mt) | Proposed FY2026 (mt) | % Change |
| EGOM Cod | N/A | 16.5 | N/A |
| WGOM Cod | N/A | 289.8 | N/A |
| GB Cod | N/A | 132.3 | N/A |
| SNE Cod | N/A | 6.7 | N/A |
| GB Haddock | 1,441.3 | 4,098.2 | +184% |
| GOM Haddock | 2,076.8 | 2,213.2 | +7% |
| GB Yellowtail Flounder | 76.3 | 24.5 | -68% |
| SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder | 33.4 | 28.0 | -16% |
| CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder | 808.4 | 1,599.8 | +98% |
| American Plaice | 8,220.9 | 6,596.9 | -20% |
| Witch Flounder | 1,406.2 | 1,406.2 | 0% |
| GB Winter Flounder | 1,430.8 | 1,620.0 | +13% |
| GOM Winter Flounder | 607.2 | 659.5 | +9% |
| SNE/MA Winter Flounder | 440.8 | 380.5 | -14% |

Table 1. Commercial groundfish and other fisheries annual catch limit (ACL) specifications for allocated and non-allocated stocks for FY2025 (current) and proposed revised specifications for FY2026 recommended through Framework 72, with percent annual change shown (Source: New England Fishery Management Council [staff presentation, Dec 2, 2025](#)).

Additionally in [Framework 72](#), the Council **updated status determination criteria for Georges Bank yellowtail flounder**, reflecting revised reference points, new information, and recommendations produced in a 2025 [assessment and peer review](#). Regarding recreational groundfish measures, the Council **agreed to establish a regulatory process for NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator authority to adjust recreational measures for all stocks of cod and haddock**. In January, the Council will provide recommendations to NOAA Fisheries on recreational measures for cod and haddock.

Of note, NOAA Fisheries announced two recent actions affecting the current groundfish fishery. On October 3, 2025, NOAA Fisheries [extended](#) Emergency management measures temporarily authorizing the FY2025 Northeast Multispecies fishery (implemented May 1, set to expire Oct 28) until April 30, 2026. On December 5, 2025, NOAA Fisheries published a 30-day comment period for the [Framework 69 Proposed Rule](#) for FY2025-2027 groundfish specifications. Framework 69 was approved by the Council in December 2024. Cod measures are not included in Framework 69, as those were moved to the revised Amendment 25, still pending NOAA Fisheries approval.

SPINY DOGFISH – The Council **approved the Joint MAFMC-NEFMC Spiny Dogfish Accountability Measures and 2026-2027 Specifications Framework**. Because Spiny Dogfish are jointly managed by the Mid-Atlantic and New England Councils, both Councils must approve the framework for it to take effect. The [Mid approved the Framework in October](#). In addition to specifications, the action considers if there are some circumstances when the current strict paybacks may be excessive (e.g., biomass is high) and if modified payback Accountability Measures (AMs) may be appropriate. Following final action by the Mid, the NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator raised concerns regarding the interaction of two of the alternatives the Mid selected, in that implementation of the combination may lead to insufficient accountability in the fishery. The NEFMC addressed this concern in their December final action.

Consistent with the approach taken by the Mid-Atlantic Council, the New England Council **approved specifications for spiny dogfish, setting the catch limit the same as it was in 2025** (ABC =7,626 mt; commercial quota = 4,236 mt). The Council deliberated modification of AMs and approved several additional alternatives consistent with the Mid, including **implementation of a tiered approach where annual catch limit paybacks are scaled depending on the stock's biomass level (14/2/1)** which changes the status quo approach of deducting the exact amount of overage; to **always pay back overages if the stock is in a rebuilding plan (17/0/0)**; to **calculate overages using a three-year average of catch limits and catches, and most recent projected biomass (16/0/0)**; and, **no change to the payback calculation depending on catch source type**. One additional provision, adopted by the Mid-Atlantic, received a failed vote at the New England Council - this was to add an additional 5% landings buffer before federal waters close (vote 1/16/0). New England instead **selected status quo (no buffer)** for this remaining alternative set. NOAA Fisheries indicated this sufficiently addressed the concern around insufficient accountability and improved likelihood of framework approval. The Mid-Atlantic Council will reconsider its final approval of the framework in December.

2026 COUNCIL WORK PRIORITIES – The Council **adopted its finalized list of 2026 Work Priorities, accepting the Executive Committee's recommendations with several amendments**. In addition to development of routine/required fishery specification setting actions for various Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) and staff support for upcoming assessments, additional priorities agreed upon by the Council for 2026 (* = multiyear) generally include:

- Groundfish - Review redfish sector exemption program; Review Amendment 23 monitoring system; Revise ABC control rules for Northeast multispecies stocks; *Review white hake rebuilding plan and reference points
- Sea Scallops - Develop sub-management units in NGOM; Develop regional allocations of Limited Access DAS; Develop new projection methods; Complete LAGC IFQ program review; Support Scallop RSA management; Consider Strategic Plan items

| Draft revised specifications – other fisheries sub-ACLs | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| Fishery | Stock | Commercial groundfish sub-ACL | | |
| | | FY2025 (mt) | Proposed FY2026 (mt) | % Change |
| Recreational Groundfish | WGOM Cod | N/A | 118 | N/A |
| | SNE Cod | N/A | 18 | N/A |
| | GOM Haddock | 1,075 | 1,146 | +7% |
| Sea Scallop | GB Yellowtail Flounder | 14.9 | 4.8 | -68% |
| | SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder | 2.7 | 2.7 | 0% |
| | GOM/GB Windowpane Flounder | 26.6 | 26.6 | 0% |
| | SNE/MA Windowpane Flounder | 71.3 | 71.3 | 0% |
| Midwater Trawl | GB Haddock | 29 | 82 | +183% |
| | GOM Haddock | 32 | 34 | +6% |
| Small-Mesh | GB Yellowtail Flounder | 1.8 | 0.6 | -67% |
| Other Sub-components – Large-Mesh Non-Groundfish | SNE/MA Windowpane Flounder | 98 | 98 | 0% |

- Atlantic Herring – Develop river herring and shad management measures within FY2027-2031 specifications; Coordinate with MAFMC/ASMFC for river herring/shad issues
- Monkfish/Skate – Conduct a peer review of monkfish CPUE RSA project work to evaluate use of CPUE indices in assessment and management; *Scope for an IFQ program for monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries
- Habitat – Develop revised Essential Fish Habitat designations for groundfish, small mesh, scallops; Evaluate the Great South Channel HMA surfclam exemption areas
- On-Demand Gear Conflict Working Group – *Joint action with MAFMC/GARFO to revise gear marking regulations
- Risk Policy Working Group – Develop communication strategies, *conduct simulation testing, and *implement revised Risk Policy Concept for some FMPs/species/stocks
- Enforcement – Reengage Committee; *Address issues related to implementation of on-demand gear
- Climate and Ecosystem Steering Committee – Provide guidance on IRA initiatives, climate-resilient fisheries management, and ecosystem approaches
- Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP) – Continue Survey Contingency working group; Support Industry-Based Survey implementation
- Inter-Agency – Revisit TMGC biomass apportionment methodology; Continue participation in (e.g.) CCC, NRCC, international fisheries management, East Coast Coordination Group and Climate Core Team, NROC, Sanctuary Advisory Councils, Take Reduction Teams
- Inflation Reduction Act Initiatives – Continue work on: *ABC control rules for Northeast multispecies; *Atlantic cod management transition (pending Amendment 25 implementation); *Operationalizing ecosystem approaches in New England fisheries management (include evaluation of approaches for cusk); *Operationalizing East Coast Climate Change Scenario Planning initiative; *Holistic Strategic Plan for climate resilient New England fisheries management; *Enhancing participatory processes for climate resilient fisheries
- Executive Order 14276 Response: *Modifications to vessel baseline restrictions; *FMP revisions

Two motions failed, to “restart development of a scallop rotational area on the Northern Edge of Georges Bank” (vote 5/12/0) and “consider revisions to the Southern New England Spiny Dogfish Gillnet Exemption Area” (vote 6/9/1); these were not added to 2026 priorities. For 2027 planning and beyond, the Council will consider a major change in how it sets priorities as informed by the Holistic Strategic Plan, expected to be completed in late 2026.

UPDATES & DISCUSSION

WHITING – The Small Mesh Multispecies fishery comprises four stocks targeted with 3” mesh or greater, including northern and southern red hake, northern and southern silver hake, and offshore hake. Southern silver hake and offshore hake are collectively known as “whiting”. In December, the Council received the [Small Mesh Multispecies fishery monitoring report](#) and reviewed [recommendations](#) made by the Whiting Advisory Panel and Committee. In FY2024, Southern red hake catch exceeded its ACL by 18% with 89% of total catch estimated as discards. Southern red hake is the only stock in the FMP under a rebuilding plan (Framework 62). The Council **approved deferment of application of the red hake post-season accountability measure** in response to the FY2024 southern overage. This AM would otherwise lower the trigger for a reduced possession limit in FY2026. Specifications for FY2027-2031 for Small Mesh stocks will be developed in 2026. The action will consider additional management measures such as revision of Exemption Area boundaries and seasons. Final action is scheduled for December 2026.

STATUS OF REGIONAL SCIENCE & MANAGEMENT – To help inform Council decision-making on 2026 work priorities, the Executive Director overviewed constraints on regional fisheries science and management capacity stemming from reductions in NOAA agency staffing, budgets, surveys, biological sampling, assessments, and research.

HOLISTIC STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVE – Despite challenges of increasingly limited federal/regional support, the Council continues to meet its obligations, respond to evolving issues, and develop initiatives to improve resiliency of fisheries to management uncertainty and ecosystem change. To further instruct its approaches to resilient and responsive fisheries management, the Council contracted with the Parnin Group to build a Holistic Strategic Plan. The Parnin Group shared results of [Discovery & Gap Analyses](#) and [overviewed](#) next steps. The Council will establish pillars and overarching goals for the Plan at a workshop January 6-7, in Boston.

RISK POLICY – The Council continues to make strides in implementing an overarching revised Risk Policy with specific considerations for each managed fishery. Refinements and simulation testing are ongoing. The Council will participate in a global weightings exercise in June, with SSC review of the revised Risk Policy expected in October.

AGENCY ACTIVITIES – Written reports on recent agency activities were provided from the: [Council Executive Director](#), [GARFO Regional Administrator](#), [NEFSC](#), [MAFMC](#), [ASMFC](#), [U.S. Coast Guard](#), [Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization](#) (NAFO), and [International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas](#) (ICCAT).

LOOKING AHEAD

The [Mid-Atlantic Council](#) meets December 16-18 and will consider Final Action on:

- Atlantic Mackerel Framework - rebuilding, FY2026-2027 specifications, and river herring/shad cap
- Joint MAFMC-NEFMC Spiny Dogfish Framework

In [January](#), the [New England Council](#) is expected to:

- Make recommendations on cod and haddock recreational measures to NOAA Fisheries
- Receive MRIP Fishing Effort Survey revised design
- Receive Scallop Limited Access General Category IFQ Program Review final report