



**MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission**  
**December 18, 2025 Meeting Summary**

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This document serves as a brief summary of the December 18, 2025 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. This business meeting was held virtually via Zoom. A recording of this meeting has been posted to [DMF's YouTube Channel](#) and all meeting materials are available on the [MFAC's past meeting website](#).

**Action Items**

*2026 Period I Summer Flounder Trip Limit.* The MFAC unanimously approved DMF's recommendation to increase the 2026 Period I summer flounder commercial trip limit from 2,000 pounds to 4,000 pounds to take advantage of a 75% quota increase for the coming year. This sizeable quota increase is the product of a 45% increase in the coastwide quota that responds to the most recent stock assessment and Massachusetts getting a larger share of the coastwide quota when it exceeds 9.55 million pounds. The MFAC did express concern about significant interannual variability in the summer flounder quota in recent years and poor inshore fishing conditions, to which DMF committed to having staff present on the summer flounder stock assessment and observations that the distribution of the biomass is shifting to the north and east.

*Recommendation on Regulatory Framework to Remove and Dispose of Fishing Gear Debris.* The MFAC unanimously approved DMF's final regulations to establish a framework to permit and authorize the removal and disposal of fishing gear debris. This framework responds to recent statutory changes that afford property rights to fishing gear but allow for DMF to authorize the clean-up of fishing gear debris. Accordingly, the framework establishes a regulatory definition for the term "intact" which allows for fishing gear to be differentiated from fishing gear debris. DMF will then authorize: (1) DMF and the Massachusetts Environmental Police to broadly remove, possess, and dispose of fishing gear debris; (2) any person or entity to remove, possess, and dispose of fishing gear debris above mean low tide; (3) commercial mobile gear fishers to remove, possess, and dispose of fishing gear debris incidentally encountered during lawful fishing; and (4) DMF to create an application process for persons and entities to obtain a permit to remove, possess, and dispose of fishing gear debris below mean low tide. This application process will minimally include a description of when, where, and how the project will be conducted; how the fishing gear debris will be disposed of; how user group and gear conflicts will be avoided; and the relevant expertise of the applicant or their contractors. Lastly, with regards to aquaculture gear, DMF will require all aquaculture gear be marked in accordance with municipal rules so that it is identifiable to the permit holder and allows municipal authorities to assist in the recovery of derelict aquaculture gear.

**Final Permitting Decision**

*Commercial Striped Bass Permitting.* The MFAC did not object to DMF moving forward with final regulations affecting permitting in the commercial striped bass fishery. This action includes: (1) making the fishery limited entry in 2026 by constraining issuance only to those persons who

held a permit in 2024 or 2025; (2) establishing the permit as non-transferable; and (3) updating the control date from June 14, 2022 to December 31, 2025. In response to public comment, DMF does not intend to move forward an owner-operator requirement at this time, but this may be reconsidered in future rule making.

This action is being taken in response to two primary drivers. First, striped bass allowable catch has declined over the past decade in response to stock status and is unlikely to increase in the near-term due to environmentally driven recruitment failure. Given the commercial fishery is already constrained by restrictive limits, constraints on permitting are warranted to ensure the fishery can remain profitable for historic participants. Second, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission recently updated the Interstate Fishery Management Plan to require member states implement a harvester tagging program for their commercial fishery by January 1, 2029. DMF currently has a dealer tagging program. Both of these factors are going to require a substantial reduction in participation in this fishery moving forward and this action effectively begins this process. Through future rule-making, DMF will likely reduce the number of permit holders through the use of the control date coupled with qualifying performance criteria, establish an exit-entry program to allow for new entrants while maintaining a low economic barrier to entry, and implement a harvester tagging program.

### **Items for Public Hearing**

*Horseshoe Crab Quota Management.* DMF briefed the MFAC on a forthcoming public hearing proposal to decrease the bait quota for horseshoe crabs from 140,000 crabs annually to 100,000 crabs annually. This 40,000-crab reduction in the bait quota will be reallocated to the biomedical quota at a 1:2 ratio to increase the biomedical quota by 80,000 crabs from 200,000 to 280,000 crabs annually. 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. Further, while it increases the overall capture of crabs annually by converting bait quota to biomedical quota, total mortality should decrease by about 28,000 crabs annually. There was general support among the MFAC to go to public hearing with this proposal. However, concerns were raised that this may negatively impact bait dealers and conch pot fishers should bait demand increase and that commercial fishers did not support additional quota being allocated away from the commercial fishing industry to two biomedical firms.

*Sea Scallop Dredge Width and North Shore Pilot Program.* DMF briefed the MFAC on a forthcoming public hearing proposal to make a technical correction to the state's sea scallop maximum dredge width rule. This proposal will increase the maximum dredge width from 10' to 10.5' to bring it in line with federal small dredge requirements. Uniform rules across jurisdictions will enhance enforcement and compliance. DMF also briefed the MFAC on the continued development of a pilot program to provide seasonal (late winter and early spring) access to areas within the year-round North Shore Region Mobile Gear Closure south and southwest of Gloucester. DMF is currently working on refining the spatial parameters and participation criteria and is hopeful this pilot program will move forward for February 2026.

*Commercial Directed Scup Limit in June.* DMF briefed the MFAC on a forthcoming public hearing proposal to increase the commercial scup limit in June from 400 pounds per trip to 800 pounds and to move from three open fishing days per week (Sundays/Tuesdays/Thursdays) to five open fishing days per week (Sundays–Thursdays). This responds to an industry request to liberalize the June limits to align with those in May, thereby allowing for directed fishing activity and improving quota utilization.

## **Discussion Items**

*Interstate Fisheries Management Update.* DMF provided the MFAC with a presentation on the 2025 American Lobster Stock Assessment. The agency also updated the MFAC with regards to a recent joint meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission whereby it was determined that coastwide recreational black sea bass harvest may be increased by 20% in 2026. The ASMFC will reconvene in February to determine how the coastwide liberalization is distributed amongst the states. Emergency rule-making will be necessary. No changes to recreational scup or summer flounder limits are anticipated. DMF also briefed the MFAC on ongoing conversations at the MAFMC/ASMFC regarding the development of an amendment to address mode management in recreational fisheries.

*Federal Fisheries Management.* DMF briefed the MFAC on the December 2025 New England Fishery Management Council meeting. This covered 2026 sea scallop specifications; the development of a multi-species groundfish framework to create a process to adjust recreational measures and set revised specifications for various stocks; spiny dogfish quota decisions; and Council priorities moving forward. Additionally, DMF noted the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council approved updated commercial and recreational mackerel limits. On the recreational side, the Council approved a 25-fish limit for private vessel anglers and a 50-fish limit for for-hire vessel anglers (up from a uniform 20-fish limit).

## **Upcoming Meetings**

DMF and the MFAC have not yet scheduled meetings for 2026.