



## **MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission**

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### **February 20, 2020 Meeting Summary**

This document serves as a brief summary of the February 20, 2020 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. Further details are available in the supplemental meeting materials and MFAC business meeting minutes.

#### **Action Items**

##### Temporary Lifting of April Commercial Groundfish Closure in Massachusetts Bay

The MFAC reviewed and approved the Acting Director's recommendation to temporarily lift the conditional April commercial groundfish closure in Massachusetts Bay for 2020. DMF's analysis indicated that lifting this closure will not result in Massachusetts' state-waters groundfish fishery exceeding annually federally allocated state-waters subcomponents for groundfish stocks and compromising federal conservation objectives. This action does not impact existing spawning closures or gear type closures. These closures still apply and may restrict groundfish fishing in certain areas.

##### In-Season Increase to Period I Summer Flounder Trip Limits

The MFAC reviewed and approved the Acting Director's recommendation to increase the Period I (January 1 – April 22) summer flounder trip limits from 1,000 pounds to 2,000 pounds. This trip limit increase goes in effect on Sunday, February 23, 2020. The Period I summer flounder fishery is allocated 30% of the annual quota. To date, only 17% of this seasonal quota allocation has been taken. This trip limit increase is intended to provide the offshore fleet that targets fluke during the wintertime with additional access to the available quota. If 25% of the annual quota is taken during Period 1, the trip limit will be automatically reduced to 100 pounds in order to ensure that the Period II fishery's quota allocation is unaffected.

#### **Discussion Items**

DMF reviewed recent interstate and federal fisheries management meetings. The focus of the discussion was on the February Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission meeting. DMF reported on the Menhaden and Striped Bass Management Board meetings. The Menhaden Board meeting focused on the adoption of eco-system based reference points. The Striped Bass Board reviewed state Addendum VI implementation plans and conservation equivalency proposals for recreational limits. At the conclusion of the meeting, it appeared that - with the exception of Rhode Island- the northeast states (Maine to New York) were going to propose their states adopt the 28" to 35" slot limit set forth in the Addendum. Rhode Island had two conservation equivalency measures approved and were taking them out to public hearing. The MFAC concurred to co-author with DMF a public comment letter to Rhode Island encouraging them to adopt the 28" to 35" slot limit due to conservation and enforcement concerns.

DMF also reviewed recreational bluefish measures for 2020. DMF was moving forward a proposal to adopt a 3-fish bag limit for private anglers and a 5-fish bag limit for for-hire anglers. These limits were being adopted coastwide, except for in Georgia where a conservation equivalency was approved. Regarding recreational Gulf of Maine cod and haddock, DMF reported that for the remainder of 2020 the limits would remain status quo. However, based on the New England Fishery Management Council's recommendation to NOAA Fisheries, it is likely that rules will change for April 2021. These expected changes will recreational anglers to retain one cod measuring at least 21 inches from April 1 to April 14, 2021 and 15 haddock measuring at least 17 inches throughout April 2021.

DMF then provided the MFAC with an overview of the recent February 18 and February 19, 2020 meetings regarding federal right whale conservation proposals. DMF expects that Massachusetts commercial lobstermen will be subject to a new weak rope rules, minimum trap per trawl requirements for the offshore fishery, and a seasonal closure south of Nantucket. DMF noted that NOAA Fisheries was giving Massachusetts fishermen conservation credit for the existing trap gear seasonal closure around Cape Cod.

In response to ongoing right whale conservation challenges, as well as impending offshore wind energy development in the Gulf of Maine, DMF determined there is a need for better spatial data regarding where the lobster fishery is conducted. Accordingly, Massachusetts and Maine were piloting a program to use cellular spatial track tools. DMF provided the MFAC with a brief presentation on this ongoing project and there was some discussion about the challenges of spatial ocean planning.

DMF provided the MFAC with an Seafood Marketing Program update. This focused on the upcoming Seafood Expo North America event in Boston from March 15 to March 17. DMF was involved in the "Mass Ave" event that features eight local seafood businesses and would be bringing about 30 seafood buyers to network with the local seafood business.

DMF also provided an update on the Massachusetts Shellfish Initiative. The Scoping Committee and Assessment Committee reports are on the verge of being released to the public and this would inform the development of the Task Force's Strategic Plan, as well as other deliverables.

DMF reminded the MFAC of the upcoming March 10 and March 12 public hearings and added that the March 25 business meeting would likely be dominated by recommendations coming out of those public hearings.

The MFAC committed to a review of the issues of state and local control of shellfish aquaculture.

### **Upcoming Meetings**

The MFAC is currently scheduled to meet again on March 25, 2020. Unless otherwise specified, business meetings begin at 9AM and are held at DFW's Field Headquarters located at 1 Rabbit Hill Road in Westborough, MA.

Any materials regarding past or upcoming MFAC business meetings may be obtained from DMF. Contact Jared Silva at DMF (617-626-1534 or [jared.silva@state.ma.us](mailto:jared.silva@state.ma.us)).