

Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission  
Final Business Meeting Minutes  
February 11, 2026  
Via Zoom

**Attendees**

**Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission:** Ray Kane, Chair; Shelley Edmundson, Clerk; Sooky Sawyer; Ray Jarvis; Chris McGuire; Eric Nelson; Bill Doyle; Bill Amaru; Willy Goldsmith

**Division of Marine Fisheries:** Dan McKiernan, Director; Story Reed, Deputy Director; Bob Glenn, Deputy Director; Kevin Creighton; Nichola Meserve; Jared Silva; Melanie Griffin; Kelly Whitmore; Derek Perry; Bradlie Morgan; Steve Wilcox; Wendy Mills; Elise Koob; Scott Schaeffer; Brad Schondelmeier; David Chosid; Greg Skomal; Kerry Allard; Tracy Pugh; Amanda Meli; Luke Putaansuu; Anna Webb; Kristen Thiebault; Ben Gahagan; Laura Tomlinson; Brendan Reilly; Bill Hoffman; Emma Fowler; Ross Kessler; Nick Buchan; Maren Budrow; Alex Boeri; Erich Druskat

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

**Massachusetts Environmental Police:** Matt Bass.

**Members of the Public:** Michael Pierdinock; Beth Casoni; Julia Logan; Olivia Loparto; Andrew Applegate; Sam Pickard; Joseph; Glen Fernandes; Jorge Davies; Alvin; Willy Hatch; Sean Leach; Nick O'Toole; Jeremy Loparto; Jason; Jonah; Joseph Huckemeyer.

**Call to Order and Routine Business**

Chairman Ray Kane called the meeting to order. He asked the group for a minute of silence in remembrance of the lives lost with the sinking of the F/V Lily Jean earlier this year. Ray noted that among the lost was Captain Gus Sanfilippo, who previously served on the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission.

Chairman Kane then welcomed Willy Goldsmith, a newly appointed member of the MFAC. Goldsmith thanked the Chair and looked forward to working with the MFAC.

## Review of the February 2026 Business Meeting Agenda

The Chair asked if there were any amendments to the February 2026 business meeting agenda. Bill Doyle asked for time to discuss a letter of support from the MFAC for the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) and UMass Dartmouth to continue modeling wastewater treatment plant effluent due to its impact on shellfish area reclassifications. This would be brought up under “Other Business”.

## Review and Approval of December 2025 Draft Business Meeting Minutes

Chairman Kane sought amendments to the December 2025 draft business meeting minutes. No amendments were proposed. **The Chair called for a motion to approve the December 2025 business meeting minutes as drafted. Chris McGuire made a motion to approve the minutes, and Bill Amaru seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously (8-0-1 with the Chair abstaining).**

## Agency Updates

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

Lieutenant Matt Bass provided the update for the Massachusetts Environmental Police (MEP). MEP officers were involved with the ongoing effort to survey and assess the site of the F/V Lily Jean’s sinking. Additionally, a recent Center for Coastal Studies (CCS) aerial survey spotted 37 North Atlantic right whales in Cape Cod Bay. MEP worked closely with DMF during the seasonal trap closures to address any gear remaining in the area.

On personnel, MEP has a total of 97 law enforcement staff, with 76 active in the field. Six new officers will be onboarded this year, all of which have previous experience as police officers. Chairman Kane asked to clarify upcoming retirements. Lieutenant Bass responded that 3 – 5 retirements are anticipated in the near future. Kane expressed interest in the MFAC submitting a letter to Governor Healey to request additional funding be allocated towards additional MEP staffing. There were no objections.

Sooky Sawyer then asked Lieutenant Bass about MEP activity in Provincetown concerning draggers landing lobsters. Bass described an ongoing case concerning an oversized lobster seizure that took place in January. Bill Amaru asked to clarify whether the enforcement concerned local vessels or a vessel offloading in Provincetown. Bass confirmed that the enforcement concerns broadly deal with vessels landing in Provincetown and not specific local boats.

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

Commissioner Tom O'Shea provided updates on behalf of the Department of Fish and Game (DFG). He first acknowledged the loss of the crew from the F/V Lily Jean. He recognized the impact on the fishing community, and thanked Sefatia Romeo-Theken for her efforts to support impacted families, as well as Governor Healey and Senator Bruce Tarr.

Commissioner O'Shea then welcomed Willy Goldsmith to the MFAC. He remarked on the value of Goldsmith's experience in fisheries management and science.

The Commissioner recently attended the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association's (MLA) Annual Weekend. The event provided an opportunity for him to connect with industry members and hear from DMF staff about their derelict gear initiative.

O'Shea applauded Bob Glenn and DMF for their efforts to develop a marine habitat restoration center at the Cat Cove Laboratory in Salem. He suggested DMF brief the MFAC on this effort at a future meeting.

Lastly, Commissioner O'Shea remarked on anticipated budget restrictions for this upcoming year which have constrained hiring state-wide.

Chairman Kane thanked MFAC members for attending the Commissioner's Cup award ceremony for DMF's annual recreational fishing derby. Commissioner O'Shea applauded DMF for their effort in hosting this event.

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

Director McKiernan thanked the MFAC for their flexibility in rescheduling this meeting to accommodate the funeral of Gus Sanfilippo. The Director shared brief remarks regarding the tragic sinking of the F/V Lily Jean and the loss of Captain Sanfillipo — a former MFAC member — as well as the crew and observer onboard the vessel. Dan thanked Deputy Commissioner Sefatia Romeo-Theken for her attention and care in supporting the Gloucester community.

The Director recently attended the US-Canada Lobster Town Meeting in New Brunswick. He emphasized the importance of Massachusetts representation at this meeting, including Tracy Pugh's role on the Planning Committee. The meeting hosted valuable discussion on market trends, with consideration to shifts in landing distribution and the impact of tariffs. He hoped for greater Massachusetts participation at the 2027

meeting (to be held in Maine). The Director also attended MLA's Annual Weekend and echoed Commissioner O'Shea's remarks on the value of speaking directly with industry members. He also applauded the success of the Commissioner's Cup ceremony for recreational fishing derby awards.

The Director shared updates on the status of three lawsuits involving state and interstate fishery management. One federal court case attempted to reopen a 1998 Outer Cape Cod lobster lawsuit ruled and the court recently denied this request and ruled in favor of the Commonwealth's motion to dismiss. There are also two ongoing cases in state court. The first deals with v-notch possession standard for the Outer Cape Cod Lobster Conservation Management Area and the other involves an electronic vessel tracking requirement for dual state-federal lobster trap permit holders.

DMF has two pilot programs occurring this winter. One allows the fishing of on-demand trap gear and the other sea scallop dredge fishing in certain areas along the North Shore. There was some concern raised by Salem Sound and Gloucester fishers and NOAA Fisheries that the scallop dredge program was ripe to cause a gear conflict with the on-demand program and potential result in the loss of expensive on-demand gear. DMF met with NOAA Fisheries and then held a meeting with NOAA Fisheries and participants in each program to clarify how this work could cooccur. There was a general consensus that gear conflicts could largely be avoided by the seasonality of each activity, increased communication, and avoidance of certain bottom types.

The Legislative Coastal Caucus has requested a meeting with DMF to discuss horseshoe crab management in the Commonwealth.

The New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) nominations being sought. MFAC members will be asked to review the Commonwealth's nomination recommendations before they are shared with the Secretary of Commerce.

The 2025 Belding Award will be presented to Henry Lind at the next Massachusetts Shellfish Officers Association (MSOA) meeting on March 19<sup>th</sup> at DMF's New Bedford Office. Bill Amaru asked to be notified of the exact time and location of this event. Jared Silva said DMF would provide this information to MFAC members.

On upcoming meetings, DMF will hold a public hearing on February 24<sup>th</sup> at Massachusetts Maritime Academy in Buzzards Bay with a listen-in option via Zoom.

Chris McGuire echoed Dan's recognition of the successful MLA's Annual Weekend event. He asked to clarify Bob Glenn's comment at the MLA event on potential changes to the timing of lobster gear closures in response to shifts to potential seasonal shifts in right whale behavior.

Glenn explained that there have been anecdotal observations of right whales aggregating in our waters earlier in the winter. DMF intends to analyze available spatio-temporal data to better understand how this may affect potential entanglement risk given our current trap gear closure does not go in effect until February 1. Better understanding this risk will help DMF assess management strategies.

Glenn and the McKiernan then discussed how the Consolidated Appropriations Act held the lobster fishery in compliance with the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act through 2028. The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team will initiate rulemaking later in 2026 with the goal to implement rules at the end of 2028. This timeline will allow changes to go into effect in 2029, when the Consolidated Appropriations Act allows.

Chairman Kane asked if the Coastal Caucus could help address the impact of ice in coastal harbors restricting fishing vessels. Bill Doyle added that his town has requested an ice breaker to help open their harbor. Dan said that this can be explored.

## Future Emergency Regulations

### Atlantic Mackerel Recreational Bag Limits and Commercial Trip Limits

Melanie Griffin provided an update on Atlantic mackerel regulations. The 2025 stock assessment suggested increased recruitment in 2024, allowing the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) to increase Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) and liberalize commercial and recreational fishing limits. DMF intends to implement relevant aspects of this action by emergency regulation for May 1, 2026, consistent with the expected federal implementation timeline. With regards to the recreational fishery, the MAFMC approved an increase in the recreational angler bag limit from 20 to 25 fish for private anglers and 25 to 50 fish for anglers onboard for-hire vessels. On the commercial side, the state waters trip limit would continue to match the federal open access trip limit. However, whereas the open access trip limit is currently 5,000 pounds reduced to 2,500 pounds once 80% of the annual quota is taken, the new trip limit starts at 20,000 pounds, decreases to 5,000 pounds, and then decreases again to 2,500 pounds in response to achieving certain quota-use thresholds.

Chairman Kane asked about size limits for forage fish like Atlantic mackerel. Griffin responded that size limits are not typically used for forage fish, though this may be considered in response to recent Executive Orders to optimize fishery management.

### Update on Potential 2026 Recreational Black Sea Bass Limits

Nichola Meserve shared an update on potential black sea bass recreational limits for 2026. She reminded the MFAC that the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

(ASMFC) and MAFMC approved a 20% coastwide harvest liberalization across the region for 2026 and 2027. Liberalizations have been distributed across regions. For 2026, the states within the Northern Region (MA–NY) are allowed to liberalize their recreational black sea bass limits to increase harvest by 27%, states within the Southern Region (DE-NC) are allowed to increase harvest by 16.5%, and the remaining increase (about 16-18%) will go to New Jersey. Meserve described the truncated regulatory timeline and noted that management options must be provided to the ASMFC by the end of February. The ASMFC Board will review and approve proposals in March, and states will inform the ASMFC of final measures by April 1. In response to this framework, DMF sought to discuss presumptive management approaches with the MFAC to help inform decision making.

Based on recent public scoping and angler surveys, DMF was working to develop a management approach that sought to balance maintaining an open season start date of no later than the third Saturday in May, reducing the minimum size from 16.5" to 16", maintaining a bag limit of no less than 4-fish in May and June, and extending the season into the fall. Meserve then outlined several different potential management options that met these objectives and their projected harvest levels.

McKiernan and Meserve discussed the dynamic between Massachusetts and other states in the Northern Region. Meserve added that the Northern Region states continue to work towards developing a regional approach, which may include considerations to uniformly reduce minimum size limits by ½-inch, set a common season opening date, and smooth out some discrepancy in harvest opportunities among the states.

McKiernan applauded Meserve and Chairman Kane for their work on the ASMFC.

Willy Goldsmith asked whether MRIP Wave 5 data is included in these projections. Meserve responded that the model does not include the most recent Wave 5 due to time limitations; rather, it uses two years' worth of data (mid-2023 to mid-2025).

Bill Amaru asked about any difference in fecundity between black sea bass at 16" and 16.5". Meserve responded that fish of these sizes are similar ages, but she wasn't sure of their fecundity. However, she emphasized that the half inch reduction is mainly targeted to reduce discards. Amaru and Meserve discussed the benefits of this approach to the recreational sector. Meserve added that in recent years, the assumed dead discards in Massachusetts have outpaced harvest according to the 15% discard mortality estimate used coastwide. Amaru voiced support for the minimum size reduction.

Eric Nelson, Ray Jarvis, and Willy Goldsmith expressed support for reducing the minimum size limit in order to minimize discards. Nelson and Meserve discussed differences in minimum sizes across neighboring states. Meserve noted the benefit of

Massachusetts aligning with Connecticut and Rhode Island. Jarvis and Goldsmith expressed support for the season extension into October, if possible, given that black sea bass may be targeted in the fall closer to Rhode Island. Goldsmith added that he would prefer a season extension over a higher bag limit.

Meserve then described the measures across other states in 2025. She noted that a key difference in Massachusetts from the Northern Region is preference for a higher bag limit earlier in the season.

Shelley Edmundson asked about size reductions across other states and voiced support for matching this reduction in Massachusetts. Meserve noted that states will likely first aim for a 16" minimum size, then incorporate other measures as they're able.

The Chair asked about the projected magnitude of harvest later in the season. Meserve explained the model shows a reduction in catch rate from September to October but noted the model was data poor for Massachusetts given limited access in Wave 5 in prior years.

The MFAC did not object to DMF's prioritizations and management approach.

McKiernan stated that DMF will report back to the MFAC at their March business meeting to provide more specific fishing limits and move to file emergency regulations immediately thereafter.

## Discussion Items

### Interstate Fisheries Management Update

DMF staff briefed the MFAC on the recent ASMFC winter meeting and the joint meeting of the ASMFC and MAFMC.

Deputy Director Bob Glenn covered American lobster and Jonah crab. The technical committee (TC) was tasked with the development of potential biological reference points to account for changing environmental conditions and stock productivity for evaluation in the next stock assessment. Additionally, the Board initiated a Management Strategy Evaluation and formed a steering committee to identify potential goals and objectives for the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank lobster stock. The Jonah crab TC did not recommend any immediate management actions for data updates.

Chairman Kane asked about the timeline before the Management Strategy Evaluation. Glenn responded one of the key roles of the steering committee will be to determine the timeline and was optimistic that they would be able to create well-defined objectives in the next 18 months.

Bill Amaru asked if any industry members will be included in steering committee. Glenn responded that each state will appoint industry representatives.

Nichola Meserve then reviewed board meetings for winter flounder, spiny dogfish, American eel, menhaden, and striped bass.

In response to the 2025 winter flounder stock assessment and federal specification process, the ASMFC set status quo commercial and recreational state waters limits for both the Gulf of Maine and Southern New England (SNE)/Mid-Atlantic (MA) management areas for 2026–2028. The Board tasked the TC with evaluating impacts related to potentially increasing the recreational limit in SNE/MA in the future.

The commercial spiny dogfish quota was set at 9.2 million pounds for Fishing Year 2026 and 2027, down from 9.34 million pounds this year. While the trip limit for the Northern Region will remain at 7,500 pounds, there is some interest in considering higher limits or weekly aggregate limits to address economic efficiency and quota underutilization.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species recently met. The proposal to list American eel on Appendix II — at risk of becoming a threatened species — was rejected.

The Menhaden Board continues to develop a draft addendum to consider revisions to the Chesapeake Bay reduction fishery cap.

The Striped Bass Board initiated discussions to scope the development of a working group to consider future striped bass management in consideration of the likelihood that the stock may be entering a period of lower productivity due to environmental changes.

Meserve then pivoted to discuss MRIP recalibration and the joint ASMFC and MAFMC meeting. Changes to the MRIP fishing effort survey will result in revisions to private and shore-based catch estimates. A recalibrated time series of recreational catch estimates is expected in the summer (delayed from this spring). Additionally, there is some consideration of moving from two-month (“waves”) to one-month catch estimates pending resource availability.

The ASMFC and the MAFMC continue to work to develop a range of proposals regarding recreational fishing sector separation. A stakeholder workshop will be held later this year to consider potential management guidelines, methods to assign alternative limits to for-hire vessels, and revisions to state and federal permitting rules including reporting requirements and entry criteria. Meserve anticipated the workshop will include about 20 participants and there will be an application process to participate.

Chairman Kane and Meserve discussed the anticipated level of participants sufficient to adequately reflect stakeholder interests.

### Federal Fisheries Management Update

Melanie Griffin provided an update on the NEFMC's most recent January 2026 meeting. The report focused on the setting of recreational Western Gulf of Maine (WGOM) cod and Gulf of Maine (GOM) haddock limits for Fishing Year 2026. For WGOM cod, the NEFMC recommended maintaining the 1-fish bag limit and 23" minimum size while going from a September 1–October 31 open season to an October 1–October 31 open season. For GOM haddock, the NEFMC recommended maintaining the 15-fish bag limit and April 1–February 28 open season but decreasing the minimum size from 18" to 17". Additionally, DMF covered the NEFMC's programmatic review of the Limited Access General Category Individual Fishing Quota program for the sea scallop fishery; considerations for Essential Fish Habitats; and a preview of the April 2026 NEFMC meeting agenda.

### North Shore Sea Scallop Pilot Program

Story Reed informed the MFAC that DMF was set to initiate a new pilot program to allow sea scallop dredging in two discrete areas off Gloucester and Salem Sound that have been historically closed to mobile gear fishing. The pilot program will occur this year from February 15–April 30. An application period ran from January 20–February 3 and there were 31 qualified applicants. Before receiving their Letter of Authorization to participate in this pilot program, qualified applicants would be required to install an operable tracking device to inform DMF of fishing effort and location, aid in enforcement and compliance, and enhance the data available to better inform management moving forward. DMF intends to monitor tracking data weekly to understand where and how fishing is taking place.

Director McKiernan added that a meeting was recently held to discuss this program between on-demand lobstermen and mobile gear fishermen. Reed and Jared Silva noted that there was interest in the mobile gear fishermen on how to view on-demand gear using online applications. Silva added that there is a difference in timing of these fisheries, where scallopers will likely use the areas in February and early spring, and ropeless gear will likely be used in the area in April and May. Issues were largely mitigated at this meeting, and an additional meeting will likely be held in the future.

McKiernan explained how the pilot program will address concerns around interactions between fishing gear and shipwrecks, underwater cables, as well as potential user group conflicts with recreational divers and commercial fishers piloting on-demand trap gear.

## Offshore Wind Energy Update

Brad Schondelmeier provided the MFAC with an update on offshore wind energy projects and awards provided by the Massachusetts Fisheries Innovation Fund.

On energy project updates, the report focused on the current status of various projects and recent federal actions and resulting litigation. On the Fisheries Innovation Fund Awards, twenty proposals were seeking \$3.37M in funding. Of these proposals, six were approved to receive up to \$1.17M in funding. This includes three fishing gear development projects (trap gear and mechanical jigging) to expand fishing opportunities around wind arrays and build fleet resiliency; two community projects to promote local seafood and enhance seafood marketing; and one safety project to evaluate potential hazards related to towing over cable protection mattresses.

Bill Amaru asked about any proposals aimed at studying fish migration through offshore wind areas with concern to high energy impact from cables. Schondelmeier noted that fishing research was not emphasized in the first solicitation in order to focus on projects that may increase monetary value for fishermen; however, there is potential to for this to be explored in future solicitations.

## Presentation on Summer Flounder Stock Assessment

Director McKiernan shared that this was presented in response to concerns about summer flounder distribution and potential inaccurate assessments.

DMF stock assessment scientist, Elise Koob, provided a presentation to the MFAC on the summer flounder stock assessment. The presentation examined the 2025 stock assessment, which found that Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) was at 83% of the target and Fishing Mortality (F) was at 76%, meaning it was not overfished and overfishing was not occurring. Koob also outlined the various fisheries dependent and independent data used in the stock assessment and stock trends and catch limits overtime.

Based on the current assessment results, the MAFMC was able to increase catch limits for next two calendar years (2026 and 2027). However, the Science and Statistical Committee found a retrospective bias in the model that overestimated terminal year-class strength and previously resulted in the yo-yoing of catch limits across stock assessments. In response, a 12% management uncertainty buffer was applied to reduce catch limits. Koob also reviewed historic abundance and catch limit data.

Koob then described the current state of the summer flounder fishery in Massachusetts based on commercial fisheries data, MRIP estimates, and the state's bottom trawl surveys. These data generally demonstrate a shift in resource availability away from inshore waters where they were historically caught. Commercial harvester data shows a

shift in fluke landings from state waters into federal waters over the past 15-years. MRIP estimates reflect a slight increase in for-hire catch alongside a substantial decrease in total summer flounder catch by private recreational angler modes, suggesting reduced inshore/nearshore availability. Lastly, while DMF's 2025 resource assessment survey showed higher catch of summer flounder and greater numbers of smaller fish compared to recent years (suggesting a strong 2023 year class), the catch occurred in deeper depth strata. Koob opined that this may be the result of the north and eastward shift in stock distribution documented in the 2018 assessment. Research in Rhode Island is currently investigating this through tagging studies.

Chairman Kane asked about stock distribution data after the 2018 assessment. Koob responded that the most comprehensive dataset addressing stock distribution was produced in that assessment.

Kane then followed up on a request from Bill Amaru at a prior MFAC meeting for DMF to investigate a potential exemption for skate and monkfish gillnet fishers to retain and land an incidental catch of summer flounder. McKiernan indicated that staff were looking into the question and he intended to reach out to the Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance to better understand the scope of the problem.

Ray Jarvis thanked Koob for her presentation and expressed interest in the tagging research. Koob responded that she can provide an update on this data later in 2026.

### Other Business and Public Comment

The Chair invited MFAC members for other business.

Bill Doyle asked the MFAC for their help with a letter of support advocating for continued funding towards modeling the effluent of wastewater treatment plants as this work is critical to maintaining shellfish fisheries. Director McKiernan suggested that DMF could present on the issue at an upcoming MFAC meeting and Doyle could follow up and work with Chairman Kane to draft a letter to the Healey Administration for the MFAC's consideration.

Sooky Sawyer asked about the North Shore Sea Scallop Pilot Program and any anticipated interactions with ghost gear. Silva noted that this was not discussed with industry members, but the Letters of Authorization can include clarification that derelict gear can be brought ashore according to new regulations and framework. Reed added that gear dumpsters will be available in Rockport and Gloucester for use at that time.

The Chair invited public comment. Beth Casoni of the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association thanked DFG and DMF for attending MLA's Annual Weekend. She echoed

earlier comments that future events can allow for increased discussion between DMF and industry.

### Adjournment

Chairman Kane thanked everyone for attending the meeting. The Chair asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. **Shelley Edmundson made a motion to adjourn and Ray Jarvis second the motion. There were no objections. The meeting was adjourned.**

### Meeting Materials

- February 11, 2026 MFAC Business Meeting Agenda
- December 18, 2025 MFAC Draft Business Meeting Minutes
- Memorandum Emergency Regulations and Future Public Hearing on Atlantic Mackerel Commercial and Recreational Rule Changes
- Recreational Atlantic Mackerel Presentation
- Presentation on 2026-2027 Recreational Black Sea Bass Measures from Public Scoping Meeting
- Presentation on Interstate Fishery Management Updates
- Presentation on Recreational Black Sea Bass Measures
- January 2026 NEFMC Meeting Summary
- Presentation on New England Regional Fishery Updates
- North Shore Sea Scallop Pilot Program Slide
- Presentation on Offshore Wind Updates
- Presentation on Summer Flounder Stock Assessment

### Next Meeting Date

March 17, 2026

Westborough