



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission February 11, 2026 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the February 11, 2026 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](#).

Future Emergency Regulations

Atlantic Mackerel. The MFAC provided unanimous consent to DMF using its emergency authority to liberalize the recreational and commercial Atlantic mackerel limits. These emergency rules will complement recent actions taken by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC). DMF anticipates both state and federal rules will go into effect at the start of the upcoming fishing year on May 1, 2026. For the recreational fishery, the bag limit will increase from 20-fish to 25-fish for private anglers and 50-fish for for-hire vessel anglers. For the commercial fishery, the state trip limit will continue to match the federal open access trip limit. However, rather than the limit starting at 5,000 pounds and decreasing to 2,500 pounds once 80% of the annual quota is taken, the trip limit will start at 20,000 pounds then decrease to 5,000 pounds once XX% of the annual quota remains, and then decrease again to 2,500 pounds when XX% of the annual quota remains.

Recreational Black Sea Bass. 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%. 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. Based on public scoping of Massachusetts anglers, DMF is working to balance several preferred management adjustments in the development of state rules. This includes maintaining the start date on the third Saturday of May; reducing the minimum size from 16.5" to 16"; extending the season into the fall; and maintaining at least a 4-fish bag limit during May and June while potentially adopting a lower bag limit during the summer and the fall to achieve the other priorities. The MFAC unanimously supported DMF's approach to prioritization. DMF will report back to the MFAC at their March business meeting to provide more specific fishing limits to be implemented by emergency regulation.

Discussion Items

Interstate Fisheries Management Update. DMF provided the MFAC with an overview of the February 2026 Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) business meeting.

- Lobster. The technical committee was tasked to develop potential biological reference points that account for changing environmental conditions and stock productivity for evaluation in the next stock assessment. Additionally, in order to work towards a

Management Strategy Evaluation, a steering committee was developed to identify potential management goals and objectives for the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank stock.

- Winter Flounder. Based on the results of the 2025 stock assessment and New England Fishery Management Council specifications, the ASMFC set status quo commercial and recreational state waters limits for both the Gulf of Maine and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic management areas for 2026–2028. However, the Technical Committee was asked to evaluate potential impacts of increasing the recreational limit in SNE/MA in the future.
- Spiny Dogfish. The quota was set at 9.2 million pounds for Fishing Year 2026 and 2027, down from 9.34 million pounds this year. The trip limit for the Northern Region will remain at 7,500 pounds. However, there is some interest in considering higher limits or weekly aggregate limits to address economic efficiency and quota underutilization.
- American Eel. The proposal to list American eel on CITES Appendix II (at risk of becoming a threatened species) was rejected.
- Menhaden. The Board continues to develop a draft addendum to consider revisions to the Chesapeake Bay reduction fishery cap.
- Striped Bass. The 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.
- MRIP Update. Changes to the 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 summer (delayed from spring). Additionally, there is some consideration of moving from two-month to one-month catch estimates pending resource availability.
- For-Hire Sector Separation. The ASMFC and the MAFMC continue to work on a range of proposals to address interest in separate management of the for-hire fishing mode. 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.

Federal Fisheries Management. DMF briefed the MFAC on the January 2026 New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) 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. DMF informed the MFAC that it was set to initiate the 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 from February 15–April 30. The 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 have to install an operable tracking device to inform DMF of fishing effort and location and aid in enforcement and compliance. Additionally, DMF discussed how the pilot program will address concerns around shipwrecks and underwater cables and user group conflicts with recreational divers and commercial fishers piloting on-demand trap gear.

Offshore Wind Energy Update. DMF 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.

Summer Flounder Stock Assessment Presentation

Per MFAC request, DMF staff provided a presentation on the summer flounder stock assessment, variability in the setting of catch limits, changing abundance in inshore waters off Massachusetts, and the shift in distribution of the summer flounder stock to the north and east.

Upcoming Meetings

The MFAC will meet again on Tuesday, March 17, 2026.