



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission January 21, 2022 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the January 21, 2022 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. This business meeting was held virtually. All meeting materials are available on the [MFAC's past meeting website](#). The full meeting can be viewed on [DMF's YouTube channel](#).

Action Items

Buoy Line Marking Requirements. The MFAC approved new buoy line marking requirements for the state's commercial trap fisheries. For state waters, all buoy lines affixed to commercial lobster traps, fish pots, or whelk pots are to have: one solid red mark of at least three-feet in length in the first 12' of the buoy line extending into the water from the buoy ("surface system") and then at least four solid or non-solid red marks of at least two-feet in length throughout the remainder of the buoy line ("body of the buoy line"). In the body of the buoy line, two of the four marks are to be in the top 50% and the other two in the bottom 50% and there is to be no more than 60' between marks. There are to be no marks other than red marks, unless the buoy line is red in which case all marks are to be white. For the federal waters commercial lobster and crab trap fishery, the existing buoy line marking requirements were clarified to ensure a solid or non-solid green mark of at least one-foot (denoting federal waters gear) is within six inches of all red marks in the buoy line. These new requirements will be effective for 2022 and a notice will be forthcoming with exact implementation dates.

Gillnet Closure to Protect Right Whales. The MFAC approved extending throughout all state waters the existing January 1–May 15 gillnet closure in Cape Cod Bay to protect right whales. Additionally, the closure may be rescinded before May 15 or extended past May 15 based on the observed presence or absence of right whales in state waters. This closure will go into effect this year.

Groundfish Trip Limits and Spatiotemporal Closures. The MFAC approved an April 15–April 30 commercial groundfish closure from Plymouth (42°00'N) to the Massachusetts/New Hampshire maritime border west of 70°30' to protect spawning cod. This matches the federal Spring Massachusetts Bay Spawning Protection Area and provides additional spawning protections north around Cape Ann in recognition of the need to provide greater spatial spawning protections for the spring Gulf of Maine cod spawning cohort. Additionally, the MFAC also approved rescinding the April conditional groundfish closure, as this is redundant with the implementation of the expanded gillnet closure to protect right whales and the late April commercial groundfish closure to protect spawning cod. Lastly, the MFAC approved increasing the Gulf of Maine cod trip limit from 200 pounds to 400 pounds and the Gulf of Maine yellowtail flounder trip limit from 250 pounds to 350 pounds. This was done to provide additional opportunities to access available groundfish allocations at times and places where right whales and spawning cod are of less of a concern.

Small Mesh Squid Trawl Season Adjustment. DMF recommended extending the small mesh squid trawl season from April 23–June 9 to April 23–June 15. With this six-day extension, DMF would also eliminate the Director's discretion to extend the season beyond the regulatorily set closure date. Ultimately, DMF

withdrew this recommendation as it did not have the support of the MFAC. Status quo regulations will remain in place moving forward and the Director will make annual determinations on whether or not to extend the season based on available information regarding squid catch rates.

Trap Tag Installation Deadline. The MFAC approved requiring commercial lobster permit holders install trap tags by May 1 regardless of the Lobster Conservation Management Area fished. If gear is not set for the year until after May 1, then a current annual trap tag must be affixed to the trap when the gear is set.

Winter Period Scup Limits. The MFAC approved a 2,000-pound scup retention limit for vessels fishing in state waters during the Winter I (January 1–April 30) and Winter II (October 1–December 31) quota management periods. Vessels fishing offshore in federal waters may possess and land scup in excess of this state retention limit provided the fish was lawfully caught in federal waters and all gear is stowed when transiting state waters.

Items for Future Public Hearing

Commercial Spiny Dogfish Trip Limits. DMF will go out to public hearing with a proposal to increase the commercial spiny dogfish trip limit from 6,000 pounds to 7,500 pounds. This is intended to match proposed changes to the overarching federal and interstate fishery management for this species. This will likely go out to public hearing in late February or early March with other proposed management measures affecting commercial quota managed species.

Commercial Bluefish Minimum Size. DMF will go out to public hearing with a proposal to establish an 18” commercial minimum size for bluefish. This is intended to reduce the incentive for recreational anglers to obtain a commercial permit to retain bluefish in excess of the recreational bag limit. This will likely go out to public hearing in late February or early March with other proposed management measures affecting commercial quota managed species.

Recreational Georges Bank Cod. As part of Northeast Multi-Species Framework 63, the NEFMC approved adopting a 22-inch to 28-inch slot limit; 5 fish per angler bag limit; and May 1–July 31 closed season. If approved by NOAA Fisheries, these changes would go into effect for this upcoming federal fishing year (May 1, 2022–April 30, 2023). Accordingly, DMF would move to adopt complementary changes to its recreational fishing limits, likely through an emergency regulation.

Discussion Items

Protected Species Updates. DMF briefed the MFAC on issues relevant to protected species. The discussion focused on a recent public hearing on an application to fish on-demand (“ropeless”) buoy lines in certain areas of state waters during the February 1–May 15 trap gear closure. DMF indicated the application was dynamic, as some of the applicants had since withdrawn. Additionally, as all remaining applicants are dual state/federal permit holders, it is DMF’s understanding that they must first receive a federal Exempted Fishing Permit from NOAA Fisheries.

Atlantic Mackerel Management. DMF provided the MFAC with an update on Atlantic mackerel management. The update highlighted a recent letter from the states of Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts to the MAFMC raising concerns about proposals requiring the states to reduce their recreational mackerel catch. DMF also laid out the process and rule making timeline for the MAFMC.

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Update. DMF briefed the MFAC on pertinent issues addressed by the ASMFC in December 2021. This included: proposed requirements for electronic vessel

tracking in the federal lobster and Jonah crab fisheries; approved recreational/commercial reallocations for scup, black sea bass, and summer flounder, and a preliminary outlook on recreational management for these species in 2022; and a continuation of the northern shrimp harvest moratorium. DMF also highlighted several important action items on the ASMFC Winter meeting agenda, including the continued development of Draft Amendment 7 to the Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan and draft Addendum I to the Menhaden Fishery Management Plan; and final action on the spiny dogfish northern region trip limit for FY22.

New England Fishery Management Council Updates. DMF briefed the MFAC on the December 2021 NEFMC meeting and the outlook for the February 2022 NEFMC meeting. This focused on: spiny dogfish trip limits; Northeast Multi-Species Framework 63; Sea Scallop Framework 34; Skate Framework 9; cod stock structure; scallop rotational management and leasing; Atlantic mackerel; climate planning; and habitat issues in Southern New England.

Upcoming Meetings

The MFAC will be meeting again on March 10, 2022. Information regarding the meeting will be published on the [MFAC's website](#). If you would like to obtain any materials regarding past or upcoming MFAC business meetings, please contact Jared Silva at DMF (617-634-9573 or jared.silva@mass.gov).