



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission January 23, 2025 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the January 23, 2025 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. This business meeting was held virtually, and the recording is available on [DMF's YouTube Channel](#). All meeting materials are available on the [MFAC's past meeting website](#).

Items for Future Public Hearing. DMF discussed proposals that will go out to public hearing later this winter for potential implementation this spring.

Commercial State Waters Groundfish Management. DMF set forth several public hearing proposals affecting the management of the commercial state waters groundfish fishery. These proposals respond to the New England Fishery Management Council's recent approval of Framework 69 to the Northeast Multi-Species Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The primary actions address codfish management. With the adoption of the new cod stock areas in the FMP, DMF proposed complementary definitions for the state waters portion of the Western Gulf of Maine (WGOM) and Southern New England (SNE) cod stock areas. This effectively changes the management area designation for those waters east of Cape Cod and Nantucket from SNE to WGOM. Additionally, with the low Annual Catch Limit (ACL) approved for WGOM producing a limited state-waters sub-components for Fishing Years 2025 and 2026, DMF proposed a trip limit reduction from 400 pounds to 300 pounds. This reduction seeks to buffer the potential for a state waters overage which could trigger an accountability measure affecting the federal fishery should it cause the CL to also be exceeded. At industry's request, DMF will also consider other approaches to limit overall state waters cod landings, including seasonal-specific trip limits. For SNE cod, DMF proposed enacting a moratorium on harvest, which would match expected federal rules affecting the recreational and commercial common pool fishery. The actual impact of this moratorium in state waters is negligible because Massachusetts does not have an active cod fishery in SNE. For non-cod species, DMF is proposing to increase Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine yellowtail flounder trip limits from 350 to 500 pounds and increase monkfish tail trip limits from 536 pounds to 1,000 pounds. Lastly, DMF proposed to update the December 31, 2018 control date for the state waters Groundfish Endorsement to December 31, 2024. No action was proposed to further limit entry based on the revised control date

Commercial Striped Bass Management. DMF brought forward a proposal for future public comment to adopt a slot limit for the commercial fishery with a minimum size between 32" and 35" and maximum size between 38" and 44" inches. The purpose of this slot limit would be to protect the largest fish in the spawning stock biomass in an effort to enhance stock productivity while maintaining a reasonably wide slot limit that would not prevent quota utilization, avoid substantially increasing discarding, and retain a separation in the size limits between the recreational and commercial sectors for enforcement and compliance purposes. Additionally, DMF will propose to prohibit gaffing of fish in the commercial fishery. DMF has allowed commercial fishers to continue to gaff large, legal sized fish given potential safety issues. However, this may be of less issue under a slot limit as the largest fish will have to be released. Moreover, the adoption of a maximum size limit likely makes it harder to discern legal sized fish increasing the likelihood of unintentionally gaffing oversized fish, raising discard mortality concerns.

Discussion Items

Upper Cape Cod Bay Whiting Area and Fixed Gear Free Zone. DMF discussed the history of the Upper Cape Cod Bay whiting area and fixed gear free zone. In the 1990s, NOAA Fisheries and DMF took action to restrict small mesh trawling given groundfish management concerns. Subsequent to this, efforts were made to create time-area exemptions to provide access to certain resources (e.g., whiting) with limited groundfish bycatch. Within this framework, DMF and NOAA Fisheries created a September 1 – November 20 season for small mesh raised footrope trawls in Upper Cape Cod Bay off Provincetown. In 2000, in response to a proliferation of fixed gear within Upper Cape Cod Bay whiting area that prevented mobile gear fishing access, particularly near Provincetown in state waters, DMF established the so-called fixed gear free zone that would occur annually from September 1 – October 31. In recent years, it has been reported that whiting fishing in this area has waned and Provincetown-area lobster trap fishers have raised the need to keep this area closed to fixed gear, particularly given the seasonal trap closure to protect right whales. DMF intends to investigate this question further, discuss it at the upcoming Massachusetts' Lobstermen's Annual Weekend, and then brief the MFAC again later this winter.

Presentation

Department of Fish and Game legal counsel provided the MFAC with a presentation on the Open Meeting Law. The focus of the presentation was on developing public meeting notices with sufficient specificity and avoiding public body deliberations outside of public body meetings.

Upcoming Meetings. The MFAC will meet next of February 25, 2025 at the Division of Fish and Wildlife's Field Headquarters located at 1 Rabbit Hill Road in Westborough.