



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission July 14, 2026 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the July 14, 2026 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. This business meeting was held virtually. A recording of this meeting can be made available upon request and all meeting materials are available on the [MFAC's past meeting website](#).

Action Items

Commercial Surf Clam and Ocean Quahog Management. The MFAC unanimously approved DMF's recommendation to modernize the management of the commercial surf clam and ocean quahog dredge fishery. This included: (1) updating the spatial management program; (2) mandating the use of vessel trackers by active fishery participants; (3) rescinding the night closure from February 1–April 30 annually; and (4) adopting streamlined and consistent regulatory language throughout the section that will not result in any modifications to existing rules.

Specific to the spatial management program, DMF's final regulations will: (1) eliminate the seasonal contour line closure approach and replace it with a year-round polygon closure south of Hull that is defined by GPS coordinates and is a proxy for the 12' depth contour but uses straight lines seaward of the 12' depth contour in areas with limited resource (e.g., Buzzards Bay, Vineyard Sound) and is inclusive of a 200' buffer zone around all eel grass beds mapped by the Department of Environmental Protection, as well as all existing regulatory closure and exemption area; (2) adopt two seasonal May 1–October 15 closures in Cape Cod Bay by expanding the existing seasonal Cape Cod Bay closure off Manomet to the east to Dennis and adopting a new closure off Herring Cove to ameliorate user group and gear conflicts; (3) retain the existing year-round closure north of Hull; and (4) create a public process to adjust polygon closure coordinates, open areas north of Hull to fishing, and create temporary closures to address user conflicts.

With regards to vessel monitoring, by January 1, 2027 all permit holders who intend to actively participate in the commercial surf clam and ocean quahog dredge fishery will be required to obtain, install, activate, and maintain a DMF-approved electronic vessel tracking device. At present, the sole approved device is Viatrax Boat Command. This vessel monitoring device must remain on and operable at all times unless otherwise explicitly authorized in writing by the DMF

Director. Permit holders may place their Surf Clam/Ocean Quahog Dredge Endorsement on an “Endorsement Only Permit” to opt out of the commercial surf clam and ocean quahog dredge fishery and resulting monitoring requirements.

Discussion Items

North Shore Sea Scallop Pilot Program. DMF authorized a pilot program from February 1–April 30, 2026 to allow commercial scallop dredge fishing in two discrete areas off the North Shore that were previously permanently closed to mobile gear fishing. The purpose of this action was to provide a near-shore commercial fishing opportunity during a season when it would not result in user group conflicts (particularly with trap gear). DMF developed this program with consideration given to habitat, archaeological resources, spawning cod aggregations, and the interests of other stakeholders. 31 permit holders enrolled in the program with 21 permit holders actively participating. These 21 active permit holders took 262 trips with some activity occurring in the exemption areas and landed an estimated 27,000 pounds of scallop meat valued at approximately \$690,000. DMF is now evaluating options to potentially renew this program in 2027.

Commercial Striped Bass Permitting. DMF is considering taking action to further reduce the issuance of commercial striped bass permits in 2028 to address latent effort, the implementation of a mandatory harvester tagging program by 2029, and better align fishery participation with stock conditions. To facilitate this action, DMF has been working through the MFAC’s Striped Bass Focus Group and an Industry Advisory Panel to solicit advice on using an activity filter with the recently updated control date to reduce the number of permit holders; establish a novel exit:entry program to facilitate permit turnover; and consider an owner-operator requirement. DMF will reconvene the MFAC Striped Bass Focus Group this summer to develop a public hearing proposal for MFAC review in late 2026. DMF anticipates holding public hearings in early 2027 to allow for implementation for January 1, 2028.

Federal Fisheries Management. DMF provided a routine update on the June 2026 New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) meeting and a brief overview of the expected agenda for the upcoming September 2026 NEFMC meeting.

The NEFMC finalized its risk policy at the June meeting. The Council also initiated specifications for Atlantic herring (2027–2031), Atlantic sea scallop (2027 and 2028 default measures), northeast multi-species groundfish (2027–2031), and whiting (2027–2031), as well as separate management actions for Atlantic herring and sea scallop. For Atlantic herring this included provisions to address river herring and shad bycatch, and modifications to the specification and quota carryover processes. For Atlantic sea scallop this included the potential development of sub-areas within the Northern Gulf of Maine region and regional Days-At-Sea allocations. On monkfish and skates, the NEFMC reviewed catch-per-unit effort, continued discussions on the development of individual fishing quotas, and requested modifications to NOAA Fisheries for modifications to the Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan to address negative socio-economic impacts.

Looking forward to September, the NEFMC is expected to finalize Atlantic herring specifications, the strategic plan to implement small mesh specifications, and the Framework 2 addressing essential fish habitat for sea scallops. Additionally, the Council will receive reports on vessel baseline evaluations for the groundfish fishery and regional stock prioritization for specification. Lastly, the NEFMC will continue to work on prioritizing potential northern edge access, permit stacking, and strategic plan goals for the sea scallop fishery; vessel monitoring in the Atlantic herring fishery following the Loper Bright decision; and habitat exemption area proposals for groundfish and clam dredges.

Quota Managed Species Update. DMF provided the MFAC with a 2025 commercial landings year-in-review and an update on the performance of 2026 quota managed fisheries through early July.

Period II Summer Flounder Consecutive Daily Limit Program. DMF notified the MFAC it had expanded the program to include offshore draggers who do not hold a Coastal Access Permit to fish state waters to facilitate quota utilization. Additionally, DMF indicated its desire to engage with industry and the MFAC to revision this program for 2027 to consider changing effort in the Period II summer flounder fishery.

Presentations

Protected Species Program Update. DMF provided the MFAC with a presentation on the work conducted by the agency's protected species program. This presentation addressed: (1) passive acoustic monitoring for right whales and early season (December/January) detections in Cape Cod Bay this past winter; (2) the 2025–2026 aerial surveillance program for right whales which identified 188 unique individuals off Massachusetts from November 1–May 31 and the need to bolster the number of early season flights this winter to verify passive acoustic monitoring findings; (3) joint DMF and MEP efforts to remove fixed gear from the Massachusetts Restricted Area and resulting administrative actions for non-compliant gear; (4) DMF's derelict fishing gear removal and disposal program and ongoing work under the recently adopted regulatory framework; (5) experimental fishing with on-demand gear; (6) an analysis of the right whale entangled in Massachusetts lobster tap gear this past January; and (7) expectations and uncertainty around state and federal rule-making related to NOAA Fisheries' Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team.

River Herring Harvest at Harwich Herring River. DMF presented on the 2026 opening of the Herring River in Harwich to the harvest of river herring. This is the first run in the state to be opened under an ASMFC-approved sustainable fishery management plan. The fishery targeted a harvest of 3% of the time-series median and accommodated 150 permits, seven open fishing days, and a 20-fish bag limit with trip ticket requirements. Ultimately, Harwich sold about 130 permits resulting in a total harvest of 4,405 herring (~1% the time-series median). Harwich is considering renewing the program for 2027 with an allowance for down-running harvest. The

Nemasket River (Middleborough/Lakeville), Herring Brooke (Pembroke), and Stony Brook (Brewster) are also considering allowing harvest under a sustainable fishery management plan.

Next Meeting

The MFAC will meet again on Wednesday, August 26, 2026.