



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission March 10, 2022 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the March 10, 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](#).

Emergency Regulations to Set 2022 Recreational Fishing Limits

Black Sea Bass, Summer Flounder, and Scup. DMF reviewed the need to adjust the 2022 recreational fishing limits for black sea bass, summer flounder, and scup under the joint ASMFC-MAFMC management system. For black sea bass, MA is required to restrict its regulations to cut harvest by 20.7%. To achieve this, DMF preferred a May 21–September 4 season with a 4-fish bag limit and a 16-inch minimum size. For summer flounder, MA can liberalize its rules to increase harvest by 16.5%. DMF preferred to accommodate this through a May 21–September 29 season with a 5-fish bag limit and 16.5-inch minimum size. For scup, there is a mandatory coastwide 1-inch increase in the minimum size, resulting in MA increasing the minimum size from 9-inches to 10-inches. There was substantial discussion regarding concerns and frustrations regarding the joint ASMFC-MAFMC management process for these species, particularly black sea bass. However, the MFAC ultimately supported DMF's preferred measures.

Recreational Cod and Haddock

DMF informed the MFAC of its intention to amend the state's recreational fishing limits for Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod and haddock and Georges Bank (GB) cod to match federal regulations. Having uniform rules across jurisdictions allows fish lawfully caught in federal waters to be landed in MA and ensures the state does not undermine federal conservation objectives. Once approved by NOAA Fisheries, DMF intends to file complementary emergency regulations. The proposed federal limits are as follows: (1) GOM cod open seasons of September 1–October 7 and April 1–April 14 with a 1-fish bag limit and 22-inch minimum size; (2) GOM haddock open seasons of May 1–February 28 and April 1–April 30 with a 20-fish bag limit and a 17-inch minimum size; and (3) Georges Bank cod open season of August 1–April 30 with a 5-fish bag limit and a slot limit of 22–28 inches.

Consultation on Residency Issues Regarding Student Lobster Permit

In January 2022, DMF brought to public hearing a proposal to clarify DMF's interpretation of state law governing the issuance of student lobster permits to non-residents. Following public hearing, DMF drafted a policy that accomplishes several things. First, it would clarify that non-resident students may obtain a student lobster permit. Second, the permit is for the commercial catch of lobsters only; the harvest and sale of edible crabs is not authorized. Lastly, it defines a full-time student as any person 12 years of age or older enrolled in middle school, high school, or in a full-time college or post-graduate education program as defined by their institution. The MFAC did not raise any objections to DMF adopting this policy. This policy is now available on [DMF's website](#).

Discussion Items

Protected Species Updates. DMF briefed the MFAC on issues relevant to protected species. This focused on ongoing DMF-MEP efforts to remove trap gear from the whale closure. DMF indicated compliance with the whale closure was generally good, particularly in Cape Cod Bay and east of Cape Cod where the closure has been in place for several years. However, there were some instances of non-compliance along the North Shore, particularly in Salem Sound. This included gear that had intentionally not been removed from the water, as well as gear that was likely displaced and lost due to fall and winter storms. This spring, DMF and MEP intended to address the non-compliance matters, particularly in instances where the buoy lines were also not whale safe. DMF also highlighted its ongoing effort to apply for an Incidental Take Permit and the agency's intention to hold gear workshops and outreach events this winter to help fishermen obtain weak contrivances and gear marking tools. More information about gear configuration rules and events are available on [DMF's website](#).

Upcoming Public Hearings. DMF reminded the MFAC of the upcoming commercial fishery public hearings on March 14 and March 16. On March 14, DMF will take comment on a bluefish minimum size, menhaden season start date, and striped bass permit control date. On March 16, DMF will take comment on commercial fishing limits for black sea bass, summer flounder, and dogfish. Final recommendations would then be made to the MFAC at their April 7 business meeting for implementation in May of 2022. Information on these public hearings may be found on [DMF's website](#).

Summary of March 2022 Shellfish Advisory Panel Meeting

DMF hosted the second meeting of the Shellfish Advisory Panel on March 1. Two deliverables from this meeting were the formation of a sub-committee to better understand local rules affecting the transfer of municipally issued shellfish aquaculture licenses and a sub-committee to investigate expanding allowances for the bulk tagging of shellfish. Additionally, DMF noted the agency and MSOA were currently hosting virtual shellfish constable training sessions. More information about the SAP can be found on [DMF's website](#).

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Update. DMF briefed the MFAC on pertinent issues addressed by the ASMFC at the January 2022 winter meeting of the full commission and subsequent board meetings. This included the Lobster Board's approval of a draft addendum for public comment to enhance spawning stock protections for the GOM/GBK stock and the postponement of the final approval of an addendum to require electronic tracking requirements in the federal lobster and Jonah crab fishery and the Menhaden Board's ongoing development of a draft addendum to address commercial allocations, the episodic event set aside, and the incidental catch and small-scale fishery allowance. Additionally, DMF touched on potential increases to the 2022 commercial spiny dogfish trip limit and required changes to the 2022 recreational black sea bass limits. Lastly, DMF highlighted upcoming virtual public hearings on the ASMFC's Amendment 7 to the Striped Bass FMP and the ASMFC/MAFMC Harvest Control Rule Addendum for black sea bass, summer flounder, scup and bluefish. The MA Amendment 7 hearing is scheduled for March 21 at 6PM ([register here](#)) and the MA hearing on the Harvest Control Rule is scheduled for April 13 at 6PM ([register here](#)).

Federal Fisheries Management Update. DMF briefed the MFAC on the February NEFMC meeting that focused on skates (Amendment 9), SNE Habitat Areas of Particular Concern and GSC Habitat Management Area, and recreational groundfish management. Looking forward to the April NEFMC meeting, DMF briefed the MFAC on habitat and scallop leasing issues. Lastly, DMF provided the MFAC with an update on recent decisions issued in Atlantic sea herring litigation regarding buffer zones; Atlantic mackerel management; and Council appointments.

Upcoming Meetings

The MFAC will be meeting again on April 7, 2022. This meeting will be held virtually via Zoom. 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).

Following this meeting, MFAC meeting dates will shift from Thursday mornings to Tuesday mornings. Additionally, the MFAC will begin to convene again for in person meetings later this spring or summer.