



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission March 17, 2026 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the March 17, 2026 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. This business meeting was hybrid, being held in person at the Division of Fish and Wildlife's Field Headquarters in Westborough and 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](#).

Final Actions

Commercial Scup Limits. The MFAC unanimously approved DMF's recommendation to liberalize the commercial June hook and line and pot fishery regulations by: (1) increasing the trip limit from 400 pounds to 800 pounds; and (2) increasing the number of open fishing days per week from three (Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday) to five (Sunday–Thursday). This would bring June limits into phase with May and allow for more consistent access to the resource when it is available inshore in order to enhance quota utilization.

Commercial Black Sea Bass Limits. The MFAC unanimously approved DMF's recommendation to: (1) eliminate the April 1–April 22 closure period for trawlers and instead allow them to retain and land a 100-pound incidental catch limit of black sea bass (consistent with the remainder of the year); (2) amend the date whereby the closed commercial fishing days for pot and hook and line gears are automatically eliminated so that it occurs on September 1 rather than September 15; and (3) amend the date whereby the quota-conditional trip limit increases occur by moving it from September 15 to September 1. These actions are designed to enhance access to the available quota.

Commercial Summer Flounder Limits. The MFAC unanimously approved DMF's recommendation to: (1) establish annual quota allocations based on the magnitude of the quota so that Period I (January 1–April 22) receives 30% of the annual quota in years when the quota exceeds 750,000 pounds and 15% in years when it does not; (2) increase the Period I trip limit to 5,000 pounds; (3) eliminate Saturday as a closed fishing day during the summertime (April 23–August 31) season; (4) increase the summertime and September baseline trip limit for net fishers from 500 pounds to 600 pounds and for hook fishers from 325 pounds to 400 pounds; (5) increase the September quota conditional trip limit from 800 pounds to 1,000 pounds if at least 20% of the annual quota remains on September 1; (6) increase the October

baseline trip limit from 800 pounds to 1,000 pounds and maintain the quota conditional trip limit at 5,000 pounds if at least 10% of the quota remains on October 1; and (7) adopt a baseline November–December trip limit of 5,000 pounds and a quota-conditional trip limit of 10,000 pounds if at least 20% of the quota remains on November 1. These actions are designed to enhance access to the available quota.

Sea Scallop Dredge Width Recommendation. The MFAC unanimously approved increasing the maximum sea scallop dredge width from 10' to 10.5' consistent with the federal rule for Limited Access General Category Northern Gulf of Maine and IFQ permit holders. This will create uniform rules across jurisdictions to enhance enforcement and compliance particularly among dual state-federal permit holders who may be fishing in both jurisdictions on the same trip.

Recreational Bluefish. The MFAC unanimously approved increasing the recreational bluefish bag limits by two fish. For private anglers, the bag limit will move from 3 fish to 5 fish and for anglers fishing from for-hire vessels the bag limit will move from 5 fish to 7 fish. This is consistent with recent actions by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) that have been adopted by NOAA Fisheries and are expected to be implemented by most states.

Final Permitting Decisions

Coastal Access Permit Consolidation. The MFAC did not object to DMF's decision to eliminate all Coastal Access Permit sub-endorsements and the Coastal Access Sea Scallop Dredge Permit and provide all current permit holders a general Coastal Access Permit that would cover all previously authorized mobile gear fishing activity. These endorsements are no longer necessary, and this action will eliminate unnecessary complexities in the permitting program.

Sea Scallop Shucking Endorsement. The MFAC did not object to DMF's decision to eliminate the Sea Scallop Shucking Endorsement. This endorsement has become superfluous, and its elimination will reduce unnecessary complexities in the permitting program.

Decisions to Withdraw Public Hearing Proposals

Horseshoe Crab Quota Reallocation. In response to public comment, DMF withdrew its proposal to reduce the bait quota for horseshoe crabs by 40,000 and reallocate it to the biomedical quota at a 1:2 ratio thereby increasing the biomedical quota by 80,000 crabs.

Lobster Permitting. In response to public comment, DMF withdrew its proposal to allow dual state-federal lobster trap permit holders to forfeit their Coastal Lobster Permit and obtain an Offshore Lobster Permit to become a federal waters only operation and avoid the owner-operator requirement. DMF also found that amending state permitting rules at this time could obfuscate analyses of state effort control measures in the pending management strategy evaluation initiated by the ASMFC.

Future Emergency Regulations

Recreational Gulf of Maine Cod and Haddock. DMF is implementing emergency regulations to adjust the recreational Gulf of Maine cod and haddock limits for the start of the upcoming fishing year on May 1. The proposed action is to mirror anticipated federal rules. For Gulf of Maine haddock, this will decrease the minimum size limit for Gulf of Maine haddock from 18” inches to 17” while maintaining the April 1–February 28 open season and 15-fish bag limit. This is consistent with the recent implementation of Framework 69 and the New England Fishery Management Council’s recommended action for the 2026 fishing year. For Gulf of Maine cod, the open fishing season will move from September 1–October 31 to October 1–October 31 while maintaining the 1-fish bag limit and 23” minimum size. This is consistent with the New England Fishery Management Council’s recommended action for the 2026 fishing year. DMF recognizes that NOAA Fisheries may implement final rules that are different than Council recommendations and if this were to occur the state would modify its emergency regulations in response to ensure uniform rules across jurisdictions.

Recreational Black Sea Bass. DMF is implementing emergency regulations to adjust the recreational black sea bass limits for 2026 and 2027. The ASMFC has authorized a 27% recreational harvest increase in the Northern Region of Massachusetts through New York. The region’s approach to liberalize measures allows DMF to adopt an open season of May 16–October 14, with a 16” minimum size, and a 4-fish bag limit through August 31 and a 2-fish bag limit beginning September 1. This action adds six weeks to the end of the open season (previously May 17–September 1) at the 2-fish limit, while also reducing the minimum size limit by a half-inch.

Presentations

Cat Cove Facility Upgrades. DMF staff presented efforts to create a marine habitat restoration facility at the agency’s Cat Cove Marine Lab in Salem. The plan for the facility is to create a hub for technical support, applied research, and outreach; produce eelgrass and kelp spores to be used in restoration; potentially act as an oyster shell recycling site; and use the facility’s salt pond as a living laboratory to test field methods and educate restoration practitioners.

Wastewater Discharge and Shellfish Sanitation. DMF staff presented challenges related to federal requirements for the classification of shellfish growing areas adjacent to sewage treatment plant outfalls and affected by combined sewage overflow discharges. DMF reviewed minimum federal dilution standards for shellfish harvest around sewage treatment outfalls and the oceanographic modeling efforts to inform decision-making around these standards. Additionally, DMF discussed the various sampling and testing protocols necessary to safeguard public health and minimize the impacts of shellfish closures in western Buzzards Bay related to combined sewage overflow discharges in New Bedford.

Upcoming Meetings

The MFAC will meet again on Thursday, May 28, 2026 in Tisbury.