

MARINE FISHERIES ADVISORY COMMISSION
Final Business Meeting Minutes
May 29, 2025
SMAST East

Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission: Raymond Kane, Chairman; Shelley Edmundson, Clerk; Arthur “Sooky” Sawyer; Bill Amaru; Tim Brady; and Kalil Boghdan. Absent: Bill Doyle and Chris McGuire.

Division of Marine Fisheries: Daniel McKiernan, Director; Bob Glenn, Deputy Director; Story Reed, Deputy Director; Kevin Creighton, Assistant Director; Nichola Meserve; Melanie Griffin; Bradlie Morgan; Jared Silva; Tracy Pugh; Kelly Whitmore; Erin Burke; Anna Webb; Leah Crowe; Emma Fowler; and Manali Rege-Colt.

Massachusetts Environmental Police: Colonel Christopher Mason; Captain Jack Chapin; and Lieutenant Matt Bass.

Members of the Public: Beth Casoni, Julia Logan, Sam Blatchley, Jamie Bassett, Matt Belson, Brendan Adams, Nick Kowaleski, and Sophia Weinstock.

INTRODUCTIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman Raymond Kane called the May 29, 2025 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting to order.

Ray noted that the MFAC generally holds its annual elections at a May or June meeting, corresponding with the end of the state’s fiscal calendar. In advance of the May meeting, and in anticipation of there being no June meeting, Jared Silva circulated an e-mail among MFAC members to gauge interest in holding annual elections and there was little interest in changing officers. Ray sought the MFAC confirm this.

Bill Amaru moved for discussion a motion to retain current officers, and Shelley Edmundson seconded the motion.

Kalil Boghdan supported maintaining the current officers given the likely turnover of the MFAC in the coming months given his pending retirement from the MFAC at the end of his term in August and the existing vacant seat. Tim Brady indicated that he was currently serving on an expired term and was not seeking reappointment.

The Chairman then asked about the status of appointments and reappointments. Director McKiernan indicated that Commissioner Tom O’Shea was working on several appointments and reappointments, and Dan expected a full Commission to be appointed by the fall. Kalil and Ray spoke to the urgency of completing these appointments as soon as possible given Mike Pierdinock’s seat has been vacant since October 2024, and two current members were not seeking reappointment.

There were no further comments and there was unanimous consent to maintain the existing MFAC officers for the time being.

REVIEW OF MAY 29, 2025 BUSINESS MEETING AGENDA

Chairman Kane asked if there were any requests to edit the May 2025 MFAC business meeting agenda. No requests for amendments were made. **Tim Brady made a motion to approve the agenda and Shelley Edmundson seconded. The motion was approved by unanimous consent.**

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF APRIL 23, 2025 DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Chairman Kane asked for edits to the April 24, 2025, business meeting minutes. Shelley Edmundson noted that Sooky Sawyer is listed as both present and absent. Additionally, she requested a spelling change on page six, changing “warning waters” to “warming waters”. No further edits were made.

The Chair called for a motion. Tim Brady moved to approve the draft minutes as amended. Bill Amaru seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with Chairman Kane and Shelley Edmundson abstaining (4-0-2).

OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT: PERSONNEL, RECENT OPERATIONS, AND MARINE FISHERY VIOLATIONS

Captain Jack Chapin began his comments by acknowledging the joint DMF and MEP effort to remove abandoned trap gear from the wintertime fixed gear closure. Chapin then provided an update on recent marine fishery violations stemming from the recent Northern Gulf of Maine scallop season, as well as rod and reel fishing activity for scup, striped bass, and tautog. He also anticipated enforcement and compliance issues related to this year’s expected recreational Atlantic bluefin tuna rules.

Chapin then discussed operations. MEP’s new offshore patrol boat is operational, allowing for an expanded patrol radius and additional patrols in Nantucket Sound. On personnel, they are looking to bring on one additional field officer before the end of this fiscal year and bring on seven additional officers by the end of the calendar year. He noted MEP is exempt from the current hiring freeze when hiring officers, but not administrative staff.

Chairman Kane, Bill Amaru, and Kalil Boghdan asked about the recent striped bass violations. Captain Chapin noted the violations involved both recreational harvest and size limits. Lt. Matt Bass and Captain Chapin discussed how social media drives fishing activity to certain discrete locations which results in certain areas becoming hot spots for poaching.

Chairman Kane, Jared Silva, Tim Brady, and Lt. Bass then discussed the administrative, non-criminal, and criminal actions that can be taken in response to fishery violations. Jared noted that while DMF has taken actions on recreational fishing permits, it is not the most effective tool given individuals who are willing to break fishing limits are also likely

willing to fish without a permit. He contrasted this with the commercial fishery where the permit is needed to sell fish, and many permits and appurtenant endorsements are limited entry. Lt. Bass explained the fine structure for criminal and non-criminal fishery violations.

Bob Glenn thanked MEP for their collaboration with gear haul out this winter. Chairman Kane asked if the frequency of incidents of abandoned gear was decreasing. Bass and Chapin concurred that it was.

Colonel Chris Mason and Kane then discussed MEP personnel and the need for additional capacity. Mason remarked on the loss of a few anticipated hires late in the hiring process and hoped that MEP would eventually be able to increase their capacity to 160 officers.

DIVISION OF MARINE FISHERIES: PERSONNEL, RECENT MEETINGS AND EVENTS, AND AGENCY ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS

Director Dan McKiernan began his comments by outlining the recent meetings he attended. The Council Coordinating Committee met in New Bedford and brought together leadership from all eight fishery management Councils, three fishery Commissions, and various state and federal fishery managers to discuss common issues. The Northeast Region Coordinating Council also met, which brought together leadership from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC), the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC), and NOAA Fisheries. With NOAA's significant staffing losses and anticipated future cuts, federal capacity is limited and may prioritize fishery-independent surveys and opening fisheries on-time over protected species and habitat programs.

Dan then described two recent federal executive orders: (1) Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation, and (2) Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness. The latter has sparked some concern that the regional Council process will be bypassed in favor of fast-tracking rules through the Secretary of Commerce. However, it may also encourage NOAA Fisheries to find creative ways to improve efficiency in the fishing industry (e.g., fluke mesh size changes, allowing retention of surf clams and ocean quahogs on the same trip, modernizing vessel upgrade rules, and shifting the start of the fishing year for certain species).

The Chairman and Nichola Meserve remarked on how shifting the start of the fishing year could allow for more clearly informed regulations for species like black sea bass.

The Director then discussed the reallocation of Interjurisdictional Fisheries Grant Funds from Conservation Engineering to a Fisheries Monitoring Program. This has been part of DMF's effort to improve portside sampling in collaboration with the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC).

Dan noted DMF was currently in the process of reviewing the petition the Southeastern Massachusetts Pine Barrens Alliance provided DMF and the MFAC at the April business

meeting to close horseshoe crab harvest in Duxbury, Kingston, and Plymouth. DMF will review its analysis with the MFAC at a summertime meeting and debate whether or not it should be brought to public hearing. Kalil agreed with this process and urged Commissioners to read the document thoroughly.

Chairman Kane asked Shelley Edmundson about conch sex and aging research. Shelley noted that the Martha's Vineyard Fishermen's Preservation Trust is not actively pursuing conch research.

Director McKiernan added that DMF paused the scheduled size-at-harvest increases for three-years (2024-2026). This was done to accommodate the development of a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for the channeled whelk fishery by SMAST. However, this work was never funded. Accordingly, over the next two-years the MFAC and DMF will have to decide how to move forward with managing the channeled whelk fishery absent this MSE.

Chairman Kane asked if DMF had updated its channeled whelk stock assessment. Bob Glenn stated that DMF assessed the channeled whelk stock in 2019 and has not revisited the information. However, fishery dependent data suggests the stock remains depleted.

Kalil, Ray, and Dan then discussed issues facing the market for whelks over the past few years.

Lastly, Dan shared that DMF would host its first ever "Marine Quest" event on Saturday, June 14th at the Cat Cove facility in Salem. Shelley added that Martha's Vineyard Fishermen's Preservation Trust "Meet the Fleet" event will be held on August 7th.

ACTION ITEMS

Approval of Regulations Implementing Addendum XXXII to Lobster FMP

Director McKiernan outlined the history of Addenda XXVII, XXXI, and XXXII to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for American Lobster and implementing state regulations.

In 2023, the ASMFC approved Addendum XXVII to the Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) to adopt lobster conservation measures to bolster the spawning stock biomass and standardize rules across the Lobster Conservation Management Areas (LCMAs) that fish on the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank (GOM/GBK) stock. In 2024, the MFAC approved complementary state regulations which DMF promulgated in early 2025 to be effective for July 1, 2025. However, immediately follow the promulgation of state regulations in 2025, Maine announced it would be unable to enact a final rule given significant pushback from its industry and New Hampshire indicated it would follow Maine's lead and act to repeal its pending rules implementing Addendum XXVII.

Consequently, at its February 2025 meeting, the ASMFC's Lobster Board ("Board") initiated draft Addendum XXXII to repeal aspects of Addendum XXVII. The Board preferred this course of action as opposed to pursuing a potential non-compliance determination. Addendum XXXII repealed the carapace size and escape vent rules in Addendum XXVII, but not the trap tag rules for Lobster Conservation Management Area

(LCMA) 1 and LCMA3, and v-notch standardization rules for Outer Cape Cod LCMA (OCCLCMA) and LCMA3.

In response, DMF filed emergency regulations to implement Addendum XXXII to maintain a state regulatory program that promotes stability in markets and equity among fishers within the same LCMA. DMF's proposed recommendation sought to finalize these regulations beyond the 90-day emergency period. Should final rules not be approved, the emergency rules would expire later this summer (July 24), and state rules would revert to those adopted under Addendum XXVII.

Kalil asked to clarify the administrative process for and feasibility of adopting second emergency action if today's proposed motion is not approved. Dan responded that DMF could potentially pursue such an action, but it would require legal review and sign off from the administration.

Chairman Kane, Kalil Boghdan, and Bill Amaru asked to clarify the impact and purpose of today's proposal. Jared Silva and Director McKiernan noted that if approved the emergency regulations would be codified as final rules. However, if rejected, all regulations made through Addendum XXVII, codified in January 2025, would go into effect upon the expiration of the emergency rules later this summer.

The expiration of the emergency regulations would significantly disrupt the seafood industry and lobster fishery in the Commonwealth. Specifically, the dealer sector would be unable to import and possess non-conforming sized lobsters (i.e., between 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ " and 3 $\frac{5}{16}$ ") lawfully caught in Maine and New Hampshire and would be required to liquidate previously purchased non-conforming product within 90-days; Massachusetts LCMA1 fishers would be subject to a more restrictive carapace size than their counterparts in Maine and New Hampshire, putting them at a competitive disadvantage; the recreational fishery in the Gulf of Maine would have their minimum size increase in-season; there would likely be a shortage of readily available 3 $\frac{5}{16}$ " gauges for fishers, dealers, and enforcement given this is a novel size limit for lobsters along the Atlantic coast; and state-only OCCLCMA fishers and recreational fishers in the Outer Cape would become subject to a 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ " maximum size standard. Additionally, the standardized v-notch rule for the OCCLCMA and LCMA3 would remain in effect regardless of the outcome of today's vote because a repeal of this rule was not included in Addendum XXXII nor implementing state regulations.

Dan acknowledged that this standardization affected about 30 state-only OCCLCMA permit holders who would see their v-notched lobster possession rule go from $\frac{1}{4}$ " deep sharp "v" shaped notch without setal hairs (" $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch standard") — the least restrictive rule along the coast — to $\frac{1}{8}$ deep v-shaped notch or indentation with or without setal hairs (" $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch standard") — the same as federal OCCLCMA permit holders and LCMA 3 permit holders (as well as all across all LCMAs in Southern New England and the Mid-Atlantic). The Director also reiterated his preference to adopt the $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch standard across the OCCLCMA as it would enhance enforcement and compliance at docks and in markets. Jared reiterated that if the recommendation were to fail, there is likely going to be a shortage of 3 $\frac{5}{16}$ " gauges available to fishers, dealers, and enforcement.

Amaru expressed frustration with the failure for the management process to include a repeal of the v-notched lobster standardization rule. He noted that Addendum XXXII repeals all the gauge and escape vent changes that were to effect, where the preponderance of lobster harvest occurs, but maintains a rule change that will impact only a small number of permit holders in Massachusetts. He argued the small Outer Cape fishery should not have to carry the conservation burden for the region, that this inaction was unfair, and DMF should not deviate from the longstanding management plan that the OCCLCMA fishers agreed to (that which was in place prior to Addendum XXVII).

McKiernan appreciated Amaru's frustration but noted that reinstating the 1/4-inch standard for state-only OCCLCMA fishers was outside the scope of the current regulatory process.

Sooky Sawyer agreed with Amaru. Sooky noted that he voted against the state implementation of Addendum XXVII. However, these rules impacted the entire GOM/GBK fishery and not just a small subset of Massachusetts fishers. He felt it was unfair and unacceptable that Addendum XXXII and implementing state rules maintained the v-notch standardization rule affecting only a small number of permit holders, while repealing the biological measures that effect LCMA1 where most of the country's lobster harvest occurs. With that said, Sooky acknowledged that if the MFAC did not approve DMF's recommendations the state's lobster and seafood industry would be negatively impacted once the emergency regulations expired. To balance these issues, Sooky argued that Massachusetts should move ahead to repeal the v-notch standardization rule and not concern itself with complying with the FMP given Maine and New Hampshire had already leveraged non-compliance to obtain the outcome they wanted for their industry.

the Director noted that Addendum XXXII merely paused the development of conservation measures for LCMA1. He anticipated the Lobster Board would review the stock assessment this fall and move ahead with a new addendum to implement new rules for 2027. Sooky countered that measures affecting the OCCLCMA should similarly be paused. Sooky also expressed frustrations with the ASMFC circumventing the LCMT processes in the development of Addenda XXVII and XXXII.

Kalil asked for the total number of active commercial lobstermen in the state, and Story Reed said there are around 650.

Kalil Boghdan made a motion to adopt the Director's recommendation. Shelley Edmundson seconded the motion.

Tim Brady voiced support for the management strategy that was in place prior to the adoption of Addendum XXVII and objected to maintaining state regulations that adopt the 1/8" standard in the OCCLMCA while moving to repeal the other measures contained in Addendum XXVII.

Amaru and Sawyer reiterated their previously stated concerns.

The Chairman remarked about the political nature of votes at ASMFC. Amaru expressed disappointment with the politics around this issue. The Director disagreed with the Chairman's views on the politics of this issue at the ASMFC. Dan argued that there are

longstanding concerns about the 1/4-inch standard for the state-only OCCLCMA fishers at the Board and these sentiments are heightened now that we are moving into a period of lower abundance.

Shelley asked to clarify the consequences of the proposed motion on Maine and New Hampshire. The Director responded that neither Maine nor New Hampshire have adopted Addendum XXXII, so approving this motion would make Massachusetts regulations equivalent to neighboring states in LCMA1.

Kalil asked if it would be possible to amend today's recommendation to include a repeal of the v-notch standardization measure. McKiernan and Silva explained that such an action outside the scope of the current rule making initiative. Accordingly, it would have to be adopted through a subsequent regulatory action and would result in Massachusetts not upholding the FMP. The Director reiterated his support for the interstate fishery management process and the v-notch standardization measure.

Sooky and Ray asked if it would be possible to delay the implementation of the v-notch standardization rule. Silva and McKiernan noted this rule was already in place and an amendment to its implementation would require a subsequent regulatory action.

Sooky reiterated his interest in preventing regulatory impacts to only a small number of OCCLCMA fishers when conservation measures were delayed for the preponderance of the industry that fishes on the GOM/GBK stock.

The Director noted that DMF sea sampling data for the OCCLCMA indicates the likely loss of landings attributable to v-notch standardization is projected to be between 2-4%. He felt the 25% loss figure being stated by industry was not supported by the available data.

Dan then explained the history as to why there are two disparate v-notched lobster standards among OCCLCMA fishers and why there is such little support at the ASMFC for the state-only OCCLCMA fishers to maintain the 1/4-inch standard.

Sooky and Dan discussed the history of conservation equivalency strategies in the lobster fishery and diverging rules across LCMAs. Dan explained that in the early 2000s, the lobster fishery was managed under a so-called "F10 approach" — the rate at which fishing reduces the estimated egg production per harvestable lobster to 10% or less of a non-fished population. In the development of conservation strategies at that time, LMCA1 fishers wanted to pursue mandatory v-notching and a zero-tolerance v-notched lobster possession rule stock-wide. The OCCLCMA fishers did not support this program and developed a conservation equivalency which achieved a similar projected egg production by moving to a larger minimum carapace size. Then in 2010, the federal government adopted the 1/8-inch standard for OCCLCMA fishers with a federal permit, but a commensurate change was not adopted for state permit holders through the FMP or unilaterally by DMF until Addendum XXVII.

Then the Director stated his support for v-notch standardization. He argued this would enhance enforcement and compliance and thusly benefit conservation over the long term.

The Chair called the vote, and the motion failed (2-3-1) with Kalil and Shelley voting for, Bill Amaru, Tim Brady, and Ray voting against, and Sooky abstaining.

The Director remarked on the likely complications created by this vote.

Shelley asked how this would impact the regulations affecting the OCCLCMA fishery. Jared and Dan explained that the state-only OCCLCMA fishers would not get reprieve from the v-notch standardization by this vote and will be subject to a maximum carapace size of 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ " once the current emergency rules expire.

Brady sought to explain his no vote. He stated he votes first for the resource and then for the fisherman. He viewed the regulatory action as being unfair claiming it overturned the conservation measures for the majority of the fishers while retaining measures affecting only a small group of Massachusetts fishers. Accordingly, he could not support this action.

FUTURE PUBLIC HEARING ITEMS

Modernization of Surf Clam Management Rules

Jared Silva provided background context and history on the surf clam fishery. He explained that surf clam management has been based primarily on 12 and 20 ft depth contours, as well as management areas to avoid user-group conflicts. Following a recent statutory change that gave DMF sole authority over permitting and managing the commercial ocean quahog and surf clam dredge fishery, DMF is proposing to bring an updated surf clam management plan to public hearing later this year for potential implementation in 2026.

The initial proposal includes: (1) requiring active vessels to install and maintain an operable real-time electronic tracking device (like those required of federal lobster and Jonah crab trap permit holders); (2) eliminating the use of seasonal depth contours and discrete management area closures in favor of creating polygons using GPS coordinates to establish closed fishing areas that are inclusive of the 12' depth contour and existing management closures while also protecting sensitive marine habitats (e.g., eel grass); (3) expanding seasonal closures in lower Cape Cod Bay to protect aggregations of egg bearing and new shell lobsters; (4) lifting the night closure for surf clamming from February 1 – April 30; and (5) maintaining the prohibition on surf clam and ocean quahog dredging north of Point Allerton in Hull pending additional review and subsequent rulemaking. Jared explained that DMF has collaborated with the fleet and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in developing these management plans.

A pilot program found that the electronic tracking devices worked effectively to track vessels in real time, differentiate fishing behavior, and notify vessel operators when they have entered or exited a regulated area. Jared then clarified that the proposed vessel tracker requirement would apply to permit holders who intended to participate in the fishery and would not apply to those who merely held the permit.

The Director provided additional context on the history of surf clam management and how

lawsuits involving Provincetown ConCom regulations gave DMF and DEP joint authority to manage this fishery, which created various complexities and ultimately resulted in DMF seeking and obtaining a legislative amendment to regain sole management authority over this fishing activity. Dan noted that public comment will contribute helpful perspective on potential gear conflicts and closures, particularly around Herring Cove.

Kalil asked about the feedback DMF received from municipalities, particularly Shellfish Constables. Dan stated that there was general support for DMF's proposal, but Provincetown officials remain concerned about the impact of this fishing activity on the benthic habitat around Herring Cove.

McKiernan, Silva, and Bass discussed how this would greatly enhance the enforceability of the state's spatial management program for this fishery but would require DMF to codify the complete set of coordinates that establish the closure boundary in the Code of Massachusetts Regulations.

Ray and Jared remarked on the fleet's desire to avoid eel grass to prevent gear fouling and the additional habitat protection benefits.

There were no further questions or comments.

Framework for Managing Derelict Gear

Bob Glenn introduced DMF's proposal to establish a framework to permit and manage the cleanup of fishing gear debris. Legislative amendments were made in 2024 to eliminate the property rights previously granted to fishing gear debris, and instead provided DMF, DFG, and the MFAC with the authority to permit and regulate the removal of fishing gear debris from Commonwealth waters and shores.

A key aspect of this regulatory framework will be the ability for DMF to adequately define what is and what is not "intact" pot and trap gear. To do this, DMF reviewed the frameworks established in other states (e.g., Florida, Washington, and California). Based on this review, DMF is proposing to define intact trap or pot gear as having at least three of the following requirements: a buoy; a complaint buoy line; identifiable to the permit holder; and configured with appropriate escape vents and ghost panels. This definition ensures that the owner is identifiable, the trap is functional, and the buoy line is identifiable and also allows for a gear to be considered non-compliant without becoming fishing gear debris and losing its property rights.

Bob then explained how DMF would authorize the clean-up of fishing gear debris. This includes: (1) providing a blanket year-round authorization to remove and dispose of fishing gear debris from the shoreline; (2) allowing DMF and MEP to remove and dispose of gear debris in the water year-round; (3) requiring proponents to apply for a special project permits to remove fishing gear during a closed fishing season with each application being reviewed by DMF and permitted based on its merits and the requisite capabilities of the applicant; and (4) enabling mobile gear vessels to bring ashore fishing gear debris incidentally caught during routine fishing operations while maintaining strict prohibitions on molesting fixed fishing gear.

Bob explained that DMF is also seeking public comment on best practices for handling fishing gear debris. This includes encouraging fishermen to attempt to return gear to the owner, ensuring gear is disposed of lawfully, and developing a more substantial network of disposal infrastructure. Lastly, Bob discussed derelict aquaculture gear, which will be addressed primarily through the municipality but with the potential for a state-wide requirement to label aquaculture gear with permit holder information.

Kalil asked about the legality of collecting buoys and displaying them, and Bob noted this is not currently legal.

Chairman Kane asked about the infrastructure available for disposing of fishing gear debris, particularly dumpsters at ports. Bob, Story, and Jared discussed approaches to effectively manage dumpster infrastructure, noting that DMF's trap crusher could be used to help this effort. Kane and Brady noted the challenges of dumpster location and monitoring. Bob Glenn wondered about incentives for this process, and a discussion followed about how to incentivize fishermen to dispose gear, such as financial support.

Amaru expressed strong support for this effort.

DISCUSSION ITEMS AND UPDATES

Interstate Fishery Management and May ASMFC Meeting

Nichola Meserve provided interstate fishery management updates.

With regards to spiny dogfish, Addendum VII to the Spiny Dogfish FMP was finalized to prohibit overnight soaks of gillnets in sturgeon bycatch hotspots. While this action does not directly impact Massachusetts state waters, it could affect spiny dogfish landings in New Bedford, which is a principal port for landing and processing these fish. Additionally, the spiny dogfish quota was reduced by about 1.5 million pounds for 2025 but this 2025 quota is still larger than what was landed in 2024.

Nichola moved on to discuss joint ASMFC-MAFMC efforts to finalize a new methodology to set recreational fishing measures for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish and the development of an amendment to consider sector separation in these recreational fisheries.

Nichola also briefed the MFAC on meetings of the ASMFC's Sea Herring and Northern Shrimp Sections. For sea herring, specifications for the upcoming fishing year were finalized and effort controls for Area 1A (Inshore Gulf of Maine) were set. Regarding northern shrimp, Amendment 4 to the FMP was finalized to allow for multi-year harvest moratoria to be set while establishing temperature- and recruitment-based "wake-up triggers" to evaluate the potential for reopening. Nichola also noted that the ASMFC Lobster Board approved Addendum XXXII, which was discussed at length earlier in the meeting.

Kalil asked about the status of northern shrimp stock. Bob Glenn explained that warming conditions in the Gulf of Maine have contributed to declines in abundance in this region. However, the Gulf of Maine is the southern extent of these shrimps' range, and the population remains strong in more northern waters. Kalil asked if there is a recreational

fishery for the species. Glenn indicated that there is not a recreational fishery for these shrimp species.

Bill Amaru asked for an update on the experimental shrimp fishery this past winter in the Gulf of Maine. Bob Glenn reported that there were very few landings, and in turn, this engendered support for moratoria and wake up trigger approach in Amendment 4.

Nichola then presented on striped bass management and the ASMFC's pending development of Addendum III to support stock rebuilding strategies starting in 2026. At present, there is some uncertainty as to what extent management may be necessary to rebuild the striped bass stock by the 2029 deadline as the Striped Bass Board awaited final 2024 harvest data.

Chairman Kane asked Nichola discussed expectations as to when the catch and harvest of striped bass will begin to decrease as the strong 2015- and 2018-year classes begin to age out of the fishery. The conversation then transitioned to discussing the 2025 young-of-the-year survey in the Chesapeake Bay. Nichola stated these data will be available in the fall and there is some tepid optimism about this year given environmental conditions this past winter and spring were favorable for a good young-of-the-year production. Boghdan asked how the recent stanza of poor recruitment may affect the population moving forward. Nichola noted that the impacts of this will really begin to be felt around 2030.

With regards to Addendum III, the Striped Bass board was developing various measures to reduce fishing mortality (e.g., commercial quota cuts, first-ever recreational seasons, and modified recreational size limits) and enhance regulatory accountability (e.g., standardized total length measurement, mandatory commercial harvester tagging). Nichola noted the various challenges Massachusetts would face if it were to move forward with a point-of-harvest tagging program. Silva asked about the specific parameters that would define a no-targeting closure. Nichola indicated that these were still being developed, and the Striped Bass Board was grappling with distinguishing between a no harvest closure and a no targeting closure.

Nichola noted that DMF will use the striped bass FAQ page to keep fishers up to date with the state of striped bass management.

Director McKiernan noted that DMF will likely reconvene the MFAC's Striped Bass Focus Group to help the agency navigate the various complicated striped bass management challenges.

DMF PRESENTATION ON PROTECTED SPECIES MANAGEMENT

DMF staff provided a two-part presentation regarding protected species management and science. The first aspect of the presentation focused on ongoing efforts to develop a passive acoustic monitoring program to detect right whales along the Atlantic coast and the recent deployment of real-time and archival monitoring units around Massachusetts coast. The goals of this project include understanding spatial and temporal presence of

NARW in state waters, increasing effectiveness of dynamic management, and informing the development of future conservation strategies. The second aspect of the presentation focused on experimental fisheries to explore the use of on-demand (“ropeless”) fishing gear, including a state reimbursement program that allows commercial trap fishers to purchase up to \$25,000 in on-demand gear.

Leah described the main threats facing North Atlantic right whales (NARW), including vessel strikes and fishing gear entanglements. Current monitoring strategies include visual surveys and passive and active acoustic monitoring. Visual surveys provide substantial data on individual whales but are limited to monitoring whales at the surface. Passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) allows for continuous monitoring and substantial data collection, and requires active vocalization, accurate target signals, and correct detection. DMF has deployed both near-real time monitoring buoys and archival monitoring loggers in state waters. In determining PAM locations, DMF considered current monitoring efforts, NARW sightings, space use conflicts, regulatory needs, and commercial fishermen insight.

The Chairman asked about the condition of humpback whale populations, and Leah and Bob responded that although they are endangered in Massachusetts, the Gulf of Maine population is no longer considered federally endangered.

Kalil asked about other PAM devices near Massachusetts waters. Leah noted that NOAA has used similar monitors near wind farms to understand construction constraints. The Chairman and Leah discussed the 5-10 km range of detection of PAM devices. Bob Glenn, Kevin Creighton, Erin Burke, and Director McKiernan then discussed funding requirements and sources for future monitors and data storage. The Chairman and Leah discussed the range of NARW on the east coast and potential impacts of wind energy.

Erin Burke then presented on DMF’s on-demand gear grant program. On-demand gear is experimental and currently requires special authorization with the use of gear from a gear library.

Jared Silva, Erin Burke, Kalil Boghdan, and the Chairman discussed the use of a phone application like the Buoy app as a virtual gear marking system. Erin noted that fishermen would be required to update their trap locations when they haul gear. There is some uncertainty concerning how environmental factors, such as tide, impact virtual gear marking.

Director McKiernan noted that the nature of on-demand gear may not allow for co-existence of buoyed and non-buoyed gear in one area, but more research is required. Erin, Bob Glenn, and Bill Amaru then discussed the importance of conducting more studies in complex systems, like Provincetown, to better understand how to minimize gear conflict. Lt. Matt Bass suggested using regular trap gear to test the virtual gear marking instead of on-demand gear to work in high density areas.

Ray asked about the timing of new regulations, and Erin and Bob discussed how on-demand gear would not be a required change through regulation in 2029.

Kalil asked about the costs of using on-demand gear for lobstermen. Erin responded that on-demand gear systems may cost up to \$4,000. This raises more questions about scaling up on-demand gear in the future.

Beth Casoni then asked about the number of lobster traps fished by on-demand gear and the permitted areas. Erin and Bob responded that this is determined on a case-by-case basis. Dan noted the impact of the new administration on the program's implementation.

OTHER BUSINESS AND PUBLIC COMMENT

The Chairman asked if there is anything to be added to the next meeting's agenda. Dan noted there will likely be an additional meeting before the anticipated August meeting to follow up on lobster management.

Sam Blatchley spoke on behalf of the Outer Cape Lobstermen's Association. He thanked DMF and staff for today's meeting and presentations. He urged DMF to bring forward new lobster management regulations that would adopt the provisions of Addendum XXXII but also include a repeal of the v-notch standardization measure.

There were no further comments.

ADJOURNMENT

There were no further questions or comments. **The Chairman asked for a motion to adjourn. Bill Amaru made the motion to adjourn meeting. The motion was seconded by Kalil Boghdan.**

MEETING DOCUMENTS

- May 29, 2025 MFAC Business Meeting Agenda
- April 24, 2025 MFAC Draft Business Meeting Minutes
- March 27, 2025 MFAC Final Business Meeting Minutes
- Memorandum on the Final Rule Making to Implement Addendum XXXII to the American Lobster Management Plan
- Public Comment on the Emergency Regulations to Implement Addendum XXXII to the American Lobster Fishery Management Plan
- Proposed Future Public Hearing Item to Modernize Surf Clam Management
- Proposal to Establish Framework to Permit and Manage the Clean-Up of Fishing Gear Debris
- Summary of the May 2025 ASMFC Meeting
- DMF's Passive Acoustic Monitoring Presentation
- DMF's On-Demand Gear Grant Program Presentation

UPCOMING MEETINGS

10AM
Tuesday, July 1, 2025
Via Zoom