

Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission

Final Business Meeting Minutes

May 28, 2026

Tisbury, Martha's Vineyard

Attendees

Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission: Shelley Edmundson; Ray Jarvis; Eric Nelson; Bill Doyle; Bill Amaru; Willy Goldsmith; Chris McGuire. Virtually: Ray Kane. Absent: Sooky Sawyer.

Division of Marine Fisheries: Daniel McKiernan, Director; Story Reed, Deputy Director; Bob Glenn, Deputy Director; Jared Silva; Nichola Meserve; Kevin Creighton; Brad Schondelmeier; Sarah Ferrara; Bradlie Morgan. Virtually: Scott Shaeffer; Kelly Whitmore; Kerry Allard; Luke Putaansuu

Department of Fish and Game: Tom O'Shea, Commissioner. Virtually: Sefatia Romeo-Theken

Massachusetts Environmental Police: Captain Jack Chapin; Colonel John Monaghan. Virtually: Matt Bass

Members of the Public: Emma Green-Beach; Ray Rowell; Wes Brighton; Tom Turner; Todd Goodell; Domenic Santoro; Nick Wilbur; Johnny Hoy; Mohawk Bolin. Virtually: Michael Pierdinock; Beth Casoni; Kate McGoldrick; Julia Logan

Call to Order and Routine Business

Bill Doyle, Vice Chair, assumed chairing the meeting because Chairman Kane was attending virtually. Doyle called the meeting to order and conducted roll call attendance.

Review of the May 2026 Business Meeting Agenda

Bill Doyle asked if there were any amendments to the May 2026 business meeting agenda. There were no amendments.

Review and Approval of March 2026 Draft Business Meeting Minutes

Vice-Chair Doyle sought amendments to the March 2026 draft business meeting minutes. No amendments were proposed. **The Vice-Chair called for a motion to approve the March 2026 business meeting minutes as drafted. Chris McGuire made the motion and Ray Jarvis seconded. The Vice-Chair proceeded to a roll-call vote and the motion unanimously passed (7-0-1), with the Vice-Chair Doyle abstaining.**

Commission Business

Annual MFAC Elections

Director McKiernan and Vice-Chair Doyle invited nominations for the position of Chair from the MFAC. Ray Kane announced he would be stepping down as Chair and nominated Shelley Edmundson for the position. There were no additional nominations. The nomination was seconded by Chris McGuire. **The Vice-Chair proceeded to a roll call vote and the nomination passed unanimously (7-0-1), with the nominated abstaining.**

Chris McGuire then nominated Bill Doyle to remain in his position as Vice-Chair. There were no additional nominations. The nomination was seconded by Willy Goldsmith. **The Chair proceeded to a roll call vote and the nomination passed unanimously (6-0-2), with the nominated and the Chair abstaining.**

Willy Goldsmith nominated Chris McGuire for Clerk, the seat vacated by Shelley Edmundson. There were no additional nominations. The nomination was seconded by Bill Amaru. **The Chair proceeded to a roll call vote and the nomination passed unanimously (6-0-2), with the nominated and the Chair abstaining.**

McGuire and Bill Amaru thanked Ray Kane for his tenure as MFAC Chair, and congratulated Shelley on her election.

Discussion on Hybrid Meetings

Jared Silva asked for the MFAC's perspective on providing a hybrid option for all future in-person meetings. Willy Goldsmith, Chris McGuire, and Ray Jarvis expressed support.

McGuire suggested that virtual attendees could have no voting power. Commissioner O'Shea added that the Division of Fish and Wildlife regularly conducts hybrid meetings.

Amaru cautioned that virtual attendance should not become the status quo. Overall, the MFAC supported this option but sought flexibility to revisit the question in the future.

Agency Updates

Office of Law Enforcement: Personnel, Recent Operations & Marine Fishery Incidents

Captain Jack Chapin provided updates on behalf of the Massachusetts Environmental Police (MEP). There was generally a strong level of industry compliance in response to the seasonal gear closure to protect right whales. Close collaboration between DMF and MEP allowed for effective removal of remnant gear. There has been growing interest in using drones to monitor and study right whales in Massachusetts waters. A right whale drone program has been included in the MEP's budget. This could improve monitoring capacity and supplement the aerial surveys by the Center for Coastal Studies (CCS).

With increased recreational fishing activity, MEP has noticed an increase in striped bass poaching at Lawrence Dam and the Charles River, which require additional officer attention.

On personnel, MEP has brought on six new hires—four in the field training officer program and two in the police academy. MEP will implement an updated entry test for new hires starting in August 2026.

Willy Goldsmith thanked MEP for their efforts to curb poaching and for monitoring activity on the water. He asked what is typically involved in vessel inspections. Goldsmith was recently on a vessel that was checked for vessel safety but not fishing permits. Chapin responded that permits may be verified electronically through running the person's name through the database. He spoke on what officers typically look for in these situations.

McGuire noted there are a variety of other organizations who are already using drones to monitor marine life, such as the New England Aquarium (NEAq) and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. Chapin responded that these organizations are being consulted in the development of MEP's program so as to avoid redundancy.

Eric Nelson and Ray Jarvis asked about the pending boating safety education and certificate requirements. Chapin described MEP's role in this project.

Willy Goldsmith asked whether analogous safety certificates provided through other states or at a national level can be used for this requirement. Chapin responded that this may vary depending on the certificate. He encouraged anyone with specific

questions on whether their certificate satisfies requirements to contact the Massachusetts Boating Safety Office.

McGuire clarified the dates when the boating safety certificate will be required. Colonel Monaghan explained the program's deadlines—boaters born after January 1, 1989 are required to have the boating certificate starting April 1, 2026 and those born on or before January 1, 1989 have until April 1, 2028 to have the boating certificate. Enforcement will be phased in as more people become aware.

Bill Amaru asked to clarify if any certifications were required for commercial fishermen. Chapin responded that this is for recreational boaters only.

Jared Silva then asked MEP whether problems persisted at the Bill Russell Bridge regarding the release of striped bass from high elevations. Chapin responded that this continues to be a hotspot for fishing and MEP has increased patrolling these areas. Chapin and Silva discussed the potential need to continue conversations that started last year to address potentially problematic catch and release fishing tactics.

Shelley Edmundson invited members of the public to ask questions for MEP.

Todd Goodell suggested a tax on luxury motors to better fund state programs that safeguard the marine environment.

Domenic Santoro suggested the installation of a ramp system to return fish caught from high elevations to safely return them to the water, such as at the Bill Russel Bridge in Boston.

Department of Fish and Game: Recent Meetings and Events and Department-wide Activities and Projects

Commissioner Tom O'Shea then congratulated Shelley Edmundson on her appointment to the position of MFAC Chair.

DMF and the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) are scheduled to brief the Legislative Coastal Caucus on the status and management on horseshoe crabs in Massachusetts. The briefing was requested to help coastal legislators better understand the impetus for House Bill 5266—legislation designed to phase out horseshoe crab harvest in Massachusetts. Bill Amaru asked to clarify where the meeting will be held. Commissioner O'Shea responded that it will be held virtually.

The Marine Recreational Fisheries Development Panel ("Panel") met earlier this week in Sandwich. The public body discussed the administration of the Marine Recreational

Fisheries Development Fund and its FY27 budget. Two members of the MFAC—Ray Jarvis and Eric Nelson—are also members of this Panel. The Commercial Fisheries Commission met in April, and will meet again in the summer, where it will discuss the group's annual report to the legislature.

Commissioner O'Shea also added that the state's hiring freeze remains in effect.

On recent and upcoming events, Massachusetts recently joined the International Union for Conservation and Nature (IUCN), along with California, and declared May 22 Biodiversity Day. Right Whale Day was celebrated this spring across the state. DMF and DFG attended the NEAq's celebration in collaboration with the Massachusetts Environmental Trust (MET). DMF's Protected Species team also recently visited NEAq's turtle rehabilitation center.

The Commissioner added that the visit earlier today to Hughes Hatchery was very productive. He looked forward to better understanding how DFG can support the Hatchery's goals in the future.

Division of Marine Fisheries: Personnel, Recent Meetings and Events, and Agency Activities and Projects

Director Dan McKiernan started by congratulating Shelley Edmundson on her appointment to the position of Chair. He thanked Ray Kane for his leadership as Chair during the decade that he served.

On recent events, Dan shared that Henry Lind received the Belding Award earlier this year during the Massachusetts Shellfish Officers Association meeting. He thanked MFAC members for attending. The Herring River in Harwich was opened to river herring harvest this spring; this was the first harvest authorized in Massachusetts since moratorium went into effect more than 20-years ago. This river herring harvest was managed by the Town of Harwich pursuant to a Sustainable Fisheries Management Plan approved by the ASMFC. Dan applauded the Town of Harwich's Department of Natural Resources' work on this project. He described the excitement around the harvest opening, noting that it was an overwhelmingly positive event. The Sustainable Fisheries Management Plan allowed for up to 3% of the run's harvest, and the final estimate harvest was about 1% of the run. He added that other towns are interested in pursuing similar harvests in the future, such as Pembroke, Middleborough, and Brewster. He added that Brad Chase, DMF's Diadromous Fisheries Project leader, will present to the MFAC on this subject at a future meeting.

Dan then described proposed bill to ban the harvest of horseshoe crabs for bait or biomedical purposes in Massachusetts. This follows New York's bill to phase out

horseshoe crab harvest by 2029 and Connecticut's bill to ban hand harvest. Dan hoped to convey to the Coastal Caucus that DMF has been able to sustainably manage its horseshoe crab resource and population indices are improving across the state. He also contrasted this with the horseshoe crab populations in New York and Connecticut where they are assessed to be in poor condition.

Bill Amaru thanked Dan and Tom for supporting the horseshoe crab fishery and bringing these issues to the Coastal Caucus for discussion. Dan added that DMF is studying post-bleeding mortality through acoustic telemetry research this summer. He suggested Tracy Pugh could share a presentation on this work at a future meeting.

Bill Doyle commented on the healthy status of the Massachusetts horseshoe crab population. Dan and Doyle spoke on how this has been corroborated through DMF's surveys.

Chairwoman Edmundson invited members of the public to ask questions for DMF.

Todd Goodell and Tom Turner spoke about the harm that eliminating the horseshoe crab fishery would have on the local coastal community and the whelk fishery, emphasizing the healthy upward trends of the horseshoe crab population in recent years.

Wes Brighton and Domenic Santoro thanked DMF for their effective management of the whelk and horseshoe crab fisheries, and for bringing these issues to the Coastal Caucus.

Mohawk Bolin then asked about the potential outcomes related to the bill to ban horseshoe crab harvest. Dan explained that the bill is currently at the Committee on Ways and Means. He was uncertain about its future, but recognized its passage may have substantial negative impacts on harvesters, whelk potters and dealers, and the biomedical industry.

Action Items

2026 Recreational Black Sea Bass Limits

Director McKiernan introduced DMF's recommendation and applauded Nichola Meserve for her efforts to bring about these regulations.

Nichola Meserve stated DMF's recommendation was to adopt a May 16 – October 14 open season with a 16" minimum size, and a 4-fish bag limit from May 16 – August 31 and a 2-fish bag limit from September 1 – October 14. This recommendation seeks to extend those emergency regulations previously reviewed by the MFAC this year and promulgated by DMF beyond their 90-day emergency implementation period. If approved, Meserve explained these limits would remain in effect through 2027.

By way of background, stock conditions allowed for a coastwide liberalization to the recreational black sea bass limits. Through negotiations at the ASMFC aimed to create greater regulatory uniformity across states in the Northern Region (NY – MA), Massachusetts was allowed to liberalize its recreational limits to increase potential harvest by 43%. Over the winter DMF conducted public scoping—through both public meetings and an angler survey—and determined there was a strong preference across all recreational fishing modes for extending fishing into the fall and reducing the minimum size. Accordingly, DMF sought to use this liberalization to extend the open season from early September to mid-October and decrease the minimum size from 16.5” to 16”.

Ray Jarvis and Eric Nelson voiced strong support for this recommendation. Jarvis was glad to see greater consistency in season length with Rhode Island. However, Nelson was surprised DMF did not receive more push back against the lower bag limit during the fall but understood the lower bag limit was the trade-off for extending the fishing season into mid-October.

Bill Amaru asked why the bag limit drops from four to two fish in September. Meserve explained that the reduction to two-fish bag limit was necessary in order to extend the season into mid-October.

Chairwoman Edmundson invited members of the public to ask questions for DMF. Todd Goodell expressed support for the longer season, noting that the season could go even further into the fall based on availability around Martha’s Vineyard.

There were no other comments. **The Chair moved for a motion. Willy Goldsmith made a motion to adopt the recommendation as presented. Chris McGuire seconded the motion. The Chair proceeded to a roll call vote and the motion passed unanimously (7-0-1), with the Chair abstaining.**

2026 Recreational Gulf of Maine Haddock Limits

Jared Silva recommended the MFAC vote to approve a 1” reduction in the recreational Gulf of Maine haddock minimum size from 18” to 17”. This recommendation seeks to extend those emergency regulations previously reviewed by the MFAC this year and promulgated by DMF beyond their 90-day emergency implementation period.

Approving the recommendation would ensure state regulations continue to match federal rules for this stock. There were no questions or comments. **The Chair moved for a motion. Bill Amaru made a motion to adopt the recommendation as presented. Willy Goldsmith seconded the motion. The Chair proceeded to a roll call vote and the motion passed unanimously by roll-call vote (7-0-1), with the Chair abstaining.**

Commercial and Recreational Mackerel Limits

Director McKiernan shared DMF's recommendation on commercial and recreational mackerel limits. Like the prior two recommendations, the action item sought to extend those emergency regulations previously reviewed by the MFAC this year and promulgated by DMF beyond their 90-day emergency implementation period.

On the commercial side, the state waters trip limit would be set at 20,000 pounds with quota-based trip limit reductions to 5,000 pounds and 2,500 pounds, an increase from prior rules that established a 5,000-pound baseline trip limit with a quota-based trip limit reduction to 2,500 pounds. This would ensure the limits for the state waters commercial fishery continue to match the federal open access trip limit.

On the recreational side, the bag limit would be set at 25 fish for private anglers and 50 fish for anglers onboard for-hire vessels, an increase from the prior bag limit of 20 fish for all anglers. This matches federal rules for the current fishing year to maintain uniform regulations across jurisdictions and support the federal conservation and management program for this species.

Amaru expressed support for this recommendation and hoped it would encourage more utilization of this resource.

Goldsmith and Commissioner O'Shea spoke on federal funding through NOAA Fisheries for a cooperative research initiative with industry on Atlantic mackerel.

Nelson spoke on the scarcity of the resource near the North Shore. Amaru, Nelson, and Bill Doyle discussed the dynamic range of mackerel and potential reasons it is more abundant in some areas than others.

Wes Brighton expressed support for recreational reporting requirements, noting that it may help provide more comprehensive data.

There were no further questions or comments. **The Chair moved for a motion. Ray Jarvis made a motion to adopt the recommendation as presented. Bill Amaru seconded the motion. The Chair proceed to a roll call vote. The motion passed unanimously (7-0-1), with the Chair abstaining.**

Discussion Items

Further Staying Whelk Gauge Changes and Knobbed Whelk Petition

Director McKiernan indicated DMF intends to move forward with rule making this fall to suspend all pending whelk gauge increases. Should this occur, the whelk minimum gauge size will remain at 3 1/8". The purpose of this is to provide the University of Massachusetts School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) with time to complete its Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for the channeled whelk fishery. Once the MSE is complete, DMF will reevaluate the conservation management program for this fishery.

McGuire asked about the timing of the completed MSE. Dan expected the evaluation will be completed within two years. DMF will then need time to analyze the report and assess and scope potential alternative management strategies.

Wes Brighton expressed support for the pause and spoke to improving conditions in the fishery particularly with the diminished effort experienced in the past few years. Brighton, McKiernan, and Silva then discussed potential interest in maintaining more modest fishing pressure and potential management actions to address latent permits.

Tom Turner asked whether SMAST's most recent channeled whelk size-at-maturity study would be incorporated into the MSE. McKiernan and Glenn explained that the MSE would consider both DMF's size-at-maturity work and the recent SMAST study. Turner noted the SMAST study indicated a substantially lower size at maturity and felt it was critical to include the most recent data in management.

Wes Brighton spoke to the value of fishery-dependent data. Shelley Edmundson agreed and highlighted the whelk study fleet work conducted by the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation. To this point, both advocated for working through the fleet in the development of the MSE and DMF's potentially new conservation strategy.

Dan shared that DMF also intends to analyze a petition to reduce the knobbed whelk gauge size. This petition was submitted to DMF by Domenic Santoro who runs an inshore dragger and shellfish dredge operation out of Cape Cod. Domenic was in attendance and Dan asked Domenic to speak to the petition.

Santoro encouraged DMF to consider decreasing the knobbed whelk minimum size to encourage the harvest of this voracious shellfish predator and decrease the regulatory discarding of knobbed whelk, which are an important incidental catch in mobile gear fisheries around Nantucket Sound. Domenic also reminded the MFAC that pot fishers generally do not catch knobbed whelk, that knobbed whelk never experienced the high levels of exploitation that occurred in the channeled whelk fishery, and that inshore mobile gear effort has been declining over the past 20-years. Lastly, Domenic provided

recommendations to DMF to effectively monitor whelk populations, including nighttime surveys.

McKiernan thanked Domenic for his comments and noted DMF would provide a formal response to the petition at a future MFAC business meeting.

Port Profile Project Update

Story Reed shared an update on DMF's Port Profile Project. In 2021, DMF completed its first Port Profile Project which reviewed commercial fishing activity statewide at the municipal level, described the infrastructure at each port, identified access and infrastructure challenges, and provided infrastructure improvement recommendations. DMF is currently in the process of completing a five-year review which will include updated commercial fisheries statistics, as well as data from new harbormaster and commercial fisher surveys at the port level. Reed was hopeful the 2026 report will be released this summer.

Reed reviewed some of the 2026 report's findings for Martha's Vineyard ports. This included active harvesters, annual landings and ex-vessel value by species, as well as infrastructure needs and challenges, by species,

McGuire asked whether these data include aquaculture. Story responded that it does include aquaculture.

Goldsmith asked about landings data confidentiality issues in certain ports. Reed explained that DMF cannot publish data when the "rule of three" is not met and this can become for some species and ports as there are fewer than three harvesters or dealers involved.

Amaru asked DMF to clarify what species are included as "invertebrates". Reed responded that this includes lobster, snails, and whelks.

Tom Turner commented on whelk landings in different ports. Wes Brighton spoke on changes and trends year to year.

Update on Offshore Wind and Fisheries Innovation Fund

Brad Schondelmeier provided a routine update on offshore wind projects around New England. This focused on: (1) current project status; (2) recent milestones; (3) federal actions; and (4) mitigation funds. He explained that two projects are in full operation, four are under construction, and four lease areas have been awarded in the Gulf of Maine. Additionally, a number of lease areas are still undergoing permitting in the New York Bight and Gulf of Maine.

South Fork Wind and Vineyard Wind are both in operation and continue to undergo fisheries surveys. Revolution Wind, Sunrise Wind, and Empire Wind are under various levels of construction. Schondelmeier highlighted recent offshore wind milestones—both Vineyard Wind and Revolution Wind began delivering power to the New England power grid.

Additionally, the Department of the Interior renounced four offshore lease areas. The funds allocated to the development of the lease areas will be reinvested into oil and natural gas projects. This may impact how future OSW areas are addressed.

He then spoke on the state of mitigation funds available to Massachusetts fishermen impacted by offshore wind. Schondelmeier then highlighted projects supported by the Massachusetts Fisheries Innovation Fund, which are currently underway.

McGuire and Amaru applauded Schondelmeier's efforts to condense and present this information to the MFAC, allowing it to be available to the public. Amaru asked how this information can be better shared with the public. Schondelmeier responded that updates are distributed through mailings and informational packets. However, he plans to update DMF's offshore wind webpage to make information more readily available. Amaru and Schondelmeier discussed potential ways to make communication more effective.

Santoro and Goodell expressed frustration with the impact of offshore wind projects on fisheries.

Wes Brighton asked about the fate of any interest accrued in these funds. Brad Schondelmeier explained that they likely stay within the trust or escrow account. However, reports on interest may not be available until five years after the initial commercial operations. He added that the Vineyard Wind direct compensation fund is most likely undersubscribed, and in five years there may be potential to transfer funds from direct compensation into the Fisheries Innovation Fund.

Dan suggested that Schondelmeier schedule a time to return to Martha's Vineyard to further discuss these issues and answer questions about mitigation funds.

Other Business and Public Comment

There was no other business.

The Chair invited public comment.

Todd Goodell voiced concern about the impact of cormorants on shellfish fisheries. He suggested an eradication program.

Johnny Hoy voiced frustration with the DMF's bonito limit and requested a potential commercially viable limit be considered.

Wes Brighton asked about more information on how bonito is managed. Dan spoke on the management approach to bonito as a Highly Migratory Species. Last year's regulation was implemented in response to MRIP data revealing high landings of this species, and in anticipation of tighter striped bass restrictions in the future.

Nick Wilbur voiced support for not using past landing history to restrict permit holders in order to allow young fishermen to join the industry.

There were no further comments. The Chair moved for a motion to adjourn. Ray Jarvis made the motion to adjourn. Chris McGuire seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.

Upcoming Meetings

July 14, 2026 via Zoom

Meeting Materials

- May 28, 2026 MFAC Business Meeting Agenda
- March 17, 2026 MFAC Draft Business Meeting Minutes
- Memorandum Recommendation on Final Regulations to Set Recreational Limits for Black Sea Bass
- Memorandum Recommendation on Final Regulations to Set Recreational Limits for Gulf of Maine Haddock
- Memorandum Recommendation on Final Regulations to Set Commercial and Recreational Mackerel Limits
- Domenic Santoro Request Regarding Knobbed Whelk Management in Massachusetts Waters
- DMF Presentation on Commercial Fisheries Port Profile Project Update
- DMF Presentation on Offshore Wind Updates