



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission November 10, 2021 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the November 10, 2021 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](#).

Items for Future Public Hearing

State Waters Groundfish Management. For 2022, DMF is proposing several management measures affecting the commercial groundfish fishery in state waters. DMF anticipates the proposals below will go out to public hearing this winter with final a final recommendation to be provided to the MFAC in early 2022.

- To reduce the potential risk of right whales becoming entangled in gillnet gear and advance DMF's Incidental Take Permit (ITP) application, DMF is proposing to expand the spatial extent of the January 1 – May 15 gillnet closure to all of state waters. While this proposed action would include all state waters, it would principally impact the gillnet fishery in Massachusetts Bay, as no gillnet fishing occurs during this period east or south of Cape Cod due to both regulation and species availability.
- To protect spring spawning cod and known spawning cod aggregations in Massachusetts Bay, DMF is proposing to adopt an April 15 – April 30 commercial groundfish closure from Plymouth to the Massachusetts/New Hampshire maritime border.
- To provide access to available groundfish stocks at times and places where right whales and spawning cod are of nominal concern and to mitigate the impacts of the above described closures, DMF is proposing to increase the Gulf of Maine cod trip limit from 200 to 300 pounds, increase the Gulf of Maine yellowtail flounder trip limit from 250 pounds to 350 pounds, and eliminate the May 15 – October 31 gillnet closure in outer Boston Harbor.

Discussion Items

Quota Managed Species Update. DMF provided the MFAC with an update on commercial fisheries quota utilization so far in 2021. This discussion focused on black sea bass, summer flounder, striped bass, tautog, and bluefish.

Protected Species Update. DMF provided an update on protected species management issues.

- NOAA Fisheries published the 2022 draft List of Fisheries (LOF) under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Massachusetts' lobster, whelk, and fish pot fisheries were separated out from the broader regional fisheries and a new Massachusetts Mixed Species Trap fishery was proposed. NOAA Fisheries is currently in the process of reviewing public comment and finalizing the LOF. If the new Massachusetts Mixed Species Trap fishery is adopted in the 2022 LOF, it would advance DMF's ITP application. However, for it to be adopted, the fishery needs to be distinguishable from other fisheries in other jurisdictions and there are concerns that DMF has not adopted a unique gear marking system for its whelk and fish pot fisheries. With this in mind,

DMF intends to go out to public hearing this winter with a proposal to adopt the new lobster/crab trap buoy line marking scheme to the fish and whelk pot fisheries for 2022.

- DMF then reviewed NOAA's 2020 right whale population estimate, which showed the population continues to decrease. Based on this new population estimate, NOAA Fisheries projects a 92% reduction in risk of significant injury and mortality is necessary to achieve the potential biological removal. Accordingly, NOAA Fisheries is evaluating whether this will require additional management measures under the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan.
- DMF renewed the development of a new approach to haul and remove abandoned gear from the trap gear closure area. In the short term, DMF is looking to fund commercial lobster vessels to haul and remove this gear. In the long term, DMF is applying for a NOAA Marine Debris grant to initiate a self-sustainable gear removal program. Both efforts will require statutory changes on gear possession rules to accommodate the efficient removal of this gear.
- DMF hosted a Ropeless Fishing Workshop on October 13 and 14. This workshop was well attended, and a variety of stakeholder interests and concerns were voiced during the two-day event. Of specific interest were discussions regarding conflicts, scalability, research and development needs, and advancing experimental fishing opportunities in an equitable manner.

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Update. DMF summarized the recent October ASMFC meeting and highlighted areas of interest for Massachusetts.

- Development of Lobster Addendum XXVII and Lobster/Jonah Crab Addendum XXIX continues. Addendum XXVII's objective is to address declining trends in survey abundance for the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank lobster stock and build in resiliency measures to increase spawning stock biomass. This includes standardizing certain rules within or across Lobster Conservation Management Areas and adopting management triggers for gauge size revisions. DMF anticipated the draft addendum would be finalized for public comment at the winter ASMFC meeting. Addendum XXIX's objective is to enhance spatial data regarding where the offshore lobster/Jonah crab fishery occurs by requiring electronic monitoring. A special Board meeting will be held on December 6 to finalize the draft addendum for public comment.
- The 2021 regional tautog stock assessments showed that stock status had improved across all stock areas since 2016. For the MA/RI region the spawning stock biomass was estimated to be 44% above its target. While the stock assessment results were strong, they did not automatically prompt a responsive management action, such changes will have to be considered on a regional basis with MA and RI having to agree on what, if any, management actions are warranted.
- The release of Striped Bass Draft Amendment 7 for public comment was delayed in order to have the Plan Development Team incorporate options addressing year class protection in the Chesapeake Bay recreational fishery and the adoption of a rebuilding plan that assumes a low recruitment regime. Despite this delay, the amendment is still on schedule for implementation in 2023. The Board also refined the options addressing the management triggers; year class protection along the coast; recreational release mortality; and the use of conservation equivalency measures.
- The ASMFC was in the preliminary stages of developing Menhaden Addendum I. This addendum is expected to consider changes to commercial state-by-state quota allocations, adjusting how the episodic event set-aside is utilized, and limiting how menhaden may be targeted when fishing under the incidental catch and small-scale fishery allowance.
- DMF also reviewed the sub-ACL management for Atlantic sea herring in Area 1A for 2022, an anticipated increase to the spiny dogfish trip limit, and the ongoing development of harvest control rules in the annual management of the recreational summer flounder, black sea bass, scup, and bluefish fisheries.

New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) Update. DMF summarized ongoing happenings at the NEFMC. There was new leadership at the NEFMC with a new Chair and Vice-Chair and new appointments to the Executive Committee. At the September meeting, the NEFMC finalized a rebuilding plan for Atlantic sea herring; finalized 2022-2023 specifications for skates; and approved 2023 catch limits for transboundary groundfish stocks. Looking forward to the December meeting, the NEFMC was expected to review 2022 management priorities and pending scallop and groundfish frameworks. Lastly, DMF highlighted several federal fisheries management initiatives of interest to Massachusetts. This included the management strategy evaluation on cod stock structure; the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act; ecosystem-based fishery management workshops; climate change scenario planning; and the development of a mackerel rebuilding plan. DMF and the MFAC established a Mackerel Sub-Committee to advise DMF on how to respond to a Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council request for northeast states to regulate recreational mackerel fishing in state waters.

Presentations

DMF staff provided the MFAC with two presentations. First, DMF presented on the new recreational fishing permit issuance platform, which is expected to go live on December 1, 2022. Second, DMF reviewed the second round of CARES relief funding and the ongoing Seafood Processing Grant. Both of these items address the economic impacts of the pandemic on the seafood industry.

Upcoming Meetings

The MFAC will be meeting again on December 2, 2021. 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).