



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission November 18, 2025 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the November 18, 2025 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. This business meeting was held at the MassWildlife's Field Headquarters (1 Rabbit Hill Rd, Westborough, MA). All meeting materials are available on the [MFAC's past meeting website](#).

Fishery Performance Review

DMF provided the MFAC with an up-to-date performance review of the 2025 quota managed fisheries for scup, tautog, black sea bass, summer flounder, bait horseshoe crabs, menhaden, bluefish, and spiny dogfish.

Discussion Items

Striped Bass. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) approved Addendum III to the Atlantic Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan (FMP) at its October 2025 meeting. This addendum includes provisions for a coastwide standardized total length measurement definition by January 1, 2027; a commercial harvester tagging requirement by January 1, 2029, and an allowance for Maryland to adopt an alternative, conservation-neutral recreational fishing season for the Chesapeake Bay. No action was taken to further reduce removals in the commercial or recreational fishery to support stock rebuilding. Rather the ASMFC opted to establish a working group to help inform future management decisions after the 2027 benchmark stock assessment.

Massachusetts is already compliant with the new total length definition; therefore, no regulatory change is necessary. However, the requirement for commercial tagging to be conducted by harvesters prior to landing is a significant departure from the state's existing dealer tagging program. To effectively administer this program, DMF will have to substantially reduce the total number of commercial striped bass permits issued annually. DMF has taken the first step to accomplish this goal by enacting emergency regulations to limit entry for 2026. Over the next several years, DMF anticipates pursuing proposals to: (1) further reduce the number of permits annually issued by using the December 31, 2025 control date coupled with to-be-developed activity criteria; (2) establish an exit:entry program to manage attrition and access; and (3) transition to harvester tagging. DMF will convene the MFAC's Striped Bass, Permitting, and Law Enforcement focus groups to help inform these initiatives.

Additionally, DMF presented on the finding of its recent striped bass release mortality study. This study relied on acoustic telemetry work conducted by Division staff to analyze the survival of striped bass released using typical recreational bait fishing techniques and tackle, as well as data from a coastwide citizen science initiative to understand what factors contribute most to post-release mortality and a survey of anglers regarding their use of various terminal tackle. These data were modeled and the preliminary conclusions are that striped bass release mortality is, on average, about half what was previously assumed (about 4.5% rather than 9%);

and that handling time, fish size, and terminal tackle (e.g., lures with treble hooks), contribute meaningfully to post release mortality.

American Lobster. DMF delayed the discussion of the American lobster stock assessment and the ASMFC's Lobster Management Board meeting until the December 2025 MFAC business meeting.

Menhaden. The ASMFC's Menhaden Management Board met in October to review the results of the 2025 single-species and ecosystem reference point stock assessment for menhaden and to consider setting the total allowable catch for 2026–2028. Ultimately, the Board opted to just set the TAC for 2026 at 186,840 metric tons (mt), a 20% reduction from the 2023–2025 level of 233,550 mt. This 20% reduction provides a TAC that has 0% risk of exceeding the ecosystem reference point fishing mortality threshold but falls short of achieving the ecosystem reference point fishing mortality target. To achieve the target the TAC would need to be cut by about 50%, raising socioeconomic concerns. The Board will meet again in October 2026 to consider setting the TAC for 2027, 2028, and 2029. DMF determined that changes to state regulations are not necessary for 2026 to absorb the 20% quota cut.

Recent Inshore Dragger Meeting. DMF met with members of the inshore summertime Nantucket Sound dragger fleet on November 17. The purpose of the meeting was to review fishery performance, discuss the pending summer flounder quota increase and preferred management options, and discuss other issues germane to the fishery. There was general support for the regulatory adjustments proposed in DMF's September 2025 memorandum to the MFAC. There was also some discussion about horseshoe crab management and knobbed whelk minimum sizes.

Update on Horseshoe Crab Fishery Management. DMF prepared an extensive memorandum for the MFAC analyzing House Bill 898 – An Act to End the Taking of Horseshoe Crabs for Bait. DMF's analysis found that the claims in support of the bill are not supported by the best available science, the fishery is strictly managed at the state and interstate level, and banning bait harvest will have direct and cumulative indirect impacts on the state's working waterfront. DMF also reminded the MFAC that representatives from the biomedical fishery have requested DMF consider reallocating quota from the bait fishery to the biomedical fishery. The agency was in the process of analyzing this request and would likely provide the MFAC with a memorandum for the December 2025 business meeting.

Upcoming Meetings

The MFAC will meet next on December 18, 2025 virtually via Zoom.