MARINE FISHERIES ADVISORY COMMISSION
BUSINESS MEETING AMENDED AGENDA
9:00AM
Tuesday, November 18, 2025
DFW Field Headquarters
1 Rabbit Hill Road
Westborough, MA
Listen-In Only Via Zoom

1. Call to Order and Routine Business (9:00 AM)
   a. Introductions and Announcements
   b. Review of October 2025 Business Meeting Agenda
   c. Review and Approval of September 2025 Draft Business Meeting Minutes
2. Agency Updates (9:15 AM)
   a. Office of Law Enforcement: Personnel, Recent Operations & Marine Fishery Incidents
   b. Department of Fish and Game: Recent Meetings and Events and Department-wide Activities and Projects
   c. Division of Marine Fisheries: Personnel, Recent Meetings and Events, and Agency Activities and Projects
3. Discussion Items (10:00AM)
   a. Striped Bass
      i. Review of ASMFC Board Meeting and Final Addendum III
      ii. Outlook on State Rule Making and Convening MFAC Focus Groups
      iii. Presentation on Recreational Release Mortality
   b. American Lobster
      i. Presentation on Lobster Stock Assessment
      ii. Review of ASMFC Board Meeting
   c. ASMFC Menhaden Board Decision
   d. Recent Inshore Dragger Meeting
   e. Update on Horseshoe Crab Fishery Management
4. Other Business and Public Comment (12:30PM)
5. Adjourn (12:45PM)

All times provided are approximate and the meeting agenda is subject to change. The MFAC may amend the agenda at the start of the business meeting.

Next Meeting Date

December 18, 2025
via Zoom

Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission Draft Business Meeting Minutes

October 21, 2025

Via Zoom

Attendees

Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission: Raymond Kane, Chair; Bill Doyle, Vice-Chair; Shelley Edmundson, Clerk; Bill Amaru; Chris McGuire; Eric Nelson, Ray Jarvis; and Sooky Sawyer.

Division of Marine Fisheries Staff: Dan McKiernan, Director; Robert Glenn, Deputy Director; Jared Silva; Nichola Meserve; Anna Webb; Kelly Whitmore; Derek Perry; Bradlie Morgan; Elise Koob; Ben Gahagan; Brad Schondelmeier; Steve Wilcox; Chrissy Petitpas; Alex Boeri; and Matt Camisa

Department of Fish and Game Staff: Commissioner Tom O'Shea; Sefatia Romeo-Theken, Deputy Commissioner

Massachusetts Environmental Police: Captain Jack Chapin, Lieutenant Matt Bass

Members of the Public: Mark Faherty; Jarrett Drake; Ike Uri

Call to Order and Routine Business

Chairman Ray Kane called the meeting to order.

Review of the October 2025 Business Meeting Agenda

Chairman Kane asked for any amendments to the October 2025 Business Meeting Agenda. There were no amendments.

Review and Approval of the September 2025 Draft Business Meeting Minutes

Chairman Kane asked for amendments to the draft September 2025 Business Meeting Minutes. There were no amendments. **The Chair called for a motion. Shelley Edmundson made a motion to accept the minutes as drafted and Chris McGuire seconded. The motion passed unanimously.**

Agency Updates

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

Captain Jack Chapin and Lieutenant Matt Bass provided updates on the operations of the Massachusetts Environmental Police (MEP). He noted that MEP's focus in the fall typically shifts to hunting, as fishing activity decreases. However, he thanked the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) for assisting MEP and NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement in addressing a recent incident concerning non-compliant lobster gear in Ipswich Bay.

On personnel, Chapin said that a new officer was hired and will be assigned to the Inland Bureau in Western Massachusetts. MEP hopes to fill seven existing vacancies and anticipates several additional retirements in the next year, particularly among management.

Sooky Sawyer asked for additional details on the lobster gear compliance issue. Chapin explained that a dual state-federally permitted lobster fisherman possessed unmarked and untagged gear. Complaints were filed through NOAA in response to gear conflicts. DMF staffed the R/V Craven — which has gear hauling and storage capabilities — to assist MEP and the Office of Law Enforcement in their investigation.

Chairman Kane asked if this effort was part of a Joint Enforcement Agreement (JEA). Chapin responded that this was part of a JEA—both DMF and NOAA were involved because the gear was in state waters—and the lobsterman held a dual state-federal permit. Kane questioned the status of the JEA in the current federal climate and Chapin noted that the program remains funded.

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

Commissioner Tom O'Shea provided an update on the Department of Fish and Game (DFG). Regarding the MFAC, he is working to fill the group's final vacant seat by the end of the year.

The Commissioner then moved on to discuss recent and upcoming meetings. The Commercial Fisheries Commission met in early October, and the meeting's agenda included presentations on the Designated Port Assessment, offshore wind (OSW) updates, Governor Healey's Biodiversity Initiative, and DMF's Seafood Marketing Program. DMF and DFG also met with the Department of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) to discuss plans to develop a marine habitat restoration center at the Cat Cove Marine Laboratory in Salem. The Commissioner will be attending Massachusetts Seafood Day at the Statehouse with on October 22. Chairman Kane encouraged all MFAC members to attend this event.

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

Director Dan McKiernan noted that Story Reed and Wendy Mainardi are currently attending a regional meeting of state agency seafood marketing programs. He hoped this would lead to coordinated efforts across northeast states to promote certain aspects of the seafood industry.

Dan then forecasted that today's meeting will cover the final quota managed fishery update for 2025. He recognized the efforts of DMF's Statistics Program to track landings against these quotas and maintain close contact with primary buyers throughout the season to accurately project closures and prevent overages.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) will meet next week. Among the most controversial items are striped bass conservation (Addendum III) and menhaden quota adjustments. He anticipated there would be disagreement among stakeholders regardless of outcome. The lobster stock assessments will also be shared at this meeting.

The Ropeless Consortium was currently holding a two-day annual meeting (October 20 and 21) in New Bedford. Dan attended the first day. The issue of ropeless fishing gear is complicated and controversial and there are a number of ongoing initiatives to investigate the challenges it presents. This includes better understanding the co-occurrence of whales and trap fishing gear through data collection accomplished by the deployment of Passive Acoustic Monitoring systems and mandating real-time vessel monitoring systems for federal lobster and Jonah crab trap permit holders.

DMF completed a survey for Massachusetts lobster fishers to determine how best to move forward with conservation. New Hampshire and Maine have also conducted similar surveys. Results will be shared during this meeting and at the ASMFC meeting in October.

Director McKiernan remarked on the recent rain that has alleviated some drought conditions across the state. He explained that DMF's Brad Chase believes this will be beneficial to young of the year river herring as they migrate downstream.

Lastly, he described a horseshoe crab bill that has been filed with the legislature. The bill aims to eliminate horseshoe crab harvest for the purpose of bait. In practice, this would eliminate the bait quota but would not prohibit the use of horseshoe crabs caught outside Massachusetts and imported in-state as bait. DMF intends to work through the Administration to address this bill's impacts to the fishing industry.

Dan then discussed Jamie Bassett's recent request for DMF to reallocate horseshoe crab quota from the bait quota to the biomedical quota. There is no mechanism for DMF to accommodate such an adjustment in-season, but DMF is currently analyzing bait demand in Massachusetts and whether it would be appropriate to pursue a regulatory adjustment to the quotas for 2026. Any potential draft regulatory proposals will be brought forward to the MFAC at a future meeting.

Sooky Sawyer remarked on calls he has received from fishermen with commercial eel endorsements who discovered their permit was not reissued for 2026. Dan explained that in spring 2025, DMF proposed to limit the reissuance of eel endorsements to only those permit holders who reported landing at least one pound of eel between January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2024. This permitting action was driven by the fact that the eel resource is severely depleted and there are significant concerns about under reporting and latent effort. This would not restrict the use of eels as bait in commercial fisheries (e.g., striped bass) provided individuals comply with the recreational possession limit of 25 eels. Nichola Meserve and Chairman Kane noted the low threshold (1-pound in any of the past 10-years) needed to continue to renew the permit in 2026.

Sawyer then asked about a recent reduction in the recreational surf clam limit to 15 clams per person. Dan responded that DMF manages the commercial surf clam fishery, but the recreational fishery is managed under municipalities. DMF will investigate this further and provide an update at a future meeting.

2025 Belding Award Nomination

Dan introduced the Belding Award—an award created in 1990 by the descendants of David Belding, a naturalist and scientist who contributed to fishery science. DMF

nominated Henry Lind for the 2025 Belding Award. Dan explained that Lind has been an active member of the shellfish community in Cape Cod and continues to be involved in the development of a Shellfish Constable Training Course, which will be offered through Cape Cod Community College.

Director McKiernan then outlined previous recipients of the Belding Award since its inception in 1990.

Bill Amaru made the motion to nominate Henry Lind for the Belding Award. Ray Jarvis seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Update on Performance of 2025 Quota Managed Fisheries

Ray Kane recognized DMF's accuracy in predicting the timing of quota managed fishery closures.

Anna Webb provided an update on the performance of the 2025 quota managed fisheries.

Scup

The state-managed summertime scup quota period ended on September 30. This year's landings were slightly lower than those in 2023 and the quota was again underutilized.

Tautog

The tautog fishery closed on October 18. The recent nor'easter disrupted fishing substantially and made projecting a quota closure challenging. However, Webb expected total landings to come in close to 100%.

Black Sea Bass

The black sea bass fishery closed on October 21. This fishery and quota closure projections were similarly disrupted by the recent storm. Webb expected a negligible quota underage would be likely.

Fluke

The fluke fishery is still open. On October 1, since more than 10% of the quota remained, trip limits were increased to 5,000 pounds. This allowed the offshore fleet, which lands primarily in New Bedford, to target fish in federal waters south of the islands. Anna projected the quota would be taken by early November and the fishery would then close.

Bait Horseshoe Crab

With only 4,000 crabs remaining, the bait horseshoe crab fishery is close to fulfilling its quota. DMF expects a small amount of landings will continue to trickle in and the quota may be achieved by year's end.

Menhaden

Menhaden landings are currently trending slowly, which is to be expected at this time of year as the fish are migrating southwards. Massachusetts closed its state quota managed fishery in late August and entered into the Episodic Event Set Aside (EESA) fishery. Quota remains in the EESA; however, Maine recently exited the program and Massachusetts is currently the only state participating in this program.

Meserve explained that the EESA is a set-aside of 1% of the overall coastwide quota made available annually to the northeast states (New York to Maine) that is accessible should the fish remain in state waters and the state's quota is taken prior to September 1. McKiernan added that as part of the rulemaking approved by the MFAC in early 2025, to the fishery is managed so as to take the state quota by late August with the expectation that the EESA could be accessed after quota is fulfilled and allow fishing to continue into the early fall when the fish remain locally available.

Kane asked whether Maine permit holders can still access menhaden. Meserve explained that Maine received a quota transfer from another state after they left the EESA and this allowed fishing to continue.

Bluefish

Bluefish landings are slowing down, and Webb did not expect significant changes moving forward, as what fish were available are migrating out of our waters. Accordingly, DMF anticipated the state's quota would not be taken and transferred some of its underage to North Carolina.

Spiny Dogfish

Spiny dogfish are managed by regional quotas monitored by NOAA Fisheries. While, DMF does not actively track landings and quota utilization for this species, Bill Amaru requested (at the September meeting) that DMF present on its performance of this fishery moving forward. Webb reported that while NOAA's quota monitoring website has not been updated since the federal government shutdown in September, the most updated information shows that landings are trending lower than previous years and the quota would likely be underutilized.

Discussion Items

Preview of Upcoming October ASMFC Meeting

Director McKiernan discussed the key items to be addressed at the October 2025 ASMFC meeting: (1) Draft Addendum III to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Striped Bass; and (2) menhaden specifications for 2026-2028 and the potential for significant commercial quota cuts. Massachusetts hosted two ASMFC public hearings on Draft Addendum III in September in Woburn and Bourne.

Nichola Meserve then reviewed the ASMFC's analysis of the testimony received at public hearing and multiple-choice survey results. She noted this analysis did not include written public comment and opened-ended survey responses. She also caveated the analysis results noting that public hearing comment skewed heavily towards the commercial and for-hire businesses, the multiple-choice survey was dominated by recreational anglers, and the number of survey respondents was substantially larger than public hearing attendees and commentors.

A substantial majority of public hearing (71%) and survey respondents (88%) supported a coastwide total length standard of a straight-line measurement with the fish laid flat, tail fins squeezed, and the mouth closed. Common themes in support of a coastwide standard included improve consistency in enforcement and compliance across states, whereas common views in favor of status quo discuss challenges handling the fish and the conservation benefits of reducing handling time.

On commercial tagging, a majority of public hearing (73%) and survey respondents (57%) supported point of harvest tagging. However, Massachusetts public hearing respondents (58%) favored status quo, which would continue to allow dealer tagging. Those in favor of harvester tagging noted that it will improve enforcement and reporting and reduce high-grading, whereas those in favor of maintaining dealer tagging noted that it allows states to develop programs best suited to their fisheries and the enforcement and reporting benefits are speculative and without direct evidence that existing programs are not working.

On mandating a 12% cut in recreational and commercial removals to support stock rebuilding, a large majority of public hearing respondents (81%) favored no action — this trend was similar among only Massachusetts public hearing respondents (83%). However, among survey respondents the majority (68%) supported the 12% cut. Arguments against the cut noted that fishing mortality is low and preliminary MRIP estimates suggest harvest was down in 2025 compared to recent years; concerns about spawning stock biomass (SSB) are driven by environment not fishing; and management would benefit from the next benchmark stock assessment. Arguments for additional

conservation focused on being precautionary in order to protect SSB given poor recruitment and declining abundance.

The addendum also contained two sub-options addressing how the cut should be achieved in the recreational fishery. First, there is an option that would accommodate a larger slot limit for the for-hire sector that would be offset by a 13% removal in reduction. A large majority of public hearing (88%) and survey (84%) respondents did not favor this. However, the issue was split 50-50 among Massachusetts public hearing commentors. Those opposing this action noted the equity and fairness issues and the need for all sectors to adapt to living with a less productive fishery, whereas those in favor noted the economic impacts to the for-hire sector compared to their relatively low contribution to total harvest. Second, to achieve the reduction there were options for seasonal no harvest closures and no targeting closures. A majority of public hearing (88%) and survey (89%) survey respondents favored no harvest closures. Those in favor of no harvest closures noted it is easier to enforce and comply with and is more likely to achieve the intended reduction, whereas supporters of the no targeting closures noted it would result in shorter closure durations and also directly impact catch and release fishers.

Lastly, the addendum addressed the Maryland Chesapeake Bay recreational season baseline. This option would either require Maryland retain their existing season, adjust the timing of their season in a conservation neutral manner, or adjust the timing of the season in a conservation neutral manner but also with an uncertainty buffer. A majority of public hearing respondents (81%) favored no change, whereas a majority of survey respondents (55%) favored allowing adjustments with an uncertainty buffer.

McKiernan noted that DMF's recently completed a striped bass release mortality study that release mortality is approximately half the rate used in the assessment (9%). Meserve and McKiernan noted that these findings were not included in the last assessment and were not considered in the development of Draft Addendum III but may influence discussion at the ASMFC's Striped Bass Board. McKiernan encouraged MFAC members to attend Micah Dean's virtual presentation on this research tomorrow. Jared Silva noted that a recording of this presentation will be shared and DMF would work to have this information presented at a future meeting.

Ray Jarvis and Eric Nelson remarked on their disagreement with some comments at Massachusetts public hearings. Jarvis voiced support for the 12% removal reductions and was interested in the impact of the release mortality shift on the ASMFC's decision. Nelson was curious what each state's potential voting plans were at the ASMFC meeting.

Bill Amaru shared the results of a beach seine survey in Chesapeake Bay that suggested striped bass recruitment in 2025 was slightly higher than in recent years.

Amaru and Meserve discussed how the 2025 results were still well below the long-term average.

Amaru and Kane then asked about the impact of barbless hooks on release mortality. Meserve noted that these practices could be introduced in future regulations if constituents aim to lower release mortality further. She suggested that harvest restrictions may have greater conservation impact than further addressing release mortality. DMF biologist Ben Gahagan noted that barbless hooks were not included in DMF's recent striped bass release mortality study. However, the data from the study indicated that handling time is predicative of release mortality. As debarbing hooks can substantially help minimize handling time, an argument can be made that using this terminal tackle would further reduce release mortality. Meserve noted that terminal tackle requirements could be introduced in future regulations if constituents aim to lower release mortality further, but harvest restrictions may have greater overall conservation benefits. Gahagan added that DMF has encouraged barbless hooks through angler outreach and education.

Amaru then asked if the new release mortality rate considers fish being caught multiple times. Gahagan explained the challenges of researching this without successful mark and recapture studies. He described a Housatonic River study in Connecticut that showed a small amount of mortality weeks after release that may have been caused by subsequent capture, but more research is needed. Amaru reflected on previous conversations with DMF biologists who were concerned about recaptures. Nelson shared incidents of recapturing fish and noted their apparent resilience. He emphasized the importance of understanding the impact of environmental conditions on striped bass in Chesapeake Bay.

Kane asked about the impact of release mortality rate changes on the stock assessment. Meserve responded that this would reduce the amount of removals attributed to release morality and may impact reference points because the rate is length and age dependent. Any change will become more evident once the stock assessment is complete.

Kane then asked about the use of format letters by organizations as part of written public comment for Draft Addendum III. Meserve responded that their current data doesn't describe written comment; however, she wondered about the impact of organizations encouraging their members to complete the online survey or submit format letters. Gahagan and Jarvis remarked on the apparent hesitancy of recreational fishery stakeholders to share comments at public hearings.

Dan encouraged MFAC members to attend Micah Dean's presentation on this research tomorrow. Jared Silva noted that a recording of this presentation will be shared.

Meserve then introduced menhaden specifications for 2026-2028 facing ASMFC decision. A recent single species assessment and ecosystem assessment have revealed errors in estimating menhaden biomass, suggesting that the average biomass is 37% lower than previously estimated based on new analyses of historical tagging data.

The stock status is derived from Ecological Reference Points (ERPs) that account for menhaden's role as forage species. Updated data showed that menhaden fishing mortality fell between the ERP Fishing Mortality Target and Threshold Level to sustain striped bass as a primary predator species in 2023. A 50% reduction in Total Allowable Catch (TAC) is thought to be necessary to reach a 40-50% probability of exceeding the ERP Fishing Mortality Target (F) in 2026 – 2028.

Meserve outlined potential approaches to address this issue. There would likely be a 20-50% cut in coastwide TAC starting in 2026, which could bring Massachusetts' quota closer to its 2018 – 2022 quota. DMF has already capped permits for the menhaden fishery and removed latent effort from the limited entry permit holders. She explained that the EESA could still be accessed under these changes.

Chris McGuire and Sooky Sawyer asked how cuts would be applied across different menhaden fisheries (reduction and bait). Meserve responded that allocations are state-by-state and states determine how their quota is distributed across the reduction and bait fishery. She noted that, given a reduction in coastwide TAC, the ASMFC may pursue an addendum to adjust the Chesapeake Bay reduction fishery cap, which limits how much of Virginia's reduction fishery can occur in the Chesapeake Bay.

Sawyer voiced concern for the local menhaden bait fishermen who invested heavily in this fishery and the local lobster industry who rely on local caught menhaden for bait.

The Board will also discuss quota allocations, as is required every three years. McGuire and Meserve discussed the process of implementing an addendum. Meserve explained that while TAC changes are determined by Board specifications, coastwide allocations and adjustments to the Chesapeake Bay reduction fishery cap would not be implemented until 2026 or 2027.

Sawyer, Jarvis, and Kane emphasized the importance of the menhaden fishery for New England's lobster industry and supported allocating more menhaden to the bait fishery.

<u>Lobster industry survey</u>

Anna Webb described the results of the recent survey given to lobster industry members. Director McKiernan explained that the survey was part of an effort across

Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts to determine how to best move forward with conservation.

DMF sent the survey to 1,043 industry members and received a 27% response rate. Respondents were predominantly from Lobster Management Area (LMA) 1, with the remainder in LMA2, LMA3, and Outer Cape Cod (OCC) LMA. The greatest concerns for fleet sustainability included input costs and whale protection regulations. Most respondents believed current conservation measures were effective in protecting the future of the lobster population and that they were adequately informed of potential regulatory changes impacting the lobster industry.

On potential future conservation initiatives, answers differed across LMAs. LMA1 preferred trap limit decreases and v-notch regulations; LMA 2 preferred trap allocation changes, increasing the minimum size, and changing seasonal area closures; OCCLMA preferred increasing the minimum size; and LMA3 preferred more conservative v-notch regulations.

Federal Fisheries Management Update

Kelly Whitmore provided the MFAC with an update on federal fisheries management focused on the September 2025 New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) meeting.

Whitmore first congratulated DMF policy analyst Melanie Griffin on her recent appointment to Vice Chair of the NEFMC.

Whitmore then discussed the approval of the Omnibus Management Flexibility Amendment to add flexibility and consistency across various fishery management plans (FMP). This will be implemented in FY2026, pending NOAA approval. Potential options include allowing specification frequencies to be increased to up to 5 years for an FMP, specification actions for groundfish and monkfish, in-season adjustments, and the removal of the annual review requirements.

On monkfish and skates, the NEFMC approved specifications for FY2026 – 2028 using catch advice based on updated data. For monkfish, status quo catch limits and effort controls were adopted for Northern and Southern areas. For the skate complex, a catch limit increase was adopted due to an increase in abundance of winter skate.

On groundfish, the NEFMC approved a revised Amendment 25 to the Multispecies FMP and the extension of existing emergency measures through April 30, 2026. This change would transition the New England cod stock units from two to four and incorporate Framework 69 after an earlier version of Amendment 25 was rejected by NOAA Fisheries.

The NEFMC approved updated Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Designations for cod, herring, skate, and monkfish. Previous designations use data through 2005, and current designations use species distribution modeling and data through 2022. Remaining FMP species will be considered in 2026 – 2027.

The on-demand gear conflict working group's final action on the Omnibus Alternative Gear-Marking Framework was postponed. This framework seeks to make it easier to standardize gear-marking beyond traditional gear. On-demand gear currently requires Exempted Fishing Permits (EFP). The working group's report was approved by the NEFMC, which also contains recommendations for reducing gear conflict.

Sooky Sawyer and Director McKiernan discussed NEFMC's involvement in lobster gear management. Dan noted that there are two federal rules in conflict: the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act dictates how buoys are marked and the Marine Mammal Protection Act allows on-demand gear in areas closed to lobster gear. This then requires NOAA to create EFPs for any ropeless gear, and NEFMC aims to simplify this process. Sawyer thanked Toni Kearns for her advocacy for the lobster fishery.

Lastly, Whitmore highlighted the challenges related to declining Atlantic sea scallop biomass. Exploitable biomass is at a historic low and recruitment is weak outside of the Gulf of Maine. Accordingly, catch limit specifications for FY2026 will be 30% lower than in 2025. The NEFMC is considering Limited Access rotational areas and trip limits; open bottom fishing or days-at-sea allocation; and closures continue for recruitment. The development of specifications development has been impacted by the federal shutdown.

The NEFMC will meet in December in Newport, Rhode Island to take final action on sea scallop, groundfish, and spiny dogfish specifications and set work priorities for the upcoming calendar year.

Shellfish Program Update

Chrissy Petitpas provided the MFAC with an update on the Commonwealth's shellfish management program.

On personnel, Petitpas shared that a number of new employees have been hired. Additionally, DMF intends to bring several other staff for the New Bedford laboratory and on the Aquaculture Project. Matt Camisa is leading DMF's efforts to assist the Massachusetts Shellfish Officers Association (MSOA) in the development of a Constable Training Course to be given by Cape Cod Community College starting as soon this coming spring semester.

On depuration harvest, there is one master digger who has resumed harvesting since DMF's depuration plant's closure in 2024 and is trucking his Massachusetts harvested moderately contaminated clams to a facility in Eliot, Maine for depuration.

Petitpas then described issues concerning whole sea scallop harvest from federal waters designated as controlled access for neurotoxins and the disconnect between federal fishery rules and federal public health rules. She concluded that whole in-shell sea scallop product should not be landed in Massachusetts from these areas.

The National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP) is a cooperative state-federal-industry program that develops a Model Ordinance that governs the harvest and handling of shellfish for sanitary purposes and public health through a Model Ordinance. The NSSP works through the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC), which meets every two years to review and develop the standards contained within the Model Ordinance. The next scheduled ISSC meeting is November January 2027.

Petitpas summarized the work DMF engages in to address shellfish-related illnesses. She described the state's *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* (Vp) Control Plan for Oyster Harvest and Handling. This plan focuses on time-to-temperature controls to slow the growth of the Vp bacteria post harvest. Chrissy outlined how the state responds to reported Vp infections and the decision matrix used to determine steps to precautionary and mandatory closures. The state's Vp Working Group may seek the removal of the precautionary closure following challenges encountered this past year.

Campylobacter is a bacteria that causes gastro-intestinal illnesses. It is thought that shellfish-borne illnesses are related to presence of defecating birds on floating oyster cages. Three outbreaks were linked to MA shellfish growing areas, though one of these outbreaks is likely due to post-harvest contamination in a restaurant. Regulations require harvesters to use bird deterrents on floating gear to prevent this and DMF anticipates regulatory compliance with this measure will be a focal point of the 2026 FDA annual review of the state's shellfish sanitation program.

Combined sewer overflow (CSO) closures pose several issues for Massachusetts shellfish harvesters, especially around New Bedford. The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has recently implemented a regulation that requires procedures for notifying the public of CSO occurrences. As DEP and DMF are more aware of the frequency of CSOs and the concentration of sewage during these events, shellfish harvest closures occur more frequently.

A model created by UMass Dartmouth's School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) is being used by DMF to assess wastewater treatment plant effluent dilution and help inform the reclassification of shellfish harvest areas proximate to sewage treatment plant outfalls so as to comply with federal standards.

Offshore Wind Update

Brad Schondelmeier provided an update on various offshore wind (OSW) development projects under construction and those in planning and permitting phases.

In the Northeast, there are four sites under construction, including Vineyard 1, Revolution, Sunrise, and Empire. One OSW site, South Fork, is complete. Several sites are in the permitting process. He provided updates on each site under construction. Sites were in various stages, including installing blades, subsea drilling, fish monitoring deployment, and deploying monopiles. Revolution was paused by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) in August, but a preliminary injunction allowed them to resume work in September. In the Gulf of Maine, several projects are currently planning and permitting.

Schondelmeier then updated the MFAC on the status of the Massachusetts Fisheries Innovation Fund. The request for proposal period ended on August 29 with 20 proposals received. Contracts will be awarded by the end of the year to allow projects to begin in 2026.

Lastly, the Massachusetts – Rhode Island wind collaboration continues on-going work on boulder relocation and seabed alteration. An East Coast/West Coast learning exchange took place earlier this year to discuss fishery impacts and perspectives, mitigation and compensation, port uses, and wind development regulation.

Other Business and Public Comment

Jared Silva expressed his intention to potentially convene the Law Enforcement Focus Group in November.

Chris McGuire asked for a recreational fisheries research presentation to be shared at an MFAC meeting in the future.

The Chairman invited public comment. There was no public comment.

Chairman Kane then asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Bill Amaru made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and Shelley Edmundson seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.

Meeting Documents

- October 21, 2025 MFAC Business Meeting Agenda
- September 18, 2025 MFAC Draft Business Meeting Minutes
- 2025 Belding Award Recommendation
- NEFMC September Meeting Summary
- Presentation Update on the Performance of the 2025 Quota Managed Fisheries
- Presentation on the Upcoming October ASMFC Meeting
- Presentation on the Federal Fisheries Management Update
- Presentation on the Shellfish Program Update
- Presentation on the Offshore Wind Update

Next Meeting Date

November 18, 2025

DFW Field Headquarters

1 Rabbit Hill Rd

Westborough, MA

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

ASMFC 2025 Annual Meeting

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

ASMFC 2025 Annual Meeting
October 27 - 30, 2025

For more information, please contact Toni Kerns, ISFMP, Tina Berger, Communications or the identified individual at 703.842.0740

Meeting Summaries, Press Releases and Motions

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ATLANTIC COASTAL COOPERATIVE STATISTICS PROGRAM COORDINATING COUNCIL (OCTOBER 27, 2025)

Meeting Summary

The ACCSP Coordinating Council met to consider the FY2026 Partner and Administrative proposals. Due to uncertainty about FY2026 funding levels, the Council moved to support the ACCSP administrative grant, up to five (5) maintenance proposals and two to three new proposals as ranked and recommended by the Advisory and Operations Committees. Exact project selection will depend on the total funding ACCSP receives, and the ability of individual projects to adapt to partial funding. The Council noted appreciation to the Operations and Advisors on the work done to rank proposals and provide thoughtful recommendations to utilize available funding.

The Council received updates on ACCSP program activities, including status of funding for prior approved projects, recreational data collection initiatives, software development timelines, biological module data load projects into the ACCSP Data Warehouse, and implementation of limited confidential access approval process.

For more information, please contact Geoff White, ACCSP Director, at Geoff.white@accsp.org.

Motions

Move to approve the funding proposal recommendations by the operations and advisory committee as proposed today.

Motion made by Dr. McNamee and seconded by Mr. Grist. Motion approved by consent.

ATLANTIC COASTAL FISH HABITAT PARTNERSHIP STEEERING COMMITTEE (OCTOBER 27 & 28)

Meeting Summary

The Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP) Steering Committee convened its Fall 2025 meeting to discuss ongoing and emerging partnership initiatives, project updates, and future planning efforts. The meeting included updates on National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP) activities, review of current and recently completed ACFHP-funded projects, and discussion of strategies to enhance partner engagement and long-term support for restoration, including the development of new outreach materials.

Guest presentations included Leah Morgan of the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary, who discussed the organization's oyster shell recycling program, and Alison Rogerson of the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) Watershed Stewardship Division, who presented on beneficial use dredging projects in the Indian River. The Committee also discussed ongoing efforts to plan the 2026 Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) Workshop and Guidance Document, updates to the project monitoring survey, and partner outreach priorities for the upcoming year.

A field visit to DNREC's new SAV facility in Lewes, Delaware, provided an opportunity to learn about current and planned restoration efforts and innovative SAV propagation techniques.

Key outcomes:

- Welcoming Tim Ellis (Quantitative Ecologist, Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership) as a new Steering Committee member.

- Review and discussion of the updated ACFHP Business Plan.
- Continued planning for the 2026 SAV Workshop, focusing on *Zostera marina* and *Ruppia spp.* restoration, monitoring, and management.
- Identification of opportunities to leverage NFHP's 20th Anniversary for increased partner engagement and communications.
- Discussion of potential new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) partners, including the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Coastal Conservation Association, National Wildlife Federation, and Delaware Center for the Inland Bays.
- Consideration of opportunities to support early-career professionals by sponsoring participation in future ACFHP meetings.
- For more information, please contact Emilie Franke, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at efranke@asmfc.org.

For more information, please contact Simen Kaalstad, ACFHP Director, at skaalstad@asmfc.org.

ATLANTIC HERRING MANAGEMENT BOARD (OCTOBER 27, 2025)

Meeting Summary

The Atlantic Herring Management Board met to set quota periods for the 2026 Area 1A fishery; review the draft Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Review for fishing year 2024, state compliance and *de minimis* request; and elect a Vice-Chair.

The Board considered quota periods for the 2026 Area 1A fishery. Per Amendment 3 to the Interstate FMP for Atlantic Herring, quota periods shall be determined annually for Area 1A. The Board can consider distributing the Area 1A sub-ACL using bi-monthly, trimester, or seasonal quota periods. The Board can also decide whether quota from January through May will be allocated later in the fishing season, and underages may be rolled from one period to the next within the same year. For the 2026 Area 1A fishery, the Board adopted a seasonal quota approach with 72.8% available June-September and 27.2% available October-December with underages from June through September rolled into the October through December period, if applicable. These 2026 quota periods are the same as the quota periods implemented for the last six fishing years.

The Board approved the Atlantic Herring FMP Review for the 2024 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* request for New York. In 2024, all states implemented management measures consistent with the FMP. The Board also discussed the short-term recommendation from the Plan Review Team that the Board consider long-term funding to support continuation of the Maine Department of Marine Resources portside sampling program, which requires funding for sample collection in states outside of Maine. The portside sampling program is an important data source informing management and the Atlantic herring stock assessment model. A call will be scheduled for the Administrative Commissioners on the Board to discuss potential long-term funding and/or the ability for states to potentially collect their own samples and send them to Maine DMR for processing.

Finally, the Board elected Eric Reid from Rhode Island as the Vice-Chair. For more information, please contact Emilie Franke, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at efranke@asmfc.org.

Motions

Move to implement seasonal distribution of quota for the 2026 Area 1A sub-ACL with 72.8% available from June through September and 27.2% allocated from October through December, with no landings

prior to June 1. Underages will be rolled over into the next quota period. The fishery will close when 92% of the seasonal period's quota is projected to be caught.
Motion made by Ms. Ware and seconded by Ms. Zobel. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Move to approve the Atlantic Herring FMP Review for the 2024 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* request for New York.
Motion made by Mr. Kaelin and seconded by Mr. Gates. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Move to elect Eric Reid as Vice-Chair.
Motion made by Ms. Ware and second by Mr. Kane. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

TAUTOG MANAGEMENT BOARD (OCTOBER 27, 2025)

Press Release

Tautog Regional Assessments Update Shows Varied Stock Status by Region

Dewey Beach, DE – The Commission's Tautog Management Board reviewed the results of 2025 Regional Stock Assessments Update, which found stock status varied by region. Tautog were not overfished in the Massachusetts-Rhode Island (MARI), Long Island Sound (LIS), and New Jersey and New York Bight (NJ/NYB) regions, but were overfished in the Delaware-Maryland-Virginia (DMV) region. Tautog were not experiencing overfishing in the MARI or LIS regions but were experiencing overfishing in the NJ-NYB region and DMV region.

Table 1. Stock status of tautog in the MARI, LIS, NJ-NYB, and DMV regions.

	Spawning Stock Biomass			
Region	**Target**	**Threshold**	**2024**	**Status**
MARI	6,143 mt	4,595 mt	9,572 mt	Not overfished
LIS	9,799 mt	7,349 mt	13,718 mt	Not overfished
NJ-NYB	7,910 mt	5,929 mt	7,900	Not overfished
DMV	4,400 mt	3,236 mt	2,687 mt	Overfished
Retrospective adjustment applied to SSB for all regions				

	Fishing Mortality			
Region	**Target**	**Threshold**	**2024**	**Status**
MARI	0.27	0.46	0.26	Not overfishing
LIS	0.25	0.35	0.25	Not overfishing
NJ-NYB	0.20	0.33	0.44	Overfishing
DMV	0.18	0.29	0.36	Overfishing
Retrospective adjustment applied to F for all regions.				

Stock status did not change for the MARI or LIS regions from the 2021 update but did change for the NJ-NYB and DMV regions. The NJ-NYB region went from being overfished but not experiencing overfishing in the 2021 update to not being overfished but experiencing overfishing in this update. The DMV region was previously not overfished or experiencing overfishing but was considered overfished and experiencing overfishing in the 2025 update.

All regions showed patterns in fishing mortality and spawning stock biomass (SSB), with MARI, LIS, and NJ-NYB assessments overestimating fishing mortality and underestimating SSB, while the pattern was reversed in the DMV region, compared to the 2021 update. Based on the Commission's policy, the Stock Assessment Subcommittee adjusted both fishing mortality and SSB for all regions to account for this pattern, which changed stock status for some regions.

Since the 2021 update, recruitment has increased in the LIS and NJ-NYB regions, and MARI shows a slight increase in SSB. In the DMV, fishing mortality had been low since 2012 before reaching a peak in 2021 followed by a sharp decline thereafter. Total removals have increased in all regions, driven primarily by increases in recreational harvest.

In response to the assessment findings, the Board initiated an addendum to address changes in stock status for NJ/NYB and DMV. The Draft Addendum will also consider allowing for the MARI and LIS regions to modify management for precautionary or alignment purposes.

The 2025 Regional Stock Assessments Update as well as a detailed overview of the update will be available at https://asmfc.org/species/atlantic-menhaden/ under News and Resources. For more information on the update, please contact Katie Drew, Stock Assessment Team Lead, at kdrew@asmfc.org; and for more information on tautog management, please contact James Boyle, FMP Coordinator, at jboyle@asmfc.org.

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PR25-25

Motions

Move to initiate an addendum to respond to the 2025 Stock Assessment Update for two stock regions: NJ/NY Bight and DMV. Additionally, the addendum should also allow for the MARI and LIS regions to modify management for precautionary or alignment purposes.
Motion made by Dr. McNamee and seconded by Mr. Cimino. Motion passes (5 in favor, 3 opposed).

Move to elect Rich Wong as Vice Chair of the Tautog Management Board.
Motion made by Mr. LaFrance and seconded by Dr. McNamee. Motion passes by unanimous consent.

AMERICAN LOBSTER MANAGEMENT BOARD (OCTOBER 27, 2025)

Press Release

American Lobster Benchmark Stock Assessment Finds GOM/GBK Stock Not Depleted but Experiencing Overfishing & SNE Stock Significantly Depleted but Not Experiencing Overfishing

Dewey Beach, DE – The Commission's American Lobster Management Board received the results of the 2025 American Lobster Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report, which presents

contrasting results for the two American lobster stocks in US waters. The Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank (GOM/GBK) stock is not depleted but has declined 34% since peak levels in 2018, and overfishing is occurring. The Southern New England (SNE) stock remains significantly depleted with record low abundances for all life stages in recent years.

“The Benchmark Stock Assessment is a considerable advancement in our understanding US American lobster resource. It was fully endorsed by an external panel of fishery scientists as the best scientific information available to manage the lobster resource,” stated Board Chair Renee Zobel from New Hampshire. “On behalf of the American Lobster Board, I commend the members of the Technical Committee and Stock Assessment Subcommittee for their outstanding work on the 2025 Benchmark Stock Assessment Report. This assessment reflects the commitment of the Committee and Peer Review Panel to providing the Board with the highest-caliber science to inform management decisions and improve our understanding of the complex and changing relationship between the environment and lobster resource.”

There are notable differences between the fisheries operating in the GOM and GBK portions of the GOM/GBK stock. The GOM fishery accounts for the vast majority of US lobster landings, averaging 82% of the annual landings since 1982, and is predominately carried out by small vessels making day trips in nearshore waters. The GBK fishery is considerably smaller, averaging 5% of the landings since 1982, and is predominantly carried out by larger vessels making multi-day trips to offshore waters. Total GOM/GBK annual landings increased from a stable period in the 1980s, averaging approximately 35.4 million pounds, through the 1990s and 2000s, exceeding 100 million pounds for the first time in 2009. Landings from 2012 through 2018 stabilized at record levels, averaging 145.7 million pounds. Landings have declined since the last assessment, averaging 123.6 million pounds from 2019-2023.

Historically, the SNE fishery was predominately an inshore fishery. Landings peaked in 1997 at 21.8 million pounds and accounted for 26% of the total US lobster landings. Following the peak, landings from SNE have continuously declined to the lowest on record in 2023 (1.7 million pounds), now accounting for only 1% of the US landings. The fishery has also shifted to a predominantly offshore fishery as inshore abundance declined at a faster rate.

In the GOM/GBK stock, recruitment and spawning stock biomass estimates have declined in recent years from record highs. Recent exploitation is just above the exploitation threshold, indicating overfishing is occurring. Given the overfishing status and rapid declines in abundance in recent years, the Stock Assessment Subcommittee

encouraged the initiation of a management strategy evaluation to establish clear management objectives for all stakeholders, better understand socioeconomic status and concerns, and identify potential management tools that might be supported by the industry and prevent further declines. Although continued adverse environmental indicators suggest environmental conditions are major contributors to the poor abundance status in SNE, the Stock Assessment Subcommittee believes significant management action would provide the best chance of stabilizing or improving the abundance and reproductive capacity of this stock.

The assessment highlights extensive research on the influence of the environment on American lobster life history and population dynamics. Among the critical environmental variables, temperature stands out as the primary influence. The American lobster’s range is experiencing changing environmental conditions at some of the fastest rates in the world, making consideration of environmental factors

essential when assessing the lobster stocks. Therefore, the assessment incorporated environmental data time series including water temperatures at several fixed monitoring stations throughout the lobster's range, average water temperatures over large areas such as those sampled by fishery-independent surveys, oceanographic processes affecting the environment, and other environmental indicators such as

lobster prey abundance. These data time series were analyzed for significant shifts in the lobster environment and population that can affect stock productivity and impact recruitment levels and the ability to support different levels of fishing pressure.

Stock abundance is characterized using reference points for abundance and exploitation. Based on these reference points, the GOMGBK stock is not depleted and overfishing is occurring. The average abundance from 2021-2023 was 202 million lobsters, which remains above the abundance limit reference point, but below the fishery/industry target, indicating the stock's ability to replenish itself is not jeopardized, but economic conditions for the lobster fishery may be degrading. The average exploitation from 2021-2023 was just above the exploitation threshold, indicating overfishing is occurring.

The SNE stock is significantly depleted and the stock's ability to replenish itself is diminished. The average abundance from 2021-2023 was 6 million lobster, well below the abundance threshold (18 million lobster) and the lowest on record. The average exploitation from 2021-2023 was between the exploitation threshold and target, indicating overfishing is not occurring.

Stock indicators, which are based strictly on observed data and are free from inherent assumptions in the stock assessment models, were also used as an independent, model-free assessment of the lobster stocks to corroborate the assessment model results. Indicators of adult lobster abundance generally showed similar results to the assessment model for the GOM/GBK stock, with abundance declines from peaks since 2018. GOM/GBK young-of-year (YOY) indicators have shown increases from lows in the 2010s, but remain below higher levels observed in the 2000s. Inshore surveys exhibit stronger abundance declines than offshore surveys, and indicators show higher exploitation rates inshore. New to the 2025 assessment, recruit-dependency indicators show inshore harvest is highly dependent on incoming recruitment (lobsters that enter the fishery due to catchable size). Landings and revenue indicators show declining trends but remain at positive levels. Indicators related to environmental conditions, particularly bottom water temperatures, remain positive in GOM/GBK and shell disease prevalence, although increasing in some areas, remains low realtive to SNE.

SNE abundance indicators agree with model results and indicate declines to record low abundances for all life stages in recent years. The contraction of the SNE stock has continued and is now evident offshore as well as inshore. Given data and survey challenges leading to increased instability in the SNE model, consistent poor stock status estimates, and the lack of evidence suggesting environmental and stock conditions will improve in SNE, the Stock Assessment Subcommittee recommended future assessments evaluate the condition of the SNE stock using model-free indicators and prioritize modelling efforts on the GOM/GBK stock.

The Peer Review Panel found the 2025 assessment meets and exceeds the standard for best scientific information available and provides a suitable foundation for management. The Panel commended the addition of socioeconomic data that provide insight into changes in the fishery and the considerable efforts to evaluate environmental impacts on the stock. However, the Panel cautioned against placing

too much emphasis on environmental effects and discounting the effects of fishing on the lobster populations.

The Board accepted the Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report for management use. A more detailed overview of the stock assessment, as well as the Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report will be available on the Commission website https://asmfc.org/species/american-lobster/ under News and Resources. For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

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PR25-27

Meeting Summary

In addition to approving the 2025 American Lobster Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report for management use, the American Lobster Board discussed follow-up tasks for the Technical Committee (TC) in response to the assessment recommendations, and received updates on the Joint New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Alternative Gear Marking Framework, and from Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts on recent surveys on management perspectives of the Gulf of Maine lobster industry. The Board also considered the annual Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Review and elected a Vice Chair.

Considering the findings of the assessment and Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) recommendations, the Board tasked the TC with several items to inform potential management responses. First, the Board tasked the TC with creating a combined index for tracking recruit abundance in GOM/GBK as part of future data updates to the Board. It also directed the TC to estimate the benefits to the GOM/GBK fishery that would have resulted from implementing the minimum gauge size increases under Addendum XXVII that were ultimately repealed. The TC will report to the Board on these analyses and review the process for conducting an MSE for the GOM/GBK stock at the Winter Meeting.

The Board received an update on recent actions of the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils regarding the development of the Joint Alternative Gear Marking Framework Adjustment. The purpose of the Framework is to consider changes to surface-marking requirements that would allow the use of fixed gear without a persistent buoy line, such as on-demand trap gear, as a possible approach for reducing entanglement risk for large whales. At their recent meetings, the Councils postponed final action on the Framework until additional information on ropeless gear and visualization technology is available to better inform stakeholder input and Council decision-making. NOAA Fisheries intends to gather information through a Request for Information in 2026 to address this need.

Maine, New Hampshire, and Maine reported out on recent stakeholder surveys conducted to better understand to better understand fishermen's and dealers' perceptions of the fishery and identify potential management approaches for the Gulf of Maine. The survey results show similar views across states within each of the Lobster Conservation and Management Areas (LCMAs), generally positive perceptions of the status of the fishery and resource, and concerns about fishing input costs and possible future restrictions related to the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan. The GOM states plan to review their survey results with industry members and will provide additional updates to the Board at the next meeting.

The Board also approved the American Lobster and Jonah Crab FMP Reviews for the 2024 fishing year, state compliance reports, and the *de minimis* status for Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. Based on the Plan Review Team recommendations, the Board tasked the Technical Committee with providing guidance on commercial sampling needs by stock area to support the stock assessment.

For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org.

Motions

Move to accept the 2025 American lobster benchmark stock assessment and peer review report for management use.
Motion made by Mr. Grout and seconded by Mr. Reid. Motion passes by unanimous consent.

Move to task the Technical Committee to include a recruit index for GOM/GBK, similar to what was used in Addendum XXVII (combined recruit survey index), as a part of future data updates to the Board at the annual meetings.
Motion by Dr. Wilson and seconded by Mr. Borden. Motion passed by unanimous consent.

Move to task the Technical Committee to project the benefits to the GOM/GBK fishery if the gauge increases from Addendum XXVII were put into place as originally scheduled.
Motion made by Mr. Kaelin and seconded by Mr. Hyatt. Motion carries (10 in favor, 1 opposed).

Move to approve the American Lobster and Jonah Crab FMP Reviews for the 2024 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* status for DE, MD, and VA, and to task the TC with providing recommendations on commercial sampling needs by stock or management area.
Motion made by Mr. Cimino and seconded by Mr. Train. Motion passed by unanimous consent.

Move to elect John Maniscalco as Vice Chair to the American Lobster Board.
Motion made by Mr. Reid and second by Mr. McKiernan. Motion passed by unanimous consent.

HORSESHOE CRAB MANAGEMENT BOARD (OCTOBER 28, 2025)

Press Release

Horseshoe Crab Board Sets Male-Only Bait Harvest Specifications for Horseshoe Crabs of Delaware Bay-Origin for 2026 and 2027

Dewey Beach, DE – The Commission's Horseshoe Crab Management Board approved bait harvest specifications for horseshoe crabs of Delaware Bay-origin. Taking into consideration the output of the Adaptative Resource Management (ARM) Framework, the Board set an annual harvest limit of 500,000 male horseshoe crabs and zero female Delaware Bay-origin horseshoe crabs for 2026 and 2027. Addendum IX was approved in May 2025 and allows the Board to set multi-year specifications for male-only harvest.

While the ARM Framework output allowed for a small amount of female harvest, the Board elected to maintain zero female horseshoe crab harvest for the next two fishing years as a conservative measure while it conducts a stakeholder engagement process to evaluate several aspects of the ARM Framework and considers changes to better align the model with stakeholder values. To make up for the lost harvest

of larger female crabs, the Board agreed to increase Maryland and Virginia's male harvest quotas with an offset ratio of 2:1 males to females. Using the allocation methodology established in Addendum VIII, the following quotas were set for New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia:

	Delaware Bay Origin Horseshoe Crab Quota (no. of crabs)	Total Quota*
State	**Male Only**	**Male Only**
Delaware	173,014	173,014
New Jersey	173,014	173,014
Maryland	132,865	255,980
Virginia**	21,107	81,331

*Total harvest quotas for Maryland and Virginia include crabs which are not of Delaware Bay origin.
**Virginia harvest refers to harvest east of the COLREGS line only

Under Addendum IX, the Board can maintain the harvest limit of 500,000 male horseshoe crabs through 2028 based on the 2025 ARM Framework output with no annual action required. The Board will continue to review survey data for red knots and horseshoe crabs each year and can modify the specifications before 2028 if desired.

The Board also reviewed and approved changes to the Advisory Panel membership based on recommendations from the Board Work Group tasked with providing input on the appropriate distribution of advisors by region and user group, including non-traditional stakeholders. For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

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PR25-26

Meeting Summary

In addition to setting Delaware Bay bait harvest specifications for the 2026 and 2027 fishing years, the Board also received planning updates on the ongoing stakeholder engagement process to inform possible changes to the ARM Framework, considered the annual Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Review, and approved changes to the advisory panel (AP) membership.

The Board received an update on a process initiated earlier this year to review and revise the Utility, Reward, and Harvest (U/R/H) functions of the ARM Framework with input from stakeholders, based on a key recommendation from the July 2024 workshop on Delaware Bay horseshoe crab management objectives. The U/R/H functions are mathematical functions within the ARM model that reflect stakeholder priorities. The Commission has contracted with a third-party facilitator, Compass Resource Management, to design and conduct a stakeholder engagement process to elicit stakeholder values and perspectives to develop clear, actionable recommendations for revising the U/R/H functions, ensuring these functions transparently reflect the importance of horseshoe crabs to commercial harvesters, human health, and the ecosystem. The process will convene participants from bait fisheries, biomedical groups, dealers, ecosystem, shorebird, and horseshoe crab conservation groups, and state and federal resource managers for a series of educational meetings and an in-person workshop, which will be scheduled over the next several months. The input gathered through this process will inform recommendations on changes to the U/R/H functions to be considered by the Board.

At the Spring 2025 meeting, the Board agreed to solicit nominations for non-traditional stakeholder seats and formed a Work Group to review the AP membership and develop recommendations for Board consideration, addressing a consensus recommendation from the July 2024 stakeholder workshop to determine if the Horseshoe Crab AP has adequate representation across stakeholder groups. The Work Group recommended changes to the AP membership to balance the relative interests of each region. Considering these recommendations the Board approved the addition of seven non-traditional stakeholder seats representing horseshoe crab and shorebird conservation interests, and three commercial harvesters to the AP.

The Board also approved the horseshoe crab FMP Review for the 2024 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* status for South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org.

For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org.

Motions
Main Motion
Move to establish male-only harvest specifications for 2026 and 2027 based on the ARM Framework with 500,000 males and no female harvest of Delaware Bay-origin crabs. In addition, the 2:1 offset will be added to MD's and VA's allocations due to no female harvest.
Motion made by Mr. Clark and seconded by Mr. Borden.

Motion to Amend
Move to amend to add 2028.
Motion made by Mr. Gates and seconded by Mr. McKiernan. Motion fails (4 in favor, 10 opposed).

Move to establish male-only harvest specifications for 2026 and 2027 based on the ARM Framework with 500,000 males and no female harvest of Delaware Bay-origin crabs. In addition, the 2:1 offset will be added to MD's and VA's allocations due to no female harvest.
Motion passed by unanimous consent.

Move to approve the FMP Review and state compliance reports for the 2024 fishing year, and *de minimis* status for SC, GA, and FL.
Motion made by Mr. Hasbrouck and seconded by Mr. Grist. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Move to approve the changes to the Advisory Panel membership as recommended in the Work Group memo dated October 10, 2025.
Motion made by Ms. Kennedy and seconded by Ms. Costa. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

AMERICAN EEL MANAGEMENT BOARD (OCTOBER 28, 2025)

Meeting Summary
The American Eel Management Board approved the annual Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Review and considered a proposal from Florida to discontinue the young of year (YOY) survey.

The Board approved the American Eel FMP Review for the 2024 fishing year, state compliance reports, and the *de minimis* status for Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, District of Columbia, and Georgia for yellow eel. Preliminary landings for yellow eel in 2024 decreased from 2023 and are at the second lowest level in the time series. The Plan Review Team noted no concerns about state implementation of the FMP and recommended the Commission work with the US Fish and Wildlife service to compare landings and export data for American eel.

Florida presented a proposal to discontinue the annual YOY survey on the Guana River. Funding for continuing this sampling is limited, there have been extremely low catches in recent years at the current sampling site, and there are no viable alternative sampling sites. FWC is proposing to use the limited available funding for other research and monitoring activities that would better support American eel management and conservation. The Board tasked the TC to evaluate the utility of continuing the Florida glass eel survey for use in management and assessment of the American eel stock. The TC will report its findings at the next Board meeting so it can consider exempting Florida from the glass eel survey compliance requirement.

For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org.

Motions

Move to approve American Eel FMP Review for the 2024 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* status for Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, District of Columbia, and Georgia for yellow eel.
Motion made by Ms. Corbett and seconded by Mr. Train. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Move to direct the American Eel Technical Committee to evaluate the utility of continuing the Florida glass eel survey and its contribution to the Commission's management and assessment of the American eel stock, and report back to the Commission at the next American Eel Management Board meeting so the Board can consider exempting Florida from the glass eel survey compliance requirement.
Motion made by Ms. Burgess and seconded by Mr. Haymans. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

COMMISSION BUSINESS SESSION (OCTOBER 28, 2025)

Press Release

Daniel McKiernan Elected ASMFC Chair

Dewey Beach, DE – Today, member states of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) thanked Joseph Cimino of New Jersey for a successful two-year term as Chair and elected Daniel McKiernan of Massachusetts to succeed him.

"I'm honored to be chosen by my fellow Commissioners to lead our efforts for the next two years. One of my priorities will be to work with my colleagues in the states and federal agencies to seek resources to fund fundamental fisheries data collection and science activities to support our management programs. Other key topics over the next two years will be our ability to adapt to changes in species distribution and availability and how best to respond to the recalibration of recreational fishing effort and

harvest data from the Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey," said Mr. McKiernan. Mr. McKiernan continued, "I want to thank outgoing Chair, Joe Cimino for his leadership in tackling some challenging management issues for species such as American lobster, American eel, Atlantic striped bass, Atlantic menhaden, horseshoe crab, and red drum. He helped support the advancement of fisheries science through the completion of an impressive number of benchmark stock assessments and assessment updates for river herring, red drum, American lobster, horseshoe crab, tautog, Atlantic sturgeon, and Atlantic menhaden (single species assessment update and ecological reference points benchmark assessment). Further, under his leadership, the Commission also strengthened stakeholder engagement in horseshoe crab management by bringing together diverse stakeholders for a Delaware Bay management objectives workshop to provide recommendations for possible revisions to the management process, and by increasing nontraditional stakeholder representation on the Horseshoe Crab Advisory Panel to more equitably balance user group perspectives. Lastly, Mr. Cimino initiated the process to consider possible changes to voting practices and declared interests on species management boards."

Additionally, advances in habitat conservation were made by the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP) through its funding of five on-the-ground projects, which will open over seven river miles and restore over 110 acres of habitat. These include dam removal projects in New Jersey and Massachusetts, as well as saltmarsh and oyster restoration projects in Maryland and Florida. ACFHP will also be hosting a Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Workshop in 2026 focused on developing a Seed Transfer Best Management Practices Guidance Document.

From a data collection and management perspective, the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) also made progress under Mr. Cimino's leadership. ACCSP supported 20 partner agency data collection projects and expanded the scope and security of the ACCSP Data Warehouse. ACCSP held a data accountability workshop and extended data validation tools within electronic reporting systems; extended implementation of harvester One Stop Reporting; and made progress on a methodology to more fully use for-hire logbooks in Marine Recreational Information Program's catch statistics.

Mr. McKiernan has directed the Massachusetts Division of Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF) since late 2019, where he develops agency policies, represents the Commonwealth in interstate and federal fishery management forums and administers nearly all aspects of the DMF's in-state management and regulations for fisheries management. He began his professional career as a field biologist for DMF in 1985 and worked closely with the lobster fishery as a sea sampler and an assistant marine biologist. He brought his field experience to DMF's headquarters and has worked on fisheries management and policy for almost four decades. He has worked diligently to achieve co-existence between endangered right whales and the maritime and fishing industries in Massachusetts. In 2023, Massachusetts was recognized with the NOAA Fisheries "Partner in the Spotlight" award for exceptional efforts to the conservation and recovery of Northern Right Whales.

Mr. McKiernan is practiced in the arenas of federal and interstate fisheries management. As a long-standing representative to the Commission, he has chaired numerous species management boards and was recognized for his management efforts with the Commission's Award of Excellence in 2018. He is a strong promoter of conservation and accountable fisheries management for commercial fisheries, recreational fisheries, and the seafood industry at large. Mr. McKiernan is a graduate of UMASS-Dartmouth and earned an MS in Fisheries Biology from Auburn University. He received the Massachusetts Pride in Performance Award, as well as the Massachusetts Lobsterman's Association "Ralph W. Maling" Award of Excellence for dedicated service on behalf of the Commonwealth's lobster industry.

The Commission also elected Doug Haymans, Director of the Georgia Coastal Resources Division as its new Vice-Chair. PR25-24

Meeting Summary
The Commission held its Business Session to review and consider approval of the 2026 Action Plan and elect a new Commission Chair and Vice-Chair. The Commission approved the 2026 Action Plan, which guides the Commission's activities over the next year as they pertain to management, science, data collection, law enforcement, habitat conservation, outreach, and finance and administration.

The Commission unanimously appointed Dan McKiernan (Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries) as Chair and Doug Haymans (Georgia Coastal Resources Division) as Vice-Chair (see above press release). For more information, please contact Robert Beal, Executive Director, at rbeal@asmfc.org.

Motions
Move to approve the ASMFC 2026 Action Plan as modified today.
Motion made by Mr. Grist and seconded by Mr. Rhodes. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

On behalf on the Nominating Committee, move to elect Dan McKiernan as ASMFC Chair.
Motion made by Mr. Borden. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

On behalf on the nominating committee, move to elect Doug Haymans as ASMFC Vice Chair
Motion made by Mr. Borden. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE (OCTOBER 28 & 29, 2025)

Meeting Summary
The Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) conducted a hybrid meeting during the 83rd Annual Meeting of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission in Dewey Beach, DE. The Committee discussed the following topics.

Species Discussion
Atlantic Striped Bass – The LEC convened on October 10, 2025, to consider the Striped Bass Management Board's request regarding the Plan Review Teams (PRT) report on the Atlantic Striped Bass Commercial Tagging Ten-Year Review. The committee focused on evaluating the report and discussing additional LEC recommendations pertaining to tagging procedures and potential enhancements to state tagging programs. A summary of the meeting was presented by an LEC member to the Striped Bass Management Board during Annual Meeting Week.

Staff presented an update regarding the draft Addendum III of the Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan. A review was conducted of the LEC recommendations on Addendum III as documented in the LEC meeting summary dated March 27, 2025. The LEC did not offer any additional comments.

Red Drum – Staff presented the LEC with an update regarding the progress of draft Addendum II to the Red Drum Fishery Management Plan. There were no LEC concerns on the proposed addendum.

Other Business

NOAA JEA Funding Update – The Chair provided an update to the committee regarding ASMFC support considering the absence of JEA program funding in the Fiscal Year 2026 Presidential budget. He reported receiving favorable feedback during congressional meetings and noted that NOAA OLE responded positively to our inquiry concerning this matter. The states remain committed to the JEA program and hope to see this funding restored.

Sector Separation – Staff consulted with the LEC regarding Sector Separation. The LEC received an update on recent discussions between the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). Representatives from the MAFMC Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) and ASMFC Plan Development Team (PDT) held an initial meeting with the LEC to address key issues identified during early discussions. During this session, FMAT and PDT members solicited input from the LEC members concerning the enforceability and anticipated compliance outcomes for the draft alternatives under review. LEC members actively participated, providing feedback on specific inquiries related to proposed management measures shared with the committee. LEC will continue to monitor these proposals as they progress, offering further insight as appropriate.

NACLEC Training Opportunities – The staff shared the upcoming training schedule for the National Association of Conservation Law Enforcement Chiefs academies covering calendar years 2025 to 2027. Both the Leadership Academy and the Introduction to Conservation Leadership Academy have grown in popularity within the conservation law enforcement community.

USCG NRFTC Training Opportunity - Members of the United States Coast Guard highlighted training opportunity for partnered agencies at the Northeast Regional Fisheries Training Center. The 2026 calendar year class schedule was shared by a USCG representative with members of the LEC.

A closed session was convened during our meeting to facilitate open discussion regarding new and emerging issues in law enforcement. Each agency was given an opportunity to highlight its work and share updates on ongoing enforcement initiatives. For more information, please contact Kurt Blanchard, Law Enforcement Coordinator, at kurt.blanchard@verizon.net.

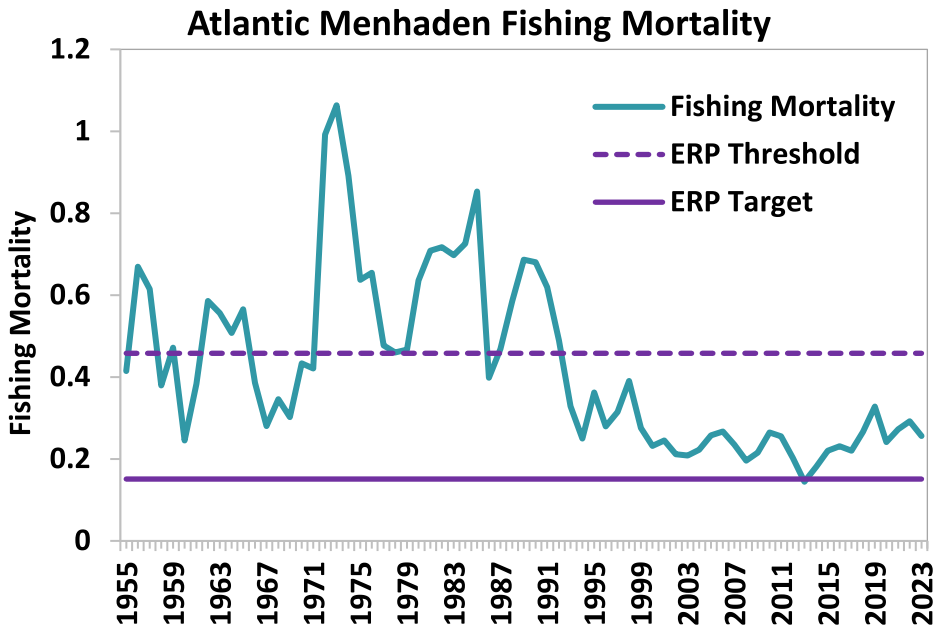
Motions

No motions made.

Press Release

ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Board Reduces 2026 TAC by 20% and Initiates Addendum for Chesapeake Bay Cap

Dewey Beach, DE – The Commission's Atlantic Menhaden Management Board received the results of the single-species assessment update and the 2025 Ecological Reference Points (ERPs) Assessment and Peer Review Reports and accepted the ERPs Assessment and Peer Review Report for management use. The goal of the ERPs is to maximize Atlantic menhaden fishing mortality while also accounting for the forage demands of Atlantic striped bass. Atlantic striped bass was the focal species for the reference points because it was the most sensitive predator fish species to Atlantic menhaden harvest in the NWACS-MICE model, so an ERP target and threshold that would provide adequate forage for striped bass would likely not cause declines for other predators in the model. The single-species assessment indicates the stock is not overfished nor experiencing overfishing relative to the ERPs developed through the benchmark assessment.

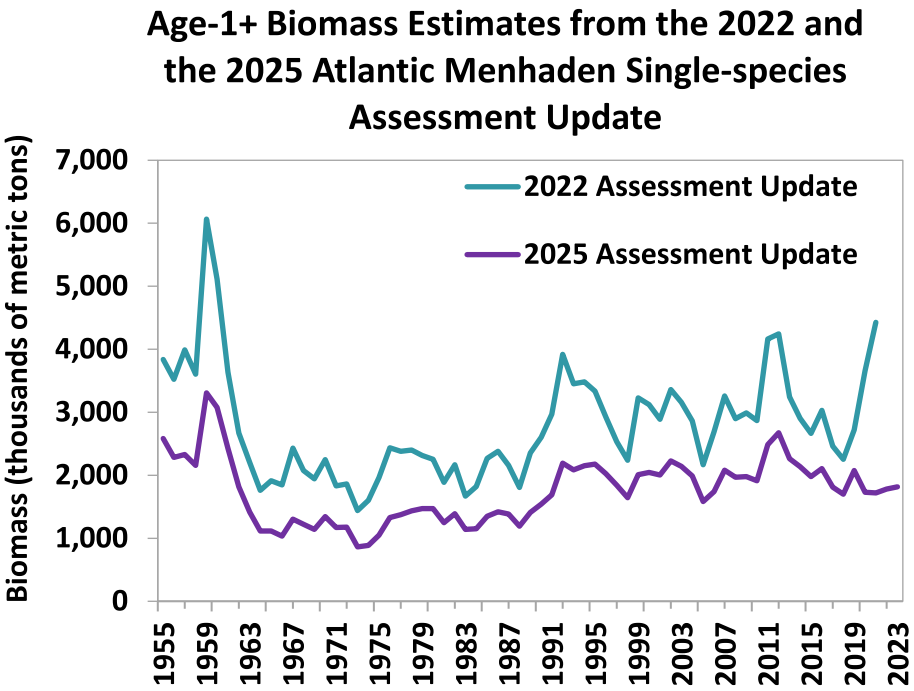


However, fishing mortality (*F*) was above the ERP *F* target and fecundity (a measure of the number of eggs the stock can produce in a year) was below the ERP fecundity target. Therefore, the Board set the 2026 total allowable catch (TAC) at 186,840 mt, a 20% decrease from the 2023-2025 TAC of 233,550 mt. Projections indicated this TAC would have a 0% chance of overfishing in 2026 but would still result in a 100% probability of fishing mortality being above the ERP *F* target. To have a lower probability of being at or above the ERP *F* target, a 50% or more reduction in the TAC would be required. The Board expressed concerns about the socioeconomic impact of implementing such a significant cut in a single year and chose to take a more moderate cut for 2026 only. This change will provide the Board time to conduct outreach on the results of this new assessment and receive more input from stakeholders before considering a TAC for 2027, 2028 and potentially 2029 at the 2026 Annual Meeting.

The need for reduction to achieve the ERP *F* target is due primarily to the change in the estimate of natural mortality used in the single-species stock assessment update, and secondarily to the lower values for the ERPs as a result of the updated and refined ERP model from the benchmark. The 2025 single-species assessment used a revised value of natural mortality that was lower than the value used in the 2020 benchmark and 2022 update. Natural mortality is the rate at which fish die from causes other than fishing; for menhaden, this includes things like predation, disease, and die-offs caused by low oxygen and warm

water. This change was reviewed as part of the 2025 ERP Benchmark Assessment, and the Peer Review Panel agreed it represented the best available scientific information on natural mortality for Atlantic menhaden. Using a lower value of natural mortality in the stock assessment results in a lower overall estimate of population size. When a high estimate of natural mortality is used, the model estimates the population needs to be very large to produce the catches and the trends in observed indices. But, if natural mortality is lower, it means fewer fish are dying due to natural causes, meaning the stock does not need to be as large to produce the observed data.

This lower overall estimate of menhaden abundance was also used in the ecosystem models to establish the ERPs. This change, combined with updating estimates of predator (striped bass, bluefish, weakfish, and spiny dogfish) population sizes and diet data as well as refining the ecosystem model structure resulted in lower estimates of the ERP *F* target and threshold. The ERP assessment, which was endorsed by an independent panel of fisheries scientists, used the Northwest Atlantic Coastal Shelf Model of Intermediate Complexity for Ecosystems (NWACS-MICE) to develop Atlantic menhaden ERPs. The model was chosen because of its ability to explore both the impacts of predators on menhaden biomass and the effects of menhaden harvest on predator populations.



The Board also initiated an addendum to Amendment 3 to consider options to reduce the Chesapeake Bay Reduction Fishery Cap by up to 50% and distribute the cap more evenly throughout the fishing season. The options will aim to alleviate a concentration of effort that may be affecting other fisheries within the Bay and other potential ecological impacts. The Board discussed concerns regarding decreasing pound net harvests and catch per unit effort within the Bay as the timing of reduction fishing effort has changed the last few years. Amendment 3 currently caps reduction harvest within the Bay at 51,000 mt per year. The Board will review the Draft Addendum in February to consider the draft for public comment or provide additional guidance to the Plan Development Team for further development.

The Assessment Update, the Benchmark ERP Stock Assessment, Peer Review Report, and an overview of will be available on the Atlantic Menhaden webpage at https://asmfc.org/species/atlantic-menhaden/ under News and Resources. For more information, please contact James Boyle, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at jboyle@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

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PR25-28

Meeting Summary
In addition to reviewing the 2025 single-species and ERP stock assessments, setting the specifications for the 2026 fishing year, and considering the PDT direction regarding Chesapeake Bay, the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board met to consider approval of the Fishery Management Plan Review and state compliance reports for the 2024 fishing year, commercial quota reallocation, and providing direction to the TC to evaluate changing coastwide environmental conditions. Although, due to time constraints, the Board decided to consider approval of the FMP Review via email.

According to Amendment 3, commercial quota allocations will be revisited at least every three years, where the Board can opt to maintain the current allocations or initiate management action, and the current allocations were approved in October 2022. The Board elected to maintain the current allocations but to revisit the discussion at the 2026 Annual Meeting.

Finally, the Board provided two tasks to the Technical Committee to evaluate the effects of changing environmental conditions on the Atlantic menhaden stock:

1. Relative to Research Recommendation 1, task the TC to evaluate information available from NOAA's Ecosystem Dynamics and Assessment Branch and Chesapeake Bay Office, and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, to evaluate the possible effect of cold water on the Continental Shelf on menhaden migration and migratory patterns, particularly in relation to the timing of osprey arrival, nesting, and breeding.
2. Task the TC to consider what role water temperature, dissolved oxygen levels, shoreline hardening, and other environmental factors play in the local abundance of menhaden and other forage species in the Chesapeake Bay.

For more information, please contact James Boyle, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator at jboyle@asmfc.org.

Motions
Move to accept the 2025 Ecological Reference Points Benchmark Stock Assessment and peer review reports for management use.
Motion made by Mr. Grout and seconded by Mr. Kane. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Main Motion
Move to set the TAC for 2026 through 2028 at 108,450mt to maintain a 50 percent probability of not exceeding the ERP F Target.
Motion made by Mr. Gates and seconded by Mr. Kane. Motion substituted.

Motion to Substitute
Move to substitute to set the annual Atlantic Menhaden coastwide TAC for 2026-2028 at 186,840 mt per year (representing a 20% reduction relative to the 2023-2025 TAC).
Motion made by Mr. Grist and seconded by Mr. Reid. Motion passes (12 in favor, 6 opposed).

Main Motion as Substituted
Move to set the annual Atlantic Menhaden coastwide TAC for 2026-2028 at 186,840 mt per year (representing a 20% reduction relative to the 2023-2025 TAC).

Motion to Substitute
Move to substitute to set three-year specifications for Atlantic menhaden with the following TACs: 2026 = 186,840 MT; 2027 = 152,700 MT; and 2028 = 124,800 MT.
Motion made by Ms. Meserve and seconded by Ms. Costa. Motion fails (7 in favor, 11 opposed).

Main Motion as Substituted
Move to set the annual Atlantic Menhaden coastwide TAC for 2026-2028 at 186,840 mt per year (representing a 20% reduction relative to the 2023-2025 TAC).

Motion to Substitute
Move to substitute to set the TAC for 2026 at 186,840 mt (20% reduction from status quo), and re-visit the 2027 TAC and 2028 TAC at the 2026 Annual Meeting
Motion made by Ms. Costa and seconded by Ms. Peake. Motion passes (16 in favor, 2 opposed)

Main Motion as Substituted
Move to set the TAC for 2026 at 186,840 mt (20% reduction from status quo), and re-visit the 2027 TAC and 2028 TAC at the 2026 Annual Meeting.
Motion passes (16 in favor, 2 opposed).

Main Motion
Move to initiate Addendum II to the Atlantic menhaden FMP to address Chesapeake Bay Management concerns. The addendum shall develop periods for the Chesapeake Bay Cap that distributes fishing effort more evenly throughout the season and a range of options to reduce the Bay Cap from status quo up to 50%.
Motion made by Ms. Fegley and seconded by Mr. LaFrance.

Motion to Amend
Move to amend to add after 50% "and set the bay cap as a percentage of the TAC or allow the bay cap to be set by specification"
Motion made by Ms. Meserve and seconded by Mr. Borden**.** Motion fails (5 in favor, 9 opposed, 4 abstentions).

Main Motion
Move to initiate Addendum II to the Atlantic menhaden FMP to address Chesapeake Bay Management concerns. The addendum shall develop periods for the Chesapeake Bay Cap that distributes fishing effort more evenly throughout the season and a range of options to reduce the Bay Cap from status quo up to 50%.
Motion made by Ms. Fegley and seconded by Mr. LaFrance. Motion passes (13 in favor, 2 opposed, 2 abstentions, 1 null)

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (OCTOBER 29, 2025)

Meeting Summary
The Executive Committee met to discuss several issues, including the FY25 Audit, the Discussion Paper on Declared Interests and Voting Privileges, "Notifying" Actions on Agendas, a Legislative update, and a future annual meeting locations update. The following action items resulted from the Committee's discussions:

- The Executive Committee reviewed and accepted the FY25 financial audit of the Commission, noting it was a clean audit and no negative findings were reported.

- Mr. Beal reported a *Declared Interests and Voting Privileges* work group was formed to flesh out the discussion paper presented in August, to further frame the Executive committee discussion. The committee will report back to the Executive Committee in February.

- Mr. Beal discussed the issue of "notifying actions" on meeting agendas. After a thorough discussion staff was tasked with developing language for agendas (and possibly the ISFMP Charter), detailing the process and noting when public input was available.

- Mr. Law presented an update on the status of FY26 federal funding, the government shutdown, and the status of two recently introduced bills; the Fisheries Data Modernization Act, and the QUAHOGS Act.

- Mrs. Leach provided an update on future Annual Meeting locations. In 2026 Rhode Island will host the annual meeting; 2027 South Carolina; 2028 Massachusetts; 2029 Pennsylvania, 2030 Georgia and 2031 Connecticut.

For more information, please contact Laura Leach, Director of Finance and Administration, at lleach@asmfc.org

Motions
Move to accept the FY25 Audit as presented.
Motion made by Dr. McNamee and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion passed unanimously.

HABITAT COMMITTEE (OCTOBER 29, 2025)

Meeting Summary
The ASMFC Habitat Committee met to review ongoing projects, discuss emerging habitat issues, and provide state updates on recent and planned habitat restoration, protection, and management activities. The Committee received updates on the Habitat Management Series, including progress toward finalizing the Atlantic States Shell Recycling Report, which compiles data and best practices from existing shell recycling programs along the Atlantic coast. Members also discussed the next installment of the Habitat Hotline Atlantic (2025 issue), which will continue to feature state and regional habitat highlights. The Committee considered future development of a centralized ArcGIS-based mapping tool to support updates to Fish Habitats of Concern (FHOC).

Committee members further discussed the development of a long-term work plan to identify and prioritize key Atlantic coastal habitat issues, synthesize shared state-level priorities, and communicate findings and recommendations to the ISFMP Policy Board for future direction.

Highlights from roundtable state updates included:
- **Connecticut:** Establishment of a new National Estuarine Research Reserve with a focus on SAV conservation and monitoring.

- **New Hampshire:** Expansion of rotational oyster reef closures with strong community support.
- **Delaware:** Completion of a major Brandywine Creek dam removal project improving shad passage.
- **Massachusetts:** Continued investment in eelgrass restoration, shellfish reef enhancement, and coastal biodiversity research.
- **New Jersey:** Expansion of oyster shell recycling partnerships with regional distributors and restaurants.
- **North Carolina:** Progress on the next phase of the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan emphasizing SAV and wetland restoration.
- **Maine:** Ongoing fish passage restoration projects projected to reopen over 800 miles of riverine habitat.
- **Florida:** Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program funding to restore more than 200 acres of fish habitat across seven habitat types.

Next steps:
The Committee will finalize the Atlantic States Shell Recycling Report, determine the focus of the next Habitat Management Series publication, and continue discussions on regional habitat mapping and data integration to support ASMFC management priorities.

For more information, please contact Simen Kaalstad, Habitat Committee Coordinator, at skaalstad@asmfc.org.

ATLANTIC STRIPED BASS MANAGEMENT BOARD (OCTOBER 29, 2025)

Press Release

ASMFC Atlantic Striped Bass Board Approves Addendum III Without Reductions in Fishery Removals

New Work Group Planned to Address Long-Term Management and Stock Concerns

Dewey Beach, DE – The Commission's Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board approved Addendum III to Amendment 7 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Atlantic Striped Bass. The Addendum modifies requirements for commercial tagging programs, implements a standard method of measuring total length for size limit regulations, and allows Maryland to change its Chesapeake Bay recreational season baseline if the state so chooses.

The Board decided not to move forward with the proposed 12% reduction in fishery removals after lengthy deliberation. The Board reviewed the preliminary estimates of 2025 recreational catch through June, which were lower than anticipated and suggested that the projections may have underestimated the probability of rebuilding by 2029 and overestimated the reductions necessary to rebuild. The Board noted that the over 4,000 public comments they received on the draft addendum were sharply divided on the issue, as was the Board itself. Ultimately, the Board maintained current recreational measures and commercial quotas, noting the severe economic consequences of the proposed reduction, the low fishing mortality rate in 2024, and preliminary indications of lower catch in 2025. However, the Board continued to express concern about the seven consecutive years of low recruitment in Chesapeake Bay and the impact on the stock as those weak year-classes become the majority of the spawning stock

biomass after 2029. To address this, the Board approved the establishment of a Work Group to consider these upcoming stock and management challenges beyond 2029. The Board will further discuss the specific tasks and timing of this Work Group at subsequent Board meetings.

For commercial tagging, the Addendum requires states to tag commercially harvested fish by the first point of landing. Previously, states could choose the point of tagging, including tagging at the point of sale. This change to when tagging occurs addresses concerns that waiting to tag fish until the point of sale could increase the risk of illegal harvest. The three states that will need to switch their tagging program from point of sale to point of landing have until the end of 2028 to make that change due to the extensive administrative and programmatic transition needed.

For measuring total length, the Addendum specifies that when measuring total length of a striped bass it must be a straight-line measurement with upper and lower fork of the tail squeezed together. This

definition applies to both sectors. This new definition addresses concerns that the previous lack of a standard definition was potentially undermining the intended conservation, consistency, and enforceability of the coastwide size limits, especially for narrow slot limits. States that do not have the new definition in place already have until January 1, 2027 to make changes to their state regulations.

For Maryland's Chesapeake Bay recreational fishery, the Board approved Maryland's ability to change its recreational season baseline (i.e., the timing, type, and duration of striped bass closures throughout the year) if the state so chooses. Maryland is considering changing its season baseline to simplify its Chesapeake Bay regulations as well as re-align access based on stakeholder input and release mortality rates. The new baseline is estimated to be net neutral calculated to maintain the same level of removals as compared to 2024. Maryland will notify the Board of its decision by December 31, 2025 in its state implementation plan.

Addendum III will be available in November on the Commission website at https://asmfc.org/species/atlantic-striped-bass/ under News and Resources. For more information, please contact Emilie Franke, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at efranke@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

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PR25-30

Meeting Summary

In addition to selecting measures for and approving Addendum III, the Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board received a report from the Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) on commercial tagging.

The LEC was tasked with reviewing the Plan Review Team's Commercial Tagging Ten-Year Review Report and discussing any further LEC recommendations on point of tagging and potential improvements to state tagging programs. The LEC discussed that the current state programs are effective and each in their own way offer a level of protection to the resource and meet the spirit of the FMP. On point of tagging, the LEC noted that management measures in the ocean fishery creating different size and possession limits between sectors gives law enforcement the ability to clearly define a commercial take from a recreational take, which reduces the enforcement concern in a point-of-sale program. Point of sale or point of landing tagging is less desirable for enforcement in states that are managed through individual quotas, and/or that allow for multiple commercial limits on board a vessel, or that have overlapping size limits between the commercial and recreational fishery. In these instances, s

states should strongly consider point of harvest tagging. If a point of landing provision were to be considered more widely, law enforcement would recommend that a clear and consistent definition of landing be used. On tag distribution, the LEC does not have any major concerns with how states are managing their respective tag distribution. On tag accountability, the LEC noted all jurisdictions have a process in place to account for the lost, damaged, or delinquent tags. For potential improvements to state tagging programs, the LEC noted the importance of being able to trace a tag back to the harvester.

For more information contact Emilie Franke, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at efranke@asmfc.org.

Motions

Main Motion

Move to approve in Section 3.4 Option A Status Quo

Motion made by Mr. Nowalsky and seconded by Mr. Clark.

Motion to Amend

Move to amend to add "and establish a Work Group to develop a white paper that could inform a future management document. The Work Group should include representation from all sectors in addition to scientists and managers. The goal of this Work Group is to consider how to update the FMP's goals, objectives, and management of striped bass beyond 2029, in consideration of severely reduced reproductive success in the Chesapeake Bay. The Work Group should utilize public comment, including that received during the Addendum III process to inform its research and management recommendations and work with the Benchmark SAS to incorporate ideas and deliver necessary data products. Work Group discussions should include the following topics:

- **Review BRPs and consider recruitment-sensitive, model-based approaches.**
- **Formally review hatchery stocking as both a research tool and a management tool for striped bass w/ cost analysis.**
- **Evaluate the potential for other river systems to contribute to the coastal stock.**
- **Explore drivers of recruitment success/failure in Chesapeake Bay, Delaware, and the Hudson in light of changing climatic and environmental conditions, including potential impacts from invasive species.**
- **Explore the reproductive contribution of large and small female fish and the implications of various size-based management tools.**
- **Methods to address the discard mortality in the catch and release fishery."**

Motion made by Mr. Gary and seconded by Mr. Reid. Motion passes (14 in favor, 2 opposed).

Main Motion as Amended

Move to approve in Section 3.4 Option A Status Quo and establish a Work Group to develop a white paper that could inform a future management document. The Work Group should include representation from all sectors in addition to scientists and managers. The goal of this Work Group is to consider how to update the FMP's goals, objectives, and management of striped bass beyond 2029, in consideration of severely reduced reproductive success in the Chesapeake Bay. The Work Group should utilize public comment, including that received during the Addendum III process to inform its research and management recommendations and work with the Benchmark SAS to incorporate ideas and deliver necessary data products. Work Group discussions should include the following topics:

- **Review BRPs and consider recruitment-sensitive, model-based approaches.**

- **Formally review hatchery stocking as both a research tool and a management tool for striped bass w/ cost analysis.**
- **Evaluate the potential for other river systems to contribute to the coastal stock.**
- **Explore drivers of recruitment success/failure in Chesapeake Bay, Delaware, and the Hudson in light of changing climatic and environmental conditions, including potential impacts from invasive species.**
- **Explore the reproductive contribution of large and small female fish and the implications of various size-based management tools.**
- **Methods to address the discard mortality in the catch and release fishery."**

Motion to Amend
Move to amend to replace "Option A Status Quo" with "Option B (equal 12% reduction by sector)"
Motion made by Ms. Meserve and seconded by Dr. McNamee. Motion fails (5 in favor, 11 opposed).

Main Motion as Amended
Move to approve in Section 3.4 Option A Status Quo and establish a Work Group to develop a white paper that could inform a future management document. The Work Group should include representation from all sectors in addition to scientists and managers. The goal of this Work Group is to consider how to update the FMP's goals, objectives, and management of striped bass beyond 2029, in consideration of severely reduced reproductive success in the Chesapeake Bay. The Work Group should utilize public comment, including that received during the Addendum III process to inform its research and management recommendations and work with the Benchmark SAS to incorporate ideas and deliver necessary data products. Work Group discussions should include the following topics:

- **Review BRPs and consider recruitment-sensitive, model-based approaches.**
- **Formally review hatchery stocking as both a research tool and a management tool for striped bass w/ cost analysis.**
- **Evaluate the potential for other river systems to contribute to the coastal stock.**
- **Explore drivers of recruitment success/failure in Chesapeake Bay, Delaware, and the Hudson in light of changing climatic and environmental conditions, including potential impacts from invasive species.**
- **Explore the reproductive contribution of large and small female fish and the implications of various size-based management tools.**
- **Methods to address the discard mortality in the catch and release fishery.**

Motion passes (13 in favor, 3 opposed).

Move to add a task to explore the socioeconomic impacts on the striped bass commercial fishing sector, including the party/charter sector, from potential quota reductions not consistent with actual striped bass mortality effects from that sector.
Motion made by Mr. Kaelin and seconded by Mr. Reid. Motion fails (1 in favor, 13 opposed, 2 abstentions).

Main Motion
Move to approve in Section 3.3 Maryland's ability to choose Option A, status quo, or Option B, a new Maryland baseline season. Maryland would notify the Board of the option chosen through its implementation plan.
Motion made by Mr. Luisi and seconded by Mr. Clark.

Motion to Amend
Move to amend to replace Option B (a new Maryland baseline season) with Option C (new baseline season with 10% buffer)
Motion made by Mr. Grout and seconded by Dr. McNamee. Motion fails (6 in favor, 8 opposed, 2 abstentions).

Move to approve in Section 3.3 Maryland's ability to choose Option A, status quo, or Option B, a new Maryland baseline season. Maryland would notify the Board of the option chosen through its implementation plan.
Motion made by Mr. Luisi and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion passes (7 in favor, 6 opposed, 2 abstentions, 1 null).

Main Motion
Move to approve in Section 3.2 Option A. Status Quo States Choose Point of Harvest or Point of Sale Tagging.
Motion made by Dr. McNamee and seconded by Mr. Batsavage. Motion substituted.

Motion to Substitute for Option C: Commercial Tagging by the First Point of Landing with a three-year transition period.
Motion made by Mr. Clark and seconded by Mr. Kane. Motion passes (8 in favor, 4 opposed, 4 abstentions).

Main Motion as Substituted
Move to approve in Section 3.2 Option C: Commercial Tagging by the First Point of Landing with a three-year transition period.
Motion passes (10 in favor, 3 opposed, 3 abstentions).

Move to adopt in Section 3.1 Option B, Mandatory Elements for Total Length Definition with the following requirements: squeezing the tail and a straight-line measurement. This definition applies to both the recreational and commercial sectors.
Motion made by Mr. Batsavage and seconded by Mr. Gary. Motion passes by unanimous consent.

Move to approve the following compliance schedule for the Maryland recreational season baseline and total length definition:

- **States must submit implementation plans by December 31, 2025.**
- **States must implement regulations for the total length definition by January 1, 2027.**

Motion made by Mr. Luisi and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion passes by unanimous consent.

Move to approve the following compliance schedule for commercial tagging:

- **States must submit implementation plans January 1, 2028.**
- **States must implement regulations by December 31, 2028.**

Motion made by Mr. Luisi and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion passes by consent with one objection by Rhode Island.

Move to approve Addendum III to Amendment 7 to the Atlantic Striped Bass FMP, as amended today.
Motion made by Mr. Grist and seconded by Mr. Gary. Motion passes (13 in favor, 1 opposed, 1 null).

SCIAENIDS MANAGEMENT BOARD (OCTOBER 30, 2025)

Press Release

ASMFC Scianeids Management Board Approves Red Drum Addendum II

Dewey Beach, DE – The Commission's Sciaenids Management Board approved Addendum II to Amendment 2 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Red Drum. The Addendum updates red drum management, with the goal of improving efficiency, flexibility, and timeliness in implementation of new regulations and providing assessment advice. In addition, the Addendum modifies the fishing mortality for the southern stock (South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida) to end

overfishing and aligns red drum recreational regulations in Virginia, Maryland, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC) given their shared water bodies.

The Addendum establishes a process whereby states can propose management measures in response to new assessment advice, including assessment analyses outside of the Commission's stock assessment process. It also allows the Board to approve new methods to estimate the impact of different management options on fishing mortality.

In addition, the Addendum modifies the fishing mortality (30% spawning potential ratio or $F_{30\%}$) for the southern stock will aim to meet with implemented management measures. At a minimum, states will reduce fishing effort to $F_{30\%}$ to end overfishing with the unchanged long-term goal of reducing effort to achieve the fishing mortality associated with 40% spawning potential ratio. South Carolina and Georgia will submit proposals by April 1, 2026 with regulatory options that, at minimum, achieve the 14.4% reduction associated with $F_{30\%}$. Florida implemented more restrictive red drum regulations in September 2022; these measures are estimated to have achieved the minimum reduction. The Board will review South Carolina and Georgia's proposals at its May 2026 meeting.

Northern stock states (New Jersey through North Carolina) are not able to estimate fishing mortality at this time. The states of New Jersey, Delaware, Virgina, and North Carolina will maintain their current fishing regulations. For Virginia, Maryland and the PRFC, the Board agreed to the following recreational measures: 3 fish bag limit and 18"-26" inch total length slot. These measures, which are currently in place for Virginia, are meant to simplify management and enforcement in the shared waterbodies of the three jurisdictions. Although these measures will raise Maryland's current red drum bag limit from 1 fish to 3 fish, the Board noted that these new regulations will lower the 5-fish bag limit for red drum in the Potomac River to 3 fish, providing some additional protection to red drum within the 18"-26" total length slot.

The implementation date for all new measures is September 1, 2026.

Lastly, the Addendum updates *de minimis* provisions. A state may be granted *de minimis* status if the Board determines that action by the state would contribute insignificantly to the overall management program for a specific species. The Addendum updates the definition so that a state may be considered *de minimis* if the average total landings for the last three years is less than 1% of total landings from its respective stock. In addition, the Addendum implements a process for

establishing a set of measures for *de minimis* states which will provide a minimum level of protection and prevent regulatory loopholes.

Addendum II will be available in November on the Commission website at https://asmfc.org/species/red-drum/ under News and Resources. For more information, please contact Tracey Bauer, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at tbauer@asmfc.org or 703.842.0723.

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PR25-29

Meeting Summary

In addition to approving Addendum II (see above press release), the Sciaenids Management Board met to consider an update to the ongoing benchmark stock assessments for Atlantic croaker and spot. Work on the Atlantic croaker and spot benchmark stock assessments were initiated in early 2023, but were both paused in Fall 2024 due to multiple personnel constraints. At that time, it was determined that work on the spot benchmark assessment would remain on hold until after the Atlantic croaker assessment was complete. Work on the Atlantic croaker assessment was reinitiated in February 2025 to update time series, split datasets into a new regional stock structure definition, and reconsider data sets based on the new stock structure definition. The SAS held check-in calls in April, May and July 2025, and a sub-group of SAS members has been meeting biweekly to discuss Atlantic croaker modeling progress. The next in-person assessment workshop will be in late 2025 or early 2026.

For more information, please contact Tracey Bauer, Fishery Management Coordinator, at tbauer@asmfc.org.

Motions

Move to adopt Option B Establish Process to Adjust Management Measures for Section 3.1.
Motion made by Mr. Dyar and seconded by Mr. Woodward. Motion carries without objection.

Move to adopt Option B Establish Process to Adjust State Management Measures, Allowing for Alternative Methods to Estimate Fishing Mortality for Section 3.2.
Motion made by Mr. Woodward and seconded by Mr. Sikorski. Motion passes (6 in favor, 2 opposed, 1 abstention).

Move to separate Issue 3.3 in Addendum II for the northern region stock and the southern region stock so that the decision is independent for each stock's preferred management program.
Motion made by Mr. Dyar and seconded by Mr. Woodward. Motion passes with one objection from NC.

Move to adopt Option B for the Southern Stock for Section 3.3.
Motion made by Ms. Burgess and seconded by Mr. Woodward. Motion passes (4 in favor, 2 opposed, 3 abstentions).

Motion to adopt Option B, of Section 3.4 of the Red Drum Draft Addendum II, setting the Virginia, Maryland, and PRFC recreational measures for red drum as a 18"-26" slot with a 3 fish per person possession limit.

Motion made by Mr. Sikorski and seconded by Mr. Owens. Motion passes (3 in favor, 1 opposed, 5 abstentions).

Move to adopt Option B Update *De Minimis* Provisions for Section 3.5.
Motion by Mr. Woodward, second by Mr. Bell. Motion passes by unanimous consent.

Move to set the following implementation schedule for Section 3.3 and 3.4:

- **States to submit proposals by April 1, 2026.**
- **The Board will review and consider approval of proposals at the Spring 2026 Commission meeting.**
- **States to implement regulations by September 1, 2026.**

Motion made by Mr. Dyar and seconded by Mr. Sikorski. Motion passes by consent.

Move to approve Addendum II as modified today.
Motion made by Mr. Grist and seconded by Mr. Sikorski. Motion passed with one objection from NC.

INTERSTATE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM POLICY BOARD (OCTOBER 30, 2025)

Meeting Summary
The ISFMP Policy Board met to review reports from the Executive Committee, the Assessment Science Committee (ASC), the Law Enforcement Committee (LEC), the Habitat Committee, and the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP) (see relevant committee reports earlier in this document); consider 2026 coastal shark specifications; receive and update on the status of the Pamlico Sound trawl survey, and receive updates on the Atlantic migratory group cobia and Atlantic sturgeon stock assessments.

Gary Jennings, the Legislative Commissioner from Florida and on behalf of the Resolutions Committee, read the resolution thanking the Delaware Commissioners and staff for hosting a wonderful annual meeting.

The ASC presented an updated version of the Commission's stock assessment schedule, with the following changes:

- The 2025 Atlantic croaker benchmark was moved to 2026
- The 2026 Atlantic migratory cobia benchmark was moved to 2027 and changed to an update
- The 2026 striped bass update was moved to 2027 and changed to a benchmark
- The 2026 spiny dogfish update was moved to 2027
- The 2026 winter flounder benchmark is tentatively scheduled for 2027 and changed to a benchmark
- The 2026 spot benchmark was moved to 2027
- The 2027 black drum benchmark was changed to an update

Assessments for Spanish mackerel (2027) and weakfish (2028) have been added. In 2029, the following species will have potential updates: black sea bass, bluefish, river herring, scup, and summer flounder. Horseshoe crab and tautog will also have benchmarks in 2029. In 2030, American shad and American lobster will undergo a benchmark and sea herring will undergo an update.

The Policy Board discussed the need for more information on the socioeconomic impacts for actions being considered by species management boards. It was noted that the lack of underlying data needed to do socioeconomic analysis is often insufficient or does not exist. The Board tasked the Committee on Economics and Social Science to prioritize the data needs to provide some basic information to the species management boards that the states could collect.

Effective January 1, 2024, NOAA Fisheries changed the federal regulations for Atlantic shark fisheries to automatically open the commercial fishing year on January 1 of each year under the base quotas and default retention limits. The Commission sets coastal shark specifications based on federal regulations for Atlantic coastal shark fisheries. The Policy Board approved opening the season on January 1, 2026, with a commercial possession limit of 55 large coastal sharks (LCS) per vessel per trip (i.e., aggregated LCS and hammerhead shark management groups) and 8 blacknose sharks per vessel trip (excluding sandbar sharks). The commercial possession limit is subject to change based on landings. The states will follow NOAA Fisheries for in-season changes to the commercial possession limit.

Chris Batsavage from North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries reported that the R/V Carolina Coast, which is used to conduct the Pamlico Sound Trawl Survey, is no longer structurally sound. The survey, which began in 1987, is conducted each June and September in Pamlico Sound and its tributaries. Data from this survey are used in the summer flounder and weakfish stock assessments, the spot and croaker traffic light analyses, and ongoing stock assessments. Another survey vessel is unavailable, so the survey will not be conducted this year, and it is uncertain whether or when it will resume. If the survey resumes in the future, then it will likely be a new time series due to the lack of vessel calibration with the Carolina coast.

A stock assessment for Atlantic cobia began in March 2024 through the SouthEast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) process but a staffing change paused the assessment until a new lead analyst could begin work. The Commission will lead the assessment process and SEDAR will coordinate a Peer Review Workshop (SEDAR 95). Staff are currently working to re-start the assessment and transition to the Commission assessment process. With the lead analyst starting in early 2026, the expected completion date for the assessment is 2027. One factor affecting the expected completion date is the terminal year of the assessment. If the terminal year is 2024 and uses the current MRIP Fishing Effort Survey (FES) estimates, the assessment could possibly be completed by early to mid-2027. If the terminal year is 2025 and incorporates the recalibrated MRIP FES data, which are expected to be available mid-2026, the assessment could potentially be completed by mid-late 2027. Other factors affecting the timeline include any challenges with potential modeling approaches, as cobia is a relatively data-limited species requiring development of a new index of abundance, if possible.

Work on the 2028 Atlantic sturgeon benchmark will begin this fall with a call for nominations to the Stock Assessment Subcommittee and development of terms of reference.

For more information, please contact Toni Kerns, Fisheries Policy Director, at tkerns@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

Motions

Move to approve the Commission's stock assessment schedule as presented today

Motion made by Mr. Grout and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion passed by consent.

Move to adopt the 2026 coastal shark specifications matching the default season start date and retention limits as specified by the National Marine Fisheries Service final rule published on November 8, 2023 (88 FR 77039). The fishing season will open on January 1, 2026 with a commercial possession limit of 55 large coastal sharks (LCS) other than sandbar sharks per vessel per trip (i.e., aggregated LCS and hammerhead shark management groups) and 8 blacknose sharks per vessel trip. The commercial possession limit is subject to change; states will follow NMFS for in-season changes to the commercial possession limit.

Motion made by Ms. Burgess and seconded by Mr. Haymans. Motion passes by consent with one abstention by NH.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

(617) 626-1520 | mass.gov/MarineFisheries

Maura T. Healey	Kimberly Driscoll	Rebecca L. Tepper	Thomas K. O'Shea	Daniel J. McKiernan
Governor	***Lt. Governor***	***Secretary***	***Commissioner***	***Director***

Memorandum

To: Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC)

From: Daniel McKiernan, Director

Date: November 13, 2025

Subject: Next Steps for Striped Bass Management after the Approval of Addendum III

Overview

This memorandum summarizes the outcomes of Striped Bass Addendum III, and DMF's plan for coming into full compliance.

Background

The Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board met during the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) 2025 Annual Meeting to take final action on Draft Addendum III. Addendum III was approved with the following measures:

- Mandatory elements for every jurisdictions' definition of total length for measuring striped bass for compliance with size limits, including 1) it's a straight-line measurement (i.e., not over the curve of the body), and 2) the tail is squeezed to obtain the longest length. Implementation deadline: January 1, 2027.
- Commercial tagging programs to be implemented as "point of landing", meaning fish have to be tagged by the harvester before offloading and/or before removing the vessel from the water (or immediately in the case of shore fishing). Implementation deadline: January 1, 2029.
- An allowance for Maryland to adopt an alternative recreational season in the Chesapeake Bay that is designed to be conservation neutral.

The Management Board decided against taking any further commercial or recreational fishery reduction to support stock rebuilding at this time. A 12% commercial and recreational reduction had been an option to increase the probability of rebuilding the stock by the 2029 deadline and would have required a commercial quota cut and recreational seasonal closures. The Board's support for

status quo management was primarily driven by uncertainty in the projections versus certain socioeconomic impacts of the proposed measures. Rather than take a reduction now, the Board will wait for the results of the 2027 benchmark stock assessment and then re-assess the current measures' progress towards the rebuilding target. However, in the interim, a workgroup of (to be named) managers, scientists, and stakeholder representatives will be established to develop a white paper to inform management of striped bass beyond 2029 under a potential regime shift in stock productivity. Some of the topics to be addressed may include: management plan objectives, alternative biological reference points, stocking as a possible management tool, and methods to address discard mortality. Many of the topics suggested for discussion by the workgroup were raised during the public comment on Draft Addendum III.

Refer to the ASMFC Annual Meeting Summary for more information.

Implications & Next Steps

Massachusetts is already compliant with the total length definition based on the regulation adopted earlier this year adding the tail squeezing element. Therefore, DMF need not adopt any regulations for 2026 to remain in line with the fishery management plan (FMP).

However, the commercial tagging program requirement for harvester tagging is a significant departure from Massachusetts' current dealer tagging program—which distributes tags to about 125 primary buyers per year. Because an unlimited number of tags cannot be distributed, and because unused tags must be accounted for and returned at the end of the season, we cannot administer a harvester tagging program with the current number of permit holders (~5,000). Accordingly, DMF will need to develop a plan to reduce the number of commercial striped bass permit holders to something that is administratively more manageable.

DMF has taken the first step with the recent emergency regulations to freeze the issuance of new striped bass permits next year (i.e., renewals for 2024 and 2025 permit holders only). These emergency regulations also make the striped bass endorsements owner-operator and non-transferable, and update the striped bass control date to December 31, 2025. Note that there will be a virtual public hearing on these emergency regulations on December 2, and DMF will review the comment and present its final permitting decision at your December 18 business meeting.

DMF will be following up with a proposal to further reduce permits in 2027 based on activity criteria and to establish an exit:entry program to manage attrition and new access. Recall that DMF previously convened an Ad Hoc Commercial Industry Advisory Panel and the MFAC Striped Bass Focus Group to provide early input on methods to address participation and access in the fishery. We plan to convene both the MFAC's Striped Bass and Permitting Focus Groups this winter to provide us further guidance on eligibility criteria and an exit:entry program, before returning to the full MFAC with a public hearing proposal by early spring. I anticipate public hearings to occur in mid-2026, such that the regulatory process can conclude in time for the 2027 permit renewal season.

Later in 2026, we will begin work on the plan to transition to harvester tagging. While the implementation deadline is not until 2029, we are striving to implement harvester tagging in 2028 barring unforeseen circumstances. This will require developing regulations and processes to implement the harvester tagging program, which should be the subject of future MFAC Law

Enforcement and Striped Bass Focus Groups. We may reconvene industry advisors to further act as a sounding board on harvester tagging program logistics.

Based on the status quo outcome for fishery reductions to support stock rebuilding in Addendum III, I am not proposing any additional revisions to the commercial or recreational striped bass regulations for 2026. Therefore, recreational and commercial fishing limits will remain status quo for 2026. The recreational fishery will be open year-round with a 28" to less than 31" slot limit, and a 1-fish per angler daily bag limit. The commercial fishery will open on June 16, with open fishing days on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, a 35" minimum size, and a 15-fish limit for fishers operating under a boat-based permit from the named vessel and a 2-fish limit for all other fishers.

While we have received some public comment in support of delaying the commercial season by a week (returning to the June 23 opening date that was in place for 2014–2020) in order to maximize market price, this was only supported by the Ad Hoc Industry Advisory Panel in response to a quota reduction, and only then because their preferred approach of reducing participation could not be achieved timely enough. Further, I prefer to focus agency resources on the monumental task of developing the limited entry and harvester tagging programs.

Similarly, there has been comment asking for DMF to consider unilaterally adopting additional recreational gear restrictions to further reduce post-release mortality. I expect these may be considered on a coastwide basis through the aforementioned ASMFC workgroup, as informed by DMF's post-release mortality research. In the meantime, preliminary results from that research are indicating a lower release mortality rate, alleviating some concern about recreational post release mortality's contribution to overall fishery removals.

Revisiting Recreational Release Mortality of Striped Bass

Micah Dean

MFAC Meeting

November 18th, 2025

Why revisit striped bass release mortality?

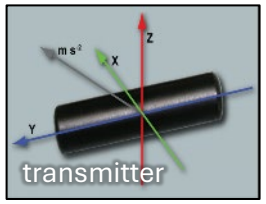
- Have regulations altered the mortality rate?
  - J-hooks → Circle hooks
- Can we offer further details?
  - Which factors affect survival
- Can we offer a more accurate estimate?
  - Diodati (1996) may not be representative

Diodati (1996) study

- 1000 fish from RI in Smith Pool
- Avg size = 12” (max = 22”)
- 173 caught via hook & line
- 15 (9%) not found when pool was drained at end of study

Estimating Release Mortality

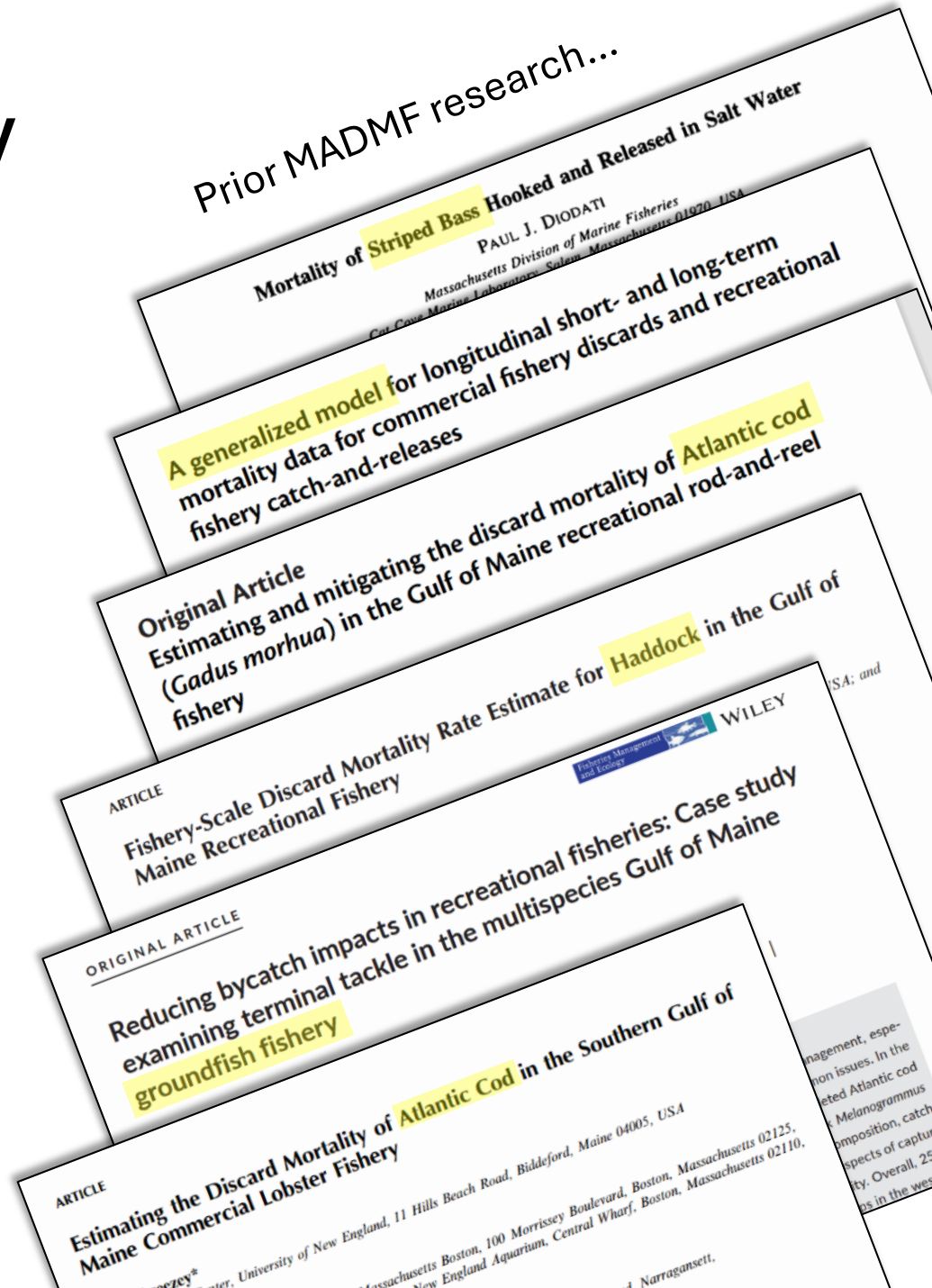
I. Mortality Rate ~ Release Condition



II. Release Condition ~ Variables

III. Describe Variables for Fishery

Prior MADMF research...

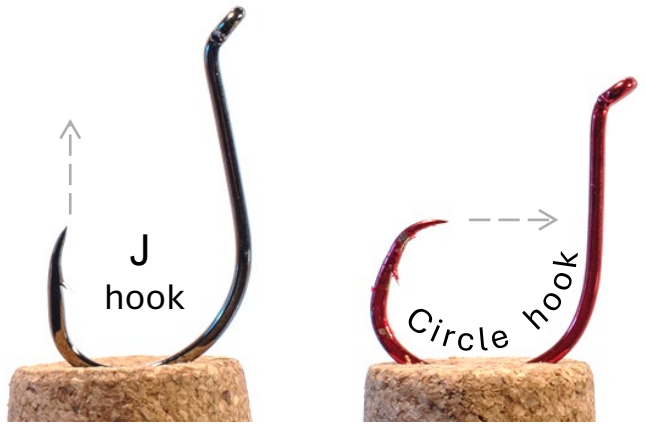


Phase I - Acoustic Telemetry

Questions

1. How does mortality rate vary with release condition?

2. How much do circle hooks reduce release mortality?



Phase I - Acoustic Telemetry

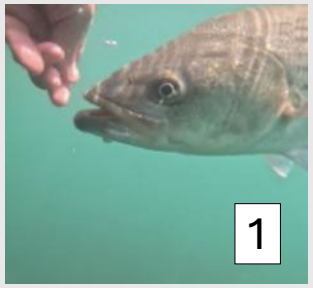
Methods

Angling

Typical recreational bait fishing techniques

J-hook vs 3 popular circle hook models

Release Condition Score

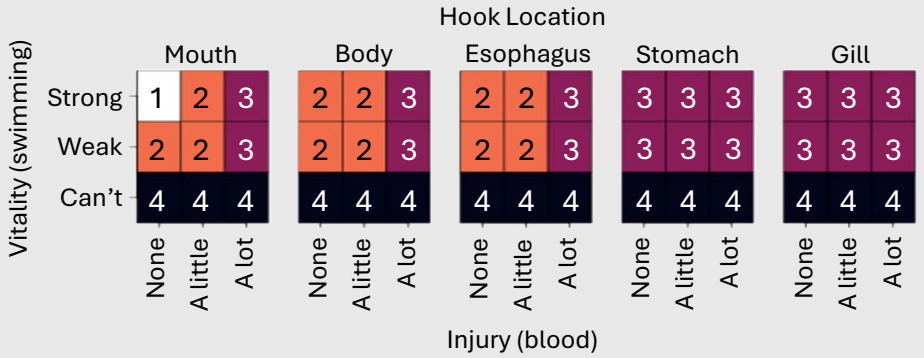


no impact

minor impact

major impact

mortality



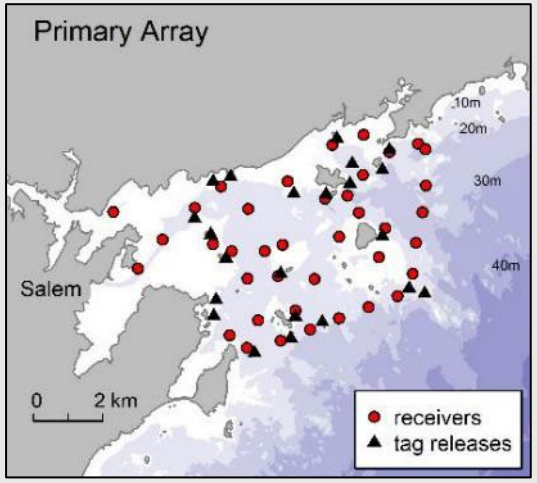
Phase I - Acoustic Telemetry

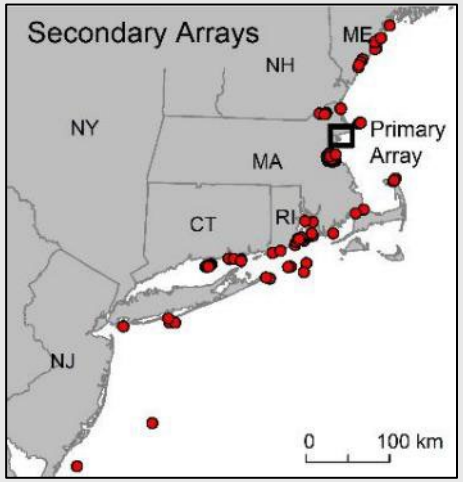
Methods

Tags

- Accelerometers
- 180-day battery
- 360+ m detection radius

Receivers



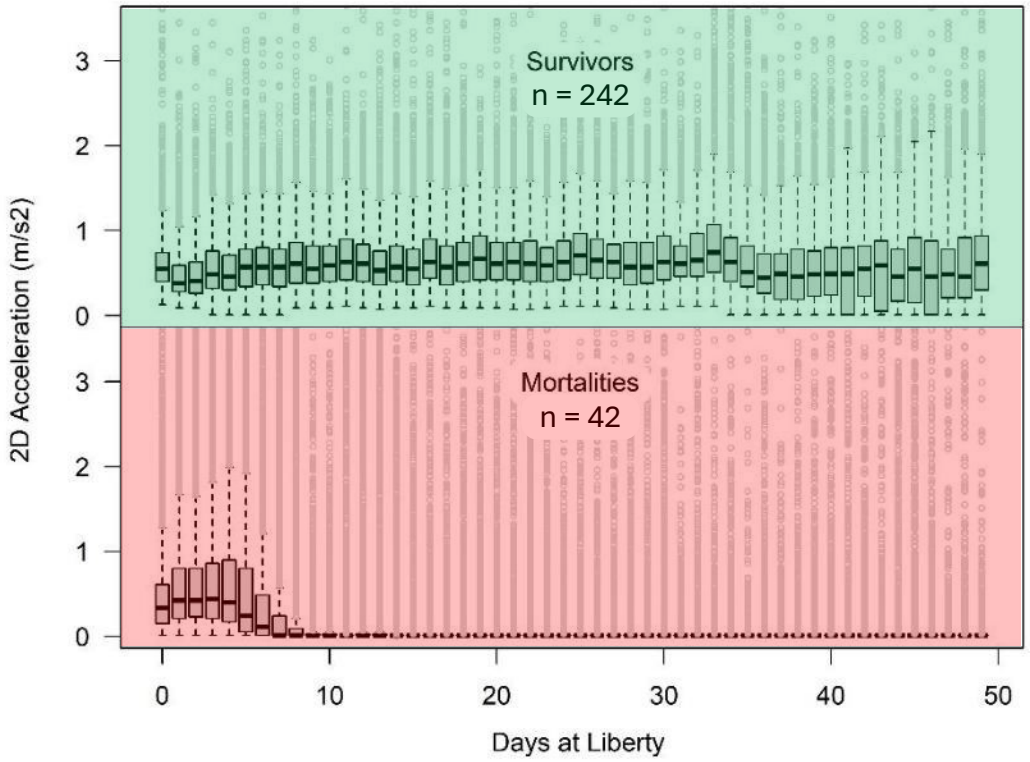


- Deployed before first tag release
- Hauled 30+ days after last tag release

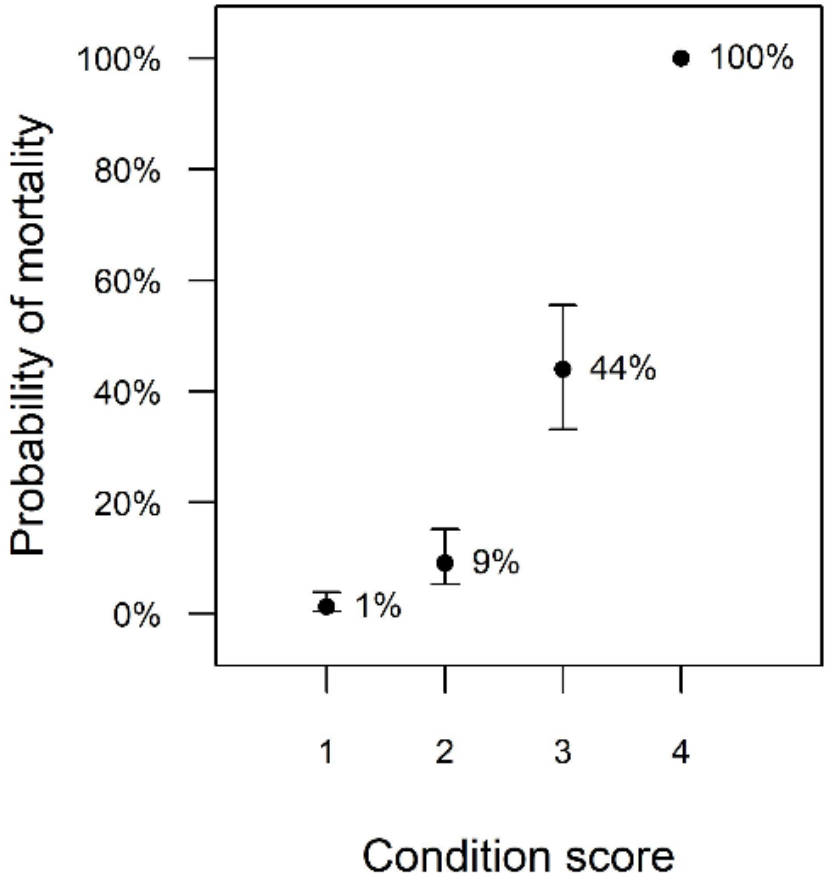
Phase I - Acoustic Telemetry

Survival Analysis

Mortality Determination

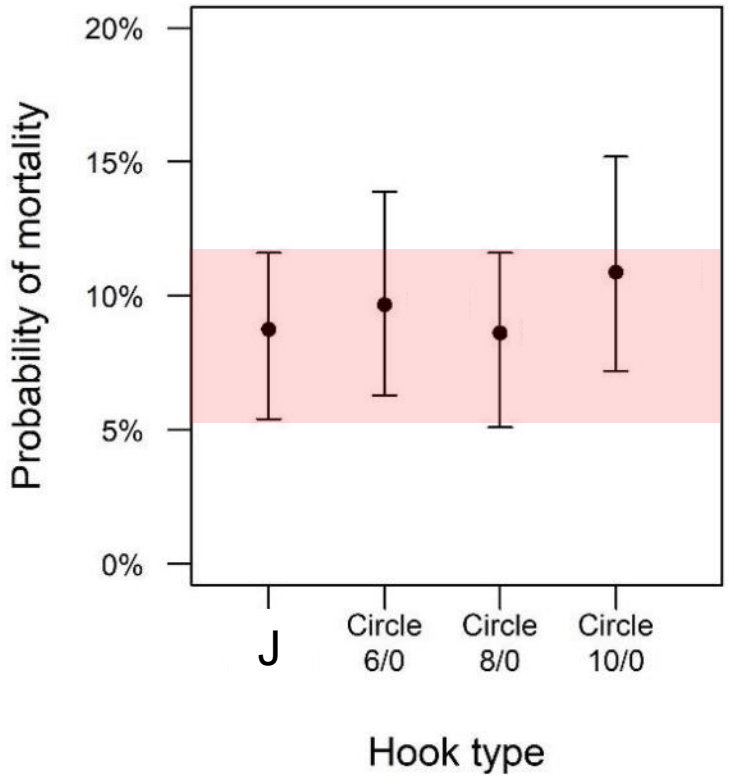


Mortality Rate



Phase I - Acoustic Telemetry

No difference between hooks!



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THEMED ISSUE

Atlantic Striped Bass Population: Past, Present, and Future Challenges

Evaluating the conservation benefit of circle hooks for the Atlantic Striped Bass recreational fishery

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Funding information
USFWS Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Grant, Grant/Award Number: F-57-R

Abstract

Objective: The Striped Bass *Morone saxatilis* is one of the most sought-after recreational fish species along the US Atlantic coast. Regulations and a strong conservation ethic among anglers make Striped Bass among the most frequently released coastal marine fishes. A recent rule requires anglers to use circle hooks when targeting Striped Bass with natural baits, yet the conservation benefit of this action remains unclear.

Methods: We used acoustic telemetry to monitor the fate of Striped Bass that were recreationally caught with baited hooks ($n = 349$) and to estimate the influence of various biological (fish size), fishery (fight time, handling time, hook location, bait type, and hook type), and environmental (water temperature and air temperature) variables on postrelease survival.

Result: A semi-quantitative score of fish release condition was the single best predictor of mortality. A broader dataset that included untagged fish ($n = 716$) was used to identify the best predictors of fish release condition, which included hook location and handling time.

Conclusion: Contrary to expectations, the circle hooks used in this study did not result in lower release mortality than conventional J-hooks.

Phase II – Citizen Science

Which variables influence release condition?

Phase II – Citizen Science

Methods

- Volunteer anglers record data while fishing
- Incentives
  - Pliers for 1st report
  - Weekly raffles
- Sampling kit
  - Thermometer
  - Stopwatch
  - Tape measure
  - Data sheets
  - Instructions

Predictor Variables

Fish
Fish Size
Fight Time
Handling Time

Fishing
Boat/Shore
Tackle Category
Bait Type
Lure Size
Hook Type
# of Hooks

Environment
Date
State
Water Temp
Air Temp

Condition Score

Hook Location
Blood
Swimming

→

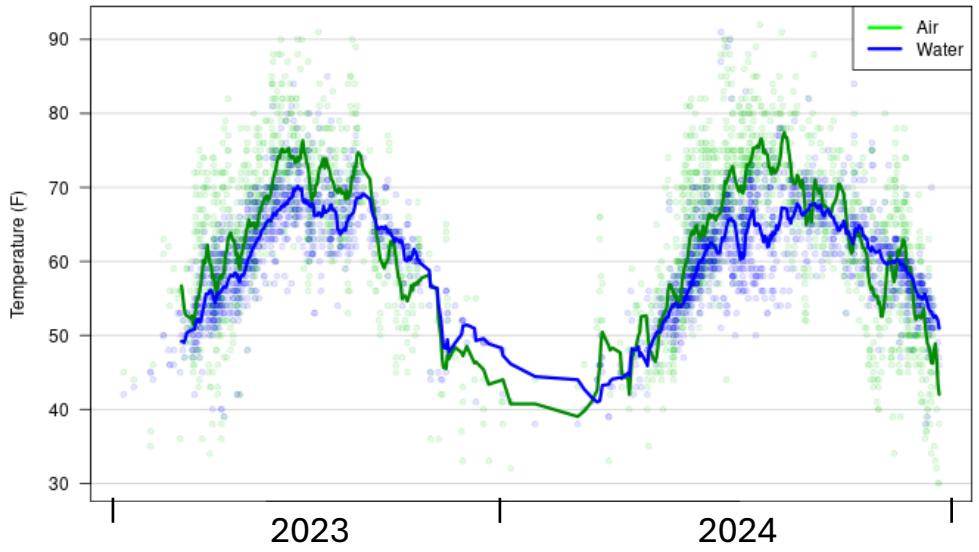
1 – No Impact
2 – Minor Impact
3 – Major Impact
4 - Dead

Phase II – Citizen Science

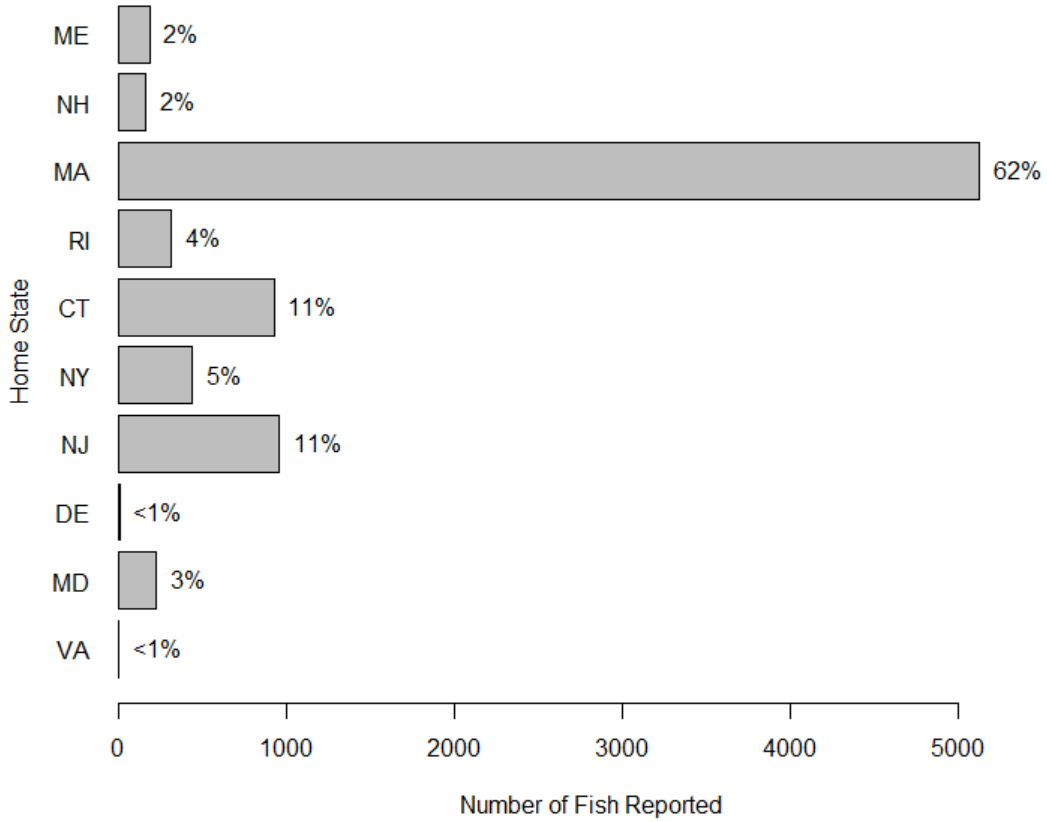
Results

362 Anglers
2,333 Trips
8,349 Fish

Seasonal Distribution

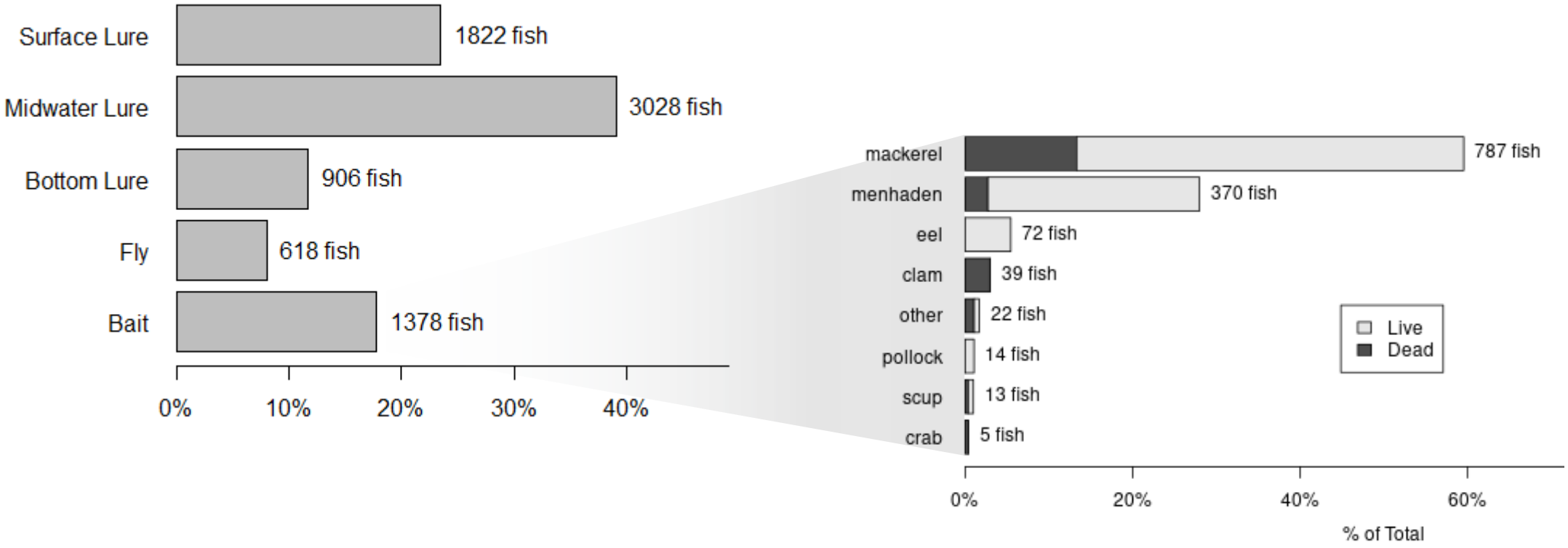


Spatial Distribution



Phase II – Citizen Science

Tackle & Bait Choices

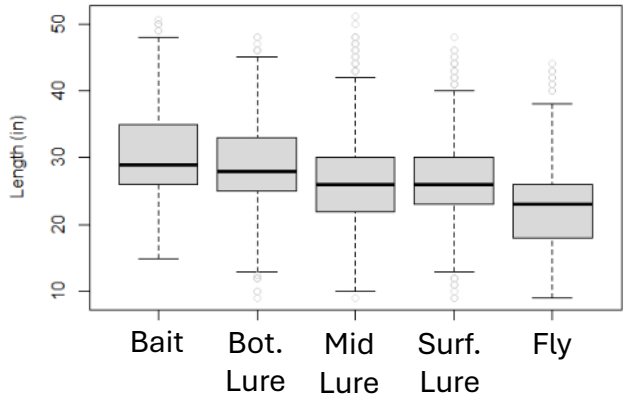


Phase II – Citizen Science

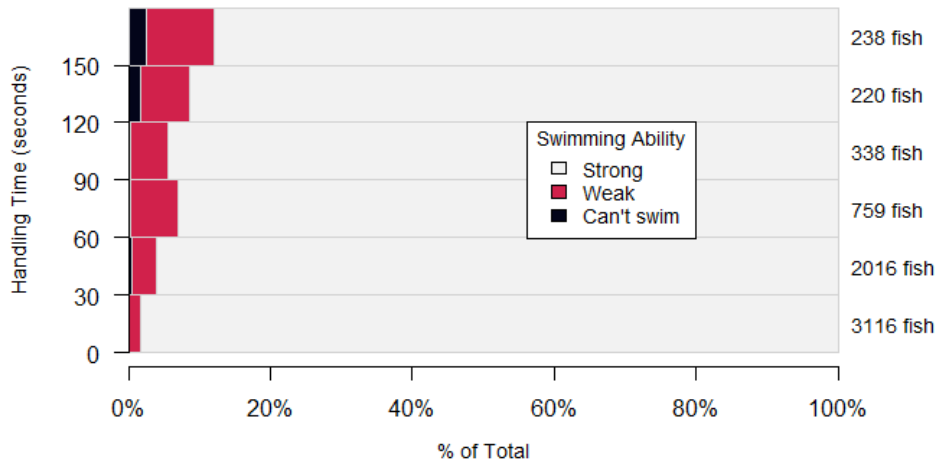
Fish length
Fight time
Handling time
Tackle category

Important suite of correlated variables

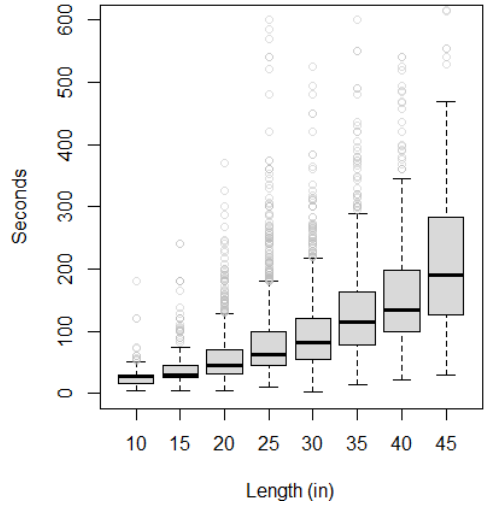
Fish Size vs Tackle



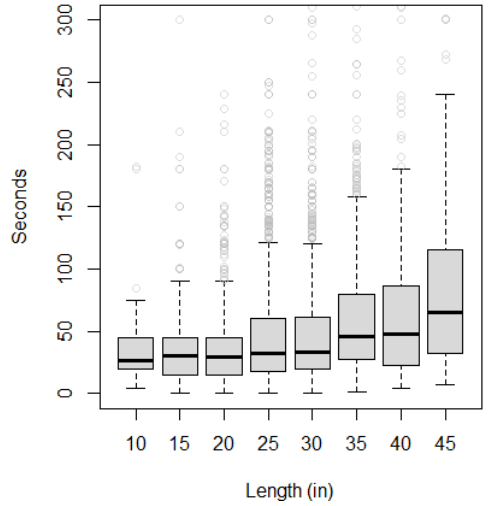
Vitality vs Handling Time



Fight Time vs Fish Size

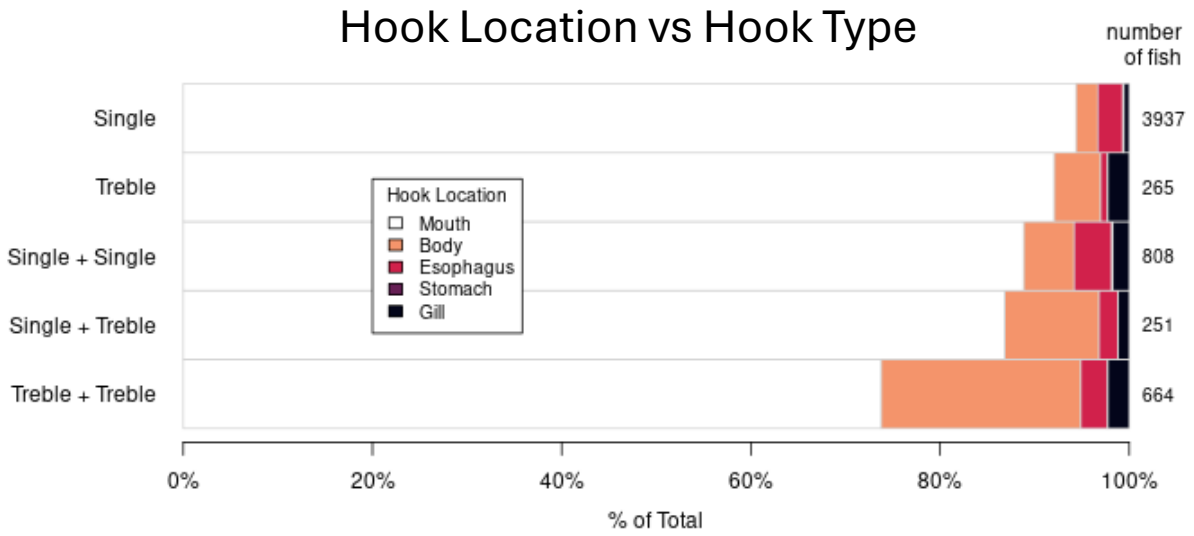


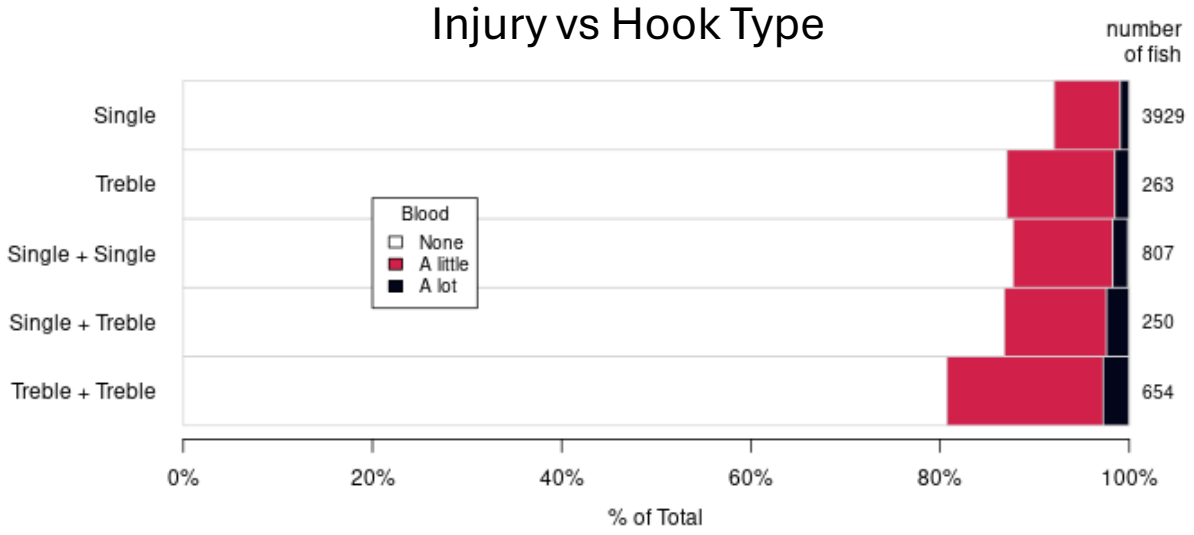
Handling Time vs Fish Size



Phase II – Citizen Science

Hooks are important





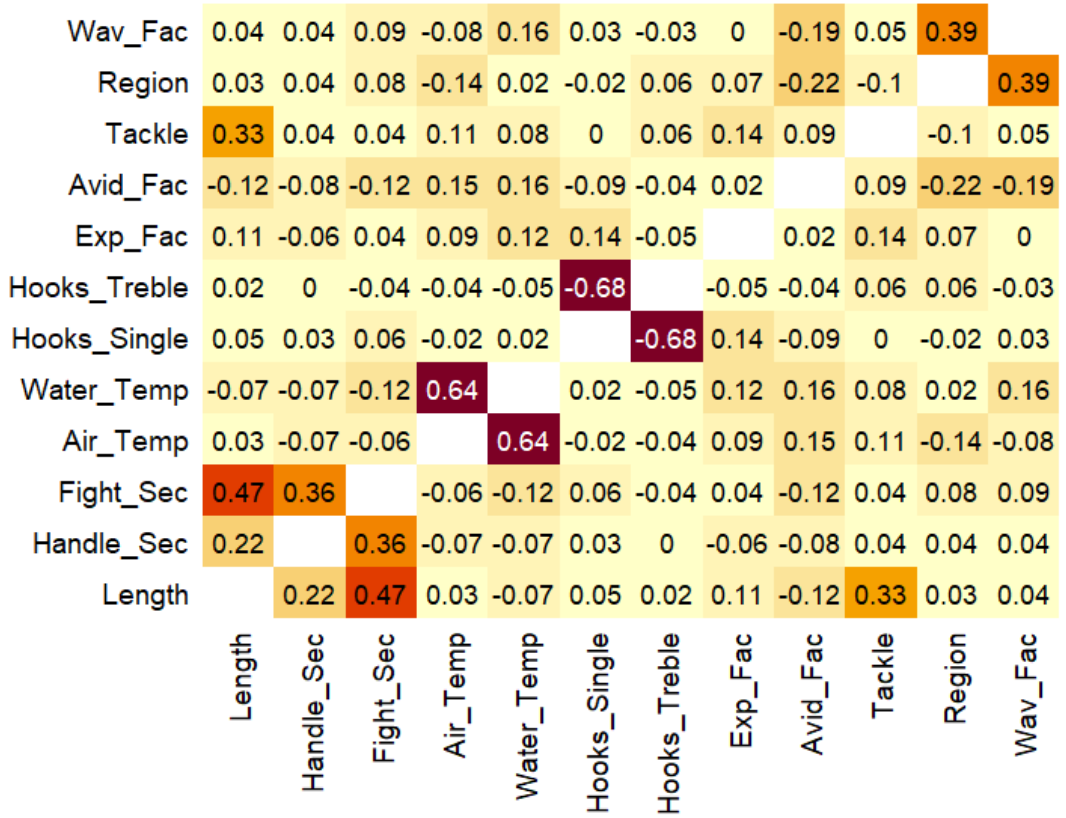
Phase II – Citizen Science

Need a model to account for variable complexity

Categorical models evaluated

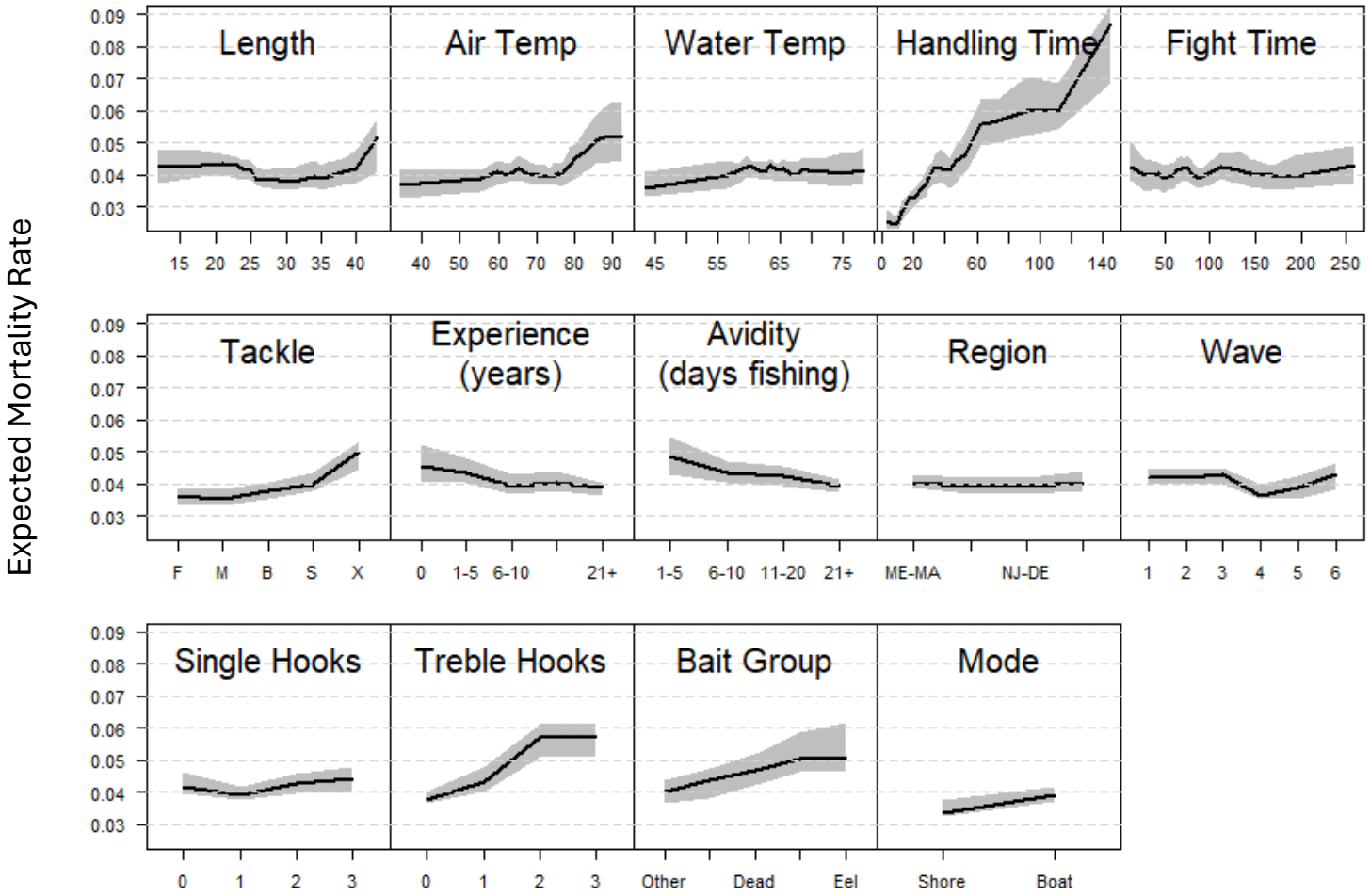
- Continuation ratio logits ✘
  - GLM-like model for ordinal response
- Random forest ✘
  - General machine learning model
- Extreme gradient boosting ✔
  - Machine learning model for imbalanced data
  - Handles missing predictor values

Variable Correlations



Phase II – Citizen Science

xgboost model – Partial Dependence



Phase III – Coastwide Estimates

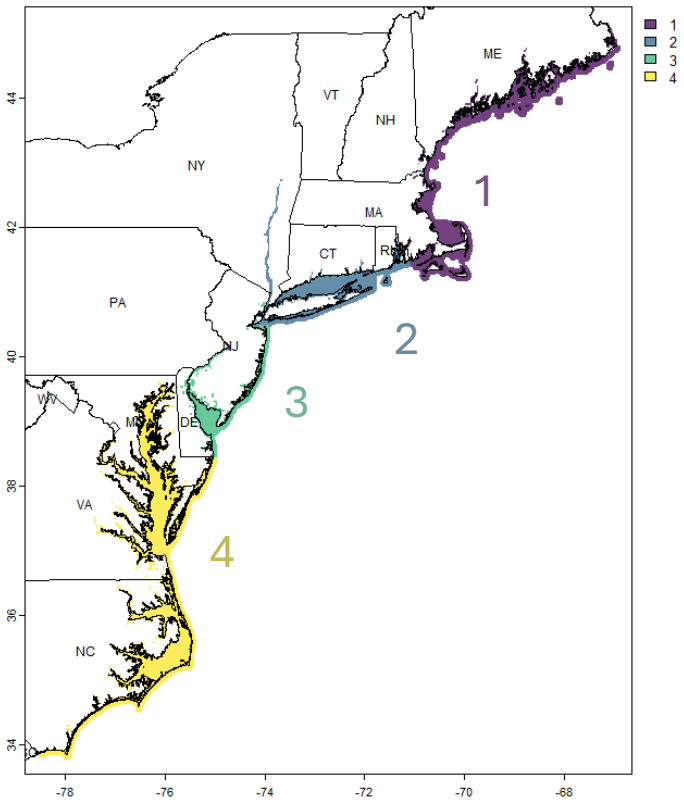
How are key variables distributed across the fishery?

Variable	Data Source
Length	Assessment (by state, year)
Handling Time	Estimated via model fit to citizen science data
Fight Time	
Air Temp	ERA5 model (by state, area, year, wave)
Water Temp	GLORYS model (by state, area, year, wave)
Experience	Coastwide angler survey (by region)
Avidity	
Tackle	
Single Hooks	
Treble Hooks	
Bait Group	
Bait Type	
Region	MRIP (by state, wave, year, mode)
Wave	
Mode	

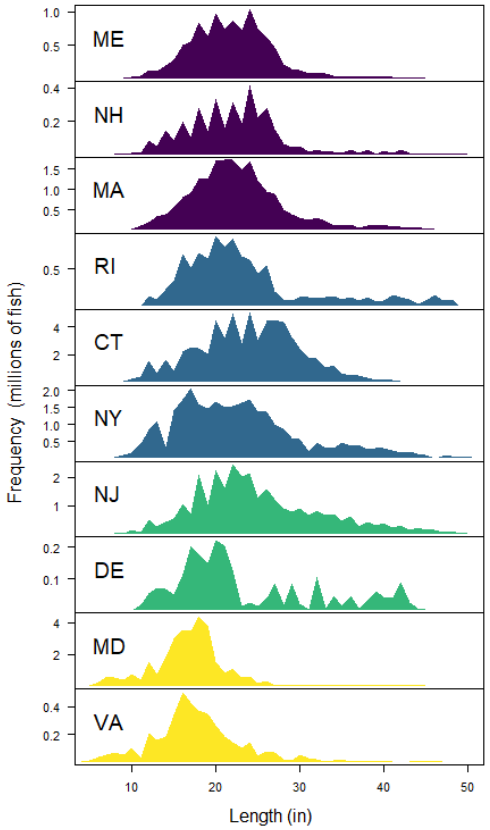
Phase III – Coastwide Estimates

Release Length Patterns (assessment data)

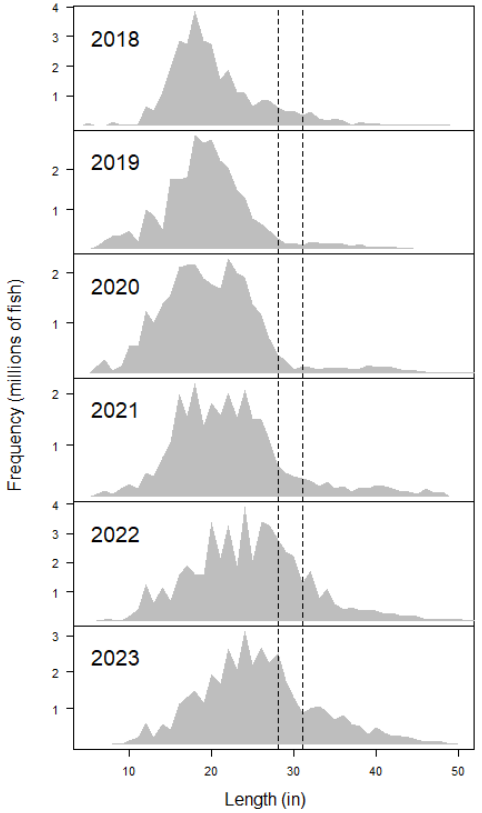
Regions



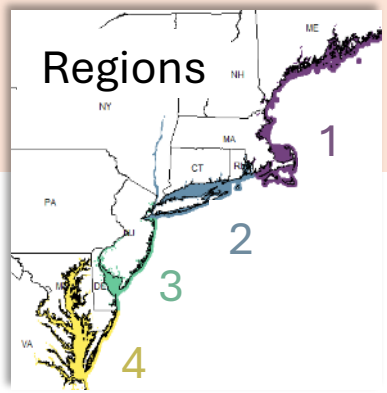
Spatial



Interannual

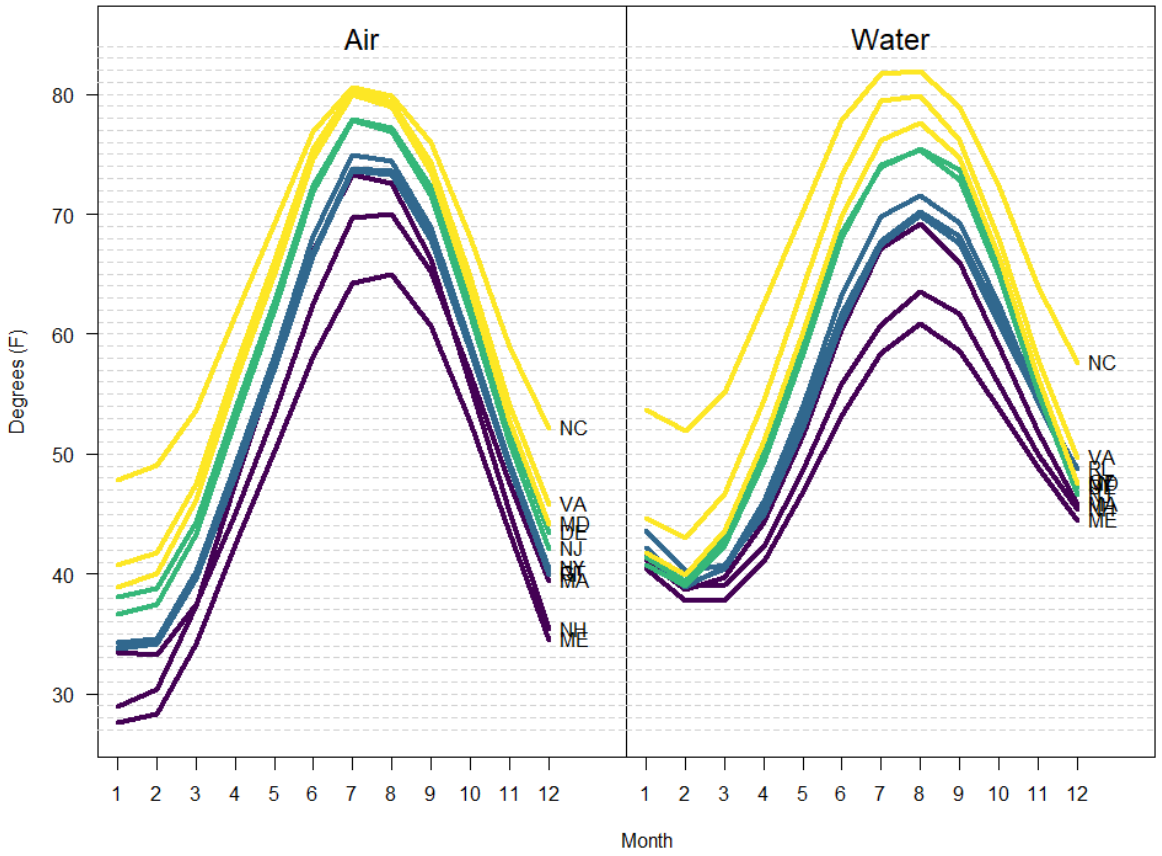


Phase III – Coastwide Estimates

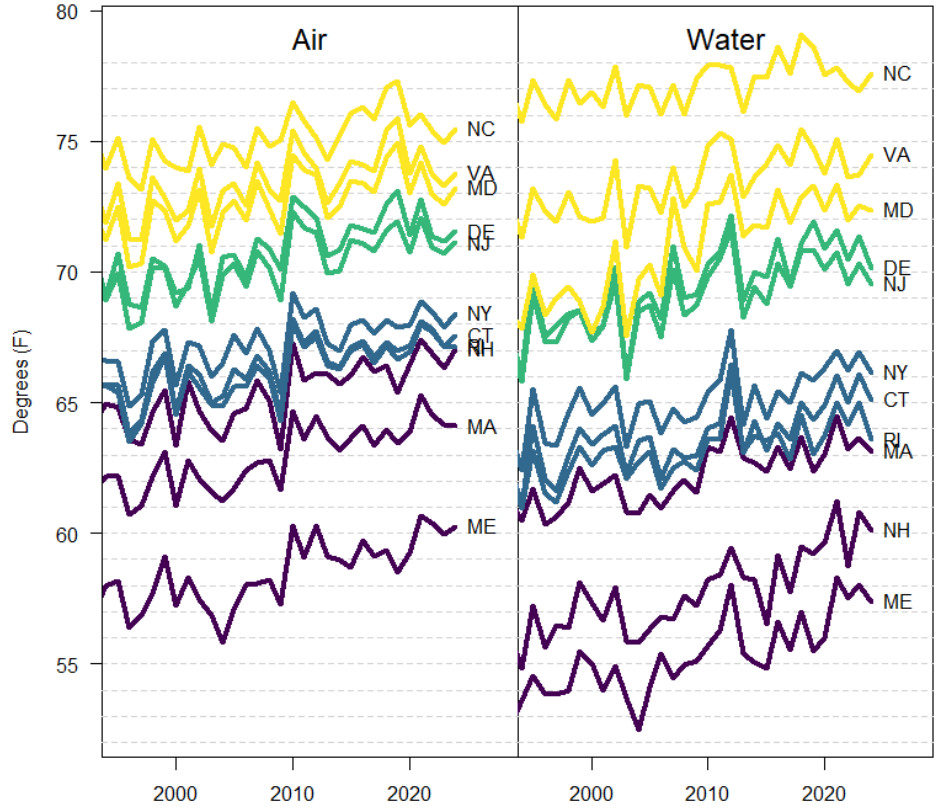


Temperature Patterns (climate models)

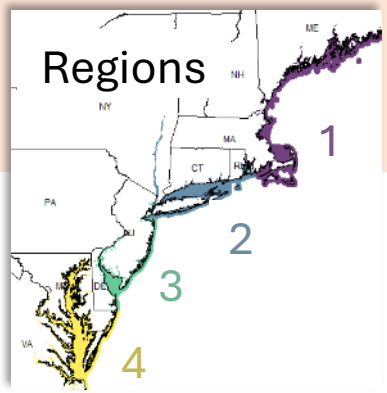
Seasonal



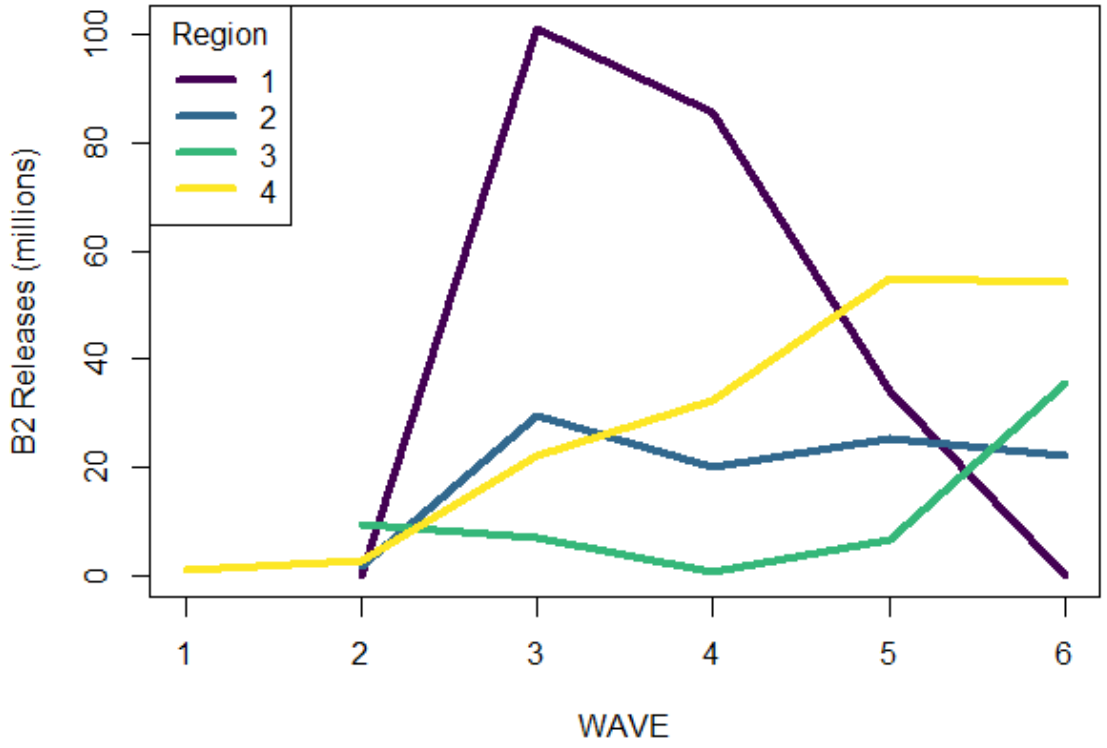
Interannual

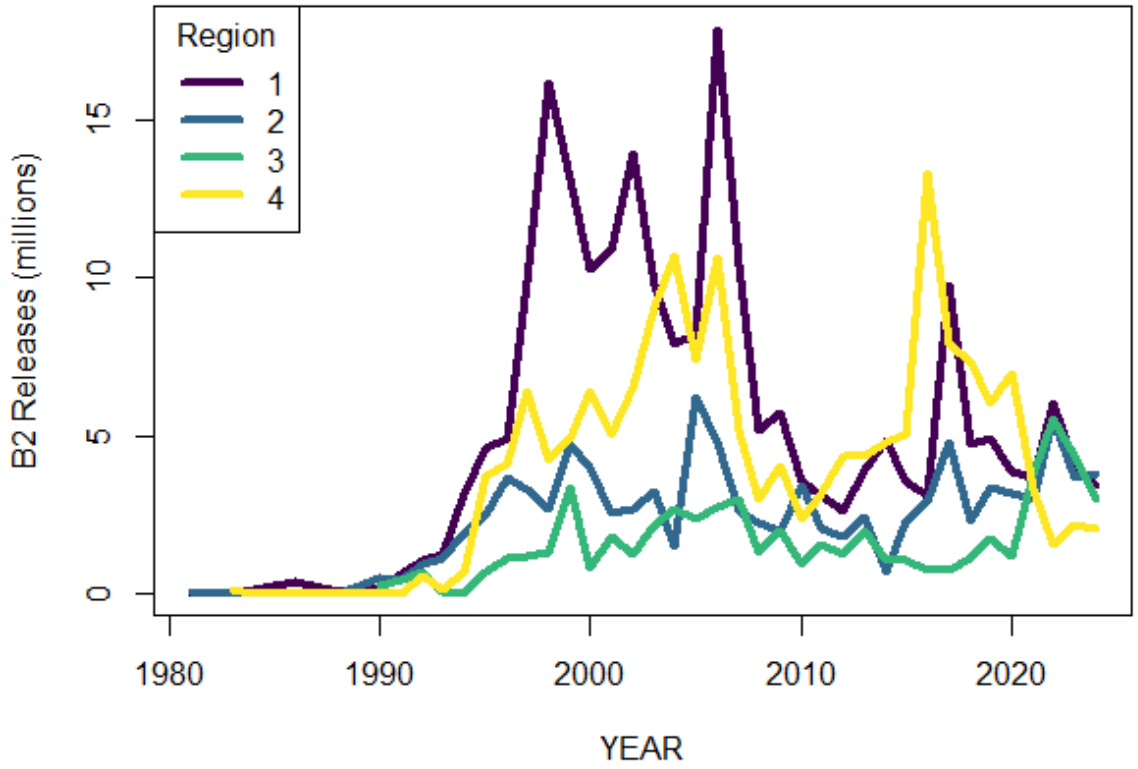


Phase III – Coastwide Estimates



Releases by State, Mode, Year, Wave (MRIP)

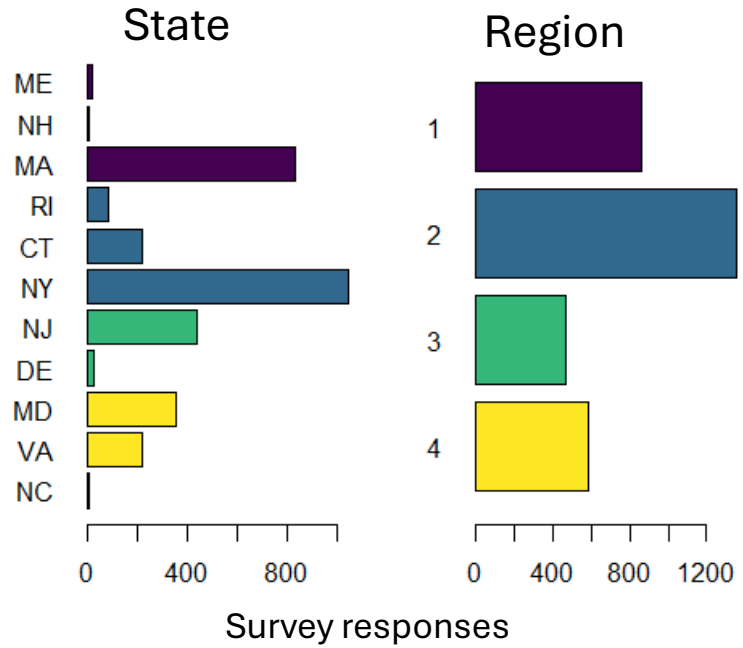




Phase III – Coastwide Estimates

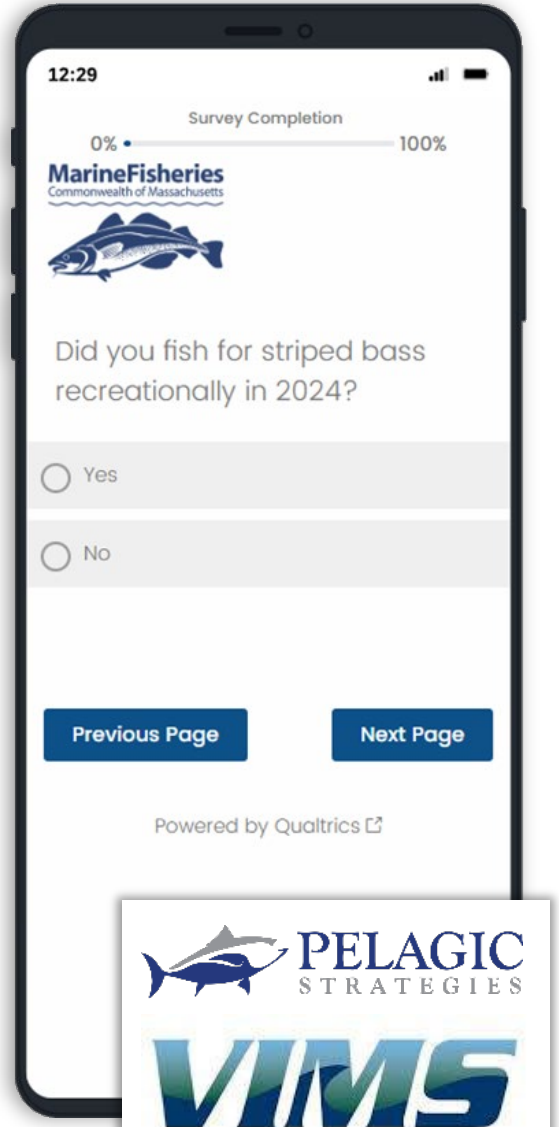
Fishery Variables (angler survey)

- Survey sent to permitted anglers in MA, CT, NY, NJ, MD, VA
- N = 4,964 angler responses → 251,078 bass released in 2024



Anglers were asked about…

- Experience & Avidity
- Primary fishing state
- Mode (shore, private boat, for hire)
- # of bass released
  - % by Tackle category
  - % by Hook configurations
  - % by Bait category

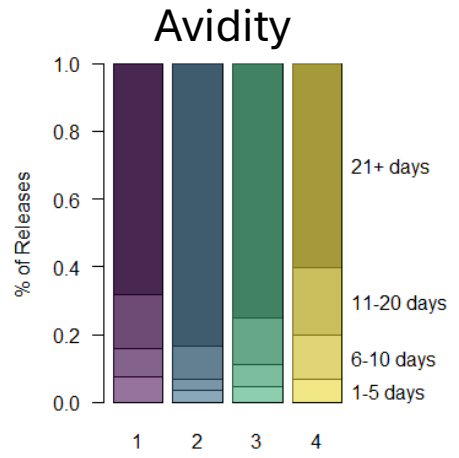


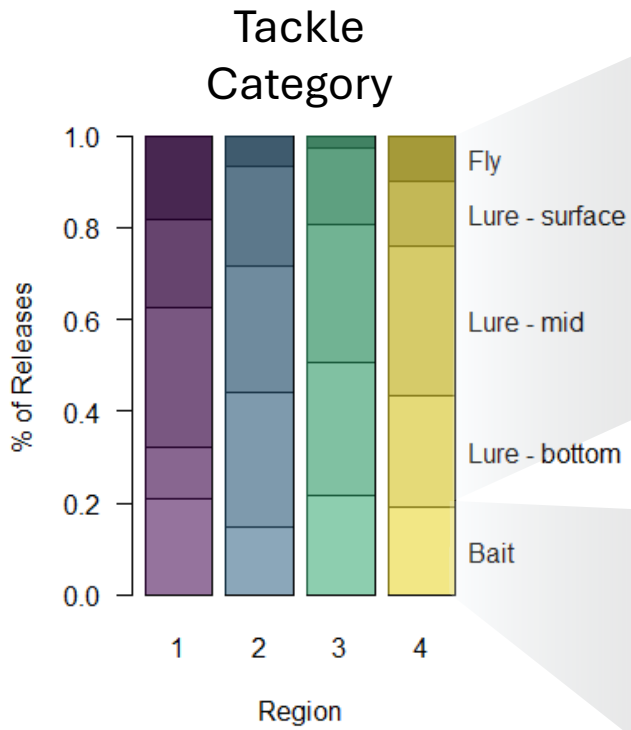
PELAGIC STRATEGIES

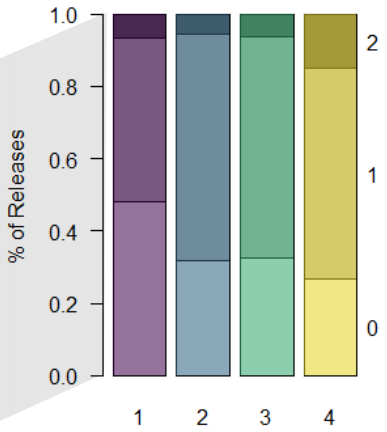
VIMS

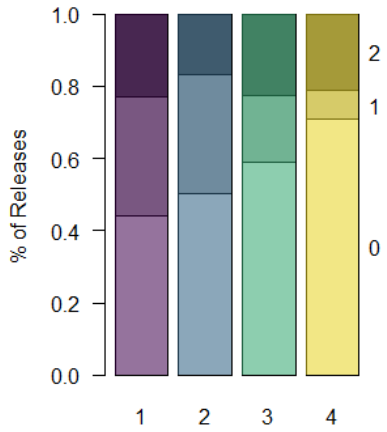
Phase III – Coastwide Estimates

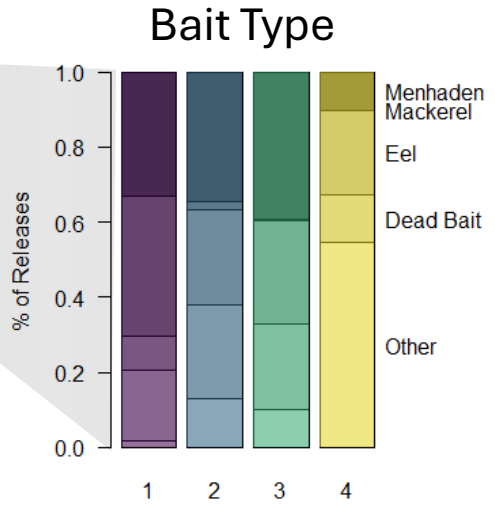
% of Releases by Fishery Variables





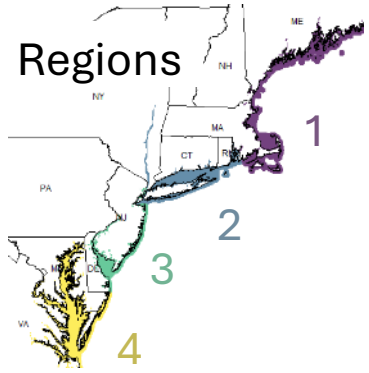






PRELIMINARY DATA!

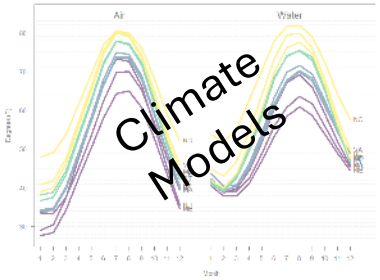
unadjusted for response bias



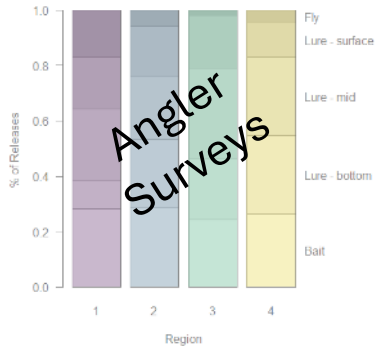
Phase III – Coastwide Estimates

Linking it all together

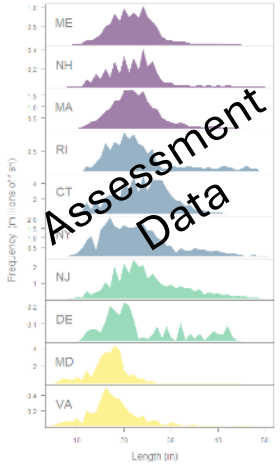
Temperature
by state, year, wave



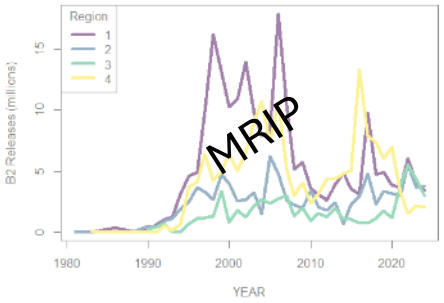
Exp., Avid., Tackle
by region, mode



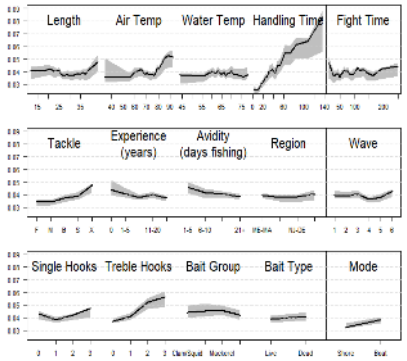
Length
by state, year



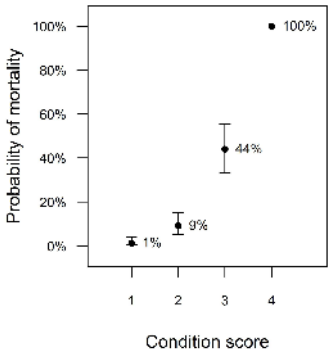
Releases
by state, mode, year, wave



Condition Model
from citizen science



Mortality Model
from telemetry



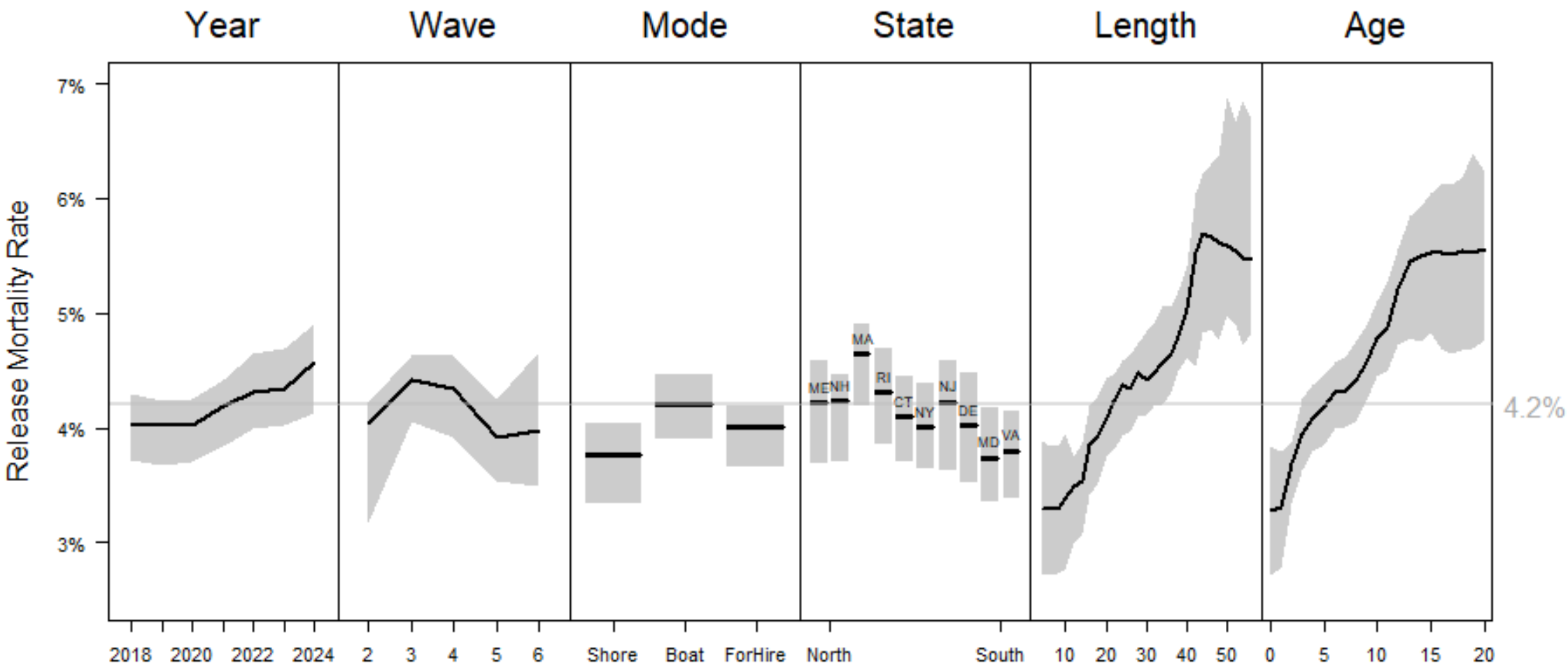
average

Coastwide Estimate

%

Phase III – Coastwide Estimates

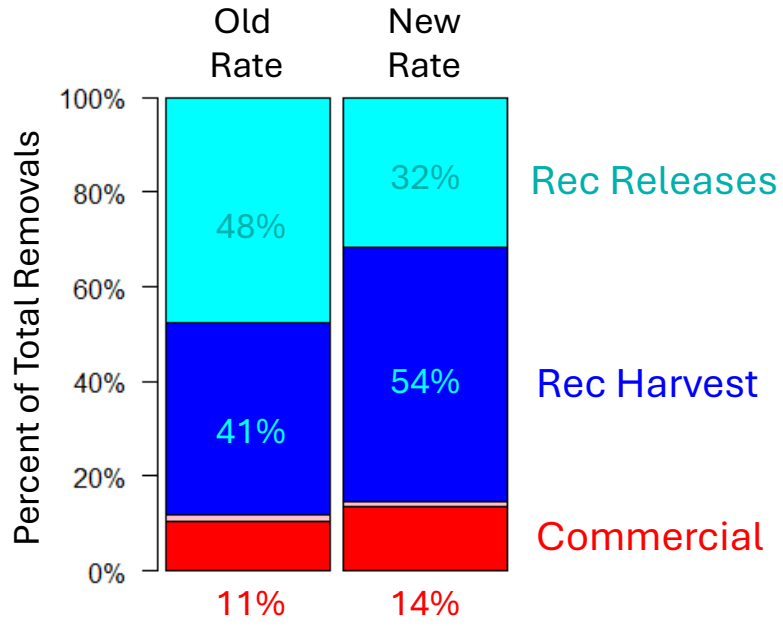
Estimated Post-Release Mortality Rates



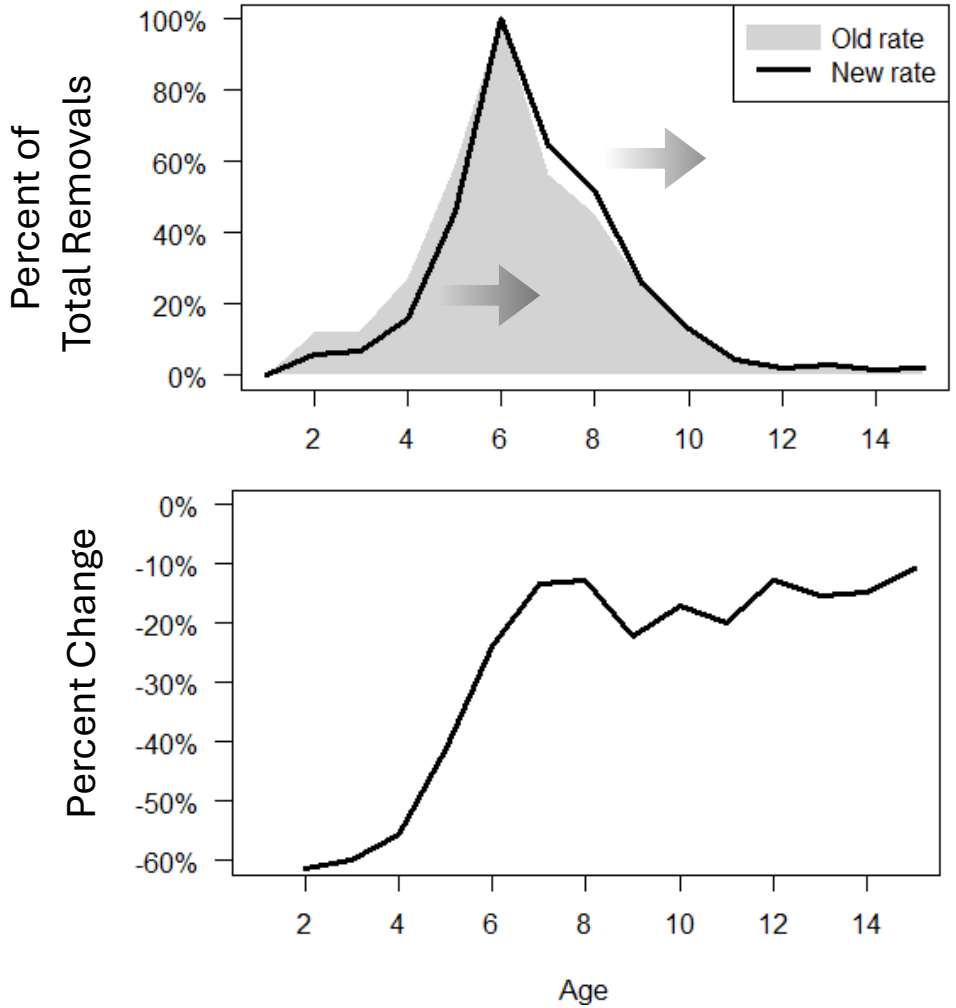
Phase III – Coastwide Estimates

Potential Consequences

Fishery removals driven more by harvest



Catch age distribution shifts to older fish

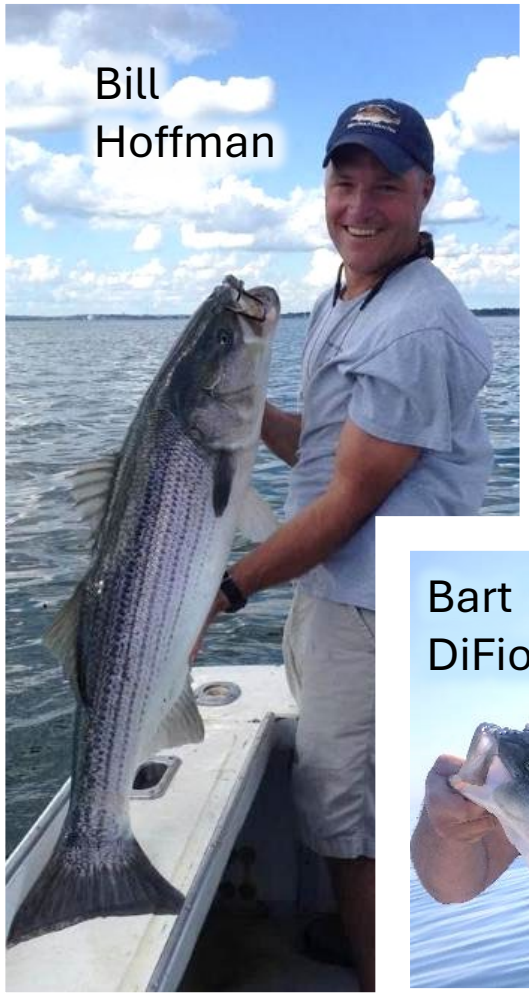


Preliminary Conclusions

Striped bass release mortality…

- Is less than previously assumed
  - Fishery removals now more driven by harvest
- Varies by fish size
  - Fishery removals now more focused on older fish
  - Age-varying rate may be warranted in assessment
- Varies by handling time, bait/lures, & treble hooks
  - Anglers can reduce mortality by altering technique
- Influences CAA, selectivity, reference points, etc.
  - Unclear what impacts a lower age-varying rate would have on stock status

MADMF Striped Bass Research Team




Many Thanks to our Partners & Participants!
OTW
BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS & ANGLERS
Got One!
COSTA
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AMERICAN SALTWATER GUIDES ASSOCIATION
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Fish and Wildlife
MARYLAND
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
NEW YORK STATE
VMRC
PELAGIC STRATEGIES
VIMS
Thank You!
So Long, and thanks for all the fish!

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

(617) 626-1520 | mass.gov/MarineFisheries

Memorandum

To: Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC)

From: Daniel McKiernan, Director

Date: November 7, 2025

Subject: 2026 Commercial Menhaden Fishery

Overview

This memorandum provides the rationale for my decision to hold the Commonwealth's commercial Atlantic menhaden regulations status quo for 2026.

Background

The Atlantic Menhaden Management Board met during the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) 2025 Annual Meeting to review the results of the 2025 single-species and ecosystem refence point stock assessments for menhaden and consider setting the total allowable catch (TAC) for 2026–2028. Ultimately, the Board set a one-year TAC for 2026 only at 186,840 metric tons (mt), a 20% reduction from the 2023–2025 TAC of 233,550 mt. The Board will reconvene at the ASMFC 2026 Annual Meeting to consider setting the 2027, 2028, and potentially 2029 TAC.

The 20% reduction provides for a level of menhaden fishery removals that has 0% risk of exceeding the ecosystem refence point (ERP) fishing mortality threshold. However, it falls well short of achieving the ERP fishing mortality target, which past Board TAC-setting decisions under the ERPs have achieved. The Management Board expressed concerns about the socioeconomic impacts of the larger reductions (~50%) associated with achieving the ERP fishing mortality target. The delay in setting the TAC for additional years beyond 2026 will allow more time to assess socioeconomic impacts and conduct outreach to stakeholders. Refer to the ASMFC Annual Meeting Summary for more information.

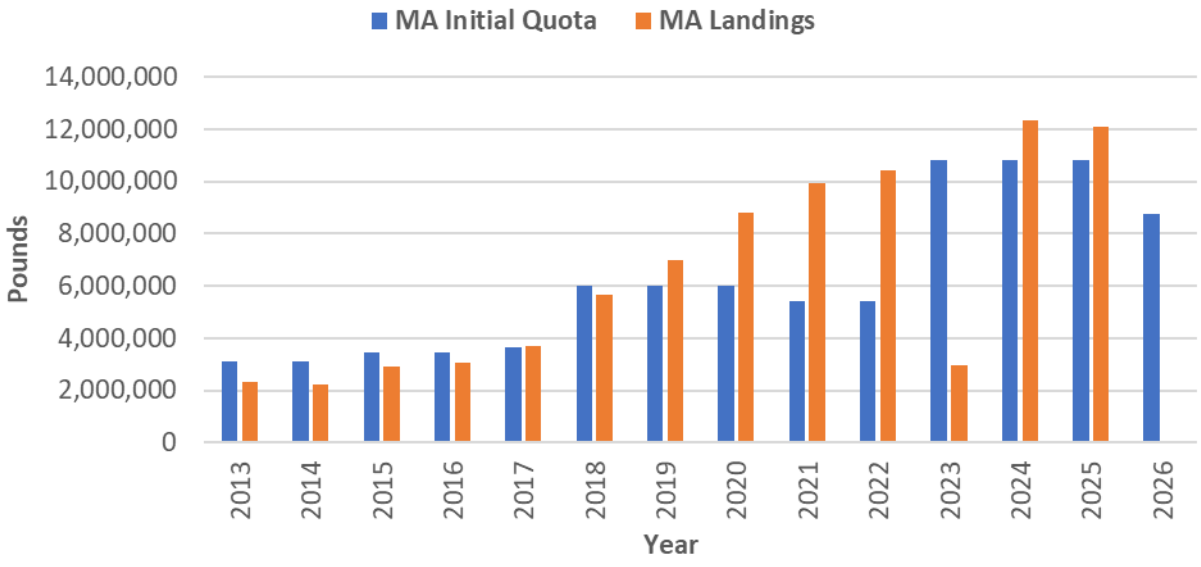
Massachusetts' current share of the coastwide TAC is 2.12%, after 1% is taken off the top for the Episodic Event Set-Aside (EESA). Accordingly, our 2026 menhaden quota will decline to ~8.73 million

pounds, down from ~10.82 million pounds in 2023–2025. The EESA, which Massachusetts has drawn from in four years (2020–2022 and 2025), will be ~4.12 million pounds in 2026, down from ~5.15 million pounds.

Rationale

I find that our current state regulations for menhaden are resilient to the 20% quota reduction in conjunction with the interstate plan's allowances for quota transfers and EESA and therefore propose no changes for next year (see Table 1 for summary of 2025 regulations). The 8.73-million-pound quota for Massachusetts remains higher than that for all years of menhaden quota management with the exception of 2023–2025 (Figure 1). I suspect that through quota transfers and the EESA we can partly make up for the 20% reduction, provided local resource availability conditions warrant it. While there may be increased demand for quota transfers and EESA, we can taper our trip limits during EESA to correspond to what is available and likely maintain small-scale access throughout the season of availability. Our recent action to further restrict access to the limited entry fishery will preserve the quota for historical users and ward off new effort that could exacerbate the quota reduction. The quota reduction also informs my decision not to consider any relaxations to the open entry fishery regulations (e.g., larger net size and increased trip limit as has been suggested based on a more offshore resource distribution in 2025). Overall, the fishery performed largely as intended under the new rules in 2025, and after years of interannual changes, I believe we are well positioned to not make changes this year and achieve a similar outcome.

Figure 1. Massachusetts' initial allocated quota and realized annual landings since 2013.



Notes about landings:
- 2019 includes directed landings under quota transfers.
- 2020-2022 include directed landings under quota transfers, incidental catch, and EESA landings.
- 2024 includes directed landings under quota transfers.
- 2025 is preliminary and includes EESA landings.
- Data source: SAFIS eDR, as of November 2025

Table 1. Summary of 2025 Commercial Menhaden Regulations

Season	Gears/Fishery	Trip Limit	Open Days	Other
Jan 1 – May 14	Small-scale and incidental (no purse seines)	6,000 lb	Sun – Sat	State waters harvest only. Storage requirement.
Jan 1 – May 14	Weir with menhaden permit	120,000 lb	Sun – Sat	
May 15 – Quota	Limited Access Directed Fishery	120,000 lb to start season. 25,000 lb if 50% quota taken before Sept 1. 6,000 lb if 98% taken after Aug 31. 360,000 lb on Oct 15 if >10% quota remains.	Purse seines: Mon-Thurs at 120,000-lb trip limit; Mon-Fri at <120,000-lb limit. Other gears: Sun – Sat.	Vessel capacity and certification requirement. Storage requirement, purse seine size restriction, and net certification at 6,000-lb limit. Carrier vessels allowed subject to LOA, only when trip limit > 6,000 lb, Boston Harbor prohibited, and additional restrictions apply.
May 15 – Quota	Open Access Directed Fishery	6,000 lb	Same as above.	Storage requirement. Purse seine size restriction and certification requirement.
Quota – Dec 31	Small-scale and incidental (no purse seines)	6,000 lb	Sun – Sat	State waters harvest only. Storage requirement.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Marine Fisheries
(617) 626-1520 | mass.gov/MarineFisheries

MEMORANDUM

TO: Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC)

FROM: Daniel J. McKiernan, Director

DATE: November 13, 2025

SUBJECT: Analysis of House Bill 898 — An Act to End the Taking of Horseshoe Crabs for Bait

---

DMF has received a number of comments and questions from the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission regarding House Bill 898 — An Act to End the Taking of Horseshoe Crabs. In response to this interest, DMF is providing you with this detailed memo that presents assessment and survey data, a narrative of past management actions, and a general description and assessment of affected industries.

Executive Summary

House Bill 898 (H.B. 898) — "An Act to End the Taking for Horseshoe Crabs for Bait" — was filed on January 16, 2025. The Bill was referred to the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources and a hearing was held on October 21, 2025. The Bill seeks to amend Massachusetts General Law Chapter 130 (G.L. c. 130) by establishing Section 107 to: (1) prohibit the retention of horseshoe crabs or horseshoe crab eggs as bait; (2) allow the incidental catch and possession of horseshoe crabs in non-targeted fisheries provided the horseshoe crab is immediately released to the sea unharmed; (3) allow DMF to authorize the taking of horseshoe crabs for educational or scientific purposes; (4) establish a criminal penalty of $25 per horseshoe crab taken in violation of the section; and (5) mandate DMF develop regulations to enforce these statutory requirements.

The views and claims submitted by proponents during the hearing testimony regarding the poor status of the horseshoe crab population in Massachusetts are not supported by the best-available science. Further, those areas north of Cape Cod — where some proponents claim horseshoe crab populations are most in need of protection from fishing mortality — have had limited historical commercial fishery landings. Accordingly, issues affecting population growth in these areas are likely not driven by commercial fishing. Further, these areas are unlikely to contribute meaningfully to

commercial harvest moving forward given existing regulatory controls governing minimum size and prohibitions on harvest during the spawning season.

Massachusetts surveys monitoring horseshoe crab abundance in the state range between time-series averages and record highs for the time series. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission stock assessment for horseshoe crabs — unanimously approved by every state and federal horseshoe crab biologist on the Atlantic coast — found that stock abundance in Massachusetts is increasing. These stock assessment findings were also supported by the most recent peer-reviewed paper from the International Union for Conservation of Nature, which stated horseshoe crab abundance has increased in the Northeast Region, which includes Massachusetts.

The horseshoe crab resource is strictly managed at the interstate (coastwide) and state level. The Atlantic Sates Marine Fisheries Commission manages horseshoe crabs coastwide through the Interstate Fishery Management Plan, which among other things sets state bait quotas to constrain harvest. DMF has voluntarily opted to reduce its allocated quota by nearly 60% (from 330,337 to 140,000 crabs annually) to promote the conservation of the resource. DMF manages harvest under this quota through a suite of regulations (both input and output controls). This includes a limited entry permitting program, spawning closures, daily catch limits, a minimum size limit (prosomal width), and comprehensive harvester and dealer reporting requirements. This management program adequately constrains commercial harvest, promotes abundance, and considers the need for precautionary management given the impacts that sea level rise, beach armoring, and coastal erosion are having on spawning habitat.

Banning bait harvest will have significant direct and indirect economic impacts to the Commonwealth's seafood industry. Although horseshoe crabs are not consumed by the public, their harvest and sale as bait are an important component of certain sectors of the commercial fishing economy. The cumulative impacts may be deleterious to the commercial fishing and seafood dealer sector, particularly along Cape Cod and the South Coast where most of the affected fisheries and processing activity occurs, and negative impact food production and seafood availability in the Commonwealth.

Obviously, a prohibition on harvest would reduce revenues for fishers. Based on data from the most recent three years (2022-2024), more than 30 fishers could lose access to a quota generated around $400,000 in annual ex-vessel value[1]. Further, horseshoe crabs are primarily harvested by fishers who pursue mixed-species fisheries and simultaneously catch and land other economically and socially important species (e.g., summer flounder, squid, scup, black sea bass, quahogs). Accordingly, the loss of horseshoe crab revenues presents the potential for cumulative impacts that may negatively affect the harvest of these other species that may impact the state's seafood industry and blue economy more broadly.

There are also about 50 fishers who harvest channeled whelk using baited pot gear. Horseshoe crabs are the primary bait in this fishery. Accordingly, H.B. 898 would prevent these fishers from accessing their sustainably managed local supply of preferred bait. As a result, Massachusetts conch pot fishers will become less profitable because they will have to either accept rising bait costs due to reliance on horseshoe crabs harvested in other jurisdictions or operate with less efficiency by switching to less

[1] Ex-vessel value is the total value of the first sale of commercial fishing catch between the commercial fisher and the primary buyer. Put another way, this figure represents the total gross revenue received by fishers for their catch.

productive bait. Both likely impacts would reduce the profitability of this fishery, which is facing narrow profit margins amid conservation, regulatory, and market driven challenges.

Impacts would not just be limited to these commercial fishers, but also the seafood dealer sector. In 2024, there were 11 dealers who purchased horseshoe crabs from bait harvesters and 14 dealers who purchased channeled whelk. Each of these dealers would be forced to grapple with the downstream effects of the loss of revenues related to horseshoe crabs, as well as the likely reduction in channeled whelk landings and other species caught in mixed species mobile gear fisheries. Given the interconnected nature of the state's seafood industry this change may have opaquely understood but potentially serious implications for seafood production in Massachusetts.

The loss of the bait fishery for horseshoe crabs may also indirectly impact the production of Limulus Amoebocyte Lysate in the Commonwealth, presenting potential public health concerns here in the Commonwealth and globally. Limulus Amoebocyte Lysate is a test reagent derived from horseshoe crab blood that is used to detect and quantify bacterial endotoxins. Accordingly, it is critical in ensuring the safety of water, pharmaceuticals (e.g., injectable drugs, vaccines), biological products, and medical devices. It is also used in the diagnosis of fungal infections. There are two Massachusetts-based firms that bleed horseshoe crabs to manufacture Limulus Amoebocyte Lysate and both of these biomedical businesses use horseshoe crabs borrowed from Massachusetts bait fishery to meet their supply needs. In fact, in recent years, nearly all of horseshoe crabs taken against Massachusetts' bait quota have been bled by these firms. If H.B. 898 were passed, the Division of Marine Fisheries would likely need to reexamine the management of the biomedical fishery to ensure there is adequate biomedical quota available. However, irrespective of such an action by the agency, the potential downstream impacts of this bill on the fishing and seafood industry infrastructure may uproot long-standing functional business models and present unpredictable and costly challenges to the biomedical industry.

Lastly, in 1962, the legislature created the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission as a public advisory and regulatory oversight body to the Division of Marine Fisheries. The agency and the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission have the expertise necessary to evaluate marine fisheries management actions and these entities have historically worked to coordinate the development of regulations to conserve and manage the state's marine fishery resources while also supporting the state's fishing and seafood industries and coastal culture. If there is sufficient biological need to further conserve the state's horseshoe crab population, there is a long-standing precedent that DMF and the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission will pursue such actions.

Status of the Horseshoe Crab Resource in Massachusetts

General Overview

The Atlantic horseshoe crab (*Limulus polyphemus*) is a marine arthropod that ranges from the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of Maine. They are often referred to as a "living fossil" because the species has been around for 350-450 million years — predating most other living organisms. Juvenile horseshoe crabs tend to inhabit nearshore embayments and estuaries, whereas adults will utilize these same areas, as well as adjacent offshore areas, to feed on worms and shellfish.

Adults in Massachusetts spawn in sheltered embayments in May and June. It is well-documented that sex ratios on spawning beaches are naturally skewed towards males, largely due to behavioral differences between the sexes. Female crabs will come to shore, often with one male crab attached to her shell, deposit eggs in multiple nests, then leave, whereas most males will remain near beaches scouring the area for more mating opportunities. It is common to see aggregations of one female surrounded by many "satellite males" attempting to fertilize the female's eggs.

Along the east coast of the United States, horseshoe crabs are most abundant in the Delaware Bay region. Massachusetts is near the northern extent of the species' range and Cape Cod provides a natural geographic barrier dividing Massachusetts' crabs into two distinct populations. Horseshoe crabs south of Cape Cod are more abundant and individual crabs are larger, likely because water temperatures south of Cape Cod are closer to the species' thermal preferences. Therefore, it should be unsurprising that the harvest of horseshoe crabs occurs almost exclusively south of Cape Cod, mostly in Nantucket Sound. In 2024[2], approximately 97% of the bait harvest occurred in Nantucket Sound. The biomedical fishery is similarly focused on the population south of Cape Cod.

DMF Horseshoe Crab Surveys

Horseshoe crab populations in Massachusetts are monitored through three relative abundance surveys: (1) the spring and fall DMF bottom trawl survey; (2) the DMF beach seine survey; and (3) the largely volunteer-based spawning beach survey. These surveys allow DMF to monitor population abundance over time. Changes in survey abundance are presumed to be proportional to the overall population. Trends in each survey demonstrate the relative abundance of horseshoe crabs is currently between time-series averages and record high abundance.

The survey trends for the waters south of Cape Cod are particularly important because this region includes Nantucket Sound, the epicenter of the resource and fishery in Massachusetts. Additionally, the time series beginning in 2010 is notable because it coincides with when DMF began to more aggressively manage this slow growing species.

Bottom Trawl Survey

The seasonal spring (May) and fall (September) bottom trawl survey involves a contracted NOAA Fisheries research vessel towing a large net along the ocean floor (similar to commercial trawling). Tows occur at certain randomly assigned stations within certain depth strata. The survey has been conducted since 1978 and collects data on all species caught. For horseshoe crabs, DMF documents

[2] 2024 is the last calendar year for which DMF has a complete data set of harvester and dealer reported data. Any 2025 data provided in this memorandum is preliminary and based only on dealer reported data as of October 30, 2025.

size, sex, count, and aggregate weight. To document the relative abundance of horseshoe crabs, data from this survey are split geographically by region — North and South of Cape Cod — and analyzed to demonstrate the stratified mean number of male and female horseshoe crabs encountered per tow.

The seasonal survey results for each region and both sexes show a decline in relative abundance at the start of the survey's time series (around 1980) followed by improvements over the last 10 to 15 years (Figures 1 and 2). The results of the spring trawl survey South of Cape Cod are particularly noteworthy, seeing a pronounced increase in the relative abundance of both male and female horseshoe crabs since 2010. Further, there has not been a spring data point below the time series median in a decade for either males or females, and more horseshoe crabs were observed in the spring 2025 survey than in any other point in the survey's history.

Spawning Beach Survey

The Massachusetts spawning beach survey started in 2008. Surveys are scheduled to occur two days prior, the day of, and two days after the new and full moons of May and June. Surveys are conducted at high tide to count the number of horseshoe crabs observed within a quadrat and most beaches are surveyed during both daytime and nighttime high tides. Given this is largely a volunteer-based survey[3], the number and location of beaches surveyed has varied over time.

In 2025, 71% of survey sites were above their respective time series medians. Further, over the past 10 years, 90% of surveys show an increasing trend. Within the Nantucket Sound region, where most of the harvest occurs, all surveys show an increasing trend over the past 10-and-15-year stanzas (Table 1).

Seine Survey

The DMF Seine Survey occurs annually from mid-June into early-July. Biologists drag a 21' by 8' beach seine along the shoreline of several Cape Cod embayments to capture animals. While the primary purpose of this survey is to provide a relative abundance index for juvenile winter flounder populations in Southern New England, horseshoe crabs are also counted. This survey started in 1976 but did not consistently collect horseshoe crab data until 1984.

Corresponding with the other above-described survey results, the seine survey has shown an increasing trend in horseshoe crabs since 2010. Further, the 2025 data point was the third highest in the history of the time series and there has not been a data point below the time-series median in over a decade (Figure 3).

<u>Horseshoe Crab Stock Assessments</u>

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) is a compact comprised of the Atlantic coastal states authorized under the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Fisheries Management Act (16 U.S.C. 5100) to conduct stock assessments and coordinate the conservation and management of nearshore

[3] The North and South Rivers Watershed Association, Southeastern Massachusetts Pine Barrens Alliance, Mass Audubon, Erik Hunter, Maria Mitchell Association, Nantucket Conservation Foundation, and DMF contribute data for this survey, and these data are compiled by DMF for analysis and dissemination.

marine fishery species. The ASMFC has coordinated the management and assessment of Atlantic horseshoe crabs since 1998.

The ASMFC's stock assessment evaluates stock status by region in comparison to population status when management started (1998). Massachusetts' population is assessed within the Northeast Region along with Rhode Island's. The most recent assessments (2019 and 2024) were unanimously approved by every state and federal horseshoe crab biologist on the U.S. East Coast and found that prior declining population trends in the Northeast Region had reversed and the number of horseshoe crabs has increased since 1998. These improvements in the Northeast Region were largely driven by the increasing abundance observed in Massachusetts' surveys.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature[4] (IUCN) conducts independent and periodic assessments for various species, including horseshoe crabs. In 2023, the IUCN Green List Report cited the northeast region (CT, RI, and MA) as "viable" with horseshoe crab populations that were either stable or increasing. This is an improvement from the findings in their 2016 report that determined populations were "vulnerable", while acknowledging Massachusetts regulatory efforts to improve conservation. The most recent IUCN horseshoe crab paper (Smith et al. 2025) reported that horseshoe crab populations are increasing, including within the northeast region. These independent findings corroborate the official stock assessments conducted by the ASMFC that underpin interstate and state management.

Horseshoe Crab Fishery Management Measures and Performance Analysis

Overview of Horseshoe Crab Fishery and Management Program in Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, horseshoe crabs are commercially harvested for bait and biomedical purposes. These fisheries primarily occur in Nantucket Sound, but catch has also been reported coming from Vineyard Sound, Buzzards Bay, Pleasant Bay, Nauset Inlet, and Cape Cod Bay. At present, harvest is principally conducted by inshore trawlers fishing in the Nantucket Sound mixed species fishery[5]. Other mobile gear operators include bay quahog dredge boats. These vessels encounter and retain an incidental catch of horseshoe crabs when fishing for quahogs. Lastly, there is also some continuing hand harvest in shallow embayments in southeastern Cape Cod outside of the spawning closure.

The bait fishery supplies horseshoe crabs to bait dealers who resell the product for use in commercial pot fisheries for channeled whelk (so-called "conch pot fishery"). Horseshoe crabs are the preferred bait of conch pot fishers. Surveys of state conch pot fishers indicate that pots are typically baited with a mix that includes about ¼ to ⅓ horseshoe crab (depending on the size of the crab) and other finfish and shellfish baits (e.g., menhaden, blue mussels).

Biomedical processors bleed horseshoe crabs to extract Limulus Amoebocyte Lysate (LAL), which is approved by the US Food and Drug Administration to detect and quantify bacterial endotoxins to ensure the safety of injectable drugs, biological products, and medical devices, and to diagnose fungal infections. The biomedical fishery in Massachusetts captures horseshoe crabs that are then kept alive and sold to biomedical firms where blood is extracted. These crabs are then returned to the sea alive

[4] On October 11th, 2025, the Healey-Driscoll Administration announced Massachusetts' intention to join the IUCN.
[5] These trawlers are typically small (30' – 50') vessels that work nearshore and return to port most nights. Catch in the fishery typically consists of summer flounder, squid, whelks, horseshoe crab, scup, and black sea bass.

within 36 hours of capture. The handling of these horseshoe crabs is highly regulated to minimize mortality.

To optimize the use of horseshoe crabs harvested for bait in Massachusetts, DMF also authorizes a so-called “rent-a-crab” program. This program allows biomedical processors to temporarily acquire live horseshoe crabs from bait dealers for bleeding. After these horseshoe crabs are bled by the biomedical processor, they are returned to the bait dealer and resold as bait.

Management of bait and biomedical horseshoe crab fisheries occurs at the interstate level through the ASMFC and at the state level through DMF. The ASMFC has coordinated an Interstate Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) for horseshoe crabs since 1998. Relevant to Massachusetts, the ASMFC establishes a bait harvest quota and monitoring requirements, best management practices for the bio-medical fishery, and defines reporting requirements.

State regulations implement a suite of requirements (both input and output controls) to promote the conservation of horseshoe crabs, manage the state’s bait quota, and ensure the biomedical fishery conforms to the ASMFC’s best management practices. State management is accomplished through the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC). The MFAC is a nine-member public body — established under state law at G.L. c. 130, §§1B and 17A — and appointed by the Governor to advise DMF on fishery management issues and vote to approve DMF regulations governing the harvest of marine fish species.

Spawning Protections and Minimum Size

In 2010, DMF and the MFAC adopted a series of five-day closures to all harvest (bait and biomedical) around each new and full moon during the period of April 16 to June 30. The initial lunar period-based spawning closures were adopted to encourage reproduction with the intention of rebuilding the population. Within 10 years, DMF’s relative abundance indices demonstrated population growth was occurring.

Despite these improved stock conditions, DMF supported — and the MFAC approved — a more rigorous blanket prohibition on all harvest during the period of April 15 – June 7 within the spawning season. Principal to the rationale was precautionary management to encourage resiliency and enhance reproductive potential. This was driven by the confluence of two factors. First, horseshoe crab life history and spawning behavior make them uniquely vulnerable to high levels of exploitation during the spawning period that can deplete local populations and the lunar closures continued to allow harvest during this important time frame. Second, their spawning habitat is highly susceptible to degradation due to sea level rise, coastal erosion, and resulting shoreline armament and these are environmental conditions affecting coastal Massachusetts communities. Additionally, there was strong public support for this measure as there is a strong cultural and social interest in this species.

In 2010, DMF and the MFAC also enacted a minimum legal size of seven inches in prosomal width (widest part of the crab’s shell). This was partially based on market preference, as bait dealers and the biomedical industry did not want small crabs. There was also concern that the lunar period spawning closures (also adopted in 2010) would direct effort away from spawning beaches, where all the crabs are mature, and towards the mobile gear fishery, which catches a mix of sizes — including immature crabs — in their nets. The minimum legal size prevented smaller crabs from being retained and would theoretically allow more crabs to reach maturity. The minimum legal size impacts different regions of

Massachusetts disproportionally. Horseshoe crabs north of Cape Cod do not grow as large as crabs south of Cape Cod, and those north of Boston rarely get above seven inches in prosomal width, which limits the possibility the fishery will expand northward.

Federal Closures

The bait and biomedical harvest of horseshoe crabs is also spatially limited by two federal rules. Both the Cape Cod National Seashore and the Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge (Figure 4) have historically prohibited the harvest of horseshoe crabs within their boundaries. This effectively provides an expansive refuge for these animals throughout a large area of Cape Cod. In 2024, DMF mirrored these federal closures as state regulations to enhance enforcement and compliance by making the closure enforceable by the Massachusetts Environmental Police (in addition to federal agents).

Bait Fishery Management

The bait fishery for horseshoe crabs is managed by an overall annual quota that caps harvest; a limited entry permitting scheme that controls overall fishing effort; trip limits to manage quota utilization; a spawning closure and minimum size to promote conservation; and comprehensive dealer and harvester reporting.

The state's annual quota was established by the ASMFC in 2000. At that time, the quota was set at 330,337 horseshoe crabs, representing a 25% reduction from estimated contemporary harvest levels. This quota figure was developed prior to the implementation of a comprehensive catch reporting program and was estimated based on the number of pot hauls in the conch pot fishery in 1998 (the baseline year for the stock assessment). To monitor the quota, DMF implemented a catch reporting system, including weekly dealer reporting. Within several years, it became apparent that the initial quota was likely set too high. Consequently, in 2008, DMF voluntarily cut the state's quota to 165,000 crabs which corresponded to recent year's reported horseshoe crab landings. The quota remained at this level until 2023 when DMF again voluntarily cut the bait quota, this time to 140,000 horseshoe crabs. This was done to establish a first-ever biomedical harvest quota and thereby cap overall mortality at contemporary levels viewed to be sustainable in order to address growing concerns about increasing biomedical harvest and how it may impact overall fishing mortality.

To manage the annual quota, DMF has established a limited entry permitting scheme and trip limits. The purpose of the limited entry permitting scheme is to control effort and prevent the proliferation of landings that may negatively impact the fishery and the market. In 2025, DMF renewed 176 horseshoe crab permits. New entrants may only obtain a permit through the transfer of an actively fished permit[6]. Permits are eventually retired if they are not transferred or renewed. There is also a limit of 300 horseshoe crabs per trip for all horseshoe crab permit holders. This trip limit is automatically increased or decreased in season based on overall quota use by a date-certain to keep the fishery open throughout the viable fishing season while ensuring there is sufficient bait reaching the market to supply the state's conch pot fishery. Additionally, there is a static open access limit of 75 horseshoe crabs for mobile gear fishers who do not hold a horseshoe crab permit but participate in a state or municipal licensed mobile gear fishery. This is authorized to reduce regulatory discarding.

[6] Actively fished means the current permit holder has landed and sold at least one horseshoe crab annually in at least four of the past five years.

Lastly, the bait fishery is prohibited in the Pleasant Bay complex within the towns of Chatham, Harwich, and Orleans (Figure 4). This closure was implemented on an emergency basis in 2006 and then permanently adopted in 2007. This was done in response to a surge in hand harvest effort coming from Cape Cod shellfish fishers displaced from municipal shellfish fisheries due to extensive red tide closures. This watershed is unique in that it may be a semi-closed population of horseshoe crabs which as a result may be quickly depleted in response to increases in harvest. For these reasons, the Pleasant Bay complex was closed to bait fishing, but remained open to the biomedical harvest, which has occurred in this area for about 50 years.

Bait Fishery Performance

Historically, the bait fishery was predominately a hand harvest fishery that occurred during the spring spawning period. There was some additional incidental catch occurring in the Nantucket Sound summertime mixed trawl fishery and in municipally managed quahog dredge fisheries in Eastern Nantucket Sound and along Billingsgate Shoal. However, effort in this fishery has shifted overtime towards the Nantucket Sound trawl fleet (Table 2) that catches them in summer and fall when the crabs migrate to deeper waters. This shift was in response to both regulatory actions and changing fishery economics. The hand harvest fishery targeted spawning crabs on along beaches and adjacent shallows during the spring period and this activity is now substantially constrained by the April 16 – June 7 prohibition on harvesting horseshoe crabs. Additionally, the mobile gear fishery fleet is facing significant economic challenges[7] that have encouraged these commercial fishers to directly target other species — including horseshoe crabs — to remain profitable.

In 2024, dealers reported the bait fishery took 139,970 horseshoe crabs, about 99% of the annual 140,000 crab quota. The ex-vessel value of these landings was reported at $404,331. This is on par with the prior two years (Table 3). Preliminary dealer reports for 2025 (through October 30, 2025) indicate the fishery has landed approximately 137,000 horseshoe crabs at a total ex-vessel value of $461,103. The ex-vessel value of an individual horseshoe crab increased from $2.13 in 2022 to $3.37 in 2025 and was likely driven by demand from the rent-a-crab program increasing the value of the horseshoe crabs taken by the bait fishery.

The increase in hand-harvest landings observed in 2023 was likely a one-time response to DMF's initial proposal to implement a spawning closure, which was ultimately not implemented until 2024. In 2024, we saw a shift to far fewer participants in the hand harvest fishery, as well as reduced landings from these fishers and the mobile gear fishery taking more than 90% of the overall harvester reported landings. Based on anecdotal data, DMF anticipates this trend was even more pronounced in 2025, as this was the first year with the April 16 – June 7 spawning closure fully implemented[8].

Mobile gear fishing for horseshoe crabs occurs almost exclusively in Nantucket Sound. The top ports for these vessels include Chatham, Hyannis, Harwich, Woods Hole, and New Bedford. There are up to two dozen trawlers that participate in the mixed trawl fishery and land some quantity of horseshoe

[7] These factors include increasing overhead costs including dockage, fuel, and ice; shifts of prime fishing grounds from nearshore to offshore — likely influenced by environmental drivers —increasing operational costs; market conditions limiting growth in fish and shellfish value; and reduced access to other fishing opportunities (e.g., groundfish).
[8] While this closure went into effect in 2024, it did not occur until April 26, allowing some amount of beach harvest at the outset of the spawning season between April 16 and April 25.

crabs along with summer flounder, squid, black sea bass, scup, and knobbed whelk. The revenues from horseshoe crab landings contribute substantially to the profitability of these commercial fishing ventures, and to some mobile gear fishers, they represent the second most valuable species retained.

Bait fishers are required to sell their catch to dealers authorized by DMF as primary buyers of horseshoe crabs. In 2024, there were 11 primary buyers actively purchasing horseshoe crabs. These bait dealers then re-sell these horseshoe crabs to service the state's conch pot fishers, by either directly supply conch pot fishers or through an intermediary sale to another bait dealer that supplies conch pot fishers. Additionally, some crabs are reportedly exported to other states where there is demand for this bait. While DMF does not track sales beyond the primary purchase between fishers and dealers, anecdotal reports from dealers suggest that most of the bait quota remains in Massachusetts and many dealers will hold this product in cold storage to meet seasonal demand.

Biomedical Fishery Management and Performance

Biomedical processors bleed horseshoe crabs to produce LAL — a reagent test used to detect and quantify bacterial endotoxins and diagnose fungal infection. This tool is critical to public health and safety. There are currently two biomedical processors in Massachusetts who acquire and bleed horseshoe crabs to manufacture LAL — Associates of Cape Cod (ACC) and Charles River Laboratories (CRL). ACC has been involved in Massachusetts' biomedical horseshoe crab fishery for more than 50 years. While CRL was founded in Boston — and is currently headquartered in Wilmington, MA — the Massachusetts-based company only began to participate in the state's biomedical fishery in 2022 (having previously sourced crabs for bleeding and LAL production from other Atlantic coastal states).

The biomedical fishery is a catch-and-release program. Harvesters capture the crabs, and the horseshoe crabs are made available through a supply chain to biomedical processors. The processors then bleed the horseshoe crabs for LAL production, and the bled horseshoe crabs are released alive back to the general area of harvest within 36 hours of harvest. Prior to release, the bled crabs are conspicuously marked with an annually designated design to prevent rebleeding in the same calendar year. As similar biomedical horseshoe crab fisheries occur along the Atlantic coast, the ASMFC developed a series of best practices to maximize survival throughout this process. These practices were developed with input from the various biomedical processors along the Atlantic coast and include guidance on pre and post bleeding handling and transportation practices. DMF requires these companies to comply with these best management practices by regulation and by permit conditions. Based on the best available science, the ASMFC estimates mortality rates are about 15%.

DMF historically regulated this fishery through general harvester and dealer reporting requirements, trip limits to match common industry practices, and permit conditions to establish best management practices. Then in 2023, DMF and the MFAC adopted a more robust management program to respond to the increase in biomedical landings[9] and resulting concerns that continued growth in this fishery may increase overall mortality to the state's horseshoe crab population. Most importantly, mortality was capped at 2022 levels, while allowing for some growth in the biomedical industry given the importance of LAL to global human health. This was accomplished principally through the adoption of a 200,000 biomedical horseshoe crab quota. The annual quota was then allocated evenly between licensed biomedical processors. To create this quota, DMF reallocated quota from the bait to

[9] The exact data on this are confidential pursuant to G.L. c. 130, §21. Given the number of entities reporting data in this fishery, even the aggregated results may disclose the reported data of a single business.

biomedical fishery and considered historic landings by the biomedical fishery. The bait quota was reduced from 165,000 horseshoe crabs to 140,000 horseshoe crabs. The reduction in the bait quota was then reallocated to the biomedical fishery using a 1:6 ratio based on the presumptive mortality rates in each fishery (100% in the bait fishery and 15% in the biomedical fishery). The revised 140,0000 horseshoe crab bait quota was in-line with 10-year mean landings for the bait fishery. Moreover, it was in-excess of estimated annual bait demand (80,000 – 100,000 horseshoe crabs) for the state's conch pot fishery[10].

DMF also adopted a more extensive permitting program for the biomedical fishery. All entities processing horseshoe crabs in Massachusetts are required to obtain a Biomedical Processor Permit. Issuance of this permit is subject to a control date that may limit issuance to only those entities involved in the activity prior to January 1, 2023, effectively closing the door on processors other than ACC and CRL to work in Massachusetts. This permit also authorized these entities to purchase biomedical horseshoe crabs directly from fishers. All other entities purchasing biomedical crabs directly from harvesters would need to obtain a Biomedical Dealer Permit. Issuance of such permits was limited only to those entities with a documented relationship with a permitted biomedical processor. Finally, all harvesters are required to obtain a Biomedical Harvester Permit. Issuance of such permits was limited only to those entities with a documented relationship with a permitted biomedical processor or dealer. Mandating relationships between harvesters, dealers, and processors was deemed necessary given the catch-and-release nature of this fishery and the interest in maximizing the survival of horseshoe crabs.

Given data confidentiality requirements pursuant to G.L. c. 130, §21 it is difficult to speak to the specifics of the performance of the biomedical fishery. However, over the past three seasons (2023-2025), the fishery has approached total utilization of its quota. Further, participation generally involves fewer than 10 biomedical harvesters, fewer than five biomedical dealers, and two biomedical processors. Biomedical harvest is limited to trawlers working Nantucket Sound and hand harvesters fishing in shallow estuaries and embayments along eastern Cape Cod where the crabs remain accessible after spawning (e.g., Pleasant Bay, Nauset Inlet).

Conch Pot Fishery Management Measures and Performance

Whelks are a type of marine snail. There are two commercially viable whelk species caught in Massachusetts state waters — channeled whelk and knobbed whelk. Channeled whelk are primarily caught in a directed pot fishery, whereas knobbed whelk are primarily caught as incidental catch in mobile gear fisheries (e.g., trawls and shellfish dredges). The primary area of harvest for both species is Nantucket Sound. Both species are processed in Massachusetts with New Bedford being the primary processing center. Product is then sold domestically and internationally, with Asia being the primary international market. For the purpose of this discussion, DMF will focus on the so-called conch pot fishery for channeled whelk, as horseshoe crabs are its principal bait.

[10] This estimate was derived using annual pot haul data for the prior decade (2013-2022) and a 2015 DMF survey of conch pot fishers on their bait use, which demonstrated conch pot fishers used about ¼ to ⅓ crab per pot haul.

Channeled Whelk Fishery Management

In 2018, DMF completed a stock assessment for channeled whelk resource in Nantucket Sound and determined the stock was overfished and overfishing was occurring. This was likely driven by several concurrent factors, including environmental-driven declines in the abundance of the Southern New England lobster stock causing an opportunistic shift of fixed gear fishing into the conch pot fishery, increased demand for the product driven by the growth of export consuming economies in Asia, and inadequate conservation regulations to address this rapid shift in effort.

Since 2015, DMF and the MFAC have worked to establish a more thorough whelk fishery management program focused on increasing size-at-harvest to size-at-maturity. This work remains ongoing and scheduled size-at-harvest changes have been postponed to investigate potential alternative management options. Other regulations affecting the conch pot fishery include a limited entry permitting scheme, a 200-trap limit per permit holder, an open season of April 15 – December 15, and comprehensive dealer and harvester reporting.

Conch Pot Fishery Performance and Demand for Horseshoe Crab Bait

Performance and effort in this fishery — as evaluated by annual pot hauls have — been on a general declining trend since 2013 (Figure 5). This is likely in response to declining abundance, regulatory controls to increase size-at-harvest, and more recently, challenges with domestic and international markets. Commercial fisher reported data from the most recent three-years (2022 – 2024) indicate the total number of pot hauls has gone from 287,388 in 2022 to 249,725 in 2023, to 213,848 in 2024 (Figure 5). Horseshoe crabs are the principal bait for the conch pot fishery. DMF's understanding is that fishers generally mix at least ¼ to ⅓ of a horseshoe crab[11] with other bait per pot haul. Declining pot hauls in the conch pot fishery means reduced demand for horseshoe crabs as bait.

Over the past three years (2022-2024), the number of permits fished has ranged from 57 to 45; average annual landings of channeled whelk have ranged from 718,156 pounds to 919,284 pounds, and average annual ex-vessel value has ranged from about $2 million to $3.8 million (Table 4). Anecdotal conservations from dealers indicate there were significant market issues in 2024 that depressed demand, but markets have been relatively stable so far in 2025. As of October 30, 2025, dealers have reported about 600,000 pounds of channeled whelk have been landed this calendar year, worth about $1.8 million in ex-vessel value. Accordingly, with about six weeks remaining in this year's conch pot season, DMF anticipates effort, landings, and value should rebound compared to 2024.

During this three-year stanza (2022-2024), Martha's Vineyard ports have landed about 35% of the overall catch. Other important ports include Harwich, Chatham, Fairhaven, and New Bedford. As of 2024, there were 14 dealers acting as primary buyers of channeled whelk. Among these 14 dealers, a majority of the product was purchased by three entities – Red's Best (Boston/New Bedford), Big G Seafood (New Bedford), and Ocean C Star (New Bedford) – who are the primary in-state processors of this product.

[11] The amount of horseshoe crab used per pot haul is generally dictated by the size of the horseshoe crab. If a fisher is using a smaller crab then it is anticipated that as much as one-third of the animal may be used.

Economic Considerations Related to H.B. 898

When analyzing this Bill, there are also significant economic considerations. These include impacts to bait harvesters, bait dealers, whelk harvesters, whelk dealers, and biomedical firms. These impacts need to also be viewed in the context of larger impacts on the seafood industry, given the interconnectedness of these businesses, the concerted effort to maintain working waterfronts, and the political interests in addressing challenges facing American seafood competitiveness.

H.B. 898 would eliminate access to the bait quota by harvesters. In 2024, there were 32 active permit holders landing horseshoe crabs. DMF anticipates that while this number may be lower in 2025 (and in subsequent years) due to the limiting effect that the spawning closure has on hand harvesters, there are likely about 20 permit holders — mostly mobile gear fishers — who will remain active in the horseshoe crab fishery moving forward. Each of these fishers would see their access to the bait quota eliminated.

While loss of access to the bait quota may result in some permit holders becoming active in the biomedical fishery, most will not be able to make this adjustment. There are significant barriers to entry to the biomedical fishery, including vessel size, investment into infrastructure necessary to appropriately handle crabs onboard their vessel, and access to a biomedical dealer or processor. Further, biomedical dealers and processors have a substantial interest in working with only a small number of harvesters who unload at ports convenient to the biomedical facilities so as to ensure demand is met in a timely manner and the horseshoe crabs are handled in a manner that maximizes survivability.

Banning bait harvest threatens the profitability of all active horseshoe crab harvesters. A number of potentially impacted mobile gear fishers have reached out to DMF expressing their concerns, and how if the Bill were to be signed into law, it may impact their profitability and potentially force them out of the inshore trawl fishery. If this were to occur, there may be substantial cumulative impacts on our seafood industry. This would include reducing the supply of other locally caught fish (e.g., summer flounder, squid, knobbed whelk, scup, black sea bass) that negatively impact the dealers and infrastructure in the commercial fishing ports where these species are landed.

The state's conch pot fishery will also be negatively impacted by a ban on harvesting bait crabs, as the fishery would lose access to its principal bait source. Losing access to local horseshoe crabs will decrease the profitability of this fishery by either forcing participants into using less productive baits or into importing horseshoe crabs at a premium cost from another jurisdiction. This loss of productivity will occur during a period of time when this fishery is already challenged by lowered stock abundance, regulatory decisions to increase size-at-harvest to protect spawning stock biomass, and macro-economic factors affecting domestic and international market demand.

There are downstream impacts on the dealer sector as well. In 2024, there were 11 primary buyers of bait horseshoe crabs (and only one of these were also active involved in the 2024 biomedical horseshoe crab fishery). Accordingly, as many as 10 dealers would lose access to the valuable horseshoe crab bait quota. Additionally, there are 14 entities that purchased channeled whelk in Massachusetts in 2024. Each of these entities would suffer a loss of revenue from a less productive whelk fishery.

Lastly, nearly all the annual bait quota is repurposed to the biomedical industry through the rent-a-crab program. Should the bait fishery be prohibited, the biomedical industry could lose access to a large number of horseshoe crabs that they have annually relied on to meet demand for LAL production. This would create significant uncertainty in these business environments and likely necessitate that DMF establishes a larger biomedical quota to supplement the loss. Even if additional biomedical quota were to be made available, the loss of the bait quota could trigger a reduction in the capacity of the working waterfront (harvesters, dealers, and infrastructure) to handle the more-narrow needs of the biomedical fishery. This could uproot long-standing functional business models and produce unanticipated, unpredictable, and costly for the state's biomedical processors to navigate to secure a sufficient supply of horseshoe crabs for LAL production.

Conclusions

Proponents of H.B. 898 often argue that Massachusetts' horseshoe crab populations are declining or are at historic lows. These arguments are largely based on anecdotal reports or personal memories recounting large numbers of horseshoe crabs on spawning beaches. The lack of historical data makes it impossible to corroborate these assertions or make inferences to abundance at present. As described above, the best available science — unanimously backed by state and federal horseshoe crab biologists — demonstrates that horseshoe crab populations in Massachusetts are increasing in abundance and there is a strong correlation to infer this is driven by the conservation management efforts of DMF and the ASMFC. Further, those areas north of Cape Cod — where some proponents claim horseshoe crab populations are most in need of protection from fishing mortality — have had limited historical commercial fishery landings and are unlikely to contribute meaningfully to commercial bait harvest moving forward given existing regulatory controls.

Additionally, the potential economic impacts on the fishing industry, seafood industry, and biomedical industry warrants consideration. Approximately, 30 harvesters would lose access to a horseshoe crab bait fishery that has recently been valued at over $400,000. Additionally, about 50 conch pot fishers would lose access to their preferred bait further diminishing the performance of the channeled whelk fishery, valued at $2-3 million dollars annually. This would also directly impact the 11 horseshoe crab dealers and 14 conch dealers who actively purchased and sold or processed horseshoe crabs and channeled whelk in 2024. Given the interconnected nature of the state's seafood industry, there are also likely opaquely understood cumulative impacts that could have substantial negative impacts on the state's seafood industry, as well as food production and seafood availability in the Commonwealth. The loss of the bait quota, and any consequent loss of capacity to the biomedical fishery, could negatively impact biomedical processing and LAL production in the Commonwealth, and the jobs they create.

Lastly, there are procedural concerns. There is a tried-and-true regulatory process to evaluate fisheries management actions. In 1960, the Massachusetts Legislature established the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission to investigate the challenges related to the management of marine fisheries in the Commonwealth. A principal finding was to establish a process to manage the Commonwealth's marine resources and fisheries through an expert regulatory agency subject to the oversight of a public body with expertise in the state's fisheries and seafood industry. Based on this advice, in 1962, the legislature wisely permanently codified the MFAC as an advisory body to DMF with certain regulatory oversight. Over the past sixty-plus years, DMF and the MFAC have endeavored to analyze fishery science and management issues and develop responsive regulatory programs that

sustainably manage the Commonwealth's marine fishery resources and promote its fisheries and coastal culture.

Appendix of Figures and Tables

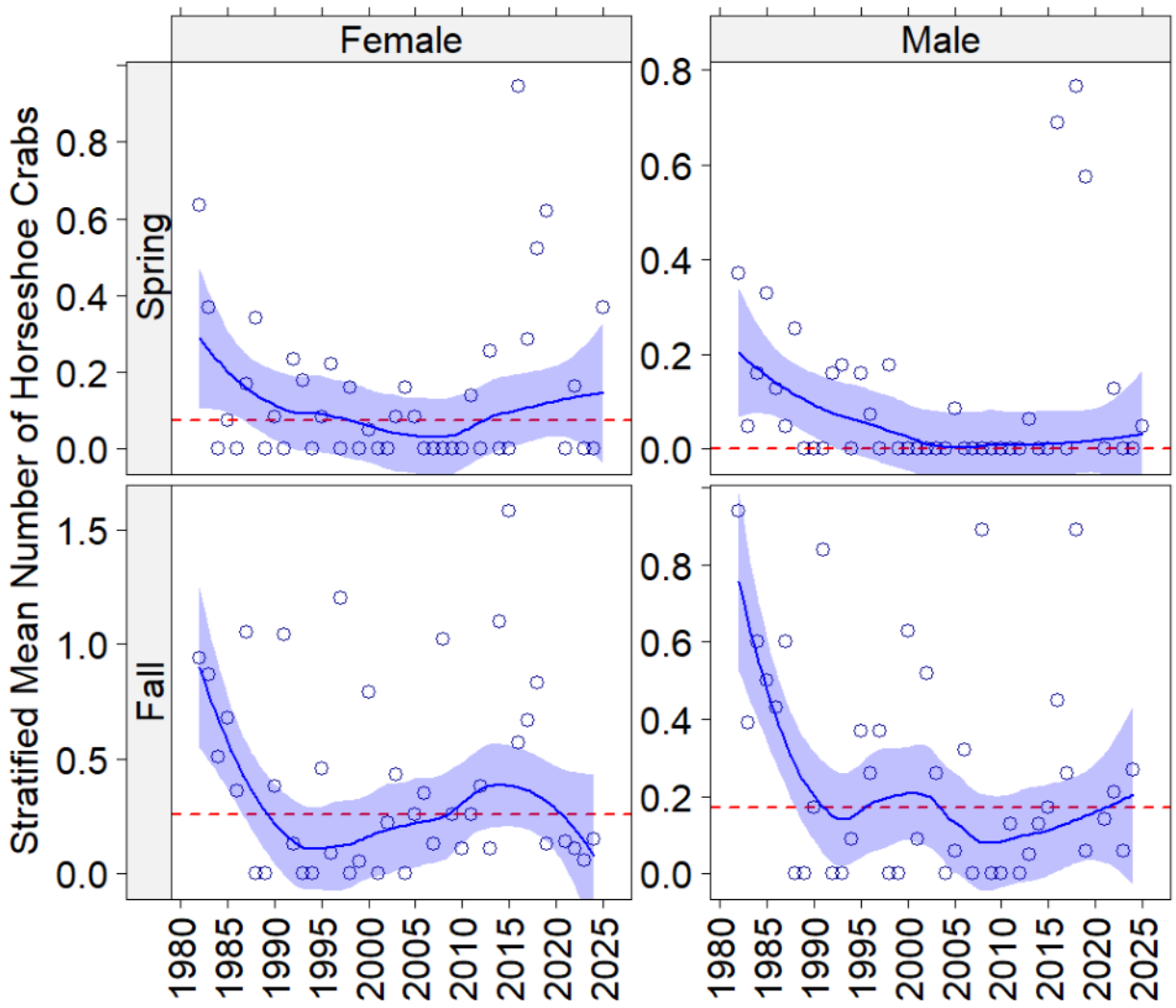


Figure 1. DMF bottom trawl survey north of Cape Cod, by survey season and crab sex through the 2025 spring survey (2025 fall data is not yet available). The survey was not conducted in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Red, dashed lines are time series medians, blue lines are fitted trend lines (LOESS smoother). Blue shaded areas are an approximate 95% confidence interval for LOESS fits.

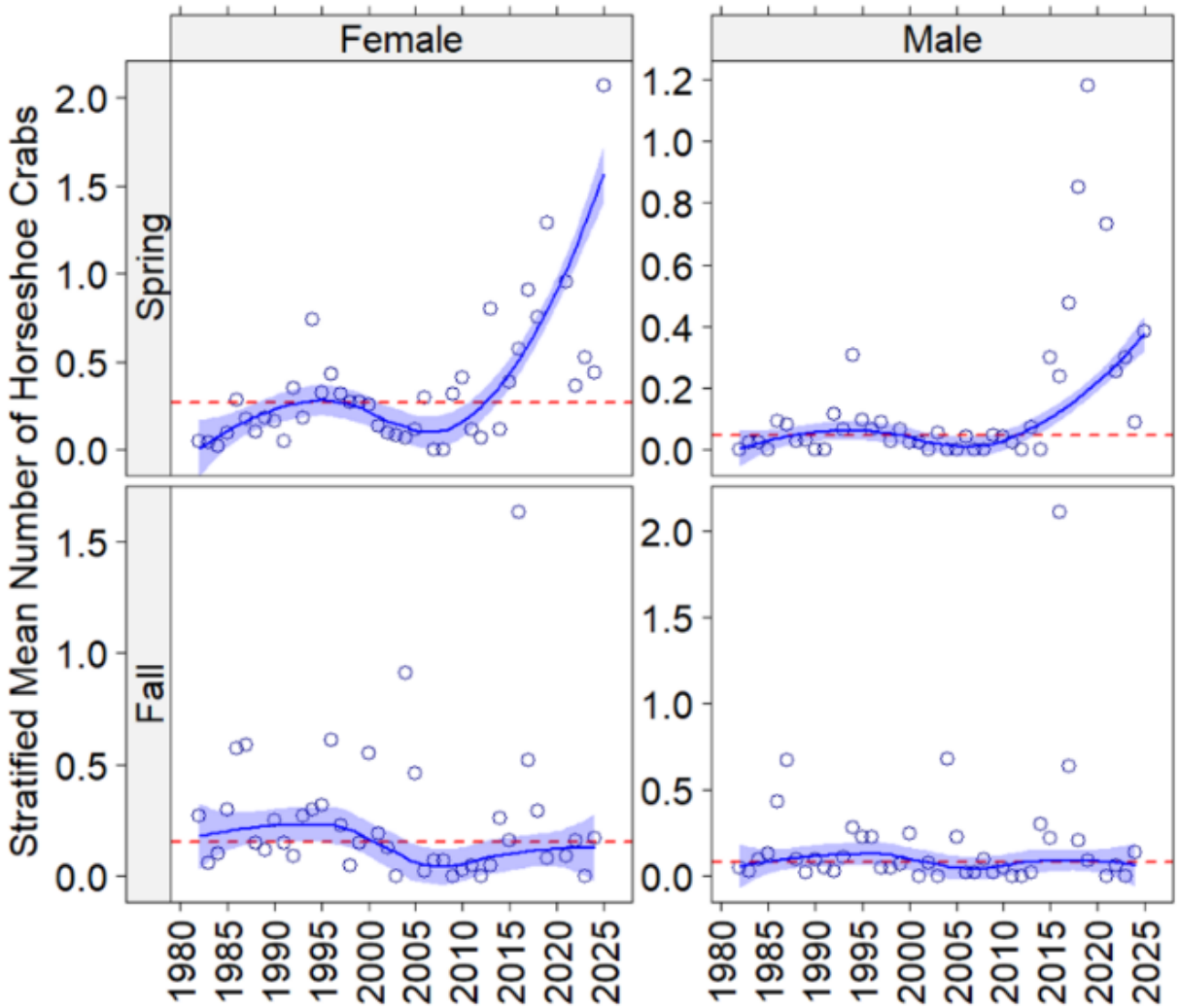


Figure 2. DMF bottom trawl survey south of Cape Cod, by survey season and crab sex through the 2025 spring survey (2025 fall data is not yet available). The survey was not conducted in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Red, dashed lines are time series medians, blue lines are fitted trend lines (LOESS smoother). Blue shaded areas are an approximate 95% confidence interval for LOESS fits.

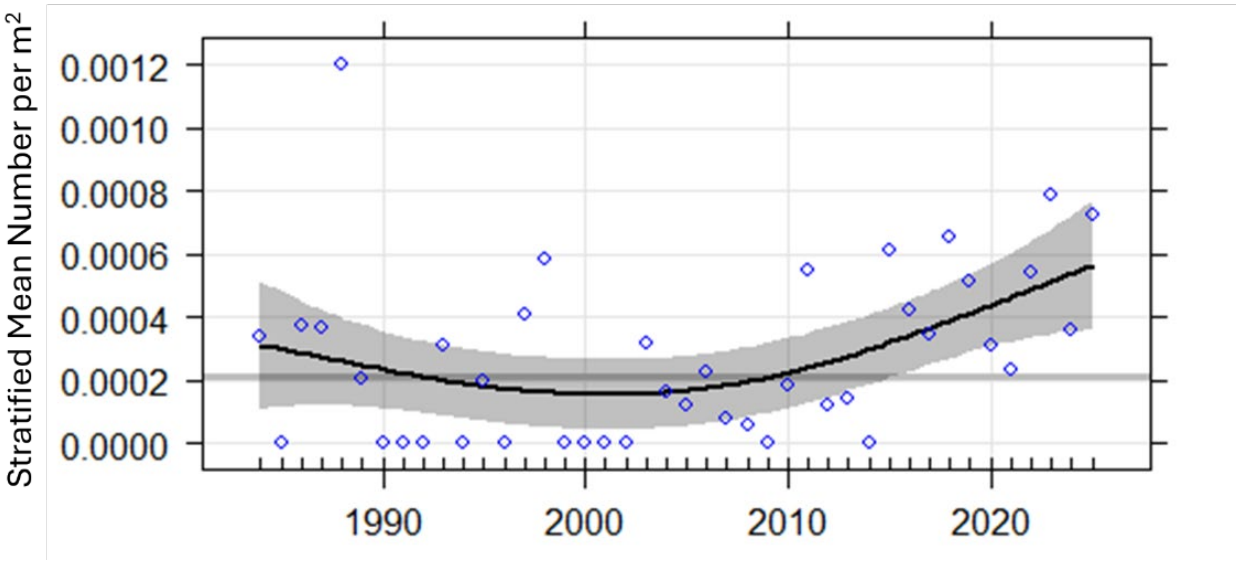


Figure 3**.** Stratified mean number of horseshoe crabs per square meter from the Massachusetts Seine Survey from 1984-2024. The solid gray line is the time series median. Black line is a generalized additive model (GAM) fit. The shaded area around the GAM fit is the 95% confidence interval of the model fit. Circles are annual means.

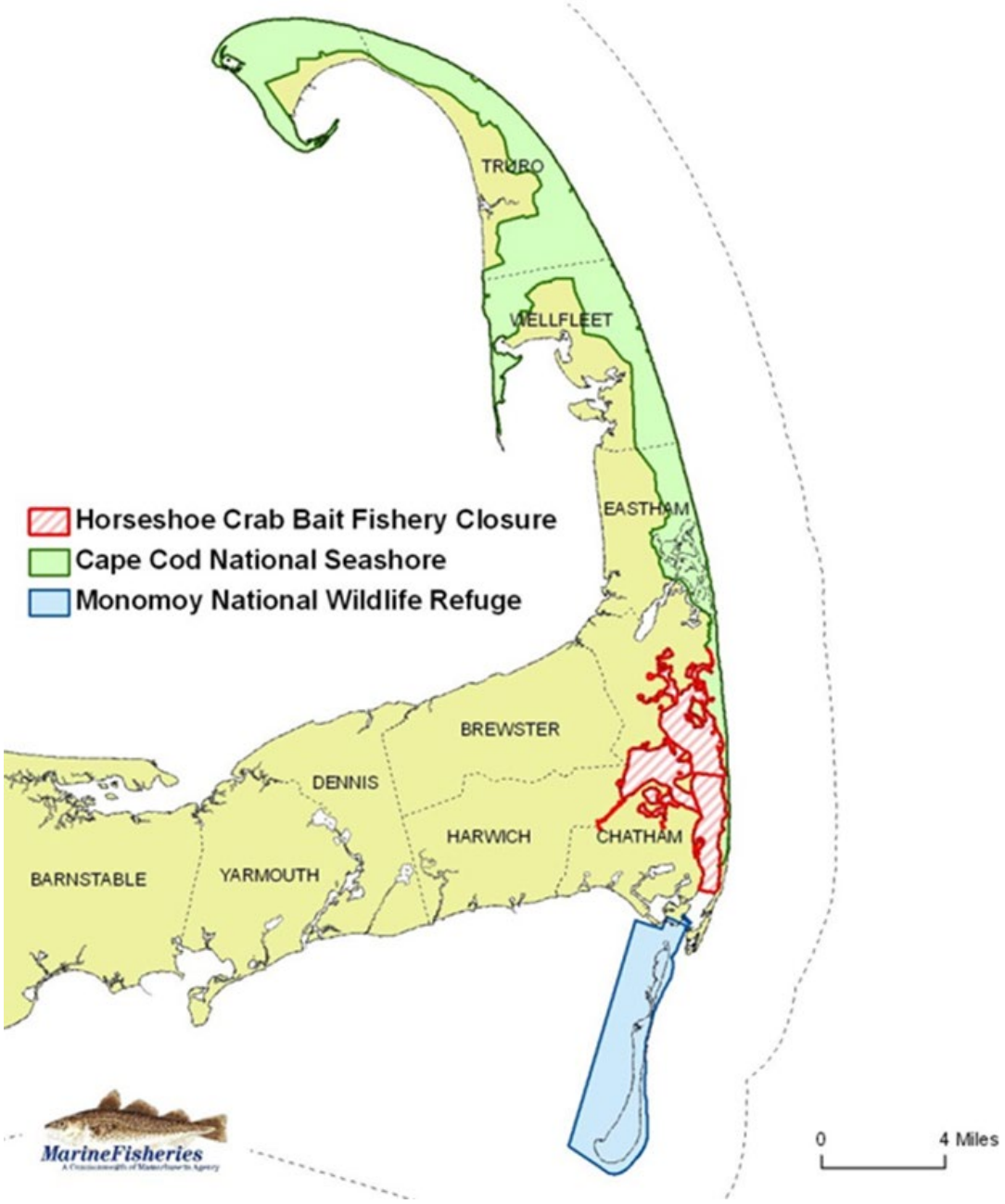


Figure 4**.** Horseshoe Crab Harvest Closures at the Cape Cod National Seashore, Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge, and Pleasant Bay Complex

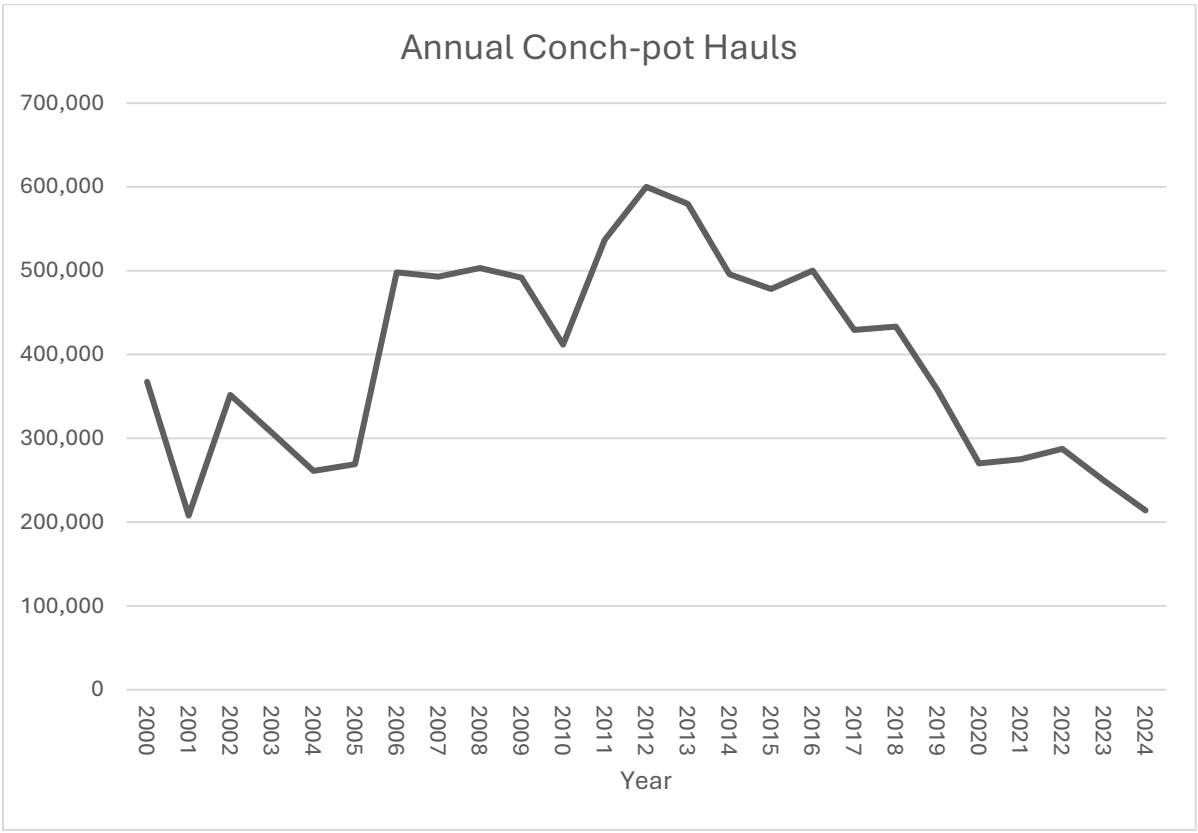


Figure 5**.** Annual Pot-Hauls in the Massachusetts Conch Pot Fishery, 2000 – 2024. Data Source: Massachusetts commercial catch reports and federal vessel trip reports as of October 2025. Data for 2024 is preliminary and subject to change. Data for all years may be inflated as permit holders do not distinguish between conch pot and lobster trap hauls and lobster traps may produce some bycatch of channeled whelks.

Region	Beach	Time of Day	2025 vs Median	15-year Trend	10-year Trend
Cape Cod Bay	Duxbury	Day	Above	Negative	Negative
	Duxbury	Night	Above	Negative	Positive
	Long Beach	Day	Equal	NA	NA
	Long Beach	Night	Equal	NA	NA
	Millway	Day	Below	Positive	Positive
	Millway	Night	Above	Positive	Positive
	Long Pasture	Day	Above	Positive	Positive
	Sanctuary Beach	Day	Below	Negative	Positive
	Indian Neck	Day	Above	Positive	Positive
	Indian Neck	Night	Below	Positive	Positive
	Great Island	Day	Above	Positive	Positive
Outer Cape Cod	Priscillas Landing	Day	Above	Positive	Positive
	Marsh 2-3	Day	Above	NA	Positive
	Erica's Beach	Day	Above	Positive	Positive
Nantucket Sound	Stage Harbor	Day	NA	NA	NA
	Stage Harbor	Night	NA	NA	NA
	Bass River	Day	Above	NA	Positive
	Bass River	Night	Above	NA	Positive
	Monomoy	Day	Above	Positive	Positive
	Monomoy	Night	Above	Positive	Positive
	Warrens Landing	Day	Below	Positive	Positive
	Warrens Landing	Night	Above	Positive	Positive
	Tashmoo	Day	Above	NA	Positive
	Tashmoo	Night	Above	NA	NA
Buzzards Bay	Swifts Beach	Day	Above	Negative	Positive
	Swifts Beach	Night	Below	Negative	Negative

Table 1. Summary of Massachusetts Horseshoe Crab Spawning Survey results through 2025 by region, survey location, and time of survey (day or night). The "2025 vs Median" column shows whether the 2025 survey data point was above, below, or equal to its respective time series median. The 15-year and 10-year trend columns show whether the survey has a positive or negative trend over that time period using a Mann-Kendall test. NA's are used when a survey's time series is too short, or there is missing data.

YEAR	HAND	MOBILE	OTHER	% MOBILE
2008	64,822	20,397	3,706	22.94%
2009	59,117	18,118	1,527	23.00%
2010	49,427	21,169	1,428	29.39%
2011	35,185	37,468	13,750	43.36%
2012	53,079	56,346	9,128	47.53%
2013	70,396	85,609	3,856	53.55%
2014	77,035	50,902	2,567	39.00%
2015	68,065	45,270	3,065	38.89%
2016	63,936	46,925	967	41.96%
2017	68,554	58,588	4,681	44.44%
2018	70,643	84,378	3,981	53.07%
2019	79,186	85,606	1,823	51.38%
2020	66,852	76,721	**Confidential**	53.44%
2021	52,546	89,603	2,784	61.82%
2022	40,411	95,487	0	70.26%
2023	83,753	50,837	0	37.77%
2024	10,155	124,751	0	92.47%

Table 2**.** Massachusetts bait horseshoe crab landings (count) by gear type and year. Data Sources: MA ACR and TL Reports, NMFS VTR. Data field marked is confidential is withheld pursuant to G.L. c. 130, §21.

Year	Bait Crabs Landed	Total Ex-Vessel Value	Average Ex-Vessel Price per Crab
2022	134,753	$287,347	$2.13
2023	139,846	$335,386	$2.40
2024	139,970	$404,331	$2.89
2025*	137,001	$461,103	$3.37

Table 3**.** Dealer reported Massachusetts horseshoe crabs landing by count, total annual ex-vessel value, and average price per crab, 2022 – 2025. Data source: SAFIS Dealer Database as of October 2025. * Data for 2025 is preliminary and subject to change. Only includes landings reported through October 30, 2025.

Year	Channeled Whelk Landings	Total Ex-Vessel Value	Average Ex-Vessel Price Per Pound
2022	917,700	$3,803,336	$4.14
2023	919,284	$2,993,633	$3.26
2024	718,156	$2,041,735	$2.84
2025*	599,222	$1,856,684	$3.10

Table 4. Dealer reported Massachusetts channeled whelk landings, total annual ex-vessel value, and average ex-vessel price per pound. Data source: SAFIS Dealer Database as of October 2025. *Data for 2025 is preliminary and subject to change. Only includes landings reported through October 30, 2025.

2025 Nantucket Sound Inshore Dragger Fleet Meeting

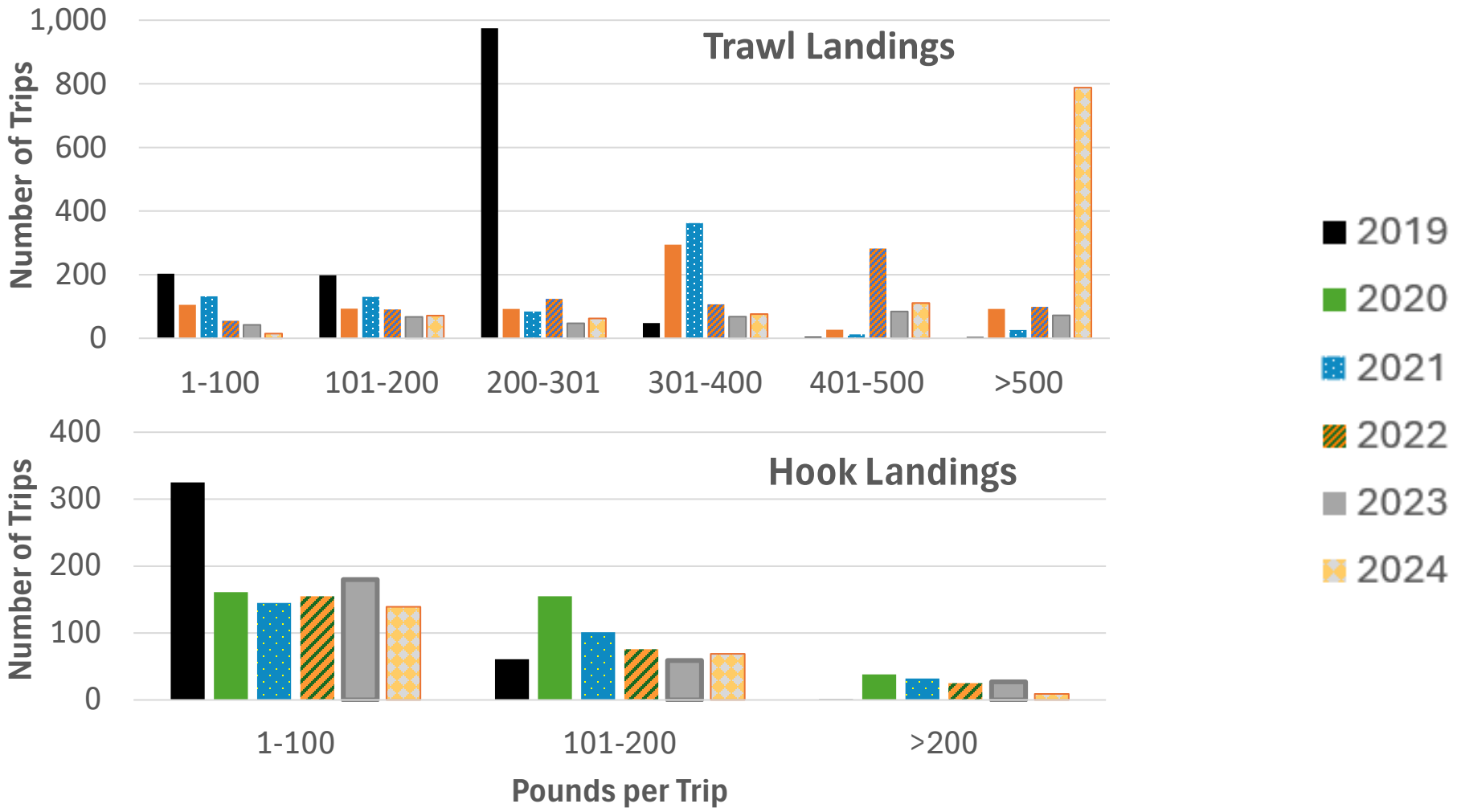
November 17, 2025

Massachusetts Division
of Marine Fisheries

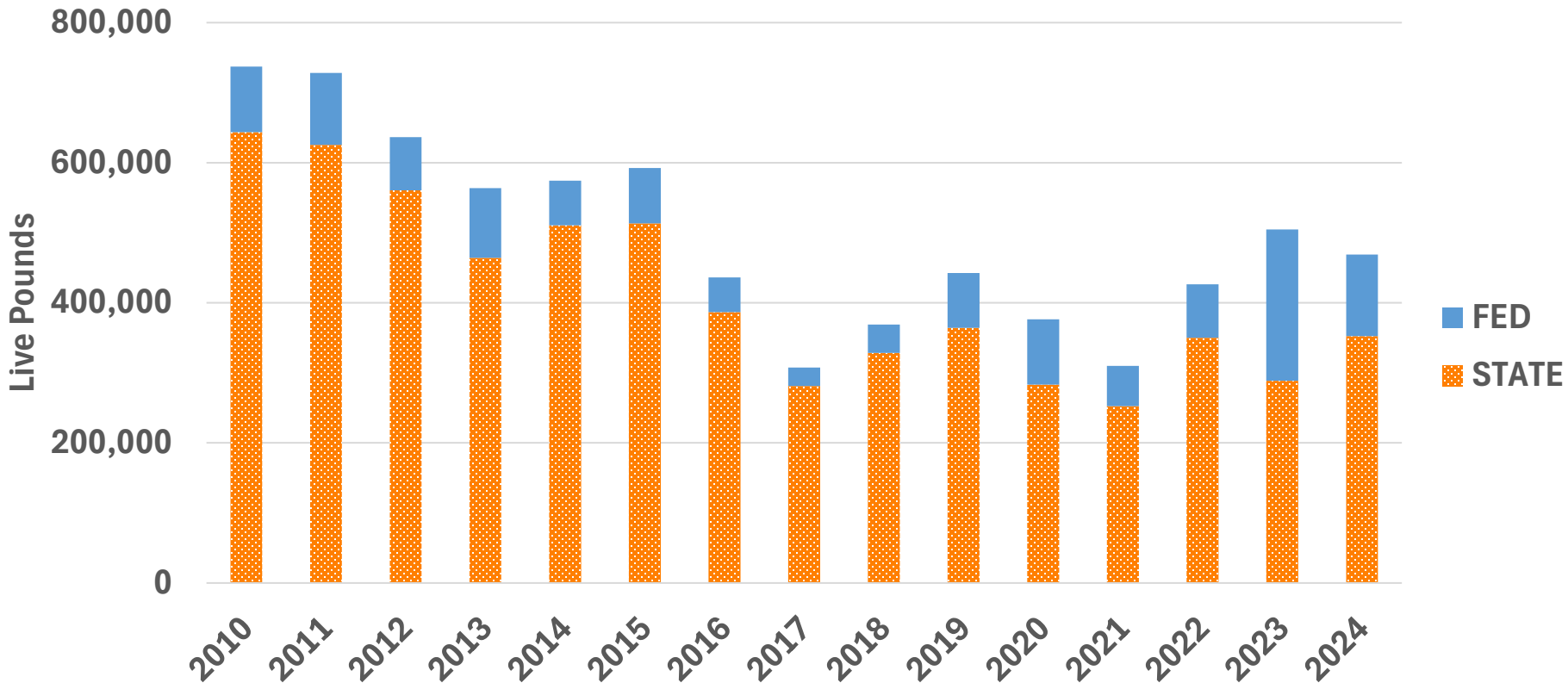
Recent History of Summer Flounder Management

- From 2021 – 2023, Massachusetts quota exceed 1M.
- Massachusetts quota was reduced by 56% from 2023 levels as stock assessment concluded overfishing occurring.
- In 2024, DMF opted not to take any management action to constrain regulations in response to reduced quota availability given recent fishery performance.
- 2024 fishery closed in late August prompting industry-drive interest to slow landings and allow quota to remain available into fall.
- DMF and the MFAC then moved to amend summer flounder limits for 2025 season.

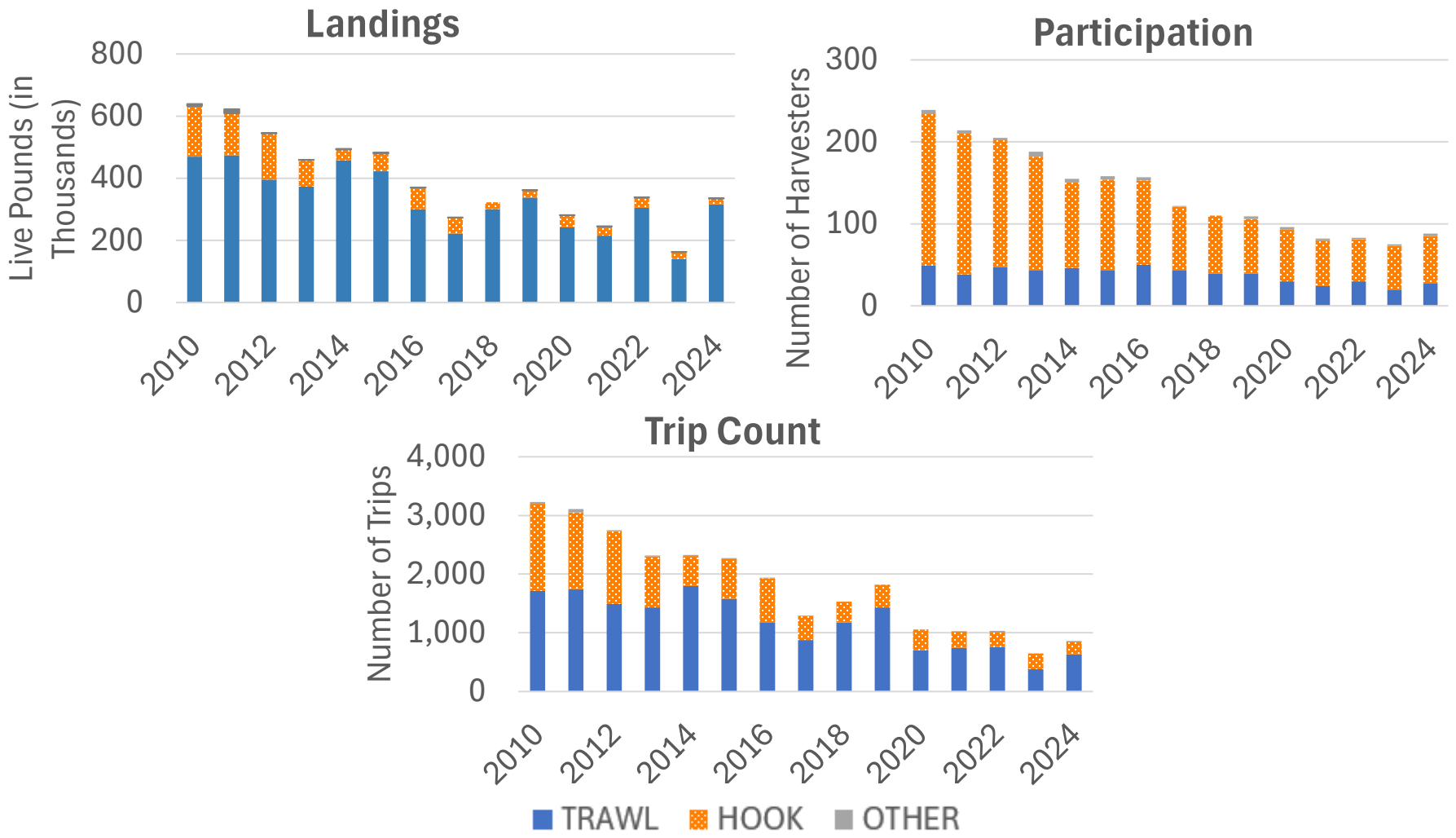
June – September State Waters Pounds per Trip Frequencies (2018-2024)



June – September Fluke Landings By Year and Distance from Shore (2010 – 2024)



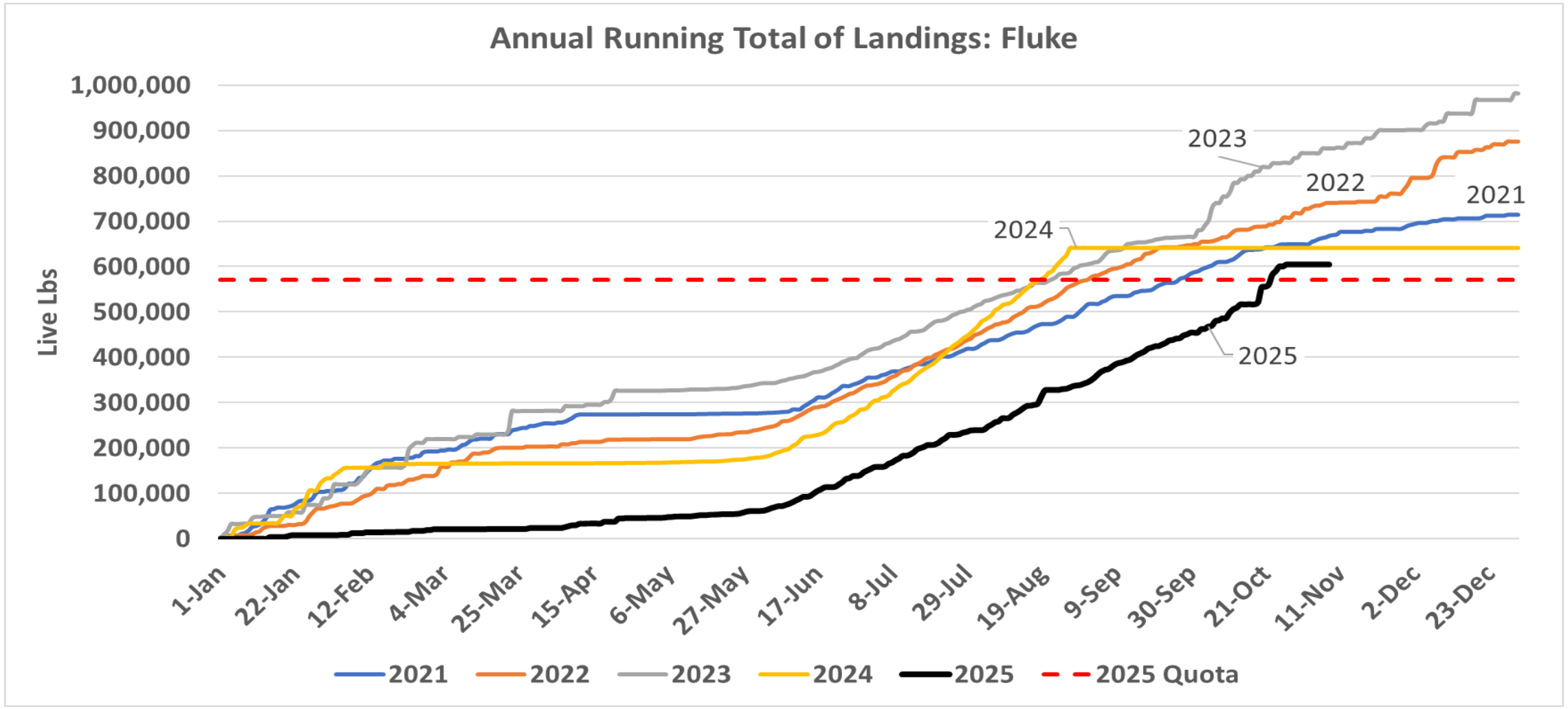
June – September State Waters Fluke Landings, Participation, and Trip Count By Gear Type (2010 – 2024)



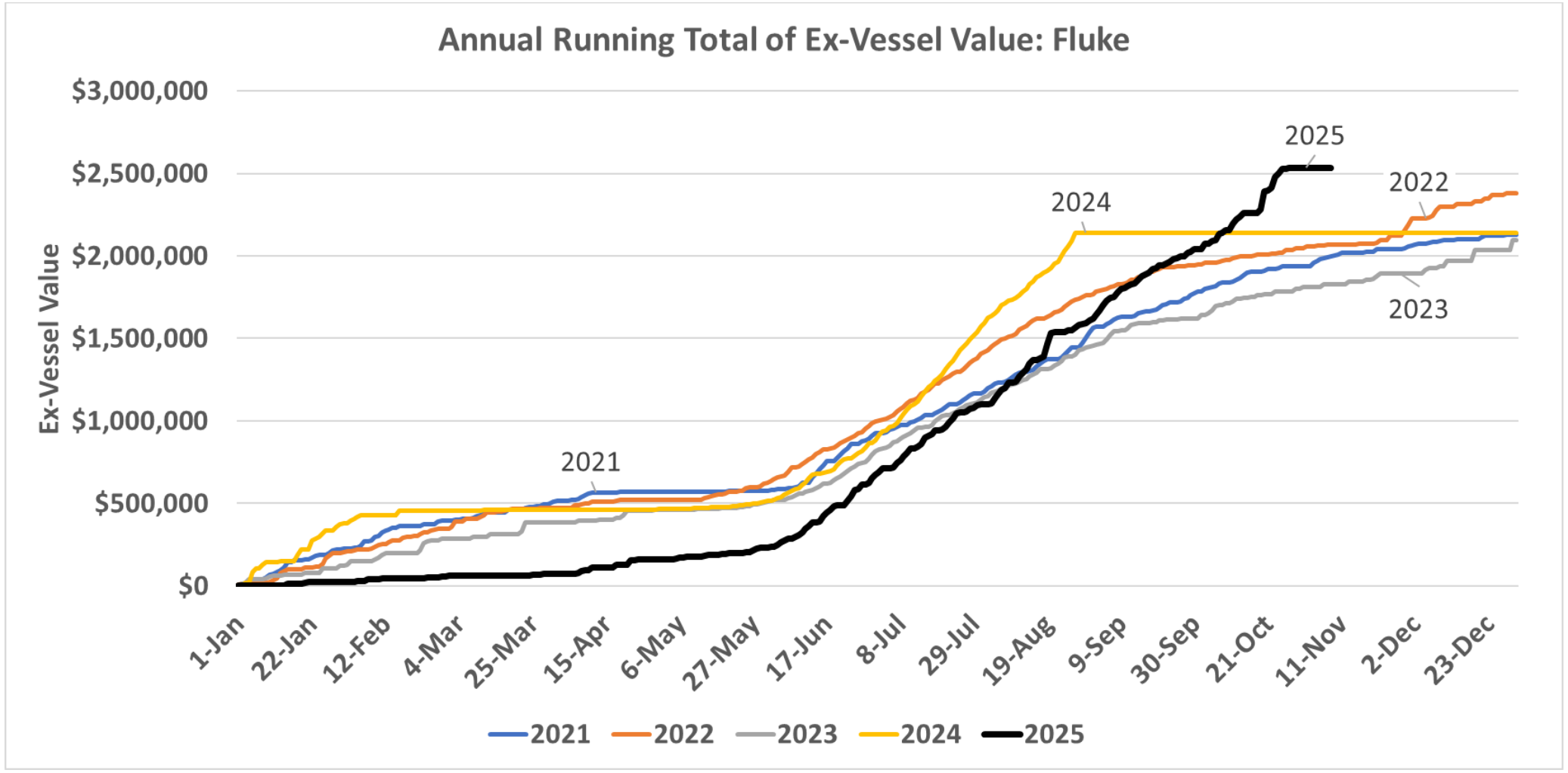
Summer Flounder Management

Period	Gear	Season	Open Days	Trip Limit	Size Limit
P1 Winter	All	Jan 1 – Apr 22	Sun - Sat	~~5,000~~ **2,000** pounds reduced to 100 pounds after ~~30%~~ **15%** quota use	14”
P2 Summer	Nets	Apr 23 – Sept 30	Sun – ~~Sat~~ **Fri Until Sept 1 then Sun - Sat**	~~600~~ **500** pounds, reduced to 400 pound if ~~80%~~ **75%** of quota is taken before ~~Aug 1~~ **Aug 15 and 200 pounds if 90% of quota is taken before Sept 1. Increase to 800 pounds on Sept 1 if more than 20% of quota remains.**	14”
P2 Summer	Hooks	Apr 23 – Sept 30	Sun – ~~Sat~~ **Fri Until Sept 1 then Sun - Sat**	~~400~~ **325** pounds, reduced to 250 pound if ~~80%~~ **75%** of quota is taken before ~~Aug 1~~ **Aug 15 and 200 pounds if 90% of quota is taken before Sept 1. Increase to 800 pounds on Sept 1 if more than 20% of quota remains.**	14”
P2 Fall	All	Oct 1 – Dec 31	Sun – Sat	800 pounds, increased to 5,000 pounds if 10% of quota remains on October 1.	14”

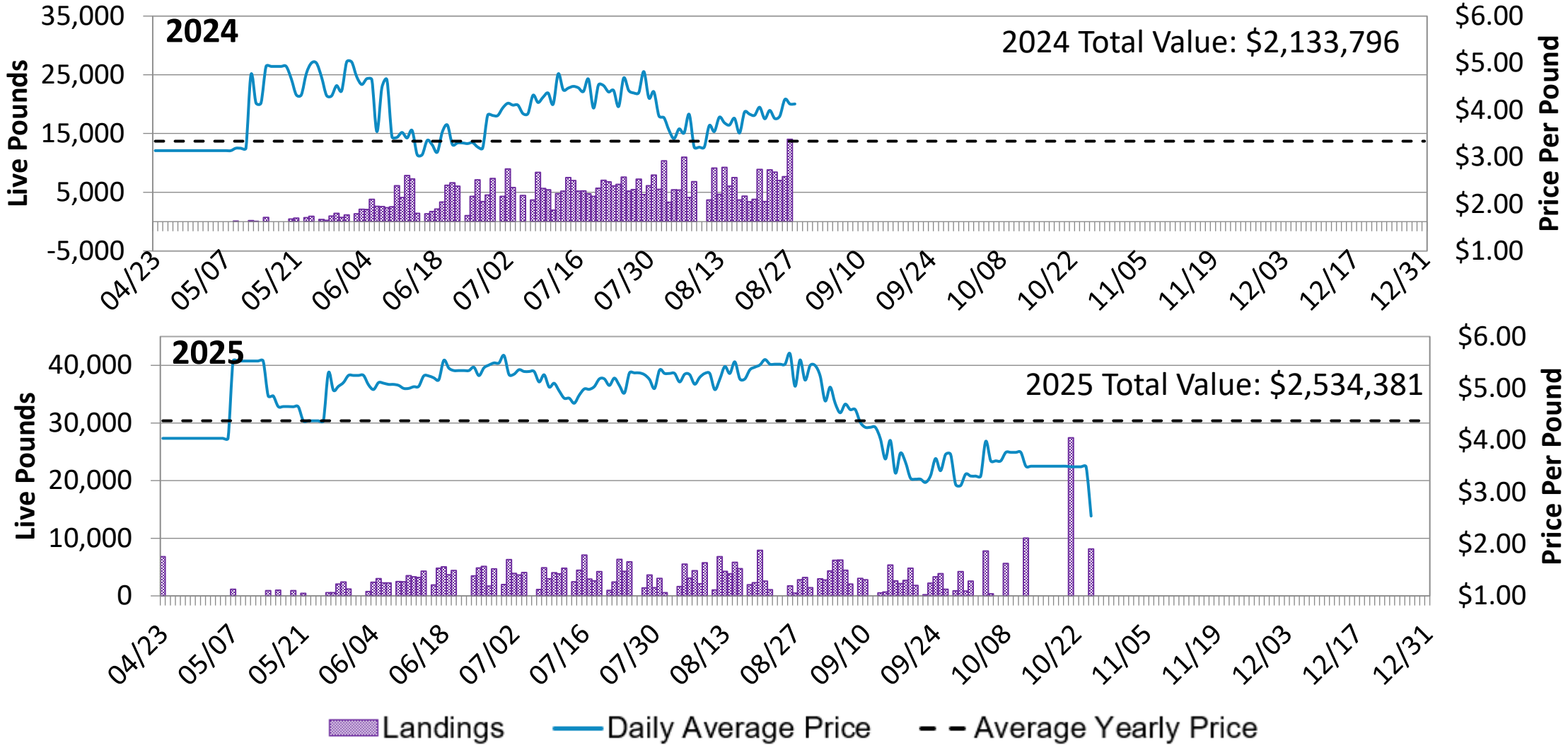
Quota Utilization (2021 – 2025)



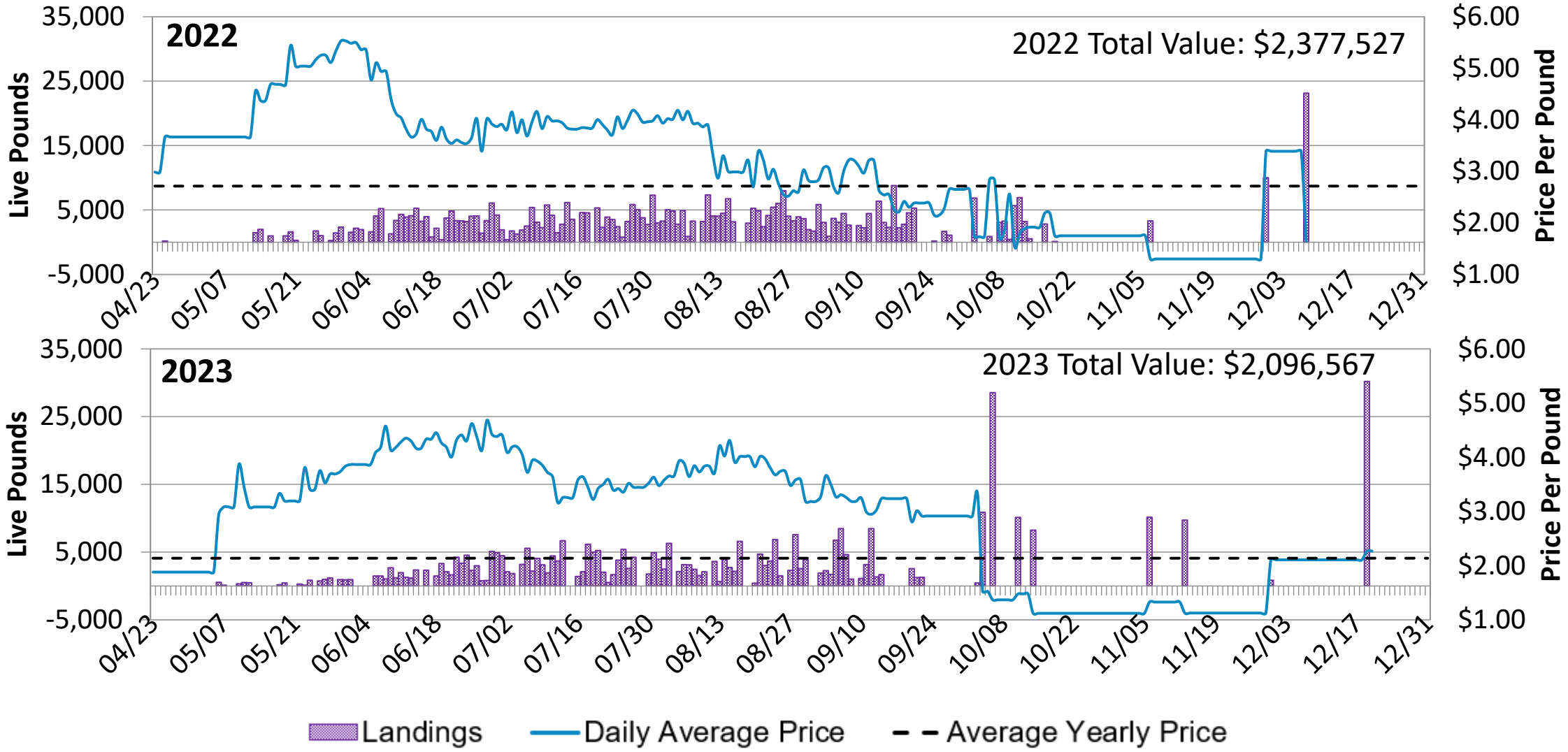
Ex-Vessel Value (2021-2025)



Daily Landings and Average Price (2024-2025)



Daily Landings and Average Price (2022-2023)



2026/2027 Summer Flounder Expectations

- Stock assessment found summer flounder are not overfished (ssb at 83% of biomass target) and overfishing is not occurring (fishing mortality is at 74% of threshold).
- Assessment predicts SSB will be above target level by 2026.
- For 2026/2027, commercial coastwide quota will increase by 45% and Massachusetts annual quota will increase by 75% to about 1 million pounds.

DMF's Pending Public Hearing Proposals

- Establish a quota-based trigger for P1 and P2 allocations.
    - If quota exceeds 750,000 pounds, the P1/P2 split will be 30/70
    - If quota is at 750,000 pounds or less, the P1/P2 split will be 15/85
- Establish a quota-based P1 trip limits.
    - If quota exceeds 750,000 pounds, trip limit will be 5,000. Otherwise, it will be 2,000.
- For P2, roll back last year's changes.
    - Increase trip limit to 600 pounds for net fishers and 400 pounds for hooks
    - Reinstate Saturdays as open fishing day
    - Start multi-day program before June 10.

Overview of Recent Changes to Horseshoe Crab Management

2023:

- Established biomedical quota of 200,000 horseshoe crabs allocated equally to each licensed biomedical processor with daily trip limits of 1,000 horseshoe crabs.
- Reduced bait crab quota from 165,000 horseshoe crabs to 140,000 horseshoe crabs to cap mortality at near 2022 levels.
- Established a 300-crab limit for all LE permit holders and a 75-crab open access limit for CAP permit holders who do not have an LE permit.
  - LE limit is increased to 400 crabs if more than 50% of the quota remains on August 1.
  - LE limit is decreased to 200 crabs if 80% of quota is taken on or before September 15.

2024

- Adopted an April 16 – June 7 closure to all horseshoe crab harvest state-wide regardless of gear type.

Horseshoe Crab Bait Fishery Performance

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2022	134,753	$287,347	$2.13
2023	139,846	$335,386	$2.40
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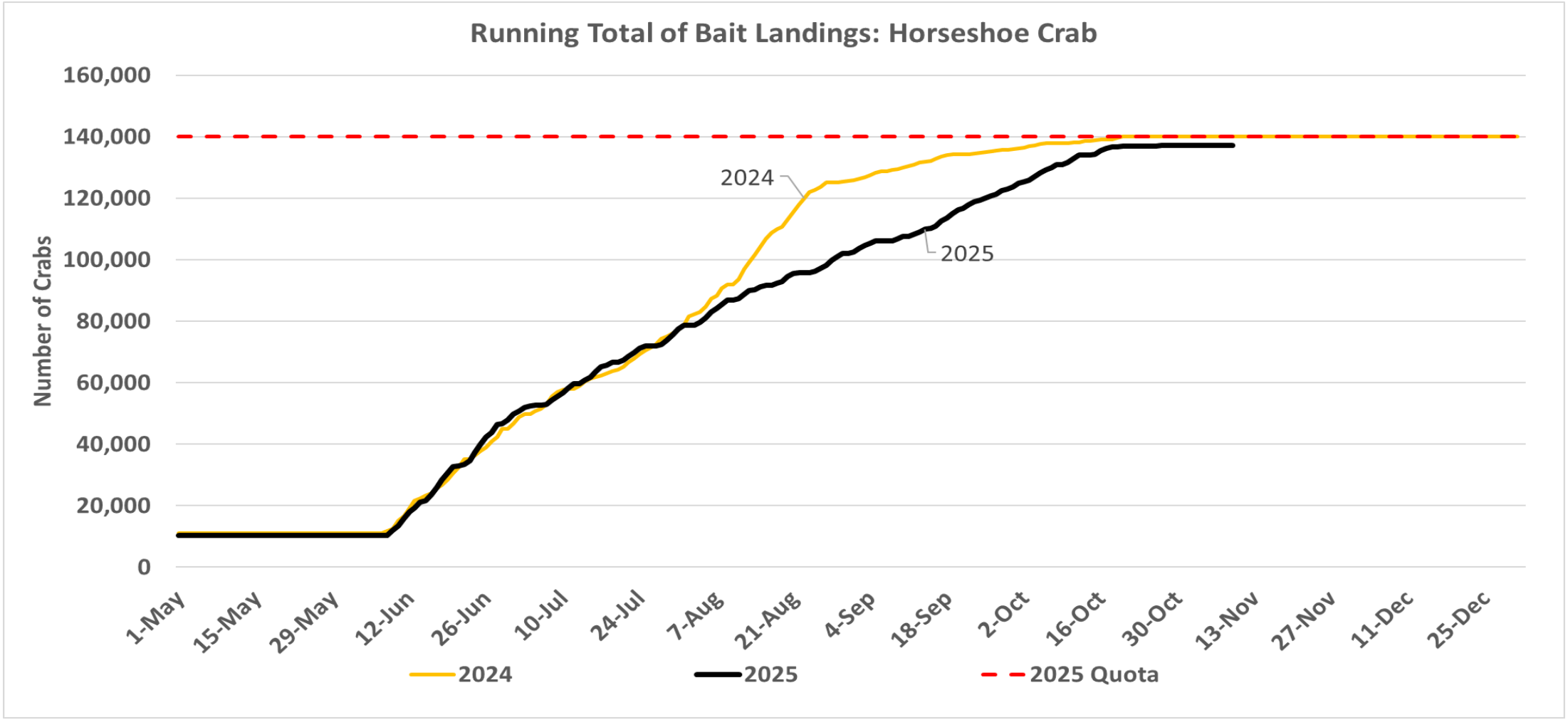
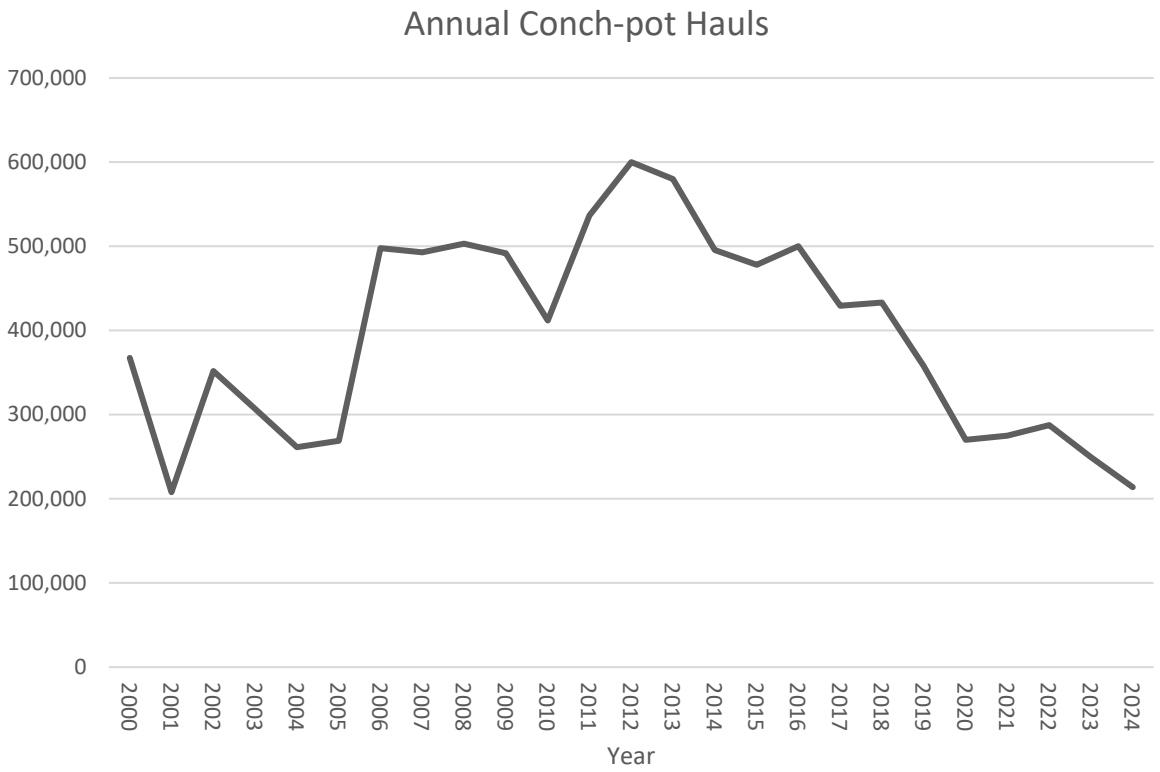
Horseshoe Crab Bait Fishery Performance



Conch Pot Fishery Performance



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*As of October, 30, 2025

Issues Pertaining to Horseshoe Crab Fishery

HB 898 – An Act to End the Taking of Horseshoe Crabs for Bait

- Bill was filed on January 16, 2025 and referred to Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
- Committee held a hearing on October 21, 2025.
- Bill seeks to prohibit retention of horseshoe crabs or their eggs as bait; allows incidental catch and release of crabs in non-targeted fisheries; allows DMF to authorize taking of horseshoe crabs for educational or scientific purposes; establishes a $25 per crab penalty; and requires DMF develop regulations to enforce.
- DMF released analysis on November 13 finding claims in support of bill are not supported by best available science, fishery is strictly managed at state and interstate level, and banning bait harvest will have direct impact and cumulative indirect impacts on Commonwealth's seafood industry.

Biomedical Requests

- DMF received a request to reallocate quota from the bait fishery to the biomedical fishery through both single quota adjustment and in-season based on quota utilization.
- DMF is currently analyzing the appropriateness of a quota allocation transfer from the bait fishery to the biomedical fishery and will likely present this to the MFAC in December 2025.
- DMF rejected the request to create a process to reallocate quota in in-season.