



## **MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission September 17, 2024 Meeting Summary**

---

This document serves as a brief summary of the September 17, 2024 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. This business meeting was held in-person at the Kingston Town House in Kingston, MA. All meeting materials are available on the [MFAC's past meeting website](#).

### **2024 Commercial Fishery Performance and Quota Utilization Report**

DMF provided an update on overall trends in fishery performance with a focus on the quota managed fisheries for black sea bass, summer flounder, horseshoe crabs, and tautog. DMF also discussed a recent transfer of menhaden quota from Rhode Island to Massachusetts that allowed the fishery to reopen at the 25,000-pound trip limit and would likely keep the fishery open for the remainder of the season. This was done to address concerns about a local shortage of lobster bait.

### **Items for Future Public Hearing**

*Controls on Fish Pots in the Federal Zone.* DMF reviewed a proposal that would: (1) require commercial fishers hold the applicable state fish-pot or conch-pot endorsement to possess or land sea bass, scup, or whelks taken by that gear in Massachusetts regardless of where the gear is set; (2) require all pot gear set in state or federal waters be tagged with a valid DMF-issued trap tag; (3) require all permit holders adhere the state's trap limits and seasons for fish pot and conch pot gear in state or federal waters; and (4) specify how buoy lines set in federal waters by state permit holders are to be set. The purpose of this action is to prevent the proliferation of pot gear in the federal zone set by Massachusetts fishers that may increase the risk of entanglement posed to right whales absent federal controls on buoy lines in these fisheries and potentially result in Massachusetts' state waters fisheries being held responsible for entanglements caused by gear in federal waters.

*Entanglement Reporting for Large Whales and Sea Turtles.* DMF introduced a proposal to require all vessel operators who observe an entangled large whale or turtle report the entanglement to the appropriate authorities. DMF discussed how this proposal addressed concerns raised by NOAA Fisheries in their review of the agency's draft Habitat Conservation Plan for its Incidental Take Permit Application. DMF also highlighted the potential challenges related to implementing a rule that would apply broadly to all vessel operators.

*Striped Bass Total Length Measurement.* DMF proposed to clarify the state's current total length measurement rule to specify the tail must be squeezed. At present, the rule is not specific which, in the recreational fishery, allows the tail to be squeezed to keep fish measuring near the minimum size and fanned to keep fish measuring near the maximum size. Requiring the tail be squeezed is also more consistent with what is required in other states.

### **Discussion Items**

*False Albacore and Bonito Management.* DMF reviewed data regarding the catch and harvest of bonito and false albacore in Massachusetts and coastwide. The MFAC then took public testimony from several recreational anglers and charter boat captains concerned that these fisheries were currently

unregulated and experiencing increasing fishing effort, particularly in New England. DMF intends to further investigate the issue and analyze potential regulatory options at the state and interstate level.

*Update on Effort to Modernize Management of Surf Clam Dredge Fishery.* DMF met with members of the state waters surf clam fleet to discuss (1) recent legislation that clarifies the Wetlands Protection Act does not apply to fishing activity regulated by DMF; (2) the surf clam dredge pilot program that looked at using geofencing and spatial monitoring technology to enhance spatial management and the potential for expanding this concept to all active fishers to establish closures that are easy to comply with and enforce, particularly as necessary to address concerns regarding habitat impacts (e.g., eelgrass); and (3) modernizing state management closure boundaries and rules. DMF presented several maps that demonstrated both the geofencing concept and initial thoughts on how to modernize management area closures (e.g., contour lines). There was also some discussion about eliminating the night closure for this fishery, particularly in the wintertime when the trap gear closure is in effect. Next, DMF will meet with local shellfish constables to discuss local interests in surf clam management.

**Upcoming Meetings.** The next MFAC meeting is scheduled for October 29, 2024 at DFW's Field Headquarters in Westborough. The following meetings are then scheduled for November 19 and December 17 via Zoom. Unless otherwise notified, all meetings are scheduled to start at 9AM.