Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission Final Business Meeting Minutes

September 18, 2025

DFW Field Headquarters

1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA

Attendees

Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission: Raymond Kane, Chairman; Chris McGuire; Bill Amaru; Bill Doyle; Ray Jarvis; Eric Nelson; Shelley Edmundson, Clerk. Absent: Arthur "Sooky" Sawyer

Division of Marine Fisheries: Dan McKiernan, Director; Story Reed, Deputy Director; Anna Webb, Assistant Deputy Director; Jared Silva; Nichola Meserve; Kelly Whitmore; Kevin Creighton; Bradlie Morgan

Department of Fish and Game: Tom O'Shea, Commissioner

Massachusetts Environmental Police: Colonel John Monaghan; Lieutenant Matt Bass; Captain Robert Forsythe

Members of the Public: Philip Michaud, Theodore Glynn

Call to Order and Routine Business

Chairman Ray Kane called the meeting to order. Kane introduced John Monaghan, the recently appointed Colonel of the Massachusetts Environmental Police (MEP).

Review of the September 2025 Business Meeting Agenda

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

Review and Approval of the August 2025 Draft Business Meeting Minutes

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

Agency Updates

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

Lieutenant Matt Bass provided comments for MEP. Bass outlined recent marine fishery violations. He described a case in Westport involving multiple size and possession limit violations of scup, tautog, fluke, and black sea bass which were addressed civilly, resulting in $51,200 of fines. Four of those being charged have paid their citations, and one has appealed the decision prompting criminal charges. Bass then described various striped bass violations observed this season and a resulting libel case that concluded in MEP's favor.

On personnel, Bass added that MEP has hired one new officer and is in the process of hiring seven additional officers. Colonel Monaghan noted that some positions are pending federal funding. Bill Amaru asked about any upcoming retirements in MEP. The Colonel stated that Captain Dean Belanger of Nantucket had recently retired, and two additional retirements are anticipated in the coming months.

Chris McGuire asked about implementing a fisheries regulation component within the upcoming recreational boating safety and certification course. Lt. Bass noted the course is designed to focus on boating safety and this information is not part of the mandatory curriculum. However, there was some discussion among Col. Monaghan, Lt. Bass, Chris McGuire, and Ray Jarvis about the potential benefits of using the course as a means to conduct outreach and education to the boating public on fisheries rules.

Chairman Kane asked who will enforce the boating safety license. Bass responded that this will be done by harbormasters and police officers (including MEP).

Bill Amaru expressed support for the boating safety certification.

Ray Jarvis asked if the certification would apply to non-resident boaters as well. Col. Monaghan noted that similar to drivers licenses there will be reciprocity with other states' boating licenses and a persons out-of-state license can be transferred to a Massachusetts license upon becoming a resident. Further, there will be abridged courses to accommodate boat rentals.

McGuire, Doyle, and Monaghan discussed how the curriculum will be made available, including in person and online options. MEP will be involved in teaching parts of the course.

Kevin Creighton and Lt. Bass discussed who is required to obtain a license. Unless specifically exempt, all boaters born on or after January 1, 1989 will be required to have a license for April 1, 2026, whereas those born before will have until April 1, 2028.

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

Commissioner Tom O'Shea welcomed Colonel Monaghan and expressed excitement to work with him and MEP.

The Commissioner then described Governor Healey's Biodiversity Initiative. In 2023, the Governor signed Executive Order No. 618 to make Massachusetts a nationwide leader in conserving, protecting, sustaining, and rebuilding biodiversity. To meet this goal, the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) developed a 25-year action plan. The administration announced this plan at an event held on August 21 at Mass Audubon's Long Pasture Wildlife Sanctuary in Barnstable. The event was attended by Governor Healey, representatives from DFG and its various agencies, MFAC members (McGuire and Kane), as well as commercial fishery stakeholders. Tom was hopeful the initiative would enable funding for DMF's efforts to support biodiversity, including the development of a Marine Habitat Restoration Center at Cat Cove Laboratory in Salem. The center will research and develop propagation practices of eelgrass, kelp, and oysters.

On personnel, the Commonwealth was currently in a hiring freeze and the Commissioner anticipated he would learn more about staffing capacity moving forward by the end of the year.

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

Director Dan McKiernan reflected on recent seafood marketing campaigns and events. DMF hosted a table at the Boston Local Food Festival, where over 300 pounds of Jonah crab were served to the public to spread awareness about this local fishery. The Seafood Marketing Program developed a series of cooking videos — in partnership with On the Water Magazine and Laura Foley — to highlight local seafood recipes. Over 20 recipes and videos have been released and are being shared on DMF's YouTube channel. A recent recipe video on flounder was presented. Lastly, Seafood Day at the State House will occur on Wednesday, October 22 at 11AM. MFAC members are encouraged to attend.

Bill Amaru expressed support for DMF's efforts to educate the public on local seafood. Amaru asked Story about a recent initiative that DMF led to collect working waterfront videos at Stage Harbor. Story remarked that these are undergoing post-production work and will soon be released.

Dan described an effort across Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts to conduct a survey of commercial lobster fishers to determine how best to potentially move forward with conservation. Maine completed their survey in August and Massachusetts' survey is underway.

Dan noted that lobster management in Massachusetts is complicated by regulations across the four Lobster Conservation Management Areas (LCMA) and fisheries occurring on both the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank stock and the Southern New England stock. Survey results will be shared with the ASMFC and MFAC next month.

Next, Dan discussed Jamie Bassett's recent request for DMF to develop more stringent requirements for the biomedical horseshoe crab dealer permits and to reallocate horseshoe quota from the bait to the biomedical fishery. Director McKiernan reminded the MFAC that DMF would not place more stringent requirements on the issuance of biomedical horseshoe crab dealer permits, but there is interest in ensuring biomedical dealers work to achieve best handling practices. Additionally, while DMF was not able to accommodate a reallocation of horseshoe crab quota between sectors for 2025, staff are currently analyzing the bait fishery and bait use and effort in the state's whelk fishery to determine if it would be appropriate to consider such a reallocation for next season. Any potential draft proposals will be brought forward to the MFAC later this year.

Chairman Kane asked if data has suggested increased whelk landings from federal waters. Jared Silva explained that there have been anecdotal reports of whelk effort shifting into federal waters south and east of Nantucket and there is no evidence to suggest increasing effort in the federal zone this year. McKiernan and Shelley Edmundson discussed how the whelk fishery has shifted seasonally as spring fishing effort has waned.

Bill Amaru expressed support for DMF's efforts to address horseshoe crab management. He also expressed his interest in potential tag-and-recapture work to better quantify the post-release mortality of horseshoe crabs bled for biomedical purposes and remarked on the apparent healthiness of the horseshoe crabs he has observed being released after bleeding.

Ray Kane asked about the anticipated response to an increase in biomedical horseshoe crab quota. Dan did not believe this change would spark a significant response.

Lastly, the ASMFC is hosting hearings on Draft Addendum III to Amendment 7 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Striped Bass and Massachusetts will host two public hearings on September 25 (Woburn) and September 30 (Buzzards Bay). The ASMFC will meet during the last week of October in Delaware, and the Striped Bass Board will vote to finalize this addendum.

2025 Quota Managed Fishery Performance Update

Anna Webb provided the MFAC with an update on 2025 quota managed fishery performance. She noted that the striped bass commercial fishery had closed before the August MFAC meeting at 99.97%.

Black Sea Bass

Black sea bass fishery landings have slowed since early September. Landings are not close enough to the quota to confidently project the closing date.

Summer Flounder

Summer flounder landings have also slowed in early September. More than 20% of the quota remained on September 1, so trip limits increased to 800 lbs. for all gear types and Saturdays were eliminated as no fishing days. There is a pending trigger that will increase the trip limit to 5,000 lbs. on October 1 if at least 10% of the quota remains.

Silva added that after September 1 there was an increase in interest in the multi-day summer flounder pilot program from offshore draggers. This was likely in response to the trip limit increase potentially incentivizing targeted fishing effort from this fleet.

A few safe harbor landings have occurred for summer flounder. These take place when a vessel was intended to land fish in a different state but instead offloads in Massachusetts for a number of potential safety related reasons (e.g., mechanical issues, weather). In such instances, the other state will transfer quota to Massachusetts to account for these landings. The safe harbor quota transfers were not reflected in the plots presented.

Kane asked how the trawlers in Nantucket Sound performed this season. Webb and Silva noted that while data are not yet available, landings from late May through the end of August are generally attributable to the inshore trawl fleet.

Bait Horseshoe Crab

The rate of landings for bait horseshoe crab has slowed and no triggers to adjust trip limits were met in 2025.

Dan noted that many horseshoe crab landings occur when there is no demand from the whelk fishery which creates a mismatch in demand and availability of the product. Accordingly, bait crabs generally go into frozen storage until they are needed.

Kane asked whether DMF anticipated an impact on local whelk fishermen if the bait quota changes and dealers can sell bait out-of-state. McKiernan and Silva opined that they did not anticipate a bait shortage in Massachusetts given recent pot haul trends in the whelk fishery, the current state of the whelk market, the Commonwealth's bait quota, and anecdotal reports from dealers about bait already held in cold storage. Silva, Kane, and Amaru then further discussed the holding of bait in cold storage.

Scup

This year's summertime (May 1 – September 30) scup landings are tracking 2023 trends closely and the state's quota will not be utilized. Kane and Director McKiernan discussed differences in the recreational and commercial scup fishery regulations.

Bluefish

Bluefish landings continue to trend slower than in 2024. Some quota has been transferred to North Carolina and DMF does not expect any sharp increases in landings. Dan noted that North Carolina has transferred quota to Massachusetts for several years and this is the first year Massachusetts has returned the favor.

Menhaden

Menhaden quota was reached on August 27, and the fishery entered the Episodic Event Set Aside (EESA) on August 28. Webb explained that the EESA is a subset of the quota accessible once a quota has been reached if there are still fish available in state waters. Maine has also entered the EESA and DMF is monitoring the states' total landings.

Kane confirmed that the EESA has a 25,000-pound trip limit.

Nichola Meserve added that Maine will likely drop out of the EESA next week to prevent a quota overage.

Ray Jarvis asked about the purpose of the EESA. Nichola explained that the EESA was implemented when state quotas were first established to allow the northeast states (Maine to New York) continued access to fish after state quotas were taken to account for the fact that the availability of these fish has historically been episodic in the region. Dan added that this allows states to avoid large fish kills by continuing to extract the biomass from inshore waters during the summertime (when water temperature can reduce the capacity to hold oxygen) and the fish remain highly available.

Jarvis and Silva then discussed the shifts in harvesting areas following the recent hurricane.

Tautog

The tautog fishery opened on September 1 and is tracking slower than 2024, which experienced the earliest closure in recent years. Webb noted that value is also tracking similarly to previous years.

Bill Amaru asked if spiny dogfish and skates will be covered at a future meeting, noting the importance of these fisheries to Massachusetts ports. Webb noted that these species are not

subject to state-specific quotas (or in the case of skate, state management), but landings trends could be presented on at a future meeting.

Commissioner O'Shea raised a comment he received from a recreational fisher voicing frustrations about recreational fisheries being closed during the fall while commercial fisheries remain open and commercial limits are frequently liberalized to accommodate quota consumption. Director McKiernan noted that he reached out to this constituent and spoke with him about the differing management programs for commercial and recreational fishers, how this affects access, and why certain recreational management measures (e.g., seasons) have been historically preferred (e.g., open season for black sea bass in beginning in late-May generally prevents a fall open season).

With regards to black sea bass specifically, the Director expressed his continued interest in developing recreational fishing limits to allow for this fishery to remain open into the fall. He was optimistic that this may be possible for 2026 given the increase to the recreational harvest limit. Kane and Meserve will have more information on this after the joint Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission – Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) meeting in December.

Kane noted that the for-hire industry has long favored a mid-May start date for the recreational black sea bass fishery, but this may be shifting to favor a fall season in response to potential recreational striped bass closures.

Proposals for Future Public Hearing

Emergency Action to Limit Entry to Commercial Striped Bass Fishery in 2026

Dan discussed the proposed emergency actions to limit entry to the commercial striped bass fishery in 2026. This would include limiting issuance of the regulated fishery striped bass endorsement in 2026 to only those permit holders who held one in 2024 or 2025; establishing the commercial striped bass fishery as being "owner-operator"; establishing the striped bass endorsement as non-transferable among permit holders until DMF develops a program in 2026 to manage exit and entry moving forward; and refreshing the control date from June 14, 2022 to December 31, 2025. This proposal was developed with input from an ad-hoc industry advisory panel which met in July 2025 and the MFAC's Striped Bass Focus Group. Director McKiernan sought support from the MFAC to implement the proposed emergency actions.

Additionally, McKiernan and Silva explained that this action was likely the first of at least three regulatory actions to address the commercial striped bass fishery over the course of the next year or two. DMF also anticipated developing a draft regulatory proposal later this year to potentially adjust commercial fishing limits (e.g., start date, catch limits) for 2026, as well as the

potential for subsequent draft regulatory proposals for 2027 to address exit-entry into the commercial fishery moving forward, further limit access to the striped bass endorsement, and adopt a point-of-harvest tagging program.

Commissioner O'Shea asked about the anticipated reaction from constituents. McKiernan and Silva clarified that this action would only limit the issuance of new striped bass endorsements.

Bill Amaru voiced concern that this action would limit people who did not participate in 2024 or 2025 due to illness or other circumstances but participated in previous years. Additionally, Amaru suggested setting aside a given number of permits for fishermen under 21 years old to allow them a means of entry into the fishery. Silva noted that DMF intends to address concerns around means of entry through the future development of an exit-entry program that would diverge from the longstanding permit transfer program and instead consider a framework that would allow DMF to issue permits based on exit:entry ratios (similar to Rhode Island). If adopted, this could potentially prevent high costs of entry and allow the commercial fishery to still be a gateway into the marine economy.

Doyle, Kane, and Silva discussed DMF's prior action to reduce access to the tautog fishery based on qualifying prior performance criteria. Silva noted that the tautog permit is transferable and this experience contributed to DMF's interest in developing an alternative approach to managing new entrants into the commercial striped bass fishery. Kane suggested DMF could use fishing income both as a qualifying criterion to retain the endorsement or to obtain entry into the fishery moving forward. McKiernan noted his hesitancy to mandate tax information to facilitate permit issuance. Kane added that the striped bass focus group also discussed requiring tagging of all fish landed by commercial permits, including those for personal use, to prevent underreporting. McKiernan noted that this proposal narrowly affects permitting for 2026 and this issue could be addressed through the subsequent rule-making initiatives anticipated over the course of the next year.

Eric Nelson voiced strong support for this initiative. Nelson asked about limiting out-of-state access to the striped bass fishery. Dan noted that this is ultimately a legal question, not a policy question, and DMF would defer to the advice provided by counsel at the conclusion of their ongoing analysis.

Doyle asked about the potential to limit states who do not allow reciprocity with Massachusetts. Dan noted that this is among the concepts being analyzed by counsel.

Silva and McKiernan discussed the process for emergency regulations and how final rules could potentially differ from emergency regulations (e.g., longer lookback window for eligibility). Chris McGuire expressed support for the exit:entry initiative. He recommended emphasizing the purpose of this idea when proposing this action.

O'Shea, Silva, and McKiernan discussed which fisheries are currently owner-operator. While most rod and reel fisheries generally operate as owner-operator, striped bass would be the first rod and reel fishery where this would be a regulatory requirement. Nelson and Jarvis supported the owner-operator requirement noting that the fishery already generally operates in this manner.

Doyle asked about the feasibility of standardizing permitting criteria across all endorsements. Dan added that there are differences in industry needs across fisheries making it challenging to standardize criteria.

Shelley asked what the anticipated number of active permits will be in 2026. McKiernan explained that because the proposed emergency rules would only restrict the issuance of new permits in 2026, he anticipated the number of active permits in 2026 to be similar to the number of active permits in 2025. DMF will have to pursue additional rulemaking in the future if it wants to further restrict access and activity in this commercial fishery.

Kane and Silva discussed how MFAC members should navigate potential conflicts of interest while voting on these issues in the future.

Dan clarified that there will not be a vote on this proposed emergency action, but DMF appreciates support and feedback from the MFAC.

Commercial Summer Flounder Limits

In response to an expected commercial quota increase of 75% for 2026/2027, and fishery performance to-date this season, DMF is proposing several changes to its commercial fishing regulations for 2026 to encourage quota utilization. Jared Silva shared these proposals.

The first proposal would establish the annual Period-based quota allocations and Period I trip limits in response to the magnitude of the annual quota. If the annual quota is at least 750,000 pounds, then the Period I (January 1 – April 22) fishery would receive 30% of the annual quota and the Period II (April 23 – December 31) fishery would receive the remainder; and if the annual quota is less than 750,000 pounds, then the Period I fishery would receive 15% of the quota and the Period II fishery would receive the remainder. Similarly, in years when the quota is at least 750,000 pounds, the Period I trip limit would be 5,000 pounds, and in years when it is not, the trip limit would be 2,000 pounds. This proposal is designed to provide the offshore fishery with greater access to the quota in years when the quota is robust while also reserving sufficient quota to sustain the inshore fishery into the early fall.

The second proposal would unwind recent changes to summertime (April 23 – September 30) trip limits and closed fishing days. The trip limits would increase back to 600 pounds for net fishers and 400 pounds for hook fishers; the current limits are 500 pounds for net fishers and

325 pounds for hook fishers. Additionally, Saturday would be reinstated as an open fishing day thereby allowing commercial fishing seven days per week. This proposal is designed to provide the inshore summertime fishery with better access to available quota.

DMF also discussed reinstating the multi-state trip limit program during the fall and winter fisheries to enhance quota utilization.

Kane asked to clarify the number of vessels participating in the multi-day program. Silva responded that eight vessels participated in 2024. Edmundson and Amaru noted that this program has been beneficial to their local trawlers as it makes it easier for them to get their fish to market.

Commercial Black Sea Bass Limits

Silva then shared DMF's proposed changes to commercial black sea bass regulations for 2026 to encourage quota utilization. These proposals are in response to an expected commercial quota increase of 30% for 2026/2027 and fishery performance.

The primary proposal would enact trip limit and open fishing day liberalizations for the directed fishery earlier in the season. At present, if at least 15% of the quota is projected to remain available on September 15, then the trip limit for pot fishers increases from 500 to 600 pounds and the trip limit for other non-trawl gears (e.g., hooks) increases from 250 to 300 pounds. Additionally, irrespective of quota use, Fridays and Saturdays are eliminated as closed fishing days on September 15 thereby allowing commercial fishing seven days per week. DMF is proposing these trip limit and fishing day changes occur no later than September 1. This should enable quota utilization while also accommodating continued quota availability into the fall when sea bass are caught alongside other target species (e.g., tautog).

Additionally, DMF would seek to amend the rules to allow trawlers to retain a 100-pound bycatch of black sea bass between April 1 – April 22. This would remediate a regulatory oversight that prohibited landing sea bass during this period without adding pressure to spawning groups in the spring.

Recreational Bluefish Limits

Nichola Meserve introduced DMF's proposals to increase the recreational bluefish bag limits by two fish. This would increase the bag limit from three fish to five fish for private vessels and shore-based fishers and from five fish to seven fish for anglers onboard for-hire vessels. This proposal is consistent with recent coastwide decisions by the MAFMC and ASMFC based on the most recent stock status and acceptable catch limits.

Nelson, Meserve, Jarvis, and Kane discussed changes in abundance and availability of bluefish across the Atlantic coast. Nelson and Jarvis remarked on the increased difficulty of finding

bluefish locally this season. Nelson suggested there may be push back from anglers in response to an increased bag limit with reduced local availability. Meserve noted that this trend is hopefully due to changes in geographic distribution along the coast, as the stock assessment has indicated that the stock will be rebuilt by the end of this year.

Allowance for Dual State-Federal Lobster Permit Holder to Retire Coastal for Offshore

Deputy Director Story Reed discussed DMF's proposal to implement a change to commercial lobster permitting. The proposal would allow an existing Coastal Lobster Permit holder with a federal lobster permit to surrender their Coastal Lobster Permit to DMF and be issued an Offshore Lobster Permit, converting their trap tag authorization from dual state-federal to federal waters only ("EEZ-only"). This would enable interested fishers to trade in their state permit and trap fishing authorization and become EEZ-only fishers and thereby avoid the owner-operator requirement associated with the Coastal Lobster Permit.

Kane asked to clarify which Lobster Conservation Management Areas (LCMA) this change would impact. Reed responded that this would most greatly impact LCMA1. Silva added that there have been many requests to implement this change from lobstermen in Provincetown. Edmundson remarked on how this may decrease the overall value of a permit suite but could afford fishers the flexibility to continue to have their permit fished while pursuing other endeavors.

Housekeeping to Eliminate Certain Regulated Fishery Permit Endorsements

Reed then introduced a proposal to eliminate the Coastal Access Permit (CAP) sub-endorsements for squid, whiting, sea herring, and North Shore mobile gear and the sea scallop shucking endorsement. DMF views these endorsements as outdated, superfluous, and contributing to unnecessarily complicated permitting requirements. If the CAP sub-endorsements are eliminated, any permit holder who receives one of these sub-endorsements will instead receive a CAP which will continue to authorize these activities. Silva added that this would not impact the CAP purse seine. If the sea scallop shucking endorsement is eliminated, any lawfully permitted vessel will be allowed to land shucked adductor muscles. The requirement for a shellfish endorsement would remain for those vessels seeking to possess and land whole in-shell product.

Amaru expressed support for this simplification.

Doyle asked about harvesting shellfish from areas that are not tested for water quality. Silva responded that all areas must be tested for adequate water quality for shellstock to be harvested. In the case of sea scallops, shucked product may be retained from areas that are not

tested or where relevant public health criteria are not met. Silva, Reed, McKiernan, and Doyle then discussed the standards for retaining sea scallop shellstock in federal waters where there is no biotoxin monitoring.

Recent Meeting to Discuss North Shore State Waters Sea Scallop Fishing Concerns

Director McKiernan briefed the MFAC on a recent (August 26) meeting with North Shore state waters sea scallop fishing interests. These concerns include increased participation and transfers of CAP permits to out-of-state interests; delaying the start of the Ipswich Bay season to better align with the February 1 – May 15 trap gear closure to protect right whales; establishing additional seasonal access areas around Cape Ann; and creating greater symmetry between state and federal dredge width rules. Additionally, there was strong support for DMF to provide additional seasonal access around Cape Ann within the North Shore Mobile Gear Closure area. DMF is currently reviewing these issues and exploring potential opportunities to address these issues moving forward.

Kane asked how these concerns relate to the alleged increase in the transfer of Coastal Access Permits to non-resident vessels (particularly scallop interests form Maine). Dan noted that this was among the issues discussed at the meeting. The issue of non-resident permitting is a legal question that is being reviewed and will be addressed separately based on guidance from counsel.

Nelson asked about potential downsides of a pilot program. Silva noted that DMF intended to accept public comment on the item and this comment would help DMF and the MFAC evaluate pros and cons. DMF previously proposed a similar pilot program for an area off Nahant and ultimately did not move forward with it because of the strong pushback received from divers and underwater archaeology stakeholders.

Bill Amaru asked to clarify what vessels would be included in this. Dan responded the pilot program would likely be limited to Coastal Access Permit holders with some historic activity in the fishery. Therefore, vessel length would be capped at 72-feet overall.

McGuire asked if this area is part of the spring cod conservation area. Silva thought the exemption area would occur primarily outside spawning cod closures in Salem Sound and scallop dredge gear has been historically exempted from state cod spawning closures. Dan added that the pilot program would narrowly exempt only scallop dredge gear from the mobile gear closure and would not allow dragger access given relevant concerns about effort and landings in the state waters groundfish fishery.

McKiernan noted that DMF would provide the MFAC with a more formal memorandum on a potential pilot program and regulatory amendments at a future meeting.

Discussion Items

Options for Recreational Striped Bass Management Under Draft Addendum III

Nichola Meserve discussed striped bass management options under Draft Addendum III to Amendment 7 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan. The ASMFC is currently in the process of holding coastwide public hearings on the draft addendum. The addendum proposes measures to reduce commercial and recreational fishery removals by 12% in support of rebuilding the striped bass stock by the 2029 deadline. For the commercial fishery, this comes as a straight 12% quota cut, but for the recreational fishery there are a myriad of options for various seasonal closures. Meserve explained how the closed seasons may be applied and provided examples of resulting open seasons in calendar dates to prime MFAC members for the two upcoming ASMFC public hearings in Massachusetts.

The timeline, as explained, is to first determine if there will be a 12% reduction in recreational removals and if there will be a uniform size limit across modes. If the for-hire fleet is afforded a wider slot limit, then there would need to be a greater reduction in removals achieved by closed seasons. Additionally, the length of the closed season would depend on whether it applied as a "no harvest" or "no targeting" season. No targeting seasons would be shorter but present serious enforcement and compliance challenges. Additionally, there are a variety of options for seasons based on the recreational fishing wave in which it would apply and the geographical region it would apply to. Accordingly, the addendum designates the number of days closed rather than specific closure dates. As for regional configurations, there is a coastwide option and a North-South option. Within the North-South option, Rhode Island can be grouped with either region and its inclusion or exclusion impacts the number of closed days for each region. Further, there is no option for closed season conservation equivalency, so all states within a region will be assigned the same closure dates. Dan and Meserve discussed how this was done prevent mismatched closures across states that would encourage non-resident vessels to fish in a neighboring state during a closure in their state thereby limiting the efficacy of the closure.

Meserve noted that there are challenges in making the impact of closures equitable across geographic regions, as well as along the Massachusetts coast. Further, a single opening and closure, rather than multiple closures throughout a season, would increase simplicity of regulation and enforcement.

Nelson and Jarvis voiced their concern about the enforceability of no targeting closures and their support for a uniform size limit across all modes. They also advocated for preventing the Massachusetts commercial striped bass fishery from occurring during any period closed to recreational striped bass fishing. Nelson added that he would prefer to avoid a recreational closure during peak summer months, whereas Jarvis supported a closure during the peak

months to minimize the total length of the closure and prevent closures during the shoulder seasons which would effectively force the south coast to carry a significant amount of the conservation burden for the state while having limited seasonal access to the resource.

Kane and Meserve discussed whether commercial and recreational fisheries would follow the same seasonal openings. Silva noted that the DMF and the MFAC may want to shift the timing of the commercial fishery in response to the recreational fishing season approved in the addendum so as to avoid this conflict.

Commissioner O'Shea urged the MFAC to consider the impact of different closure dates and the potentially significant impact on non-resident fishing in Massachusetts if a closure occurs during Wave 4, when many anglers travel to the Commonwealth to fish.

Director McKiernan remarked on the challenge facing the ASMFC to pass the addendum given the diversity of preferences across and within states.

Doyle asked what the ratio is of fish caught outside the slot limit to fish caught within the slot in the recreational fishery. Meserve responded that this is not currently quantifiable because MRIP data does not capture the reason a fish is released. Meserve, Doyle, and Nelson discussed how recruitment may affect the availability of slot-sized fish moving forward. Nichola anticipated Maryland would release its 2025 striped bass young-of-the-year survey results for the Chesapeake Bay in advance of the ASMFC's October meeting.

Doyle asked about tagging bluefish to better understand their distribution. Dan noted that DMF would follow up on this.

Kane encouraged the MFAC to listen-in to ASMFC striped bass hearings being held in other states.

Commercial Fisheries Commission Update

Director McKiernan provided an update on the issues being addressed by the newly established Commercial Fisheries Commission (CFC), the content of their first several meetings, and expected content for the fall and winter meetings this year.

These upcoming meetings will address a variety of topics: the Port Profile Project, the Office of Coastal Zone Management's (CZM) ResilientCoasts Initiative, DMF's derelict gear initiative, and addressing the undervaluing of flounder. Dan added that funding supported by Senator Bruce Tarr has allowed the Consensus Building Institute to administer these meetings. Commissioner O'Shea remarked on the importance of the CFC to create a forum to bring together industry members to collaborate with state agencies on addressing relevant issues. O'Shea recognized Dan and Senator Tarr for their efforts with the CFC and hoped the annual report would outline actionable points for policy makers.

Dan noted that offshore wind is of particular interest to the CFC. However, working waterfronts, port infrastructure, and sustainability of the fishing industry will likely grow into prominence.

Presentation on Biodiversity Conservation Goals for Massachusetts

Commissioner Tom O'Shea presented on the Biodiversity Initiative in Massachusetts and its relation to marine fisheries.

The pillars of the initiative are to protect, restore, sustain, and connect across Massachusetts. O'Shea outlined potential goals and actions related to the marine environment, including convening a marine biodiversity taskforce, prioritizing comprehensive marine habitat mapping, watershed and oyster reef restoration, ensuring no net shellfish loss, investing in working waterfronts, and implementing grants to connect the marine environment with neighborhoods and schools.

McKiernan and O'Shea discussed the applicability of the Department of Agricultural Resource's Food Security Infrastructure Grants (FSIG) to support commercial fishing through this initiative.

O'Shea added salt marsh conservation could benefit further from the Blue Carbon Finance Program, which generates carbon tokens to help entities reduce their carbon footprint.

O'Shea and Colonel Monaghan discussed the relevance of derelict gear removal to marine biodiversity.

Amaru remarked on a frustrating conflict between state regulations and a local town effort to prohibit fertilizers in order to protect marine habitat. Commissioner O'Shea voiced appreciation for learning about this issue. Doyle suggested Amaru contact the National Soil Conservation Service.

McGuire expressed appreciation for this initiative and noted it aligned with The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) mission. O'Shea and McGuire discussed how members of the public prioritize these issues. McGuire was recently appointed to the Ocean Advisory Commission and hoped to have opportunities to address biodiversity more closely with CZM. He also expressed support for the share the catch program.

Nelson, Jarvis, and Kane expressed strong support for this initiative. Shelley noted the impact of the FSIG on fishermen in Martha's Vineyard by funding a refrigerated truck. She expressed interest in the school programs as well. Dan suggested a potential collaboration with Hughes Hatchery.

Other Business

Director McKiernan shared a DMF staff nomination for the Belding Award for 2025—Henry Lind. Dan felt Lind was a strong candidate given his lifetime of work supporting shellfish fisheries and the Massachusetts Shellfish Officers Association. However, DMF welcomed other nominations for the 2025 Belding Award throughout the remainder of September with the intention of making a final recommendation in October.

Amaru shared that the Commercial Fish News will be shutting down at the end of this year.

McGuire and Silva discussed an upcoming training through the Marine Resource Education Program to help fishermen learn about relevant marine fishing regulations. The training will be held in January in Falmouth. McGuire shared that TNC is hosting an event on green crabs in Boston in October.

Public Comment

The Chair welcomed public comment.

Philip Michaud, a commercial dragger fisherman, commented on two subjects. He first asked DMF to support the whelk fishery by ensuring sufficient bait horseshoe crab is available. He then asked for greater access to more fishing opportunities for the inshore dragger fleet, noting that the inshore dragger fleet faced a multitude of challenges that make it difficult to operate and current regulations could be relaxed to allow the fishery to retain its profitability. He suggested additional small mesh fishing opportunities for mantis shrimp and squid and additional access to target skate.

Doyle asked how the number of inshore draggers has changed over the past several decades. Michaud noted that the number has dropped from at least 150 to fewer than ten in Massachusetts, with additional non-resident vessels. Doyle and Michaud discussed the changes and difficulties facing this fishery. Amaru expressed support for this request and remarked on Dan's earlier comment on supporting the inshore scallop fleet.

Dan noted that they will reach out to both Philip Michaud and Bill Amaru to discuss this further.

Adjournment

Chairman Kane asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Chris McGuire made the motion to adjourn, and Ray Jarvis seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.

Meeting Documents

- September 18, 2025 MFAC Business Meeting Agenda
- August 21, 2025 MFAC Draft Business Meeting Minutes
- Memorandum on Emergency Regulations to Restrict Access to Commercial Striped Bass Fishery in 2026
- Proposal to Amend Commercial Summer Flounder Limits for 2026
- Proposal to Amend Commercial Black Sea Bass Limits for 2026
- Public Hearing Proposal for Bluefish Recreational Possession Limits
- Proposal to Modify and Update Commercial Offshore Lobster Permitting Rules
- Proposed Housekeeping Amendments to Regulated Fishery Permit Endorsements
- Memorandum on Discussion of Potential Recreational Striped Bass Seasons
- State Waters Scallop Meeting Summary
- Summary of the Commercial Fisheries Commission's First Year Thus Far

Next Meeting

November 18, 2025
DFW Field Headquarters
1 Rabbit Hill Road
Westborough, MA