



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission September 18, 2025 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the September 18, 2025 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. This business meeting was held at DFW Field Headquarters at 1 Rabbit Hill Rd, Westborough, MA. A recording is available for viewing on [DMF's YouTube Channel](#). All meeting materials are available on the [MFAC's past meeting website](#).

Fishery Performance Review

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

Emergency Action to Limit Entry to Striped Bass Fishery

DMF reviewed its plan to move forward emergency regulations this fall to limit entry into the commercial striped bass fishery for 2026. This includes 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. The MFAC supported DMF moving forward the proposed emergency action.

DMF and the MFAC also discussed the process for emergency regulations and how final rules could potentially differ from emergency regulations (e.g., longer lookback window for eligibility). Additionally, DMF explained that this action was likely the first action in a three-part series of actions to address the commercial striped bass fishery. DMF anticipated developing a draft regulatory proposal later this year to adjust commercial fishing limits (e.g., start date, catch limits) for 2026 and also the potential for a draft regulatory proposal to adopt a point-of-harvest tagging program and further limit entry based on activity criteria.

Proposals for Future Public Hearing

The MFAC supported DMF going to public hearing with the proposed measures for 2026 summarized below.

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.

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 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 charges 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 intends to reinstate the multi-state trip limit program during the fall and winter fisheries to enhance quota utilization. This will occur for October 1, 2025 to enable greater utilization of the remaining quota this year and will continue into 2026.

Commercial Black Sea Bass Limits. In response to an expected commercial quota increase of 30% 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. 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 is proposing 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.

Recreational Bluefish Limits. DMF is proposing 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 a for-hire vessel. This proposal is consistent with recent coastwide decisions by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission based on the most recent stock status and acceptable catch limits.

Commercial Lobster Permitting. DMF is proposing to allow Coastal Lobster Permit holders whose corresponding vessel holds a federal lobster permit authorized for traps to surrender their Coastal Lobster Permit to DMF and be issued an Offshore Lobster Permit thus permanently converting their trap fishery authorization from dual state-federal (MA-EEZ) to federal waters only (EEZ-only). This would enable interested fishers to trade in their state permit and trap fishing authorization and become federal waters only fishers and thereby avoid the owner-operator requirement associated with the Coastal Lobster Permit.

Elimination of Certain Outdated Regulated Fishery Permit Endorsements. DMF is proposing 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 being 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. 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.

Discussion Items

Options for Recreational Striped Bass Management Under Draft Addendum III. The ASMFC is currently in the process of holding coastwide public hearings to accept comment on Draft Addendum III to Amendment 7 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan. 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. DMF explained how the closed seasons may be applied and provided examples of resulting open seasons in calendar dates to prime MFAC members for the upcoming ASMFC public hearings in Massachusetts (6PM on September 25 at the Hilton Hotel in Woburn and 6PM on September 30 at Mass Maritime Academy in Buzzards Bay).

Recent Meeting to Discuss North Shore State Waters Sea Scallop Fishery. DMF met with several North Shore state waters sea scallop fishing interests on August 26 to discuss overlapping concerns. 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; establishing additional seasonal access areas around Cape Ann; and creating greater symmetry between state and federal dredge width rules. DMF is currently reviewing these issues and exploring potential opportunities to address these concerns for 2026.

Commercial Fisheries Commission Update. DMF provided a brief update on the issues being addressed by the newly established Commercial Fisheries Commission, the content of their first several meetings, and expected content for the fall and winter meetings this year.

Upcoming Meetings

The MFAC will meet next on October 21 via Zoom.