



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission

April 10, 2017 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the April 10, 2017 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. It provides only an overview of the votes taken and items discussed. Further discussion of each item is captured in MFAC business meeting minutes for this date.

Emergency Regulations

DMF introduced and solicited MFAC feedback on a series of emergency regulatory proposals. These emergency regulations are expected to go into effect for May 1, 2017. Public hearings will be held in June, after the emergency regulations are implemented, and final rules will be promulgated after the public hearing(s). Additional information will be made available on DMF's website over the next several weeks. A brief summary of each emergency regulation follows:

- **Gulf of Maine Cod Recreational Fishing Limits.** For the 2017 fishing year (May 1 – April 30), the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) enacted a year-round closure to the recreational fishery for codfish in the Gulf of Maine. DMF will be matching the year-round federal closure in state-waters for the for-hire fishery only. Private anglers fishing exclusively in state-waters will be able to retain one fish per angler per day year round with a minimum size of 19 inches.
- **Gulf of Maine Haddock Recreational Fishing Limits.** For the 2017 fishing year (May 1 – April 30), the NMFS reduced the haddock bag limit from 15-fish to 12-fish and established closed fishing seasons from September 16 to October 31 and March 1 – April 15. DMF will match the federal rules in state-waters for the for-hire fishery only. For private anglers, state rules will reduce the bag limit to 12, concurrent with the federal limit, but the state will maintain a year-round open fishery in state-waters. The minimum in both the state and federal zone will be 17 inches.
- **Summer Flounder.** To address mandatory cuts to the coast-wide recreational harvest of summer flounder (fluke), the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) approved an Addendum to the Fishery Management Plan that would require all states to reduce their bag limit by one fish and increase their minimum size by one inch (a conservation equivalent measure was adopted for North Carolina). Accordingly, for 2017, the recreational bag limit for fluke in Massachusetts will be reduced from 5-fish to 4-fish and the minimum size will increase from 16 inches to 17 inches. The existing May 22 – September 24 open fishing season will remain status quo. DMF proposed a conservation equivalency measure to ASMFC that would allow the state to retain its 5-fish bag limit, but this proposal was not supported by the ASMFC's Summer Flounder Board.
- **Commercial Black Sea Bass Limits.** In late February 2017, NMFS announced that the coast-wide commercial black sea bass quota would increase by 53%. As a result, Massachusetts' quota allocation was expected to increase from about 350,000 pounds to 530,000 pounds. To increase access to this quota, DMF is increasing the weir set-aside from 10,000 to 15,000 pounds and the open fishery for nets, pots/traps and hook and line will open on July 9 rather than August 1. No changes will be made to the open fishing days or the trip limits.

Discussion Items

Mobile Gear Closures and the 1881 Line. The 1881 Line is the historic seaward boundary of the Commonwealth and it is used to demarcate the seaward boundary of the state's mobile gear closures in

certain areas. However, the precise location of the line has become obscure, as it no longer appears on charts. As a result, the mobile gear closures have become difficult to enforce in areas and gear conflicts between mobile and fixed gear fishermen have become difficult to resolve. These issues have been particularly problematic north of Boston in the state-waters portion of Massachusetts Bay.

DMF is in the process of researching and mapping the 1881 line. However, this project and the complementary regulatory change are not expected to be complete until 2018. To more immediately resolve the burgeoning gear conflicts in Massachusetts Bay, DMF mapped the coordinates of the seaward mobile gear closure boundary using the current municipal boundaries as a proxy for the 1881 Line. Permit conditions have been issued to mobile gear fishermen establishing this boundary as the mobile gear closure boundary.

Recreational Black Sea Bass. DMF expects that recreational black sea bass regulations will remain status quo in Massachusetts for 2017. This will result in a May 21 – August 31 open fishing season with a 5-fish bag limit and 15 inch minimum size. However, at the end of April, the ASMFC will hold a conference call to further discuss recreational black sea bass. More details about any potential changes to the 2017 recreational black sea bass limits will be better understood after this meeting. The MFAC heard from several charter boat captains who expressed concerns regarding the negative impact that status quo regulations are expected have on their businesses.

Future Meetings

Spring 2017 meetings have been scheduled for May 4th and June 15th. All meetings are held at 10:30 AM at the MA Division of Fish and Wildlife's Headquarters, 1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough. The MFAC business meeting schedule is published on the [Division's website](#) and agendas are made available approximately 1-week before the scheduled meeting. Meeting dates for the second half of 2017 will be announced in the near future.

If you would like to obtain any materials regarding past or upcoming MFAC business meetings, please contact Jared Silva at DMF (617-626-1534 or jared.silva@state.ma.us).