



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission

May 4, 2017 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the May 4, 2017 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. It provides only an overview of the items discussed. Further discussion of each item is captured in MFAC business meeting minutes for this date.

Emergency Regulations

Black Sea Bass Recreational Fishing Limits. At the February meeting, the ASMFC approved states retaining status quo recreational black sea bass fishing limits for 2017. This would have had the fishery open on Sunday, May 21 and close on Thursday, August 31 with a five fish bag limit and 15 inch minimum size (Note: these limits were published in our recreational sportfish guide). However, certain recreational fishing interests advocated Massachusetts retain two full weekends of fishing in May and instead open on May 20. This was consistent with DMF's recent approach to opening this fishery on a Saturday. To accommodate this and comply with ASMFC's status quo determination, DMF would have to close the fishery two days earlier in August. This is because estimated daily harvest rates in Wave 3 (May – June) are almost double what they are in Wave 4 (July – August). DMF analyzed this slight adjustment to the fishing season and supported it. Accordingly, for 2017, the recreational fishing season will be May 20 – August 29; the bag limit (five fish) and minimum size (15 inches) will stay the same. The public was notified of this adjustment (and the discrepancy with the limits published in the sportfish guide) via a [DMF advisory](#).

Presentations

The MFAC received three presentations from DMF biologists. Micah Dean provided a presentation on DMF's Industry Based Survey on Gulf of Maine cod and initial findings from 2016. Micah also presented on a collaborative study to better understand haddock discard mortality in the recreational fishery. Dr. Tracy Pugh presented on the status of the Southern New England lobster stock and pending management actions at the ASMFC.

Discussion Items

Head Boat Meeting on MRIP and Improving Angler Compliance. In late-April 2017, DMF staff met with members of the south coast's head boat fleet. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss how to best accommodate MRIP sampling and industry practices to ensure angler compliance with recreational fishing limits on head boats. A number of head boats have operation specific methods to help ensure compliance (e.g., limiting cooler size or requiring deckhands handle catch). In 2017, DMF will be requiring all the south coast head boats to submit compliance plans to the agency that detail these methodologies. These compliance plans will be shared with Law Enforcement.

Extension of Trap Gear Closure in Cape Cod Bay. The February – April trap gear closure around Cape Cod was set to end on May 1. However, a large number of endangered right whales remained aggregated in Cape Cod Bay feeding on plankton through late-April. To prevent potential interactions between these whales and vertical buoy lines that may result in entanglements, DMF extended the trap gear closure within certain waters of Cape Cod Bay through May 7. The Center for Coastal Studies was conducting an aerial survey of the Bay and if it indicated the whales had departed DMF would open take

immediate action to lift the closure. It is noteworthy that the May 4 aerial survey demonstrated few whales remained and the closure was lifted on May 5. (A subsequent flight on May 9 found zero right whales in the Bay).

Preview of the May ASMFC Meeting. This item was covered in discussion that occurred throughout the meeting. The focus was primarily on improving recreational black sea bass management and creating greater equity between state regulations in the Norther Region (MA – NJ), adjusting fisheries management to account for changes in species distribution and abundance due to climate change, and pending actions to potential enhance egg production for Southern New England lobster.

Future Meetings

The next MFAC business meeting is scheduled for June 15th. Meetings dates for the second half of 2017 are forth coming. 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.

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).