



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission

March 15, 2018 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the March 15, 2018 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.

Action Items

The MFAC approved several DMF recommendations to adjust 2018 fishing limits. The approved recommendations are as follows:

Recreational Tautog Limits. The MFAC unanimously approved new recreational tautog fishing limits to be effective for the 2018 fishing season. This action was taken to comply with the ASMFC’s fishery management plan for tautog. These limits will match the recreational fishing limits in RI, except that the recreational tautog fishery in RI will be closed from June 1 – July 31. The approved recreational fishing limits are described in the table below.

Season	Bag Limit	Minimum Size
January 1 – March 31	0-fish	N/A
April 1 – May 31	3-fish*	16 inches
June 1 – July 31	1-fish*	16 inches
August 1 – October 14	3-fish*	16 inches
October 15 – December 31	5-fish*	16 inches

* 10-fish maximum vessel limit for private anglers during any period when the fishery is open

Commercial Striped Bass Fishing Days. The MFAC voted 6-1 to close the commercial striped bass fishery on July 3, July 4 and Labor Day. This action was proposed to prevent user group conflicts between recreational boaters and commercial fishermen during summertime holidays. The initial recommendation to close the striped bass fishery from July 3 – July 5 and on Labor Day failed by a vote of 3-4.

Commercial Black Sea Bass Fishing Days in Directed Summertime Fishery. The MFAC voted unanimously to eliminate Wednesday and add Thursday as an open commercial black sea bass fishing day during the directed summertime fishery. Beginning in 2018 the open commercial fishing days will be Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Commercial Black Sea Bass Bycatch Allowance During the Small Mesh Trawl Squid Fishery. The MFAC voted 5-2 to allow trawlers to retain a 50 pound bycatch limit of black sea bass during the state-waters small mesh trawl squid fishery (April 23 – June 9). The total annual amount of bycatch allowed to be landed by trawlers during this period is capped at 50,000 pounds.

Commercial Scup Seasons. The MFAC voted unanimously to move the month of October from the state managed summertime fishery to the federally managed Winter II fishery. This was done to complement adjustments to the MAFMC and ASMFC’s fishery management plans for scup.

Commercial Scup Bycatch Allowance by Vessels Using Small Mesh Trawls. The MFAC unanimously approved a measure that would prohibit trawlers from possessing more than 200 pounds of scup during the period of May 1 – September 30 and 1,000 pounds of scup during the period of October 1 – April 30 while using net mesh smaller than 5” diamond.

Surf Clam Dredge Closure in Southwest Cape Cod Bay. The MFAC voted 5-2 to prohibit the use of surf clam dredges in an area of southwest Cape Cod Bay off Ellisville Beach from May 15 – October 15. This closure area includes all waters south of 41° 55’ north latitude and west of 70° 29’ west longitude. This closure was proposed to address concerns surf clam dredge gear may be having on newly molted soft shelled lobsters and gear conflicts this dredge activity may be having with fixed gear fishermen.

Menhaden Bycatch Limits. The MFAC voted unanimously to clarify that the 1,000 pound menhaden bycatch limit, which is allowed after the commercial quota is taken, does not apply to large scale purse seine vessels. Large scale purse seine vessels are defined as those vessels utilizing a net that exceeds 150 fathom length or 8 fathom depth. This item was proposed to comply with the ASMFC’s fishery management plan for menhaden.

Use of Bleach in Razor and Soft Shell Clam Fisheries. The MFAC voted unanimously to prohibit the use of bleach or bleach solutions while fishing for or in possession of razor and soft shell clams.

DMF did not make a recommendation to establish a minimum bar spacing requirement on the bottom of surf clam dredges. DMF had proposed a 2” minimum spacing requirement for public comment, but a final recommendation was tabled to further investigate concerns raised during public comment.

Upcoming Emergency Rule Making

Recreational Gulf of Maine (GOM) Cod and Haddock Limits. DMF will be filing emergency regulations that will prohibit the retention of GOM cod by private recreational anglers. This will allow status quo limits for GOM haddock to be retained in state and federal waters. The NEFMC notified DMF that if it were to continue to allow private anglers to retain 1-GOM cod, then the May GOM haddock fishery would be closed to private anglers and the for-hire per angler bag limit would be reduced from 12-haddock to 10-haddock.

Recreational Georges Bank Cod. DMF will be filing emergency regulations to raise the recreational minimum size limit for Georges Bank cod from 22” to 24”. This is consistent with the pending federal action. As nearly all Georges Bank cod landed in MA are taken from outside of state-waters, this action was necessary for enforcement and compliance.

Recreational Fluke, Scup and Black Sea Bass. DMF will be taking public comment on potential adjustments to the 2018 recreational fishing limits for fluke, black sea bass and scup. For fluke, DMF anticipates being able to increase the per angler bag limit from 4-fish to 5-fish, where it was in recent years and extend the season past Columbus Day. For scup, DMF anticipates being able to decrease the minimum size for scup from 10” to 9”. Lastly, for black sea bass, DMF has committed to opening the recreational fishery on May 19th. MA may also liberalize its rules to increase harvest by 4.6%. With a May 19 opening and 5-fish bag limit this will allow the closure date to move from August 30th to September 2nd. DMF has also modeled several options that could extend the open season further into September through adjustments to the bag limit.

Cape Cod Bay Seasonal Vessel Speed Limit Restrictions. DMF notified the MFAC that it may take an emergency action to establish a 10 knot speed limit from February 1 – May 15. This would apply only to vessels measuring less than 65’; vessels 65’ or greater are already subject to a similar federal rule. This was being considered to further protect right whales from ship strikes. Ship strikes contribute to the mortality of this endangered species. DMF scheduled public meetings on this proposal for March 15 and

March 19. Some members of the MFAC opposed such a measure due to the limiting access it may have on the late-April and May haddock fishery on Stellwagen Bank.

Discussion Items

State-Waters Mobile Gear Management Petitions. DMF received several multi-faceted petitions from the MA Fisherman's Mobile Gear Alliance regarding mobile gear closures and surf clam management. The agency is in the process of analyzing these petitions. DMF will likely review these petitions and their analysis of them at an upcoming MFAC business meeting. DMF did not anticipate rule changes would be likely for 2018.

MFAC Sub-Committees. DMF and the MFAC will reconvene the Enforcement Sub-Committee this spring. The Enforcement Sub-Committee includes Chairman Kane, Kalil Bodghan, Tim Brady and Bill Doyle.

Upcoming Meetings

The next MFAC business meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 12, 2018. It will be held at the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife's Westborough Field Headquarters and will begin at 10:00 AM.

Future 2018 meetings are then scheduled for May 10 and June 14; these meeting dates and locations may be subject to change.

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).