



MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission

February 17, 2017 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the February 17, 2017 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. It provides only an overview of the items discussed, votes taken and decisions made. Further discussion of each item is captured in MFAC business meeting minutes for this date.

Elections

With Bill Adler's term on the MFAC expiring in October 2016, the Vice-Chairmanship was open. Michael Pierdinock was appointed to the position of Vice-Chairman. Michael had been serving as the Clerk for the MFAC. With the Clerk's seat now open, Bill Doyle was appointed to the position of Clerk.

Discussion Items

Sea Herring Research Set-Aside Program. DMF biologist, Brad Schondelmeier, provided a presentation on the ongoing Atlantic Herring Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program being conducted between DMF, SMAST and mid-water trawl fishermen. The presentation focused on the program's design and its funding the port-side sampling program and river herring bycatch avoidance program.

State-Waters Groundfish. Three state-waters commercial gillnetters met over the winter with DMF to discuss their proposal to relax the state-waters commercial groundfish closures in May and to increase the state-waters trip limit for Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod. Presently, the state-waters GOM cod trip limit is 200 pounds year-round and state-waters between Boston and the MA/NH border are closed to all commercial groundfish activity in May. These rules are principally designed to protect spawning cod, as well as to reduce fishing mortality on various groundfish species. The gillnetters requested DMF adjust the southern or eastern boundary of the closure to provide access to fishing bottom that would allow for the targeting of flounder species. They also requested DMF increase the 200 pound GOM cod trip limit by 100 pounds during the spring and summer and 300 pounds during the fall and winter. DMF did not support this request because GOM cod biomass remains at a historically low level; it would open up areas at a time when known spawning cod aggregations exist; and it would increase fishing mortality on a variety of species, including GOM cod. Under status quo rules, DMF expects to meet or exceed the 2017 state-waters ACL sub-components for certain groundfish stocks, including GOM cod, witch flounder and CC/GOM yellowtail flounder.

Recent Interstate and Federal Management Meetings. DMF staff reported on recent federal and interstate management meetings. The report focused on Southern New England (SNE) lobster, tautog, striped bass, black sea bass and fluke.

- *SNE Lobster.* The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) is holding public hearings this spring on an addendum to the Lobster Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The addendum was developed to increase egg productivity in the SNE lobster stock. MA's hearing is scheduled for [March 23](#).
- *Tautog.* The ASMFC's Tautog Board is developing an addendum to the Tautog FMP. The primary purpose of this addendum is to establish a commercial tagging program, similar to striped bass.

A tag has been developed to accommodate the live market. DMF will eventually have to determine to establish tagging at point-of-harvest or point-of-sale. The addendum also addresses recreational fishing. MA and RI are working cooperatively to establish complementary rules for both states. Early expectations are that tautog regulations may be changing for 2018.

- *Striped Bass*. The ASMFC's Striped Bass Board is developing an addendum to the Striped Bass FMP. The recent stock assessment update indicated that fishing mortality (.016) was slightly below the fishing mortality target (.018). Certain states pushed for an addendum to potentially liberalize harvest regulations. MA did not support the addendum, as the difference between the two numbers is likely be attributable to statistical noise and potential liberalizations are ill-advised.
- *Black Sea Bass*. The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council supported a 53% increase in harvest limits for 2017 for both the commercial and recreational fisheries based on the most recent stock assessment. This will result in MA's commercial quota increasing from approximately 350,000 pounds to about 530,000 pounds. For the recreational fishery, the 2016 harvest is projected to be in excess of the 2017 Recreational Harvest Limit (RHL), even after accounting for a 50% increase to the RHL. A conference call is being held at the end of February 2017 to discuss potential management action. The ASMFC has proposed NMFS approve status quo, given the status of the stock and the precision of MRIP data.
- *Fluke*. For 2017, the recreational fluke fishery is looking at a mandatory 40% cut in coast-wide harvest. The ASMFC approved an option that would achieve only 31% reduction. The ASMFC is proposing to NMFS that this reduction is sufficient given the precision of MRIP data. If approved, in MA the recreational fluke size limit will be increased by 1" and the bag limit may have to be reduced by 1-fish. MA is proposing an exemption to ASMFC to allow the state to retain its 5-fish bag limit, as there is a negligible increase in harvest between a 4 and 5-fish bag limit.

Surf Clam and Ocean Quahog Dredge Fishery. DMF received two petitions affecting the surf clam and ocean quahog dredge fishery. The first petition was to allow the use of hydraulic clam dredges in Ipswich Bay. Prior to providing any recommendation to open the area, DMF is permitting a late-winter survey. This will be used to determine if there is an abundance of surf clams and ocean quahogs in this area that could support a dredge fishery. Historical surveys have not demonstrated this level of abundance. The second petition was to establish a part-time small scale surf clam and ocean quahog dredge permit that could be made available to certain mobile gear fishermen. DMF is not adopting this petition at this time. However, scoping meetings will be held to determine if access to the surf clam and ocean quahog dredge fishery should be increased, and if so, how to best increase this access.

Nantucket Mobile Gear Petition. In 2016, DMF received a petition from Nantucket Selectmen to: (1) close town waters to mobile gear fishing from May 1 – October 31; (2) prohibit the use of net strengtheners in the squid fishery; and (3) establish a 1 7/8" minimum net mesh size for the squid fishery. This petition was addressed during the recent public hearings and public comment period. Due to inclement weather and ferry cancelations, DMF cancelled the February 13, 2017 public hearing on Nantucket. To provide an opportunity for further comments and to review DMF's analysis of the petition, DMF is scheduling a meeting on Nantucket for late-March 2017. Consistent with his previous decision, the Director is not making a recommendation to adopt the mobile gear closure.

Future Meetings

Spring 2017 meetings have been scheduled for March 9th, April 6th, and May 4th. 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).