



# MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission

## June 15, 2017 Meeting Summary

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

### Action Items

**2017 Recreational Black Sea Bass and Fluke Limits.** The MFAC unanimously approved the 2017 recreational fishing limits for black sea bass and fluke. DMF had set these limits on an emergency basis in May 2017. This action codifies these limits on a permanent basis for the remainder of the fishing year. The limits are described in the table below:

#### 2017 Recreational Fishing Limits for Black Sea Bass and Fluke

Species	Open Season	Closed Season	Bag Limit	Minimum Size
Black Sea Bass	May 20 – August 29	August 30 – May 19	5-fish	15"
Fluke	May 22 – September 23	September 24 – May 21	4-fish	17"

**2017 Commercial Black Sea Bass Limits.** For 2017, Massachusetts commercial black sea bass quota was increased by 53%. DMF held public scoping meetings in March 2017 to determine how to best amend the summertime commercial rules and utilize this additional quota. Based on the feedback received, DMF enacted regulations on an emergency basis to increase the weir set-aside commensurate with the quota increase and start the commercial fishing season in early July. The MFAC unanimously approved these changes to commercial fishing limit for 2017, codifying them on a more permanent basis for this calendar year. The limits are described in the table below:

#### 2017 Commercial Summertime Black Sea Bass Limits

Gear Type	Open Season	Open Days	Trip Limit	Minimum Size
Weirs	January 1 - Quota	Sunday - Saturday	15,000 annually	12"
Pots/Traps	July 9 - Quota	Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday	300 lbs	12"
Hook & Line	July 9 - Quota	Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday	150 lbs	12"
Nets	July 9 - Quota	Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday	150 lbs	12"

During and subsequent to the March 2017 public scoping period, DMF received comments from fishermen requesting changes to the number and sequence of the open fishing days and trip limits, as well as the black sea bass pot limit and the timing of the net fishery. Due to timing, DMF did not take action on these potential adjustments for 2017. However, DMF intends to analyze 2017 fishery performance and these potential adjustments and consider more broad sweeping regulatory changes for 2018.

### Presentations

The MFAC received a presentation from Kathryn Ford, the head of DMF's habitat program. The presentation focused on offshore wind energy development in the north east and the offshore wind energy development process.

### **Items for Future Public Hearing**

**Net Strengtheners in the Squid Fishery.** For 2017, DMF adopted a 1 7/8" minimum net mesh size for the state-waters squid fishery (April 23 – June 9). This complemented the federal minimum net mesh size for Trimester 2 (May – August). When adopting this net size rule, DMF determined that it would not prohibit the use of net strengtheners. However, there were questions regarding whether or not the longstanding rule that prohibits the use of net covers in large mesh fisheries also applied to the small mesh squid fishery. This was not the intent of the regulation and DMF intends to amend state regulations to clarify that the net cover rule does not apply to the small mesh squid fishery.

**Surf Clam Dredge Bar Spacing.** At the June 2017 Shellfish Advisory Panel meeting, representatives from the surf clam industry requested DMF establish a minimum dredge bar spacing of 2". The purpose of this would be to increase selectivity and thereby minimize the potential for sub-legal catch in this high volume fishery.

### **Discussion Items**

DMF reviewed the recent May 2017 ASMFC business meeting. The focus of this was on the draft amendment to the Tautog FMP. This amendment aims to establish regional management. Rhode Island and Massachusetts would form a region. Under this approach there exists an opportunity to create uniform recreational fishing regulations between the states. Each state would continue to be able to unilaterally manage its commercial fishery. The amendment also looks to establish a commercial tautog tagging program. DMF expected the tagging program would be adopted. To facilitate its implementation, DMF intended to establish a permitting control date prior to the start of the 2017 fishing season (September 1) and would also likely consider a tautog permit endorsement for 2018.

DMF also reviewed a request from hook and line fishermen to consider allowing the transfer of limited entry fluke and black sea bass permits. There was support for this request. DMF will now begin to analyze potential transfer criteria, such as active fishing thresholds. This prompted a discussion about the future transferability of other non-transferable limited entry permits. DMF will analyze this for the MFAC at a future date.

For 2017, DMF adjusted the technique by which commercial fishermen are to measure whelks. A DMF analysis concluded that the change in the gauging technique would result in an estimated 1/16" increase in the minimum shell width and potential 10% loss of catch. This would be the first step in series of minimum size adjustments aimed at enhancing spawning stock biomass. Vineyard fishermen, however, have reported this change in gauging technique has had a larger than anticipated impact on harvest. DMF sent fishery technicians to the island to investigate this claim and will meet with concerned fishermen on July 10.

### **Future Meetings**

Meeting dates for the second half of 2017 are forthcoming.

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](mailto:jared.silva@state.ma.us)).