



# MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission

## August 15, 2019 Meeting Summary

This document serves as a brief summary of the August 15, 2019 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. Further details are available in the supplemental meeting materials and MFAC business meeting minutes.

### Action Items

#### 2019 Recreational Fishing Limits

The MFAC unanimously approved the Director’s recommendation to adopt the 2019 recreational fishing limits for Gulf of Maine cod and haddock and Georges Bank cod. This adopts state recreational fishing rules that mirror those federal regulations adopted in July 2019.

<b>Fishery</b>	<b>Open Season</b>	<b>Bag Limit</b>	<b>Minimum Size</b>
Gulf of Maine Haddock	May 1 – February 29	15 fish	17”
	April 15 – April 30	15 fish	
Gulf of Maine Cod	September 15 – September 30	1 fish	21”
Georges Bank Cod	January 1 – December 31	1 fish	21”

#### In-Season Adjustments to the 2019 Commercial Fishing Limits for Summer Flounder and Striped Bass

The 2019 commercial summer flounder (fluke) quota was increased by 80% compared to 2018 due to the improved stock conditions observed in the 2018 benchmark stock assessment. On July 31, 2019, DMF proposed liberalizing the state’s Period II (April 23 - December 31) commercial fluke fishing limits to provide greater access to this elevated quota for the remainder of the fishing year. After reviewing public comment, Director Pierce recommended that through October 31, 2019, the Period II fluke limits will remain status quo, then effective November 1, 2019, allow commercial fishermen to fish for, retain, possess and land up to 1,000 pounds of fluke per trip and the closed and rescind the closed fishing and days (Fridays and Saturdays). The MFAC unanimously approved this recommendation. This action continues to provide the inshore fleet more access to the quota by way of a prolonged summertime. Additionally, it recognizes that the offshore fleet was not afforded additional access to the quota during the 2-10 Period I fishery (January 1 - April 22) due to the timing of the quota increase, and this allows them to access the remaining 2019 quota at elevated levels after fluke migrate out of our inshore waters during the late fall.

Director Pierce did not make a recommendation to amend the striped bass limits at this time. Until further notice the limits will remain status quo. This position was unanimously supported by the MFAC. The decision for no action is principally based on updated commercial landings data that demonstrated average weekly landings have doubled since the proposal to increase the number of open commercial fishing days per week was made on July 31, 2019 and if landing trends continue the available quota could be taken by early October 2019. However, if landings wane in the fall, as they typically do, increasing the number of open fishing days per week may be considered at the September MFAC business meeting. If such an action is taken, it will be done with the explicit intention of having 2019 landings not exceed a self-imposed 713,000 pound threshold. This threshold corresponds to the 18%

reduction to the 2020 quota being proposed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to end overfishing on striped bass and achieve the fishing mortality target.

### **Future Public Hearing Items**

DMF will be holding a public hearing on September 11, 2019 at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy to take comment on a number of fisheries management issues. Of particular interest are tautog tagging and permitting; a control date for the LCMA1 lobster trap fishery; liberalizations to the Period I fluke fishery limits; and (4) coastal shark compliance measures. At the request of the MFAC, DMF will announce an additional public hearing September 12 at DMF's Gloucester office.

DMF will host two public hearings for the ASMFC in early October to take comment on Addendum VI to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Striped Bass. The Addendum aims to reduce fishing mortality by 18% to end overfishing and achieve the fishing mortality target. This includes proposals to cut commercial quotas, adjust recreational minimum sizes with options for a slot limit, and a broad mandate for the use of circle hooks when fishing with bait. A formal announcement is forthcoming.

Lastly, DMF presented two new draft regulations that will go out to public hearing later this fall and winter. First, DMF will be filing emergency regulations to update its lobster processing regulations consistent with recent changes to the overarching statute (G.L. c. 130, §44) allowing for additional processing opportunities and commerce. This public hearing will likely occur just prior to the October MFAC business meeting. Next, DMF seeks to clarify in regulation that the individual named on a for-hire permit may fish as a private recreational angler under the authority of the for-hire permit and not have to obtain a recreational saltwater license to cover the private recreational angling activities. This item will likely proceed to public hearing over the winter as part of a larger docket.

### **Discussion Items**

DMF also provided the MFAC with an overview of the recent ASMFC quarterly meeting. Comments focused on Addendum VI to the Striped Bass FMP. However, DMF staff also touched on issues germane to horseshoe crabs, menhaden, tautog and spiny dogfish. DMF biologist Kelly Whittemore also gave a presentation on potential issues caused by bait imports that may arise in response to the impact lowered herring quotas on lobster bait availability. Kelly is currently involved with an ASMFC working group to evaluate the bio-security of potential bait sources, and potentially develop prohibited bait lists to prevent the spread of veterinary disease and invasive species.

### **Upcoming Meetings**

The MFAC is currently scheduled to meet again on September 19, 2019. All meetings begin at 9AM and are held at DFW's Field Headquarters located at 1 Rabbit Hill Road in Westborough, MA.

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)).