



**MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission  
July 10, 2023 Meeting Summary**

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This document serves as a brief summary of the July 10, 2023 Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission (MFAC) business meeting. This business meeting was held virtually via Zoom. All meeting materials are available on the [MFAC's past meeting website](#) and the recording of this business meeting has been published on [DMF's YouTube channel](#).

**Action Items**

*Recreational Striped Bass Slot Limit.* The MFAC unanimously approved DMF finalizing existing emergency regulations to reduce the recreational striped bass maximum size from less than 35" to less than 31", resulting in a new recreational slot limit for the ocean fishery of 28" to less than 31". DMF filed emergency regulations on May 26, 2023 responding to the May 3 emergency action by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The emergency rules were prompted by an unexpected doubling in the recreational harvest from 2021 to 2022, which greatly reduced the probability of rebuilding the currently overfished striped bass stock by the 2029 rebuilding deadline set by the Interstate Fishery Management Plan. The increased recreational harvest in 2022 was driven by the dominant 2015 year-class ageing into the harvestable size range. The narrowed slot limit is expected to reduce harvest in 2023 by protecting more than half of that dominant 2015 year-class, compared to limited protection afforded by a 28" to less than 35" slot limit.

*In-Season Adjustment to Horseshoe Crab Trip Limits.* The MFAC unanimously approved DMF's recommendation to reduce the horseshoe crab trip limit for mobile gear fishers for the remainder of 2023. This action will reduce the trip limit from 300 crabs to 200 crabs for limited entry permit holders and 75 crabs to 50 crabs for the open access fishery. This action is intended to slow the consumption of the remaining quota so it remains available throughout the summer season thereby reducing potential regulatory discarding that may occur due to an early season closure. At present, the horseshoe crab fishery has taken more than 80% of its 2023 quota of 140,000 horseshoe crabs, driven by unanticipatedly high levels of early season harvest due to increased winter fishing effort, increased hand harvest effort responding to DMF proposals this spring, and the frontloading of the bait quota to make crabs available to the biomedical industry through the rent-a-crab program.

*In-Season Adjustment to Smooth Dogfish Trip Limits.* The MFAC unanimously approved DMF's recommendation to increase the commercial smooth dogfish trip limit from 100 pounds to 300 pounds for the remainder of the 2023 season. This action is designed to better utilize Massachusetts' available quota and responds to an industry request. For 2024, DMF will consider adopting this adjustment as a permanent regulation.

*In-Season Adjustment to Summer Flounder Trip Limits.* The MFAC unanimously approved DMF's recommendation to increase the 2023 commercial summer flounder trip limits for the April 23 – August 31 season. For net fishers the trip limits will increase from 500 pounds to 600 pounds and for hook fishers it will increase from 300 pounds to 400 pounds. This is consistent with the action approved by the MFAC at their May 2023 business meeting. However, due to administrative delays, DMF has not yet been able to finalize the trip limit increase as a regulation. This in-season adjustment will serve as a

stop-gap until the regulations are implemented on July 21, thereby allowing the limits to be implemented in a more timely manner to the benefit of the state's seafood industry.

*Belding Award.* The MFAC unanimously approved DMF's recommendation to posthumously award the 2023 Belding Award to J. Michael Hickey. Hickey was the long-time Shellfish Program Manager for DMF, retiring in 2020 after a near 52-year career, during which he was integral in the development of DMF's Shellfish Program, as well as the founding of the national Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference. Mike followed in Dr. Belding's legacy as a prominent authority on the Commonwealth's shellfish fisheries.

*Letter to Secretary Tepper on Law Enforcement.* The MFAC consented to sending a letter to Rebecca Tepper, Secretary of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. The purpose of the letter was to advocate support for additional funding for the Massachusetts Environmental Police to increase their ranks to levels sufficient to meet their mission and thereby enhance marine fisheries enforcement.

### **Upcoming Meetings**

The MFAC will meet next on Wednesday, August 16, 2023 at 9AM via Zoom.