



**MA Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission
September 19, 2023 Meeting Summary**

This document serves as a brief summary of the September 19, 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](#).

Fishery Performance and Quota Managed Species Update. DMF staff reviewed the current year-to-date performance of its commercial quota managed fisheries for black sea bass, bluefish, summer flounder, scup, spiny dogfish, tautog, and menhaden. DMF will re-evaluate the management of some of these commercial fisheries this fall given performance this year and quota changes anticipated for 2024 (see Items for Future Public Hearing, below).

Action on Commercial Menhaden In-Season Adjustment. The 2023 menhaden quota has been largely underutilized due to lack of inshore availability. To date, less than 25% of the quota has been landed. While it is unlikely that the fish will show up in large quantities during their fall run, there may be opportunities for vessels fishing offshore to encounter large quantities of menhaden and land this fish in Massachusetts. Accordingly, for 2023, DMF recommended and the MFAC unanimously approved an in-season adjustment to: (1) suspend the trip limit trigger that would reduce the trip limit from 120,000 pounds to 25,000 pounds once 50% of the quota is taken and instead allow commercial fishers to land up to 120,000 pounds until 90% of the quota is taken; and (2) maintain the Friday closure to purse seining during any period when the trip limit is at 120,000 pounds.

Items for Future Public Hearing

Menhaden. Given the performance of the 2023 menhaden fishery, DMF will consider modifications to its menhaden rules for 2024 to enable utilization of the quota under more variable resource distribution conditions. This includes proposals to: (1) start the commercial fishery earlier (e.g., June 1 rather than June 15); (2) if 50% of the commercial quota is taken prior to a date certain (e.g., July 1), then delay the opening of the 25,000 pound fishery until July 1 and during the interim period allow landings up to 6,000 pounds; (3) if 50% of the commercial quota is not taken by a date certain (e.g., September 1) allow the commercial fishery to continue to operate at the 120,000 pound trip limit until 90% of the quota is taken; and (4) maintain the Friday closure to purse seining during any period when there is a 120,000-pound trip limit. The MFAC also requested DMF consider opening earlier in the spring (e.g., May 15) and a year-round Friday closure to purse seining in inshore net areas, particularly Boston Harbor.

Summer Flounder. For 2024 and 2025, DMF anticipates there will be a near 60% reduction in the state's summer flounder quota; however, given recent quota underutilization, drastic management changes are not warranted. DMF's proposal is to consider reducing the April 23 – August 31 trip limit by 100 pounds for all gear types, and the September trip limit by 200 pounds for all gear types, so as to slow quota consumption. Ultimately, this will come down to industry's preference to maintain higher limits and potentially close the fishery during the summer or take a slight cut to fishing limits in hopes of maintaining the fishery into September.

Note that the September 14 memorandum to the MFAC indicated DMF did not intend to take action to amend the limits during Period I (January 1 – April 22). However, following conversations with industry and neighboring states, DMF anticipates proposing to reduce the Period I trip limit from 10,000 pounds to 5,000 pounds beginning in 2024.

Buoy Line Marking and New Rope with Tracer. The Massachusetts Lobstermen’s Association has developed buoy line that has a breaking strength of 1,700 pounds or less, is red or candy cane (red and white) in color, and contains a visible tracer throughout the buoy line that reads “MASS LOBSTER”. In response, DMF is proposing to amend its buoy line modification and marking regulations to recognize this buoy line meets the state’s weak rope and buoy line marking standards and thereby authorize it to be used in the Massachusetts’ commercial mixed species pot/trap fishery

Permitting. DMF is proposing to amend its permitting regulations for 2024. First, DMF is seeking to allow the electronic display of its commercial fishing permit. At present, DMF requires a hard copy of the permit be in possession. Second, DMF is looking to allow latent limited entry permit endorsements to be transferred to immediate family members. This would make DMF’s transfer program for limited entry endorsements consistent with the program for Coastal Lobster Permit transfers.

Discussion Items

New England Fishery Management Council Update. DMF staff provided the MFAC with updates pertaining to the New England Fishery Management Council and federal fisheries management. The presentation focused on federal trawl survey issues; climate change planning; management issues pertaining to scallops, red crab, groundfish, skate, and herring; and protected species management. Of particular interest to the MFAC and state-waters fisheries management was potential specifications for Gulf of Maine haddock for 2024 and 2025, which may result in DMF having to make some regulatory adjustments for the upcoming fishing season.

Update on Commercial Surf Clam Fishery Management. DMF provided the MFAC with three updates relevant to surf clam management. First, the agency met with industry representatives and has initiated a pilot program to test the efficacy of electronic vessel monitors in spatio-temporal management. This may help DMF modernize its approach to spatial surf clam management and better protect sensitive habitats. Second, DMF was provided an informal review of the Center for Coastal Studies’ preliminary results into the marine ecology and geology at Herring Cove Beach and the potential impacts hydraulic surf clam dredging may have on this area’s marine ecology and geology. While most of the hypotheses tested, particularly regarding fishery impacts, were inconclusive, Herring Cove was found not to be a high energy area and past dredge tracks were more persistent than expected. The final report is expected to be released soon and it may further inform DMF on how to best manage the fishery. Lastly, DMF continues to have discussions with DEP regarding jurisdictional issues and the application of the Wetlands Protection Act to commercial fishing activities.

Whelk Fishery Management. DMF studies have shown the channeled whelk resource is overfished and overfishing is occurring and the current size-at-harvest does not provide any protection to female spawning stock biomass. As an initial management action, DMF enacted a series of incremental gauge increases to raise the minimum size-at-harvest to 50% maturity. The current gauge schedule increases the minimum size by 1/8” every three years and reaches the terminal gauge size in 2033. Concerns have been expressed that this management approach will result in a female only fishery at the terminal gauge size and may have significant economic impacts on industry. Accordingly, there is interest in developing potential alternative management approaches to reduce fishing mortality and enhance spawning stock biomass. To this point, DMF met with State Representative Cabral and SMAST researchers about

obtaining funding for a PhD student to develop a management strategy evaluation for to explore a range of potential management options for thechanneled whelk resource and conch pot fishery.

Presentation on Striped Bass Citizen Science Program. DMF has initiated a citizen science program to enhance data collection on recreational release mortality of striped bass. DMF staff provided an overview of this project; partnerships with angler organizations and smart phone application developers; and some of its initial findings. DMF is looking to collect data for another year and to expand this project to other states.

Upcoming Meetings

The upcoming MFAC business meeting schedule for the fall and winter of 2023 will be announced shortly.