



October 2020 Council Meeting Summary

The following summary highlights actions taken and issues considered at the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's meeting October 5-8, 2020. This meeting was conducted by webinar due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Presentations, briefing materials, motions, and webinar recordings are available at <http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/october-2020>.

During this meeting, the Council:

- Revised 2021 specifications for spiny dogfish and adopted new specifications for 2022
- Reviewed previously-implemented 2021 specifications for chub mackerel and recommended no changes
- Approved a list of eighteen recommendations in response to Executive Order 13921
- Received a report detailing updates made to the research priorities document and outlining plans for a comprehensive review of all priorities scheduled for 2021.
- Received updates on several ongoing EAFM activities
- Convened a joint meeting of the Council and SSC to support open communication and continue development of SSC activities in support of Council priorities
- Revised and finalized the range of alternatives for the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment*
- Reviewed progress on the Recreational Management Reform Initiative and agreed to initiate a joint framework/addendum and a joint amendment to address several recreational issues*
- Received a report from the Executive Committee regarding draft deliverables for the 2021 Implementation Plan

** Items denoted with an asterisk (*) were undertaken during joint meetings with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Bluefish Management Board or Policy Board.*

Spiny Dogfish 2021-2022 Specifications

The Council revised spiny dogfish specifications for the 2021 fishing year (begins May 1) and adopted new specifications for the 2022 fishing year. Although the Council had previously set multi-year specifications for 2019-2021, in December 2019 the Council approved a revised risk policy with the intent that 2021 specifications would be revised to reflect the new policy. As such, the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) recommended increasing the upcoming 2021 Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) for 2021 from 35.4 million pounds to 38.6 million pounds. Based on this revised ABC, the Council approved a commercial quota of 29.6 million pounds, which is an 8% increase compared to the quota previously recommended for 2021 and a 27% increase compared to the current 2020 quota. The Council also voted to extend these same specifications for the 2022 fishing year, as recommended by staff and the SSC, to align with the timing of the 2022 research track assessment. The Council did not recommend any trip limit changes but plans to conduct socio-economic analyses of potential trip limit changes in 2021.

Chub Mackerel – 2021 Specifications Review

The Council reviewed the previously implemented 2021 catch and landings limits for Atlantic chub mackerel. After considering the recommendations of the SSC and Monitoring Committee, as well as the Advisory Panel Fishery Performance Report, they agreed that no changes are necessary to the previously implemented measures. Additional details about 2021 specifications are available [here](#).

Executive Order on Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth

The Council approved a final list of recommendations in response to Executive Order (EO) 13921. Section 4 of the EO requires each of Regional Fishery Management Council to submit to the Secretary of Commerce a prioritized list of recommended actions to reduce burdens on domestic fishing and to increase production within sustainable fisheries, including a proposal for initiating action by May 6, 2021. The Council approved 18 recommendations covering a broad range of topics.

The Council approved eight “Council Actions,” which are tasks that can be carried out primarily by the Council. These include a combination of new initiatives which will be added to the Council’s 2021 Implementation Plan and ongoing initiatives that address the objectives of the EO:

- **Council Actions – New Initiatives:** (1) Consider increasing the *Illex* incidental possession limit for certain vessels after the *Illex* fishery closes. (2) Consider increasing the amount of butterfish that can be landed by vessels using smaller than 3-inch mesh. (3) Review and consider changes to the commercial minimum mesh size for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. (4) Analyze the potential socio-economic impacts of potential changes to the dogfish trip limit. (5) Initiate a framework to allow golden tilefish specifications to be set for more than 3 years.
- **Council Actions – Ongoing Initiatives:** (1) Continue development of the Recreational Reform Initiative and associated actions. (2) Continue to plan and participate in Climate Change Scenario Planning process. (3) Provide training and outreach to facilitate compliance with commercial eVTR requirements.

The Council also approved ten “Non-Council Actions” recommendations, which are directed to other agencies. Based on guidance provided by the Council, these recommendations will be organized and prioritized within three sub-categories:

- **Non-Council Actions – General:** (1) Modify the USFWS definition of *Shellfish* so that squid will be exempt from import/export rules and fees. (2) Provide increased funding and resources to address fishery reporting issues and improve fishery dependent data. (3) Evaluate the National Standard 1 guidelines relative to the Modern Fish Act and provide clarification on the Councils’ flexibility to implement alternative recreational management approaches. (4) Establish federal policy requiring that imports of seafood should meet or exceed the U.S. standards of harvest.
- **Non-Council Actions – Offshore Wind:** (1) Provide additional funding to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center to support the design and evaluation of new supplemental surveys that can be integrated into stock assessments and existing time series. (2) Collect additional information on fishing and transit locations, especially for fisheries that are not fully covered by existing datasets.
- **Non-Council Actions – Highly Migratory Species (HMS):** (1) Address the disparity between U.S. and foreign HMS harvesting standards (recommendations will address specific concerns related to gear requirements as well as a desire to restrict HMS imports from countries that do not meet U.S. harvesting standards). (2) Integrate Vessel Trip Reporting (VTR) and HMS reporting systems. (3) Require holders of HMS permits with a commercial sale endorsement to report catch and harvest of all species, as well as discarded/undersize fish. (4) Integrate the HMS and GARFO permitting database and USCG safety inspection database.

Additional background information on these topics is available in the [briefing materials](#). Staff is preparing the Council’s recommendations for final submission to NMFS. These will be made available on the Council’s website in the coming weeks.

Research Priorities Update

The Council received a report detailing updates made to the research priorities document and outlining plans for a comprehensive review of all priorities scheduled for 2021. Last year, the Council approved the Five-Year (2020-2024) Research Priorities document which was re-organized and prioritized to develop a more useful, tactical, and

strategic document to effectively advance scientific and management information by the Council. The 2020 update and 2021 review are intended to track, monitor, and improve the Council's research priorities document to ensure its successful implementation.

Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management Updates (EAFM)

The Council received progress on several ongoing activities in support of advancing the Council's EAFM guidance document. First, staff reviewed progress on the development of a management strategy evaluation (MSE) that will evaluate the biological and economic performance and trade-offs of management alternatives to minimize discards in the recreational summer flounder fishery. The MSE will specify management objectives, performance metrics, and identify uncertainties through an extensive management and stakeholder engagement process. A kick-off webinar and mock MSE workshop was held in September with relevant advisory panels and additional focused stakeholder workshops will occur over the next 12-15 months.

Staff also provided an update on a collaborative research project between the Council and a research team from Rutgers University. The project will test new methods and models to predict short-term (over the next 1-10 years) climate-induced movements of diverse species that better align with management timescales. Summer flounder, spiny dogfish, *Illex* squid, and gray triggerfish have been selected as the focal species and, to date, the model has been fitted to spiny dogfish data. Model development will continue through 2020, with forecast testing scheduled for 2021. It is anticipated the project will be completed sometime in 2022.

Joint Council/SSC Meeting

Building off the success of the first joint meeting of the Council and its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) in 2019, a second joint meeting was held to support open communication and continue development of SSC activities in support of Council priorities. The Council provided direction to the SSC Economic Work Group regarding their proposal to use the draft 2021 Implementation Plan to develop three case studies to highlight a process and the types of economic information that could be provided to the Council. The Economic Work Group will present the three case studies to the Council in December. Other topics discussed by the Council and SSC included the potential science implications of missing 2020 data due to the COVID-19 pandemic and considerations and approaches to address the application of the new risk policy for a species like ocean quahog.

Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment

The Council met jointly with the Bluefish Management Board (Board) to finalize the range of alternatives for the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment. The Council and Board reviewed recommendations from the Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) and approved a range of alternatives for inclusion in a draft public hearing document.

Consistent with FMAT recommendations, the Council and Board reduced the range of alternatives for further consideration in this amendment. The state commercial allocation alternatives were condensed to better represent recent state-by-state landings trends in the bluefish fishery. The Council and Board also voted to remove the alternatives related to regional commercial allocations from further consideration in this action. Council and Board members were concerned that this management approach would result in a loss of autonomy and flexibility necessary for state fishery managers to effectively manage to the needs of their state's commercial fisheries. The Council and Board also removed the two rebuilding plan alternatives that were projected to rebuild the stock to its biomass target within 10 years. The Magnuson Stevens Act mandate to rebuild an overfished stock in as short a time as possible while taking into consideration biological and socioeconomic impacts was an important factor in this decision. Council and Board members reasoned that the three remaining rebuilding plan alternatives span a reasonable time period of 4 to 7 years. Lastly, the Council and Board refined the range of alternatives pertaining to the sector transfer process, whereby landings are transferred between the recreational and commercial

sectors, and the *de minimis* provision, which would relieve a state from adopting certain fishery regulatory measures when its harvest has minimal contribution to the coastwide harvest of bluefish.

The Council and Board expect to approve a public hearing document at the joint February meeting. Additional information, including an updated list of issues addressed in this action, can be found at:

<https://www.mafmc.org/actions/bluefish-allocation-amendment>.

Recreational Management Reform Initiative

The Council and the ASMFC's Policy Board (Board) reviewed progress on the Recreational Management Reform Initiative and discussed next steps. After reviewing nine topics that were either recommended by the Recreational Management Reform Initiative Steering Committee or by stakeholders through scoping for two separate ongoing amendments, the Council and Board agreed to initiate a joint framework/addendum and a joint amendment to address several recreational issues.

The **framework/addendum** will further develop and consider the following topics and management issues:

- better incorporating MRIP uncertainty into the management process;
- guidelines for maintaining status quo recreational management measures (i.e., bag, size, and season limits) from one year to the next;
- a process for setting multi-year recreational management measures;
- changes to the timing of the recommendation for federal waters recreational management measures; and
- a proposal put forward by six recreational organizations called a harvest control rule.

The **amendment** would consider options for managing for-hire recreational fisheries separately from other recreational fishing modes (referred to as sector separation) and would also consider options related to recreational catch accounting such as private angler reporting and enhanced vessel trip report requirements for for-hire vessels.

The Council and Board may consider an initial draft range of alternatives for the framework/addendum, as well as a draft scoping document for the amendment, in early 2021. Additional information about the Recreational Management Reform Initiative can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/actions/recreational-reform-initiative>.

Executive Committee - 2021 Implementation Plan

The Executive Committee met to discuss the 2021 Implementation Plan. The Council develops Implementation Plans each year to ensure progress toward achieving the goals and objectives of its 5-year strategic plan. First, the Committee received a progress update on the 2020 Implementation Plan. The Executive Director noted that despite the disruptions caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Council is on track with most of the actions and deliverables identified for this year. Status updates for each item are provided on pages 3-6 of the briefing materials. The Committee then reviewed and provided feedback on a draft list of deliverables that had been developed by staff for 2021. Staff noted that several items on the list (#55-59) were flagged as "Possible Additions" because they were being considered for inclusion in the Council's response to Executive Order 13921. These items will be moved to the main sections of the list in the next iteration reviewed at the December meeting.

The Executive Committee had a lengthy discussion about whether to move item #66 ("Initiate an action to implement a possession limit for frigate and bullet mackerel in the Mid-Atlantic") from the "Possible Additions" section to the proposed deliverables for 2021. A motion to make this change ultimately failed based on a tied vote. This action remains on the draft list of "Possible Additions" for consideration by the Council in December. The Committee requested that additional information be provided during the December Council meeting on why the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council decided against implementing a possession limit for these species, the potential connection between these species and the Mid-Atlantic Council's Fishery Management Plans (e.g.,

as prey for Council managed species or bycatch in Council managed fisheries), and the type of management action that could be used to implement a possession limit for these species in the Mid-Atlantic.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the full Council will be held via webinar on **December 14-17, 2020**. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.