



April 2021 Council Meeting Summary

The following summary highlights actions taken and issues considered at the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's meeting April 6-8, 2021. This meeting was conducted by webinar due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Presentations, briefing materials, and motions are available at <http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/april-2021>.

During this meeting, the Council:

- Postponed final action on the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment until the joint Council/Board meeting in December 2021 (joint with the ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board)
- Adopted status quo specifications for the Mid-Atlantic blueline tilefish fishery for 2022-2024
- Reviewed a preliminary range of alternatives for the Tilefish Multi-Year Specifications Framework
- Provided comments on E.O 14008 on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad
- Received an update regarding several ongoing activities in support of advancing the Council's EAFM guidance document
- Reviewed the 2021 Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem Report and EAFM Risk Assessment
- Received an update on the East Coast Climate Change Scenario Planning Initiative
- Received a presentation on Climate Change Science Efforts Underway at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center

Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment

The Council met jointly with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (Commission) Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board (Board) to consider final action on the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Commercial/Recreational Allocation Amendment. This action considers possible changes to the commercial and recreational allocations of summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. The amendment also considers options that would allow a portion of the allowable landings to be transferred between the commercial and recreational sectors each year, in either direction, based on the needs of each sector.

During the meeting, the Council and Board reviewed a summary of the 334 public comments submitted during five virtual public hearings and a written comment period earlier this year. In general, comments from the commercial sector favored maintaining status quo allocations, while comments from the recreational sector tended to support the alternatives that would increase allocations to the recreational sector. A more detailed summary of the public comments is available [here](#).

After several hours of discussion, the Council and Board voted to postpone final action until December. This is intended to allow for further development of the Recreational Reform Initiative—an approach that has been recommended by stakeholders from both sectors, as well as representatives from the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO). The [Recreational Reform Initiative](#) focuses on management changes to more appropriately account for uncertainty and variability in the Marine Recreational Information Program data and provide stability in the recreational bag, size, and season limits. Proponents of postponing final action have argued that a better sense of potential management changes through the Recreational Reform Initiative may inform the allocation decisions that the Council and Board are considering through this action.

This decision is not expected to affect the timing of any allocation changes, as GARFO has advised that implementation of the amendment would be very unlikely to occur until January 1, 2023, regardless of whether

approval occurred at this meeting or in December. In the months ahead, staff may incorporate a small number of new alternatives proposed by Council and Board members that fall within the range of alternatives already analyzed within the amendment. The Council and Board are expected to discuss the need for any additional alternatives at their joint meeting in August. Additional information and updates are available on the amendment [action page](#).

Blueline Tilefish 2022-2024 Specifications

After reviewing recommendations from its Scientific and Statistical Committee, Tilefish Monitoring Committee, and Tilefish Advisory Panel, the Council adopted status quo specifications for the Mid-Atlantic blueline tilefish fishery for the 2022-2024 fishing years. These specifications are summarized in the table below.

Summary of Blueline Tilefish 2022-2024 Specifications	
Acceptable Biological Catch	100,520 pounds
Recreational Total Allowable Landings	71,912 pounds
Recreational Trip Limits	Private Boat: 3 fish USCG uninspected for-hire vessel: 5 fish USCG inspected for-hire vessel: 7 fish
Commercial Total Allowable Landings	26,869 pounds
Commercial Trip Limits	500 pounds (until 70% of quota is met, then reduced to 300 pounds)

The Council discussed several significant sources of uncertainty for this data poor stock. In particular, the SSC has voiced concerns about the data limited assessment approach for blueline tilefish as well as the methods used to estimate private/rental recreational catch. It was also noted that there is uncertainty about whether the spatial expansion of the fishery represents increased effort by harvesters or a shift northward in the range of the population as result of climate change.

Finally, the Council also discussed the status of private permitting and reporting for blueline and golden tilefish. In August 2020, NOAA Fisheries implemented a [final rule](#) requiring recreational vessels to obtain a private recreational tilefish permit and submit vessel trip reports for all trips where tilefish were targeted or retained. Because the recreational season runs from May 1 - October 31, the Council was only able to review 3 months of data. The Council anticipates a presentation from the regional office that will include a status update of private permitting and reporting at the October 2021 meeting. Learn more about tilefish permitting and reporting requirements [here](#).

Tilefish Multi-Year Specifications Framework

The first of two meetings was held to consider the Tilefish Multi-Year Specifications Framework to the Tilefish Fishery Management Plan. This framework was initiated to address minor process-related modifications to the golden tilefish management system and set specifications for 2023-2024. The Council reviewed a preliminary range of alternatives and selected preferred alternatives for the process related issues. The golden tilefish management track assessment update, which is scheduled to be completed in June, will be used to develop specifications for 2023-2024. Staff will continue development of the framework for further consideration at the August 2021 Council meeting.

Listening Session on President Biden's Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad

Mr. Paul Doremus, Acting Administrator of the NOAA Fisheries, hosted a listening session on Section 216(c) of E.O 14008 on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad. This section of the EO requires the Secretary of

Commerce to collect input from the Councils on how to make fisheries and protected resources more resilient to climate change. The Council and members of the public offered comments and recommendations related to science and monitoring needs, governance concerns, fish habitat, aquaculture, offshore wind, and other topics. Council staff will summarize these comments for submission to NOAA Fisheries. A recording of the discussion is available [here](#).

Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) Updates

The Council received an update regarding several ongoing activities in support of advancing the Council's EAFM guidance document. First, staff reviewed progress made on the 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. Since the Council's last update on this project in October 2020, staff conducted considerable outreach to solicit input from a broad sector of stakeholders regarding the future management of summer flounder and ideas on how to reduce recreational discards. Initial results from a scoping survey were presented to the Council and will be used in future focused stakeholder workshops. This input will help the Council identify management objectives and strategies to be evaluated in the MSE. Over the next 8-10 months the project will focus on additional stakeholder workshops, biological and economic model development, and additional feedback and direction from management. It is anticipated that final results will be available for Council consideration in the spring of 2022.

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 due to their diverse life histories, data availability, and interest in past and future distribution shifts. This project will test the utility of dynamic range models and their ability to forecast changes in species distributions. Observation models are currently being fitted to survey data and life history information and should be complete for all four focal species by the end of summer 2021. An update on model development and preliminary results will be presented to the Council's Ecosystem and Ocean Planning Committee and Advisory Panel, tentatively planned for early this fall. It is anticipated the project will be completed in late 2022.

2021 Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem Report and EAFM Risk Assessment

Dr. Sarah Gaichas (NEFSC) presented the key results and findings of the 2021 Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem report developed by scientists at the NEFSC, NOAA researchers, academia, and non-profit organizations. The report is provided to the Council each April and gives an overview of ecosystem-level indicators that evaluate the status and trends of ecological, environmental, economic, and social components of the Mid-Atlantic ecosystem. Addressing previous Council feedback and helping improve the utility to management, the 2021 report includes information detailing the linkages between ecosystem indicators and environmental variables and the potential risks they pose to meeting management goals and objectives. The 2021 report highlights how climate change, particularly ocean warming, is affecting the Mid-Atlantic ecosystem and its fisheries. In addition, the report provides new information on the potential management, biological, economic, and science risks associated with offshore wind development.

Dr. Gaichas also provided an update of the 2021 EAFM risk assessment, part of the Council's EAFM structured decision framework to incorporate ecosystem considerations into the management process. Risk assessment helps identify and prioritize ecosystem interactions and risks to help the Council decide where to focus limited resources to address priority ecosystem considerations. The report is an adaptive document and updated annually with new science, analysis, and information, including many of the indicators included in the 2021 State of the Ecosystem report. The updated risk assessment allows the Council to re-evaluate risk on an annual basis, track changes in risk across managed species and sectors, and identify possible management and science priorities.

East Coast Climate Change Scenario Planning Initiative

The Council received an update on the East Coast Climate Change Scenario Planning Initiative, which was initiated by the Northeast Region Coordinating Council (NRCC) in 2020. The NRCC, which consists of leadership from the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, New England Fishery Management Council, Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, and Northeast Fisheries Science Center, will serve as the primary decision-making body for this initiative, with the addition of South Atlantic Council representatives. The NRCC has appointed a Core Team of staff from each participating organization to serve as the technical team for this initiative, in conjunction with a contracted facilitator to be secured in the near future. The Council reviewed a tentative plan and timeline for this process, which will be reviewed by the NRCC at their May meeting. Pending NRCC approval, a public scoping process is expected to occur this summer. Additional information can be found at the [webpage for this initiative](#).

Climate Change Science Efforts Underway at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center

The Council received a presentation from Dr. Vincent Saba (NEFSC Ecosystem Dynamics and Assessment Branch) on climate science underway at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center. Dr. Saba provided an overview of observed change in the U.S. Northeast Shelf, discussed progress toward implementing the National Climate Science Strategy and Northeast Regional Action Plan (NERAP), and identified a number of steps that can be taken to help achieve climate ready fisheries. The presentation and discussion can be viewed [here](#).

Other Business

Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel

Staff provided an update on the ongoing revisions to the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP) charter, which the Council will review at a future meeting. The Council also reviewed the proposed use of available research funds in 2021 for a project titled “Quantifying the impacts of a restrictor rope on the composition, rate, and size-distribution of catch derived from a bottom trawl survey”. Since this document was only available as supplemental material in the briefing book, the Council decided to offer comments to staff the following week. Ultimately, no comments were received, and the document was approved by the MAFMC. The NEFMC approved the same document on April 14th leading to joint Council approval.

Research Steering Committee Report – RSA Workshops

The Council reviewed a summary of the Research Steering Committee's meeting on March 18 to discuss redevelopment of the RSA program and potential workshop options. The RSC recommended holding three workshop webinars during the summer and early fall focusing on research, funding, and enforcement, followed by an in-person 1-day workshop in the fall to report all findings and recommendations to the participants. The results of the entire workshop will be presented to the Council in December with a recommendation on whether/how to re-develop the RSA program.

Next Meeting

The next Council meeting will be conducted by conducted by webinar **June 8-10, 2021**.

A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.