



February 2024 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met February 6-7, 2024, in Arlington, VA. Presentations, briefing materials, motions, and webinar recordings are available at <http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/february-2024>.

HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- Approved a public hearing document for the Surfclam Ocean Quahog Species Separation Requirements Amendment, with the addition of an industry-drafted alternative
- Received an update on an action to reduce sturgeon bycatch and endorsed several packages of alternatives for further technical analysis
- Recommended the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP) develop a pilot project to test the viability of an industry-based survey
- Received updates on offshore wind development in the region
- Received a presentation on the black sea bass research track assessment
- Received an update on efforts to increase awareness and compliance with recreational tilefish permitting and reporting requirements
- Received a briefing on the Magnuson-Stevens Act financial disclosure and recusal requirements, as well as a review of the litigation process for Council actions
- Recognized Captain Jimmy Ruhle posthumously as the namesake and first recipient of a new cooperative research award

Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Species Separation Requirements Amendment

The Council reviewed a draft public hearing document for the Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Species Separation Requirements Amendment. The goal of this action is to address issues related to mixed catches of the two species occurring in these fisheries. After reviewing input from the Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Committee and Advisory Panel, which met the prior day, the Council agreed with the Committee's recommendation to include a new, industry-member recommended alternative in the document prior to going out for public comment. Once the Fishery Management Action Team completes analysis of this new alternative, the Council will schedule a public comment period and hold public hearings. The input received from the public will be summarized and provided to the Council for consideration and final action. Additional information can be found at the [action page for this amendment](#).

Sturgeon Framework

The Council reviewed and endorsed several packages of alternatives for further technical analysis to include both their sturgeon bycatch reduction potentials and fishery impacts. The Council also requested inclusion of a sub-alternative where a gear alternative with an overnight-soak prohibition (which should reduce sturgeon bycatch and associated mortalities) would not apply to fishing with gillnet mesh less than 5.25 inches. These measures would generally only apply in areas and times of higher observed sturgeon bycatch, and under this sub-alternative fishermen could either fish larger mesh during the day or fish 5-inch mesh overnight. The document reviewed by the Council detailed potential area and time restrictions for the alternatives and also included potential fishery closures in areas and times of higher observed sturgeon bycatch. On March 5, 2024, the Spiny Dogfish and Monkfish Advisory Panels will review the alternatives/impacts and make recommendations regarding preferred alternatives. On March 13, 2024, the Spiny Dogfish and Monkfish Committees will consider the

alternatives/impacts, Advisory Panel input, and public input before making recommendations to the Councils (this action is joint with the New England Council). These meetings will be webinars and connection details are on the Councils' calendars. The Councils are scheduled to take final action at their respective April 2024 meetings. Additional information is available at the [action page for this framework](#).

White Paper: Draft Proposed Plan for a Novel Industry Based Multispecies Bottom Trawl Survey on the Northeast U.S. Continental Shelf

Dr. Kathryn Ford presented a white paper titled "[Draft Proposed Plan for a Novel Industry Based Multispecies Bottom Trawl Survey on the Northeast U.S. Continental Shelf](#)," which was recently developed by the Northeast Fishery Science Center (NEFSC) in coordination with the joint Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils' Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP). The paper describes a draft plan for an industry-based multispecies bottom trawl survey (IBS) that would operate in parallel to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's (NEFSC) multispecies bottom trawl survey (BTS). As a result of the presentation and subsequent discussion, the Council passed a motion recommending that NTAP develop a pilot project to test the viability of an industry-based survey as described in the white paper and provide a progress report of the draft pilot project to the Council at the April 2024 meeting.

Offshore Wind Updates

The Council received updates on offshore wind energy development from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and a state-led working group which is seeking to establish a regional third-party administrator for fisheries compensation funds. The Council also received a presentation on the fisheries compensation program for the Vineyard Wind 1 project which is currently under construction off Massachusetts. They also received updates on the Kitty Hawk Wind project off North Carolina and the Community Offshore Wind project off New Jersey, both of which are in the planning stages.

Black Sea Bass Assessment

The Council received a presentation on the black sea bass research track assessment which passed peer review in December 2023. Several improvements were made to the assessment, including moving to a new modeling framework that accounts for differences in productivity and movement between regions and combining multiple fishery-independent surveys into one aggregate abundance index. In addition, the assessment now includes bottom temperature as a factor influencing recruitment, making this the first assessment in this region to directly incorporate an environmental variable. This research track assessment will inform a June 2024 management track assessment that will provide updated estimates of stock status using data through 2023 and be used to set management measures for future years.

Recreational Tilefish Permitting and Reporting Updates

The Council received an update from staff on two outreach/program evaluation efforts related to recreational tilefish permitting and reporting requirements. The goal of the first project is to engage anglers through different outreach initiatives to raise awareness about the permitting and reporting requirements and promote the use of the *eFin Logbook* reporting app. The goal of the second project is to conduct a series of in-person meetings with recreational tilefish community leaders to evaluate the MAFMC private angler tilefish permitting and reporting requirements and identify potential strategies for increased participation and compliance. Learn more about tilefish permitting and reporting requirements [here](#).

Legal Review/Financial Disclosure/Recusal Training

John Almeida with the NOAA Office of General Counsel provided a briefing on the Magnuson-Stevens Act financial disclosure and recusal requirements, as well as a review of the litigation process for federal fishery regulations.

Awards

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council named Captain Jimmy Ruhle as the first recipient and namesake of a new award that recognizes outstanding contributions to cooperative fisheries research in the Mid-Atlantic region. Jimmy Ruhle was a lifelong commercial fisherman, a former Council member, and a trailblazer in cooperative fisheries research. He had an instrumental role in the creation and success of the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP) Mid-Atlantic/Southern New England trawl survey, a cooperative fishery-independent survey of coastal waters from Cape Hatteras north to Cape Cod. Since 2007, the survey has been conducted biannually aboard Jimmy's vessel, the *F/V Darana R*, by a team of



Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) researchers working in partnership with Jimmy and his crew. Data from the survey have improved the assessments of several Council-managed species, including black sea bass, butterfish, longfin squid, scup, and summer flounder. After Jimmy's death in 2023, the Council decided to create a new award to honor his legacy. The award will be given to individuals or groups who have demonstrated exceptional collaboration, dedication, or innovation in their research, or in recognition of cooperative research projects that have made significant contributions to the understanding or management of Mid-Atlantic fisheries.

Next Meeting

The next Council meeting will be held **April 9-11, 2024, in Atlantic City, NJ**. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.