



## Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

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# Assessment and Peer Review Overviews – Spiny Dogfish and Atlantic Mackerel

## October 2023 Council Meeting

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This agenda item is informational to provide background for December 2023 discussions when the Council revisits Atlantic Mackerel (mackerel) specifications and sets spiny dogfish specifications.

Council staff will summarize the 2023 Management Track Assessments for mackerel and spiny dogfish as well as the peer review results. These assessments and peer reviews will inform the Scientific and Statistical Committee's (SSC) Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) recommendations ([October 30, 2023 SSC meeting](#)). The SSC's ABCs are the binding upper catch limit for specifications that will be considered in upcoming Council meetings. A September 2023 peer review report was not finalized at the time briefing materials were collated, but the reviewers appeared generally positive regarding the scientific merit of the assessments (staff participated in the peer review meetings). Once available, the peer review reports will be posted as supplemental materials. The draft assessment documents will also be posted on the October 2023 Council Meeting webpage.

The Council adopted preliminary 2024-2025 mackerel specifications in August 2023. Due to low catches that apparently ended overfishing in 2022, additional peer review was required, so the SSC and Council will both review their preliminary decisions. The Council is generally familiar with the mackerel assessment based on action at the August Council Meeting. Recent assessments have been stable in terms of past stock trends (and that we are at a low point currently), but projected stock growth has not occurred. It appears that catches may need to remain low for some time.

Spiny Dogfish specifications action is anticipated at the December 2023 Council Meeting and the January 2024 New England Fishery Management Council Meeting – the stock is jointly managed so both Councils must take action. A November 2023 Spiny Dogfish Committee Meeting is also being planned. The spiny dogfish Management Track Assessment maintained the stock trends seen in the Research Track Assessment, but adopted a different approach for the target biomass reference point. The assessment concludes biomass is near its target despite being relatively low, and it also projects that relatively low future catches are needed to stay at the target (due to reduced productivity in both cases). The new assessment model is a major advancement from the previous approach, but being a new model for east coast spiny dogfish, its ability to accurately predict the future via projections is untested.

The Spiny Dogfish Advisory Panel (AP) met just before mailout for the October 2023 Council Meeting. Their *Fishery Performance Report* will be provided to the SSC and Council in preparation for ABC and specifications-setting. Staff notes the AP expressed grave concerns about the new assessment model results not matching their experience, and about the effects of roller-coaster style management endangering the spiny dogfish fishery and associated infrastructure.