



February 2021 Council Meeting Summary

The following summary highlights actions taken and issues considered at the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's meeting February 10-11, 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/february-2020>.

During this meeting, the Council:

- Approved the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment Public Hearing Document and the Commission's Draft Amendment for public comment (joint with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Bluefish Board)
- Received informational presentations on right whale issues, aquaculture topics, and offshore wind projects in the region
- Approved revisions to the Council's Statement of Organization Practices and Procedures (SOPP)

Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment

The Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) Bluefish Management Board (Board) met jointly to review the Public Hearing Document and the Commission's Draft Amendment for the Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment. During their review, the Council and Board recommended three modifications to the document.

First, the Council and Board directed staff to incorporate decision trees indicating the flow of decision making and the subsequent decisions that need to be made when an alternative is selected. This was recommended in response to concerns about the complexity of the amendment and potential confusion about how decisions on one management issue will dictate how other alternatives related to another management issue should be interpreted. For example, the amendment includes several rebuilding plan options with varying durations. The duration of the rebuilding plan will dictate the length of time allocation changes will be phased-in, should phase-in alternatives be a selected as the preferred alternative. The addition of decision trees is intended to help guide public comment on those sections that are tied together. Second, the Council and Board agreed to incorporate additional information regarding what should happen if the rebuilding plan fails to achieve adequate progress toward rebuilding the stock. Finally, the Council and Board approved revisions to the *de minimis* provisions alternatives to provide states with a larger set of options.

After agreeing to these changes, the Council and Board approved the Public Hearing Document and the Commission's Draft Amendment for public comment. The public comment period will open on February 22, with hearings held via webinar between March 24 and April 8. Additional public hearing details are available at <https://www.mafmc.org/actions/bluefish-allocation-amendment>.

River Herring and Shad White Papers

The Council reviewed several river herring and shad (RH/S) staff white papers and approved two follow-up requests to the NOAA Fisheries Northeast Fisheries Science Center. First, the Council requested that Center staff assist with scoping potential approaches to synthesize survey information in order to discern recent RH/S abundance trends. After, the Council would consider if pursuing additional related analyses appeared promising. Second, the Council requested that the Center produce several revenue maps that match the years of spatial analyses in one of the staff white papers. The Council would use the revenue maps to consider whether to initiate an action to further explore potential time-area restrictions to further reduce RH/S interactions, complementing

the existing RH/S caps. Both requests are investigational in nature, and no related management actions are pending at this time.

Right Whale Issues

The Council received an update on the proposed rule to amend the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan to reduce the impacts of entanglement in fishing gear on right whales in U.S. waters. The proposed modifications focus on the Northeast Jonah crab and Lobster trap/pot fisheries. Council members and staff will continue to participate on the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team which will discuss recommendations for risk reduction measures for other Atlantic trap/pot and gillnet fisheries later in 2021. The Council also received an overview of the Draft Biological Opinion on 10 Fishery Management Plans (BiOp) released by NOAA Fisheries in January 2021. This Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation requires federal agencies to ensure that any action by a federal agency is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed species or destroy or adversely modify critical habitat. Council staff have reviewed and provided comments on the Draft BiOp.

Aquaculture

Danielle Blacklock, director for NOAA Fisheries' Office of Aquaculture, presented on aquaculture topics in Executive Order (E.O.) 13921 (Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth), including Aquaculture Opportunities Areas (AOAs). E.O. 13921 contains various provisions that allow federal agencies to build on existing efforts to foster marine and freshwater aquaculture. Section 7 of E.O. 13921 relates to the establishment of AOA. An AOA is a small defined geographic area that has been evaluated to determine its potential suitability for commercial aquaculture. NOAA will use a combination of scientific analysis and public engagement to identify areas that are environmentally, socially, and economically appropriate for commercial aquaculture. The first two AOAs under E.O. 13921 have been selected for science-based evaluation and development. The next steps for future AOAs are to review all submitted comments regarding AOAs, work with Regional Offices to define opportunities and challenges of AOAs in their region, and for the office of aquaculture to consider opportunities and challenges, including budget limitations, and recommend options with high likelihood of beginning successful AOA process in fiscal year 2021.

The Council also received a presentation from Kevin Madley, Aquaculture Coordinator for the Greater Atlantic Region (GARFO), on the status of aquaculture projects in the region. Mr. Madley described the organization of the GARFO's aquaculture program to coordinate strategy for sustainable and responsible aquaculture development in the region. GARFO's aquaculture staff works with other staff at GARFO and with federal and state agencies, industry, and members of the scientific, academic, and NGO communities on a variety of marine aquaculture issues. The presentation included status updates on various regional aquaculture projects, including Manna Fish Farms, Blue Waters Fisheries LLC, and Northeastern Massachusetts Aquaculture Center at Salem State University.

Offshore Wind

The Council received an update from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management on the status of offshore wind energy leases in the northeast region. The presentation included a summary of the draft environmental impact statement for the South Fork Wind Farm Construction and Operations Plan, research carried out during construction of the Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind (CVOW) pilot project, and other topics.

In addition, the Council received two presentations on offshore wind projects in the Mid-Atlantic region. First, representatives from CVOW presented additional details on their two-turbine pilot project, plans for their larger commercial project, and observations of commercial and recreational fisheries in the area of both the pilot and commercial project. Then, representatives from the Kitty Hawk Wind project presented on their efforts to characterize fishing effort within their lease area and export cable corridor using vessel trip report data, observer data, sampling by the state of North Carolina, and oral histories documented by the Kitty Hawk Wind Fisheries Liaison.

Other Business

SOPP Revisions

The Council approved several changes to the Statement of Organization Practices and Procedures (SOPP). These revisions will increase the amount of paid parental leave from 6 to 12 weeks for Council staff, modify the procedures for post-severance payment for unused leave upon retirement, and modify the Medicare supplemental insurance plan options for retirees.

Shifting Stocks Proposal

The Council considered a motion to task the Ecosystem Committee with initiating a review of potential methods to address management of species as a result of their shifting stocks. While a number of Council members voiced support for the motion, others noted that the Council process already includes mechanisms for representation of stakeholders outside of the Mid-Atlantic region through joint management with the ASMFC and seats for New England Council members on certain committees. In addition, the Council is actively involved in a climate change scenario planning process which will address topics related to shifting stocks. The motion failed due to lack of Council majority. The Council is scheduled to receive an update on climate change scenario planning at the April Council Meeting.

Next Meeting

The next Council meeting will be held via webinar on **April 6-8, 2021**. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.