



February 2023 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met February 7-9, 2023, in Washington, DC. Presentations, briefing materials, motions, and webinar recordings are available at <http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/february-2023>.

HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- Approved 2023-2025 monkfish specifications and revised 2023-2024 monkfish priorities
- Continued discussion regarding follow-up action to address disapproved sections of Amendment 22
- Received an update on development of the Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Species Separation Amendment and reviewed additional suggestions submitted by the Advisory Panel and industry members
- Reviewed the results of the 2022 Bluefish and Dogfish Research Track Assessments
- Received information presentations on a variety of topics
- Reappointed four members to the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee

Monkfish 2023-2025 Specifications

The Council approved the same monkfish specifications for 2023-2025 as recommended by the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) at their January 2023 meeting. The new Acceptable Biological Catches (ABCs) – 6,224 metric tons for the Northern Management Area and 5,861 for the Southern Management Area – represent substantial reductions from current ABCs but are close to the most recent 3-year average catches in each area. Maximum usable Days as Sea Allocations (DAS) would remain the same (46), but there would be limits for using up to 35 DAS in the Northern Area and 37 DAS in the Southern Area. No trip limit changes were adopted. Both Councils approved a 12" minimum mesh size for monkfish gillnets starting in the 2026 fishing year. Additional background on these recommendations is available in the [NEFMC press release](#). In addition, the Council approved revised research priorities for a 2023-2024 Monkfish Research Set-Aside (RSA) funding opportunity. For additional information and updates, please visit the [NEFMC monkfish web page](#).

Illex Permit Action Follow Up

The Council continued its discussions regarding a possible follow-up action related to the disapproved sections of Amendment 22. The Council discussed a potential action that would consider establishing a volumetric hold baseline and upgrade restriction for *Illex* squid permits to control further increases in fleet capitalization. The Council will decide whether to pursue this and/or other actions focused on capitalization in the *Illex* fishery after receiving additional input from NMFS and Council staff at the April 2023 Council meeting (including a response to the Council's [request for clarification from NMFS](#) on several aspects of the disapproval of capacity-related measures in a previous Amendment).

Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Species Separation Issues

Industry Presentation

The Council received a presentation from Dr. Roger Mann, Site Director for SCMFIS at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, which summarized their survey examining the composition and size of surfclam and quahog in clam beds from Ocean City, MD to south of Hudson Canyon. In addition, a 9-minute video developed for SCMFIS,

by Stove Boat Communications, was shown that highlighted survey footage onboard the vessel and discussed some of the challenges associated with the mixing of surfclam and ocean quahog in fishery catches.

Species Separation Requirements Amendment Update

The Council received an update on the ongoing development of an amendment to consider potential modifications to the species separation requirements in the surfclam and ocean quahog fisheries. The Council reviewed an updated timeline for ongoing work, which is expected to occur in 2023 into 2024, and a summary of input provided by the Advisory Panel and industry on additional types of solutions/approaches that could be considered for the amendment. These included suggestions such as sorting and reporting mixed surfclam and quahog catches at the dealer/processor, limited sorting onboard the vessel on eVTRs to provide hail weights, modification of the current 32-bushel cage tagging system, among other possible approaches.

Bluefish and Dogfish Research Track Assessments

Russ Brown (NOAA Fisheries Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC)) presented the results of the Bluefish and Spiny Dogfish research track assessments that were peer reviewed in December 2022. The working groups for the research track assessments considered new datasets, modeling frameworks, and other aspects of the biology for these species. It was noted that in the last years of the bluefish assessment, the bluefish stock was below its target biomass, above the overfished threshold, and slightly increasing (with overfishing not occurring). In the last years of the spiny dogfish assessment, the spiny dogfish stock was below its target biomass, above the overfished threshold, and decreasing (with overfishing occurring). Both assessments passed peer review and will form the foundation for the upcoming 2023 management track assessments, which will integrate updated data to determine official stock statuses and future catch limits.

Highly Migratory Species Update

Randy Blankinship (NOAA Fisheries Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Management Division) presented an update on recent and ongoing HMS management initiatives. Some recent HMS management initiatives include adjusting bluefin tuna quotas, implementing retention limits for shortfin mako sharks, and establishing a new framework to implement acceptable biological catch and annual catch limits for sharks. The presentation also included a summary of the November 2022 International Commission for Conservation of Atlantic Tunas meeting and some of the major outcomes from that meeting.

Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team

The Council received an update from NMFS Protected Resources staff on the recent Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (team) meeting and recent whale strandings and entanglements. At their meeting, the team provided recommendations on gillnet and trap/pot measures to reduce the risk of right whale entanglement in fishing gear. Some of these measures include weak rope and use of one endline on nets and trap trawls. Because of this, it was discussed that there is more work to be done regarding the potential for gear conflict due to less markings and increased use of ropeless technology. The Council heard from the NEFMC Chair, Eric Reid, regarding the NEFMC's recent decision to form a working group to address gear conflict. The Council agreed to coordinate with the NEFMC and participate on that working group.

Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel

The Council received an update on the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP). NTAP is a joint advisory panel of the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils. It is composed of Council members, as well as fishing industry, academic, and government and non-government fisheries experts who provide advice and direction on the conduct of trawl research. The presentation provided background information on NTAP as well as a summary of the recently held hybrid meeting.

Squid Squad

The Council received a presentation from NEFSC staff on ongoing efforts to use a collaborative framework to improve squid science, focusing recently on oceanographic indicators of *lllex* squid productivity. The group integrates industry, science, and management perspectives to facilitate collaborative efforts for squid science given the many challenges of modeling these short lived and highly dynamic stocks. Pending research interests include additional fieldwork and modeling regarding oceanographic indicators, examination of metrics for the shelf slope front and cross-shelf exchange, and enhanced biological sampling for both *lllex* and longfin squids.

Lessons Learned – Squid Jigging

Dr. David Bethoney of the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation (CFRF) summarized a research project testing the potential use of automatic jigging equipment in the commercial longfin squid fishery in southern New England. Catch rates were very low during research trips, but a variety of *lessons-learned* were reviewed and CFRF may consider additional related research after consulting with international contacts in other squid fisheries that use jigging.

Northeast Commercial Fishing Vessel Cost Survey

The Council received a presentation from Samantha Werner (NEFSC Social Science Branch) on the Northeast Commercial Fishing Vessel Cost Survey. The voluntary cost surveys are routinely conducted by the NEFSC to collect commercial fishing business costs from vessel owners in the Greater Atlantic Region. Upcoming survey will be implemented in March/April of 2023 for costs incurred in 2022. Collected data is used for understanding trends, tracking economic performance of fleets, and generating analyses that inform management decisions. Learn more at [Commercial Fishing Business Cost Survey](#).

Marine Recreational Education Program (MREP)

Lauren O'Brien, Senior Program Manager of the Marine Resource Education Program (based at the Gulf of Maine Research Institute), reviewed the goals and successes of MREP, which is designed to help fishermen engage in the fishery management process. The program provides supported travel to workshops focused on either fisheries science or the management process. In our area, a 2-part workshop series is held once per year, and applications are accepted on a rolling basis. Visit the [MREP web page](#) for details or to apply for the 2024 workshop series.

Other Business

The Council reappointed four members of its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to another three-year term effective March 2023. The Council also thanked Dr. Lee Anderson, professor emeritus from University of Delaware, for his numerous contributions and accomplishments during his more than 40 years associated with the Council and SSC. Dr Anderson is stepping down from his role on the SSC to enjoy retirement and his family. The Council is [soliciting new SSC candidates](#) to fill the vacancy. The deadline to apply is March 17, 2023.

Next Meeting

The next Council meeting will be held **April 4-6, 2023, in Durham, NC**. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.