

APPROVED DECEMBER 2022

MID-ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

2023

Implementation Plan



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INTRODUCTION

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council is responsible for the conservation and management of more than 65 fish and shellfish stocks that are found within the federal 200-mile limit of the mid-Atlantic region (North Carolina through New York).

The Mid-Atlantic Council was established in 1976 by the Fishery Conservation and Management Act (later renamed the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, or MSA). The MSA created a 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone and charged eight regional councils with management of fishery resources in the newly expanded federal waters.

The Council develops fishery management recommendations which must be approved by the Secretary of Commerce before they are finalized and implemented by NOAA Fisheries. All of the Council's fishery management recommendations must be consistent with the ten national standards as defined by the MSA and must be developed in an open, public process as prescribed by law.

Fifteen species are directly managed with specific fishery management plans (FMPs). These include summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, Atlantic bluefish, Atlantic and chub mackerel, *Illex* and longfin squids, butterfish, Atlantic surfclam, ocean quahog, golden and blueline tilefish, spiny dogfish (joint with the New England Council), and monkfish (joint with the New England Council). In addition, more than 50 forage species are managed as "ecosystem components" in all seven FMPs.

The Council partners with other fishery management organizations, including the New England and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, to ensure that fisheries are managed effectively across jurisdictional boundaries.

About This Document

The Council's work is guided by a five-year strategic plan. The [current plan](#), for the years 2020-2024, is organized around five goal areas: Communication, Science, Management, Ecosystem, and Governance.

Each year, the Council develops an annual implementation plan which describes the specific fishery management actions, deliverables, and other activities planned for the upcoming year. The implementation plan is designed to provide a comprehensive and realistic framework for merging the Council's ongoing projects with new initiatives while ensuring progress toward the goals and objectives identified in the strategic plan.

The 2023 Implementation Plan is organized into two main parts:

- 1 The **Proposed Actions and Deliverables** section provides an overview of activities planned for each fishery management plan and topic area.
- 2 The **Strategic Plan Framework and 2023 Activities** section organizes the Council's planned actions and deliverables within the context of the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan's five goal areas and 21 objectives. This section also highlights select ongoing/routine activities that address strategic plan objectives.

2020-2024 STRATEGIC PLAN OVERVIEW

Mission: The Council manages fisheries in federal waters of the Mid-Atlantic region for their long-term sustainability and productivity consistent with the national standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Council is committed to the stewardship of these fisheries, and associated ecosystems and fishing communities, through the collaborative development of effective, science-based fishery management plans and policies.

Vision: Healthy marine ecosystems and thriving, sustainable fisheries and fishing communities that provide the greatest overall benefit to the nation.

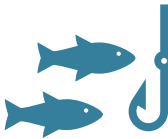
Strategic Goals



Communication: Engage stakeholders and the public through education and outreach that foster sustained participation in, and awareness of, the Council process.



Science: Ensure that the Council's management decisions are based on timely and accurate scientific information and methods.



Management: Develop effective management strategies that provide for sustainable fisheries and healthy marine ecosystems while considering the needs of fishing communities and other resource users.



Ecosystem: Support the ecologically sustainable utilization of living marine resources in a manner that maintains ecosystem productivity, structure, and function.



Governance: Ensure that the Council's practices accurately represent and consider the interests of fisheries, fishing communities, and the public through a transparent and inclusive decision-making process.

Visit www.mafmc.org/strategic-plan to download the full strategic plan.

2023 PROPOSED ACTIONS AND DELIVERABLES

This section provides an overview of the activities, amendments, frameworks, specifications, and other projects the Council expects to initiate, continue, or complete during the year. These activities are organized by Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and topic area. See the Appendix for additional details about the proposed deliverables.

SUMMER FLOUNDER, SCUP, BLACK SEA BASS

1. Develop 2024-2025 specifications for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass
2. Develop 2024-2025 recreational management measures for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass
3. Evaluate commercial scup discards and gear restricted areas
4. Review and potentially revise commercial minimum mesh size regulations and exemptions for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass
5. Initiate development of action to replace Recreational Harvest Control Rule after sunset period, including enhanced use of the Recreational Demand Model and/or Recreational Fleet Dynamics Model
6. Continue development of amendment to consider recreational sector separation and recreational catch accounting for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish
7. Facilitate development of summer flounder, scup, black sea bass advisory panel fishery performance reports
8. Support black sea bass research track assessment
9. Support 2023 management track assessments for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass

BLUEFISH

10. Develop 2024-2025 specifications for bluefish
11. Develop 2024-2025 recreational management measures for bluefish
12. Facilitate development of bluefish advisory panel fishery performance report
13. Support 2023 bluefish management track assessment

Note: Deliverables 5, 6, and 7 in the previous section will also address bluefish recreational management issues

GOLDEN AND BLUELINE TILEFISH

14. Review 2024 specifications for golden tilefish
15. Review 2024 specifications for blueline tilefish
16. Complete and review Golden Tilefish Individual Fishing Quota Program Review
17. Facilitate development of advisory panel fishery performance reports
18. Review performance of private recreational tilefish permitting and reporting
19. Work with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to support the upcoming 2024 blueline tilefish operational assessment
20. Coordinate the 2023 golden tilefish survey pending approval of funding/logistics
21. Support 2024 golden tilefish research track assessment

MACKEREL, SQUID, BUTTERFISH

22. Develop 2024-2025 Atlantic mackerel specifications
23. Develop 2024-2026 longfin squid specifications
24. Review 2023 specifications for *Illlex*
25. Develop 2024-2025 specifications for *Illlex*
26. Review 2024 specifications for butterfish
27. Review 2024 specifications for chub mackerel
28. Facilitate development of mackerel, squid, butterfish advisory panel fishery performance reports
29. Support 2023 management track assessments for Atlantic mackerel and longfin squid

RIVER HERRING AND SHAD

30. Develop 2024-2025 river herring and shad cap (paired with Atlantic mackerel specifications), including consideration of the river herring assessment

SPINY DOGFISH

31. Develop 2024-2026 specifications and/or a rebuilding plan (possibly including trip limit changes), as appropriate given outcome of research and management track assessments
32. Facilitate development of spiny dogfish advisory panel fishery performance report
33. Support 2023 spiny dogfish management track assessment

ATLANTIC SURFLAM AND OCEAN QUAHOG

34. Review 2024 specifications for surfclam and ocean quahog
35. Facilitate development of surfclam and ocean quahog advisory panel fishery performance reports
36. Oversee SCOQ Electronic Monitoring Project
37. Develop alternatives for the Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Species Separation Requirements Amendment

SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

38. Conduct biennial review of the 2020-2024 research priorities document
39. Approve Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) membership
40. Review outcomes and recommendations from the SSC Ecosystem Work Group
41. Review past action and consider possible redevelopment of a revised Research Set-Aside program
42. Review results and determine potential application of the research project on short-term forecasts of species distributions
43. Support the 2023 Applying State Space Models Research Track Assessment
44. Coordinate and facilitate the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel

ECOSYSTEM AND OCEAN PLANNING/HABITAT

45. Continue development of Essential Fish Habitat Amendment
46. Maintain and integrate Northeast Regional Habitat Assessment products
47. Oversee National Fishing Effects Database Project
48. Maintain joint MAFMC and New England Fishery Management Council offshore wind web page

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49. Develop habitat- and fishery-related comments on offshore energy development
 50. Complete comprehensive review and update to Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management risk assessment
 51. Complete East Coast Climate Change Scenario Planning Initiative and identify priorities for resulting action
 52. Continue to track thread herring Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) application and develop comments, if needed
 53. Develop a policy and/or process for reviewing EFP applications for new or expanding fisheries as it relates to the unmanaged forage amendment

GENERAL

54. Review commercial landings of unmanaged species
55. Participate on Council Coordination Committee Working Groups and Subcommittees (Habitat, Area-Based Management, Legislative, ESA/MSA Coordination, Equity and Environmental Justice)
56. Respond to requests for information associated with Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification or audits for MSC-certified fisheries (Atlantic surfclam, ocean quahog, Illex squid, longfin squid, spiny dogfish, scup)
57. Track relevant legislation and provide comments as requested
58. Continue to participate on marine mammal take reduction teams and protected resources working groups, and initiate necessary actions in response to protected resource issues
59. Initiate action in response to the action plan developed by the Atlantic Sturgeon Bycatch Working Group to reduce sturgeon bycatch in gillnet fisheries

COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

60. Continue to inform and engage stakeholders using a variety of communication tools and channels, including the Council website, email updates, press releases, YouTube, webinars, face-to-face meetings, and a variety of printed and digital communication materials
61. Conduct outreach to increase stakeholder awareness and understanding of Council actions under development
62. Further develop and refine the Council's website content and structure to increase usefulness and functionality
63. Develop fact sheets and outreach materials as needed
64. Continue additional outreach to improve awareness of, and compliance with, private recreational tilefish reporting requirements

STAFF WRAP-UP ON COMPLETED ACTIONS

The following actions have been, or are expected to be, approved by the Council by the end of 2022 but will require staff work in 2023 to finalize for submission to NMFS:

65. Finalize and submit any outstanding specifications packages for 2023

POSSIBLE ADDITIONS

To be considered for addition to the 2023 implementation plan if time and resources allow:

66. Develop framework to allow quota transfer between commercial and recreational sectors for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass

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67. Initiate amendment to address disapproved portions of *Illex* Permit Amendment
 68. Initiate action to implement "did not fish" reports for commercial, for-hire, and private tilefish permit holders
 69. Initiate action to implement a possession limit for frigate and bullet mackerel in the Mid-Atlantic
 70. Explore the use of unused ACL carryover for the Council's fisheries
 71. Develop an action to authorize an experimental Atlantic surfclam fishery in the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area (HMA)
 72. Develop spatial management options for Atlantic surfclam open water aquaculture in the New York Bight and central Atlantic.

STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK & 2023 PRIORITY ACTIVITIES

This section organizes the Council’s planned actions and deliverables within the context of the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan’s five goal areas and 21 objectives. A number of additional ongoing/routine activities are also included. Please note that the Timeframe column describes the *estimated* timeframe for completion of the activity/deliverable (TBD: Work is expected to extend beyond 2023; Ongoing: This item is part of the Council’s routine activities and does not have an expected end point; Annually: This activity occurs on an annual basis). **See the Appendix for additional details about these activities.**



COMMUNICATION

Goal: Engage stakeholders and the public through education and outreach that foster sustained participation in, and awareness of, the Council process.

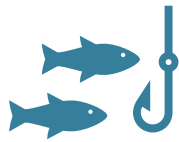
Objectives and Priority Activities for 2023	Deliverable	Timeframe
1. Use a wide range of communication tools and methods tailored to engage target audiences.		
Continue to inform and engage stakeholders using a variety of communication tools and channels, including the Council website, email updates, press releases, YouTube, webinars, face-to-face meetings, and a variety of printed and digital communication materials	60	Ongoing
Further develop and refine the Council’s website content and structure to increase usefulness and functionality	62	2023
Coordinate communication efforts with management partners	--	Ongoing
2. Increase stakeholder participation in the Council process.		
Conduct outreach to increase stakeholder awareness and understanding of Council actions under development	61	Ongoing
Develop outreach materials to facilitate constructive stakeholder input on proposed management actions (e.g., scoping guides, video presentations, etc.)	63	Ongoing
Schedule, advertise, and conduct meetings and public hearings in a manner that encourages and enables stakeholder attendance and participation.	--	Ongoing
Utilize webinars, conference lines, and other technology to expand remote access to and/or participation in Council and advisory body meetings	--	Ongoing
3. Broaden the public’s understanding and awareness of the Council and its managed fisheries.		
Develop fact sheets and outreach materials on current fisheries issues and topics of public interest	63	Ongoing
Conduct outreach to improve awareness of, and compliance with, private recreational tilefish reporting requirements	64	2023
Collaborate with science partners to develop outreach materials related to stock assessments for Council-managed species	63	Ongoing
Collaborate with partners to promote relevant educational opportunities	--	Ongoing
Ensure that Council documents use plain language	--	Ongoing



SCIENCE

Goal: Ensure that the Council's management decisions are based on timely and accurate scientific information and methods.

Objectives and Priority Activities for 2023	Deliverable	Timeframe
4. Collaborate with science partners and research institutions to ensure that the Council's science priorities are addressed.		
Support stock assessments for Council-managed species, including staff participation on research track working groups	8, 9, 13, 21, 29, 33, 43	Ongoing
Work with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to support the upcoming 2024 blueline tilefish operational assessment	19	2023-2024
Conduct 2023 golden tilefish survey pending approval of funding/logistics	20	2023
Coordinate and facilitate the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel	44	Ongoing
Continue to support implementation and continued development of the Northeast Region Coordinating Council (NRCC) stock assessment process to improve assessment efficiency	--	Ongoing
5. Support the use of collaborative research to meet the Council's science, data, and information needs.		
Review past action and consider possible redevelopment of a revised Research Set-Aside program	41	2023
Identify research needs that can be addressed using collaborative approaches with commercial, for-hire, and recreational fishery participants	--	Ongoing
Continue to support development of cooperative research programs that use "vessels of opportunity" from all sectors to address science and research needs	--	Ongoing
6. Promote efficient and accurate data collection, monitoring, and reporting systems.		
Continue to support the Fishery Dependent Data Initiative (GARFO lead)	--	Ongoing
Review performance of private recreational tilefish permitting and reporting	18	Annually
Oversee SCOQ Electronic Monitoring Project	36	2023
7. Promote the collection of relevant social and economic data and on-the-water observations.		
Collaborate with the Northeast Regional Coordinating Council (NRCC) Stock Assessment Communications Group to facilitate increased stakeholder involvement in (and awareness of) the stock assessment process	--	Ongoing
Engage the Council's SSC to identify existing studies or other sources of social and economic information that could be used to inform management decisions	--	Ongoing
8. Identify and prioritize the Council's research needs.		
Conduct biennial review of the 2020-2024 research priorities document	38	2023



MANAGEMENT

Goal: Develop effective management strategies that provide for sustainable fisheries and healthy marine ecosystems while considering the needs of fishing communities and other resource users.

Objectives and Priority Activities for 2023	Deliverable	Timeframe
9. Strengthen state, federal, and interstate partnerships to promote coordinated, efficient management of fishery resources.		
Complete East Coast Climate Change Scenario Planning Initiative and identify priorities for resulting action	51	2023
Continue to use the NRCC process as a forum for Atlantic coast management entities to enhance communication, coordination, and pursue shared objectives	--	Ongoing
10. Adapt management approaches and priorities to address emerging issues and changing fishery conditions.		
Review and potentially revise commercial minimum mesh size regulations and exemptions for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass	4	2023
Initiate development of an action to replace Recreational Harvest Control Rule after sunset period, including enhanced use of the Recreational Demand Model and/or Recreational Fleet Dynamics Model	5	TBD
Continue development of an amendment to consider recreational sector separation and recreational catch accounting for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish	6	TBD
Evaluate commercial scup discards and gear restricted areas	3	2023
Complete and review Golden Tilefish Individual Fishing Quota Program Review	16	2023
Develop alternatives for the Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Species Separation Requirements Amendment	37	2023
11. Ensure that management decisions consider social, economic, and community impacts and opportunities.		
Respond to requests for information associated with Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification or audits for MSC-certified fisheries	56	Ongoing
Participate on CCC Equity and Environmental Justice (EEJ) Working Group (WG)	55	Ongoing

Continued on the following page

Specification-Setting Activities

<p>In addition to the activities associated with specific management objectives, the Council will also develop new or review existing specifications for each of its managed species. These activities are listed below. The associated deliverable is indicated in parentheses.</p>	
<p>Develop and approve new specifications:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2024-2025 summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass specifications and recreational management measures (1, 2)• 2024-2025 bluefish specifications and management measures (10, 11)• 2024-2025 Atlantic mackerel specifications and RH/S cap, including consideration of the river herring assessment (22, 30)• 2024-2026 longfin squid specifications (23)• 2024-2025 <i>Illex</i> squid specifications (25)• 2024-2026 spiny dogfish specifications (31)
<p>Review specifications and recommend changes if needed:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2024 golden tilefish specifications (14)• 2024 blueline tilefish specifications (15)• 2024 chub mackerel specifications (27)• 2023 <i>Illex</i> squid specifications (24)• 2024 butterfish specifications (26)• 2024 Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahog specifications (34)



ECOSYSTEM

Goal: Support the ecologically sustainable utilization of living marine resources in a manner that maintains ecosystem productivity, structure, and function.

Objectives and Priority Activities for 2023	Deliverable	Timeframe
12. Implement the Council’s Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) as described in the EAFM Guidance Document.		
Complete comprehensive review and update to EAFM risk assessment	50	2023
Review SSC Ecosystem Work Group recommendations	40	2023
13. Collaborate with management partners to develop ecosystem approaches that are responsive to the impacts of climate change.		
Complete East Coast Climate Change Scenario Planning Initiative and identify priorities for resulting action	51	2023
Review results and determine potential application of the research project on short-term forecasts of species distributions	42	2023
14. Identify, designate, and protect habitat using an ecosystem approach.		
Continue development of Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment	45	TBD
Oversee National Fishing Effects Database Project	47	TBD
Maintain and integrate Northeast Regional Habitat Assessment products	48	Ongoing
Participate on the CCC Habitat Work Group and Area-Based Management Subcommittee	55	Ongoing
15. Engage in the offshore energy development process to address impacts to Council-managed species and associated habitats.		
Develop habitat- and fishery-related comments on offshore energy development	49	Ongoing
Maintain joint MAFMC-NEFMC Offshore Wind web page	48	Ongoing
Engage offshore wind developers to support effective communication and outreach with the fishing industry	--	Ongoing
16. Support the maintenance of an adequate forage base to ensure ecosystem productivity, structure, and function.		
Review report on commercial landings of unmanaged species and respond to changes if necessary	54	Annually
Consider and account for, to the extent practicable, the impact of Council-managed fisheries on the forage base	--	Ongoing
Consider and account for, to the extent practicable, the role of Council-managed species in the ecosystem, including roles as prey, predator, and food for humans	--	Ongoing

17. Develop management approaches that minimize adverse ecosystem impacts.		
Participate on marine mammal take reduction teams and protected resources working groups, and initiate necessary actions in response to protected resource issues	58	Ongoing
Initiate action in response to the action plan developed by the Atlantic Sturgeon Bycatch Working Group to reduce sturgeon bycatch in gillnet fisheries	59	TBD
Participate on CCC Working Group Addressing Integration of ESA Section 7 with MSA processes	55	Ongoing
Review State of the Ecosystem Report	--	Annually
Continue to track thread herring Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) application and develop comments, if needed	52	Ongoing
Develop a policy and/or process for reviewing EFP applications for new or expanding fisheries as it relates to the unmanaged forage amendment	53	2023



GOVERNANCE

Goal: Ensure that the Council's practices accurately represent and consider the interests of fisheries, fishing communities, and the public through a transparent and inclusive decision-making process.

Objectives and Priority Activities for 2023	Deliverable	Timeframe
18. Maintain an open, accessible, and clearly defined process.		
Provide an update on Council activities and a summary of implementation Plan progress.	--	Annually
Provide conference lines or Webinar access to Council and advisory body meetings whenever feasible	--	Ongoing
Review and revise the Council Statement of Organization Processes and Procedures (SOPP) as needed	--	Ongoing
19. Engage management partners to promote effective collaboration and coordination.		
Participate on CCC Working Groups and Subcommittees	55	Ongoing
Track relevant MSA/fisheries legislation and develop comments as requested	57	Ongoing
Review the composition and operation of Council committees	--	Annually
20. Ensure that stakeholder interests are understood and addressed.		
Facilitate development of advisory panel fishery performance reports	7, 12, 17, 28, 32, 35	Annually
<i>See Objective 2 for additional related activities</i>		
21. Provide training and development opportunities for Council members and staff to enhance organizational performance.		
Support the ongoing professional development of Council staff	--	Ongoing
Continue to participate in staff-to-staff meetings and collaborate with GARFO, NEFSC, and ASMFC on other initiatives	--	Ongoing

APPENDIX: 2023 PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

This appendix provides additional background information and details about the proposed actions and deliverables included in the *2023 Implementation Plan*. Details in this Appendix are subject to change. Item numbers in the far-left column are associated with the deliverable numbers in the *Proposed Actions and Deliverables* section of the implementation plan.

Deliverable	Staff Lead(s)	Description
1. Develop 2024-2025 specifications for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass	Dancy Beaty Hart	Results of the 2023 management track assessments will inform 2024-2025 specifications. Measures to be considered include commercial and recreational catch and landings limits and commercial management measures.
2. Develop 2024-2025 recreational management measures for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass	Dancy Beaty Hart	Recreational management measures will be set for a two-year cycle to align with anticipated 2023 management track stock assessments, as provided for in the Recreational Harvest Control Rule Framework.
3. Evaluate commercial scup discards and gear restricted areas	Hart	Data through 2019 shows scup discards in the commercial trawl fishery have been well above average, including record breaking high discards in 2017. This review will update and summarize trends in scup discards, evaluate the effectiveness of gear restricted areas, and consider options to address this issue.
4. Review and potentially revise commercial minimum mesh size regulations and exemptions for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass	Moore	In 2018, the Council and Board reviewed results of a study on minimum mesh size effectiveness for these species. The Monitoring Committee recommended additional analyses and industry input before considering modifications, and the Council and Board recommended continuing to pursue this issue as a lower-tier priority at the time given other ongoing actions for this FMP. Current regulations require different minimum mesh sizes for each of the three species, which are targeted by an overlapping group of vessels fishing in similar areas. Industry members have requested analysis of a uniform mesh size for these three species. This review would build on the previous research and consider revisions to the commercial minimum mesh sizes and exemptions for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass.
5. Initiate development of action to replace Recreational Harvest Control Rule after sunset period, including enhanced use of the Recreational Demand Model and/or Recreational Fleet Dynamics Model	Beaty	The Recreational Harvest Control Rule Framework (approved June 2022) modified the process for setting recreational management measures for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish (once bluefish is no longer in a rebuilding plan). The new "Percent Change Approach" will sunset no later than the end of 2025, with a goal of implementing a new and improved approach to managing the recreational fisheries by the beginning of 2026.

Deliverable	Staff Lead(s)	Description
6. Continue development of amendment to consider recreational sector separation and recreational catch accounting for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish	Dancy	This amendment considers (1) options for managing for-hire recreational fisheries separately from other recreational fishing modes and (2) options related to recreational catch accounting, such as private angler reporting and enhanced vessel trip report requirements for for-hire vessels. The Council and Policy Board initiated this action in October 2020. No additional progress has been made due to prioritization of the Harvest Control Rule Framework/ Addenda.
7. Facilitate development of advisory panel fishery performance reports for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass	Dancy Beaty Hart	The Council's advisory panels develop Fishery Performance Reports (FPR) each year to provide the Council and SSC with an annual description of the factors that influenced fishing effort and catch within each of the Council's fisheries. These reports are intended to summarize fishermen's "on-the-water" perspectives, including information about fishing effort, market trends, and environmental changes, and other factors that may not be fully accounted for in the stock assessment process. To support development of FPRs, Council staff develop a Fishery Information Document (FID) for each species managed under the fishery management plan. The purpose of the FID is to summarize the most recent catch, landings, and effort data.
8. Support black sea bass research track assessment	Beaty	Research track (RT) assessments evaluate new datasets that can either inform or be used in new or existing stock assessment models. These assessments are carried out over longer time frames and with fewer requirements for using the most recent data. The research track is intended to be the opportunity for extensive and comprehensive research and analysis. The Council staff lead for a species typically participates on the assessment working group (WG) which is responsible for carrying out and making decisions about the stock assessment and addressing the assessment terms of reference.
9. Support 2023 management track assessments for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass	Dancy Beaty Hart	Management track (MT) assessments provide routine, scheduled, updated advice to directly inform management actions. MT assessments are designed to be simpler, quicker, and more efficient than research track assessments. NEFSC assessment scientists have primary responsibility for planning and carrying out management track assessments. Council staff involvement typically includes attending assessment meetings/calls, tracking assessment progress, and communicating assessment results to advisory bodies.
10. Develop 2024-2025 specifications for bluefish	Cisneros	Bluefish is currently managed under a rebuilding plan. Results from the 2022 research track and 2023 management track assessments will inform 2024-2025 specifications and management measures.
11. Develop 2024-2025 recreational management measures for bluefish	Cisneros	See #10

Deliverable	Staff Lead(s)	Description
12. Facilitate development of bluefish advisory panel fishery performance report	Cisneros	See #7
13. Support 2023 bluefish management track assessment	Cisneros	See #9
14. Review 2024 specifications for golden tilefish	Montañez	Multi-year specifications were previously set for the 2022-2024 fishing years. The Council will review updated information and determine if any changes are needed for 2024.
15. Review 2024 specifications for blueline tilefish	Hart	Multi-year specifications were previously set for the 2022-2024 fishing years. The Council will review updated information and determine if any changes are needed for 2024.
16. Complete and review Golden Tilefish Individual Fishing Quota Program Review	Montañez	The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the periodic review of all limited access privilege programs. The last review of the golden tilefish IFQ program was completed in 2017. The Council initiated a review in 2022 and expects to complete the review in 2023.
17. Facilitate development of advisory panel fishery performance reports for golden and blueline tilefish	Montañez Hart	See #7
18. Review performance of private recreational tilefish permitting and reporting	Montañez Hart	In August 2020 NOAA Fisheries implemented new permitting and reporting requirements for all recreational vessels targeting or retaining golden or blueline tilefish from Virginia to Maine. The Council will receive an update on numbers of issued permits, landings, reporting systems used, and lessons learned during the first two years of this initiative.
19. Work with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to support the upcoming 2024 blueline tilefish operational assessment	Hart	Council staff will participate throughout the Southeast Data Assessment and Review (SEDAR) process and working group and coordinate Mid-Atlantic/Northeast efforts and support with the Northeast Fishery Science Center.
20. Coordinate the 2023 golden tilefish survey pending approval of funding/logistics	Montañez	Two short-term tilefish surveys conducted in 2017 and 2020 have provided important information to inform the management of golden tilefish. There is an interest in continuing this survey if the necessary funding can be secured.
21. Support 2024 golden tilefish research track assessment	Montañez	See #8 for overview of research track assessments. Note: Council staff will chair the golden tilefish assessment working group.
22. Develop 2024-2025 Atlantic mackerel specifications	Didden	Results of the 2023 management track assessment will inform 2024-2025 specifications.
23. Develop 2024-2026 longfin squid specifications	Didden	Results of the 2023 management track assessment will inform 2024-2026 specifications.

Deliverable	Staff Lead(s)	Description
24. Review 2023 specifications for Illex	Didden	In 2022 the Council set preliminary 2023 <i>Illex</i> specifications with the expectation that the SSC (March) and Council (April) will review and may modify the ABC after reviewing updated data and related analyses.
25. Develop 2024-2025 specifications for Illex	Didden	<i>Illex</i> data updates in March 2023 will inform development of 2024-2025 specifications.
26. Review 2024 specifications for butterfish	Didden	Multi-year specifications were previously set for the 2023-2024 fishing years. The Council will review updated information and determine if any changes are needed for 2024.
27. Review 2024 specifications for chub mackerel	Beaty	Multi-year specifications were previously set for the 2022-2025 fishing years. The Council will review updated information and determine if any changes are needed for 2024.
28. Facilitate development of MSB advisory panel fishery performance reports	Didden Beaty	See #7
29. Support 2023 management track assessments for Atlantic mackerel and longfin squid	Didden	See #9
30. Develop 2024-2025 river herring and shad cap (paired with Atlantic mackerel specifications), including consideration of the river herring assessment	Didden	The mackerel fishery operates under a river herring and shad (RH/S) catch cap, which closes the directed mackerel fishery and implements a 20,000 pound trip limit for all permits once the cap (currently 129 MT) has been projected to be caught in the directed mackerel fishery. The Council will review cap performance and determine if changes are needed.
31. Develop 2024-2026 spiny dogfish specifications and/or a rebuilding plan (possibly including trip limit changes), as appropriate given outcome of research and management track assessments	Didden	Results of the 2023 management track assessment will inform 2024-2026 specifications (research track assessment results have suggested a recent decline in biomass).
32. Facilitate development of spiny dogfish advisory panel fishery performance report	Didden	See #7
33. Support 2023 management track assessment for spiny dogfish	Didden	See #9
34. Review 2024 specifications for surfclam and ocean quahog	Coakley	Multi-year specifications were previously set for the 2021-2026 fishing years. The Council will review updated catch and landings information for both stocks and determine if any changes are needed.

Deliverable	Staff Lead(s)	Description
35. Facilitate development of surfclam/quahog advisory panel fishery performance reports	Coakley	See #7
36. Oversee SCOQ Electronic Monitoring Project	Coakley	This project is an initial test of the ability of machine learning and image analysis to differentiate the species and determine the length of the two primary clam species caught commercially in federal waters in the Northeast Atlantic. This project will fund placement of cameras and image recording equipment onboard the vessel contracted to conduct the 2023 Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) clam survey. The survey is conducted from, and operates like, a typical commercial clam fishing vessel.
37. Develop alternatives for the Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Species Separation Requirements Amendment	Coakley	Current regulations do not allow Atlantic surfclams and ocean quahogs to be landed on the same trip or in the same tagged cage. The Council is developing and Amendment to modify species separation requirements in these fisheries. In December 2022 the Council agreed to postpone final action to allow for continued development of alternatives in 2023.
38. Conduct biennial review of the 2020-2024 research priorities document	Muffley	A comprehensive biennial review of all Council research priorities will occur in 2023. Feedback and input from all APs, Monitoring Committees, NEFSC staff, and the SSC on existing and new priorities will take place throughout the year. A review of Council-funded projects and an evaluation of all species-specific priorities will occur to track progress and implementation of the document.
39. Approve Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) membership	Muffley	The Council will consider reappointment of SSC members whose terms expire in 2023.
40. Review outcomes and recommendations from the SSC Ecosystem Work Group	Muffley	The Council will review recommendations from the SSC's Ecosystem Work Group on advancing the operational use of ecosystem information in management decisions.
41. Review past action and consider possible redevelopment of a revised Research Set-Aside (RSA) program	Muffley	In June 2022 the Council reviewed recommendations from the Research Steering Committee and discussed potential redevelopment of the RSA program. The Council agreed to continue engaging with the ASMFC and state partners on possible redevelopment of the program in 2023 to determine if issues with the previous program can be addressed.
42. Review results and determine potential application of the research project on short-term forecasts of species distributions	Muffley	The Council is collaborating with Rutgers on a project to develop forecast models to predict short-term (1-10 years) climate-induced distribution changes for four economically important Mid and South Atlantic managed species (summer flounder, spiny dogfish, Illex squid, and gray triggerfish). Short-term projections should provide for greater management utility and application since most management considerations and decisions operate at similar timescales.

Deliverable	Staff Lead(s)	Description
43. Support the 2023 Applying State-Spaced Models Research Track Assessment	Muffley	The purpose of this research track is to explore the application and use of state-space models across a wide range of stocks in the Greater Atlantic Region. Council staff will participate on the assessment working group.
44. Coordinate and facilitate the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTA)	Hart	The NTAP is a joint advisory panel of the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils. It is comprised 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 Mid-Atlantic Council serves as the administrative lead for NTAP.
45. Continue development of Essential Fish Habitat Amendment	Coakley	The Council will continue development of the omnibus Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Amendment (initiated October 2022). This action will concurrently conduct the 5-year EFH review required under the Magnuson Stevens Act while amending fishery management plans for the Council, as needed. This action is an opportunity to utilize the best available fish habitat science to improve EFH designations and support the Council’s fish habitat conservation efforts while supporting the EFH consultation process. The consultation process plays an important role in addressing the impacts of non-fishing projects (such as wind energy projects) on fish habitat.
46. Maintain and integrate Northeast Regional Habitat Assessment products	Coakley Kentner	From 2019 to 2022 the Council was engaged in the Northeast Regional Habitat Assessment – a collaborative effort to describe and characterize estuarine, coastal, and offshore fish habitat distribution, abundance, and quality in the Northeast. Core work products were completed in mid-2022 with the launch of the NRHA data explorer. Council staff will maintain and improve these products in 2023 and beyond.
47. Oversee National Fishing Effects Database Project	Coakley Kentner	The Mid-Atlantic Council will work with the New England Council and NOAA Fisheries to develop a national fishing effects database to support fishery management councils EFH reviews. The National Fishing Effects Database will allow users to see and share information with two levels of accessibility: 1) a detailed, searchable fishing effects library (with direct access to literature where available) for internal Council and NOAA Fisheries users, and 2) a publicly accessible and searchable viewer that can be used by interested parties (Council stakeholders, academics, others) to understand the body of information the Councils use for fishing gear effects analyses.
48. Maintain joint MAFMC and New England Fishery Management Council offshore wind web page	Sabo Beaty	The Council maintains a joint offshore wind page in coordination with the New England Council to communicate updates on offshore wind energy development with interested stakeholders.

Deliverable	Staff Lead(s)	Description
49. Develop habitat- and fishery-related comments on offshore energy development	Beaty	The Council will track offshore energy developments and develop comments as appropriate.
50. Complete comprehensive review and update to Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) risk assessment	Muffley	The first EAFM risk assessment was completed in 2017 and has been updated annually since then. This review will identify new information and analyses that may be available to further refine or evaluate existing risk factors. In addition, this review will identify any new/different risks and priorities to potentially be included in future risk assessment reports.
51. Complete East Coast Climate Change Scenario Planning Initiative and identify priorities for resulting action	Dancy	The Council has been coordinating with East coast fishery management organizations on a scenario planning process to consider future management strategies in the face of climate change and species distribution shifts. A summit meeting will be held in early 2023 with representatives from participating organizations across regions and jurisdictions. The summit meeting will serve as a venue to discuss input from manager sub-group and individual management body sessions, with the goal of developing a final set of governance, management, and monitoring recommendations from the scenario planning process. Based on the recommendations from the summit meeting, the NRCC will consider priority follow up actions, some of which may be coordinated among multiple management entities and some of which may be initiated at the individual Council level. Details on this initiative are available at https://www.mafmc.org/climate-change-scenario-planning
52. Continue to track thread herring Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) application and develop comments, if needed	Beaty	In 2021, GARFO received an exempted fishing permit (EFP) application for an experimental Atlantic thread herring purse seine fishery in federal waters. Thread herring are an ecosystem component species under the Council's Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment and are subject to a 1,700 pound possession limit. The EFP application requested the ability to retain up to a total of 3,000 MT of thread herring in 2022 as a first step towards assessing the potential commercial viability of a thread herring fishery. The Council's SSC and Ecosystem and Ocean Planning Committee reviewed this application in 2021. The applicants subsequently revised their application and re-submitted it in late 2022. If GARFO moves forward with this application, they will publish a Federal Register Notice with a public comment period. The Council agreed that review of this application and development of Council comments should be a proposed deliverable on their 2023 Implementation Plan.

Deliverable	Staff Lead(s)	Description
53. Develop a policy and/or process for reviewing EFP applications for new or expanding fisheries as it relates to the unmanaged forage amendment	Beaty	The Council will initiate development of a policy/process for Council review of EFP applications for harvest of species designated as ecosystem components through the Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment. The goal in establishing this policy/process is to provide clarity and guidance as to what the Council should consider when reviewing and making recommendations on EFP applications for ecosystem component species.
54. Review commercial landings of unmanaged species	Beaty	The Council will review an annual update on landings of unmanaged species compiled by GARFO. The intent is to look for signs of emerging unmanaged commercial fisheries.
55. Participate on Council Coordination Committee Working Groups and Subcommittees	Staff	Staff currently participate on the CCC's Habitat Workgroup, Area-Based Management Subcommittee, Legislative Workgroup, ESA/MSA Coordination Workgroup, and Equity and Environmental Justice (EEJ) Workgroup.
56. Respond to requests for information associated with Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification or audits for MSC-certified fisheries (Atlantic surfclam, ocean quahog, Illex squid, longfin squid, spiny dogfish, scup)	Staff	The Marine Stewardship Council is an independent, third-party fishery certification program. Council staff are periodically asked to provide information as part of the certification process or for audits of currently-certified fisheries.
57. Track relevant legislation and provide comments as requested	Sabo	The Council will track relevant fisheries/ocean legislation and provide comments if invited to do so by a member of Congress. NOAA General Counsel has instructed the RFMCs that (1) there must be a documented request from Congress, and (2) comments should be limited to technical or factual presentation directly related to performance of the grant.
58. Continue to participate on marine mammal take reduction teams and protected resources working groups, and initiate necessary actions in response to protected resource issues	Cisneros	Council staff currently participate on several marine mammal take reduction teams (TRT), including the Atlantic Large Whale TRT (ALWTRT), Harbor Porpoise TRT, and Pelagic Longline TRT. The ALWTRT is currently engaged in development of measures to reduce the risk of entanglement to right whales in U.S. East Coast fixed gear fisheries including gillnet, mixed species trap/pot, and lobster and Jonah crab trap/pot fisheries. There is a possibility that measures developed by the ALWTRT could require Council action in 2023.
59. Initiate action in response to the action plan developed by the Atlantic Sturgeon Bycatch Working Group to reduce sturgeon bycatch in gillnet fisheries	Cisneros	In December 2022 the Council and NEFMC will decide on a path forward related to the development of an action to address sturgeon bycatch in federal large mesh gillnet fisheries including dogfish and monkfish which are jointly managed.

Deliverable	Staff Lead(s)	Description
60. Continue to inform and engage stakeholders using a variety of communication tools and channels	Sabo	A variety of communication platforms and tools are used to engage stakeholders, including the Council website, interested-parties email lists, press releases, YouTube recordings, webinars, face-to-face meetings, and a variety of printed and digital communication materials.
61. Conduct outreach to increase stakeholder awareness and understanding of Council actions under development	Sabo	Outreach is conducted during the development of each Council action to ensure that interested and affected stakeholders are informed about potential management changes and aware of comment opportunities. Communication approaches and outreach products are often tailored to meet the needs of the target audience(s).
62. Further develop and refine the Council's website content and structure to increase usefulness and functionality	Sabo	Staff will continue efforts to streamline Council web pages, develop new content, and increase usability of the Council website.
63. Develop fact sheets and outreach materials as needed	Sabo	Staff will develop print and digital communication products on an as-needed basis.
64. Continue additional outreach to improve awareness of, and compliance with, private recreational tilefish reporting requirements	Hart Sabo Montañez	At the October 2022 meeting the Council discussed strategies to improve angler awareness and compliance with recreational tilefish permitting and reporting requirements. Council staff will work with NMFS to execute these outreach strategies in 2023.
65. Finalize and submit any outstanding specifications packages for 2023	Staff	