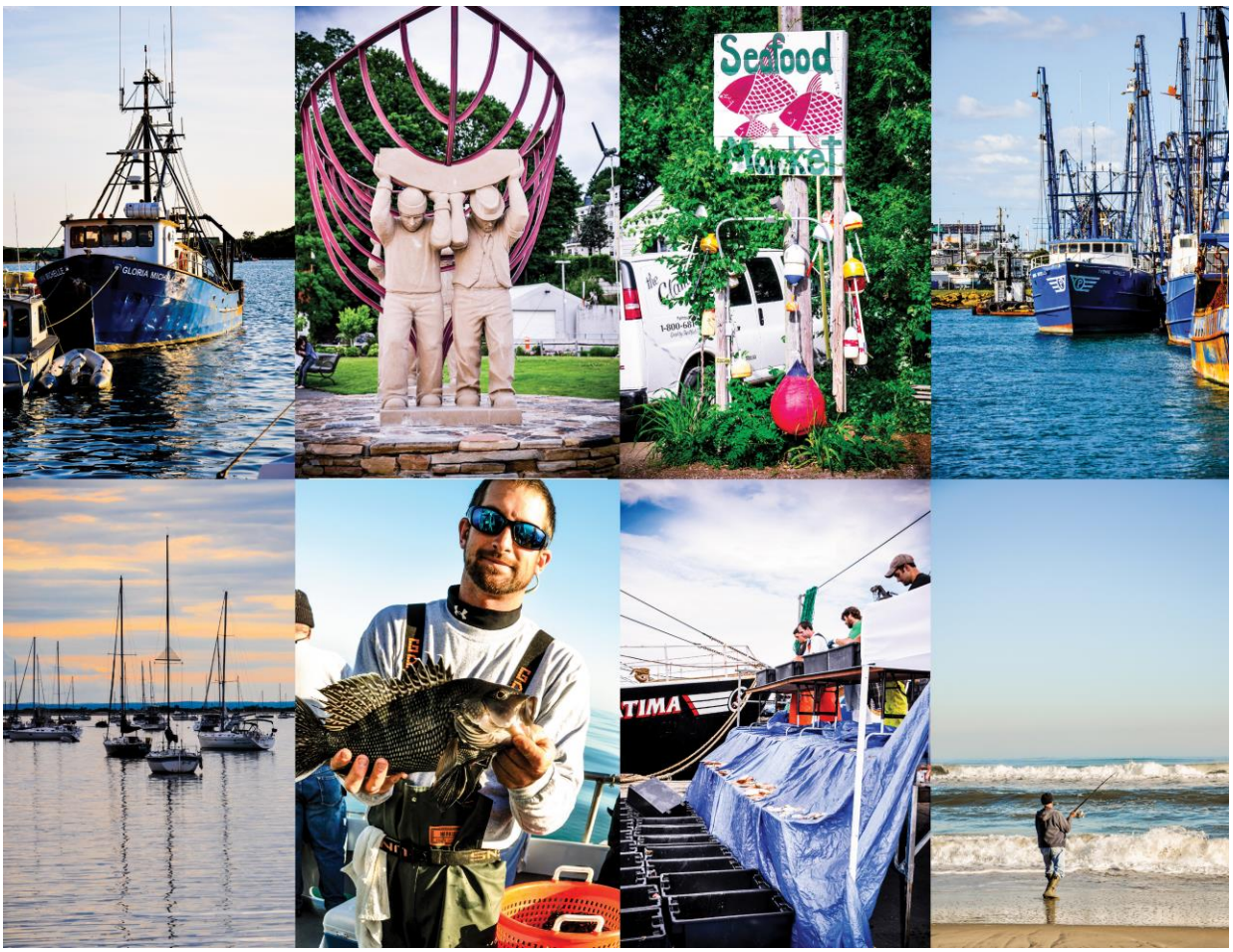
MID-ATLANTIC
FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

2014 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN



APPROVED DECEMBER 2013

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INTRODUCTION

In August 2013, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council approved the 2014-2018 Strategic Plan. The Council's strategic plan provides the first comprehensive strategic approach for fisheries management in federal waters off the Mid-Atlantic coast. Over the next five years, the strategic plan will guide the Council's efforts to achieve sustainable and productive fisheries, a healthy marine ecosystem, and stable coastal communities.

Implementation of the MAFSP will be a long-term process, and the purpose of the 2014 Implementation Plan is to identify specific tasks necessary for achieving the goals and objectives defined in the strategic plan. The implementation plan was designed to provide a comprehensive and realistic framework for merging the Council's ongoing projects with new initiatives. The plan will be used by the Council and staff as a planning tool and as a way to update the public on progress toward achieving the goals and objectives of the strategic plan.

Although the 2014 Implementation Plan was organized around the goals and objectives of the MAFSP, it is largely focused on specific tasks to be undertaken in 2014. The plan will be updated and expanded each year to reflect the Council's progress and to accommodate new opportunities and challenges.

BACKGROUND

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (also referred to as the Council or MAFMC) is responsible for the conservation and management of fish stocks 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 law created a 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), eliminated foreign fishing effort within the EEZ, 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 become final. All of the Council’s fishery management recommendations must be consistent with the ten national standards as defined by the MSA.

The Council develops fishery management recommendations for thirteen species of fish and shellfish, including summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, Atlantic mackerel, short-finned squid, long-finned squid, butterfish, surfclams, ocean quahogs, tilefish, spiny dogfish and monkfish.

The Council initiated its Visioning and Strategic Planning Project in 2011 in an effort to address current and future challenges and secure a more stable and sustainable future for Mid-Atlantic fisheries. Between September 2011 and February 2012, the Council collected input for the strategic plan from more than 1,500 stakeholders through surveys, roundtable meetings, and position letters. Their input was summarized in the *Stakeholder Input Report*, released by the Council in June 2012.

In August 2012, the Council established a Visioning and Strategic Planning Working Group composed of Council members, stakeholders, and regional leadership. Through a series of meetings from August-December 2012, the working group crafted a vision, mission, goals, and objectives for the strategic plan. The framework developed by the working group was further refined by Council staff and presented to the Council as a Draft Strategic Plan in June 2013. The final plan was approved by the Council at its August 2013 meeting.

STRATEGIC PLAN OVERVIEW

VISION

Healthy and productive marine ecosystems supporting thriving, sustainable marine fisheries that provide the greatest overall benefit to stakeholders.

MISSION

The Council manages marine 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 effective stewardship of these fisheries and associated habitats by incorporating scientific information and informed public input in transparent processes that produce fishery management plans and programs.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND STRATEGIES

Communication Goal: Engage, Inform, and educate stakeholders to promote public awareness and encourage constructive participation in the Council process.

1. Develop and implement a strategic communications plan to provide clear and accurate information to a broad range of stakeholders
2. Engage a diverse audience of stakeholders
3. Increase stakeholder trust and facilitate greater stakeholder engagement by making the Council process accessible and transparent
4. Increase awareness and understanding of fishery science and management
5. Increase stakeholder involvement in the development of fishery management actions

Science Goal: Ensure that the Council's management decisions are based on timely and accurate scientific data that are analyzed and modeled in a manner that improves management performance and builds stakeholder confidence.

6. Promote the collection and analysis of accurate and timely scientific data to support the Council's management plans and programs
7. Improve our understanding of the social and economic dimensions of Mid-Atlantic fishing communities
8. Promote the collection and analysis of data needed to support the Council's transition to an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management
9. Encourage effective stakeholder participation in data collection and analysis
10. Promote efficient and accurate methods of monitoring and reporting

Management Goal: Develop fishery management strategies that provide for productive, sustainable fisheries.

11. Evaluate the Council's fishery management plans
12. Incorporate economic and social analysis of management alternatives into the decision-making process
13. Develop management strategies that enable efficient operation of commercial and recreational fishing businesses
14. Develop innovative management strategies for recreational and commercial fisheries
15. Advance ecosystem approaches to fisheries management in the Mid-Atlantic

Governance Goal: Ensure that the Council's governance structures and practices fairly represent stakeholder interests, are coordinated with the Council's management partners, and include a clear and well-defined decision-making process.

16. Establish a formal decision-making process for the development and evaluation of management actions
17. Develop and strengthen partnerships to promote greater efficiency and enhance coordination among management partners and other relevant organizations
18. Ensure that stakeholder interests are accurately understood and meaningfully considered in the Council process

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN STRUCTURE

The 2014 Implementation Plan is organized in to four sections, described below.

PROPOSED DELIVERABLES

The Proposed Deliverables section provides an overview of deliverables expected by the end of the implementation plan period. Since many of the proposed implementation activities cannot be measured with traditional metrics, the list of deliverables establishes a mechanism for measuring the Council's progress toward achieving the goals and objectives of the strategic plan.

STRATEGY CHECKLIST FOR ACTION DEVELOPMENT

A significant portion of the MAFSP strategies cannot ever be "completed" because they relate to tasks that should be considered an intrinsic part of every project or action. The Strategy Checklist for Action Development section is the companion to the Proposed Deliverables section—it provides a mechanism for ensuring that the Council is upholding the standards included in its strategic plan. These tasks are expected to be addressed for each Council action for which they are relevant. The Strategy Checklist for Action Development was designed to be used by the Council and Staff as a helpful guide for integrating the Council's strategic goals into everyday action.

SCIENCE AND RESEARCH NEEDS

The Science and Research Needs section is a summary of the specific science and research needs that were identified in the MAFSP. These strategies are handled differently because they require additional planning in coordination with NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center and other research institutions. The Science Center has already played a significant role in in the development of the strategic plan, but since the Council has little control over how and when the science-related tasks of the strategic plan will be addressed, the implementation of these strategies requires a unique approach.

PROPOSED 2014 IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

The Proposed 2014 Implementation Activities section identifies the specific activities and projects that the Council plans to begin or complete in 2014. The matrix is organized around the four goal areas identified in the MAFSP and includes anticipated timelines for completion of each task. Each activity is linked with one or more "primary" objectives from the strategic plan, indicated by a solid blue circle. Many activities are also linked with "secondary" objectives, indicated by an open blue circle.

PROPOSED 2014 DELIVERABLES

SUMMER FLOUNDER, SCUP, AND BLACK SEA BASS

- ☐ 2015 specifications (review)
- ☐ 2015 recreational management measures
- ☐ Summer flounder amendment (review summer flounder goals, objectives, and management strategies)
- ☐ Framework 8 (scup gear-restricted areas)
- ☐ Refinement of scup allocation model (contract)
- ☐ Fishery Performance Reports

MACKEREL, SQUID, AND BUTTERFISH

- ☐ 2015, 2016, and 2017 specifications for squid and butterfish (develop and approve)
- ☐ 2015 mackerel specifications (review)
- ☐ Shad and river herring working group
- ☐ Amendment 16 (Deep Sea Coral Protection)
- ☐ Framework 9 (Address disapproved Amendment 14 issues and/or BRP revisions)
- ☐ Fishery Performance Reports

BLUEFISH

- ☐ 2015 specifications (develop and approve)
- ☐ Fishery Performance Report

TILEFISH

- ☐ 2015, 2016, 2017 specifications (develop and approve)
- ☐ 5 year FMP review (IFQ)
- ☐ Fishery Performance Report

SURFCLAMS & OCEAN QUAHOGS

- ☐ Amendment 17 (Cost recovery amendment)
- ☐ 2015 specifications (review)
- ☐ Fishery Performance Reports

DOGFISH

- ☐ 2015 specifications (review)
- ☐ Fishery Performance Report

MONKFISH

- ☐ Amendment 6 (Alternatives to DAS system) (completion 2016)

GENERAL

- ☐ Omnibus Allowable Biological Catch (ABC) Framework
- ☐ EAFM guidance document (completion 2015)
- ☐ Consistency Amendment Vessel Baseline Regulations (NERO Lead)
- ☐ Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology

COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH

- ☐ Communications plan
- ☐ Completion of initial phase of website development
- ☐ Reorganization of stakeholder database
- ☐ Revised "Navigating the Council Process" booklet with new website version

SCIENCE & RESEARCH

- ☐ EFH updates for all species (FMPs) (completion 2015)
- ☐ Comprehensive research priority plan
- ☐ Scientific and Statistical Committee Meetings

WORKSHOPS

- ☐ Climate change and science workshop
- ☐ Climate change and governance workshop
- ☐ Wind energy best practices workshop (in coordination with BOEM)

STRATEGY CHECKLIST FOR ACTION DEVELOPMENT

The following items should be used by staff and Council members in the development and evaluation of management alternatives.

COMMUNICATION

- ☐ Ensure that communication materials meet the federal plain language guidelines
- ☐ Provide conference lines or webinar access to meetings whenever possible
- ☐ Ensure that meetings and events are posted on Council website calendar in a timely manner and with relevant information and documents
- ☐ Follow Council guidelines* for collection and summarization of public comments
- ☐ Ensure that background information about the action is included with briefing materials each time the issue is discussed at a Council meeting
- ☐ Consider the feasibility and appropriateness of a workshop as part of the action development process
- ☐ Ensure that scoping and public hearings are held in locations with high concentrations of interested individuals
- ☐ Use targeted communication to inform stakeholders and solicit public input from individuals and groups that are most likely to be interested in or affected by the potential action

SCIENCE

- ☐ Fully consider species interactions in the assessment process and in the determination of catch limits
- ☐ Effectively communicate stakeholders' concerns or recommendations regarding monitoring/observing to the NEFSC

MANAGEMENT

- ☐ Evaluate the cumulative social and economic impacts of proposed and existing management alternatives
- ☐ Consider energy efficiency in the development of management measures
- ☐ Account for uncertainty in recreational catch estimates
- ☐ Support the development of models and analyses that evaluate alternative bag, size, and seasonal limits
- ☐ Reduce regulatory discards
- ☐ Ensure fair access to recreational fisheries throughout their range
- ☐ Incorporate species interactions into fishery management plans and coordinate these considerations across appropriate management plans
- ☐ Consider the relationship between essential fish habitat and productivity of marine resources into management decisions
- ☐ Minimize adverse ecosystem impacts

GOVERNANCE

- ☐ Follow Council guidelines for evaluation of stakeholder input
- ☐ Use advisory bodies and stakeholder input to inform the decision-making process and actively monitor changing conditions in the fisheries and ecosystem

**Guidelines for collection, analysis, and evaluation of public input will be developed as part of the implementation plan.*

SCIENCE AND RESEARCH NEEDS

DATA NEEDS

- ☐ Timeline for completion of acceptable benchmark assessments for all of the Council's managed fisheries
- ☐ Oceanographic data related to climate change and ocean acidification
- ☐ Regional evaluation of species interactions within the marine ecosystem
- ☐ Climate change risk assessment for the Northeast marine ecosystem
- ☐ Habitat data—particularly data to link habitat protection with fishery productivity
- ☐ Relevant and up-to-date social and economic data about Mid-Atlantic communities
- ☐ Real-time commercial fisheries data
- ☐ Bioeconomic models

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, FUNDING, AND PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

- ☐ Electronic VTRs / log books in the commercial and for-hire sectors
- ☐ Innovative technologies (e.g., electronic monitoring, smart phones, etc.) to improve the accuracy and/or efficiency of data collection
- ☐ Evaluation of potential uses for volunteer angler data in recreational management decisions
- ☐ Additional observer program funding options
- ☐ Cooperative and collaborative research program expansion

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY INNOVATION

- ☐ Management strategies that account for uncertainty in recreational catch estimates
- ☐ Management strategies that reduce regulatory discards
- ☐ Management strategies that minimize adverse ecosystem impacts
- ☐ Management strategies that ensure fair access to recreational fisheries

PROPOSED 2014 IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH

	Year				
	13	14	15	16	17
1. Develop and approve a strategic communications plan	●				
2. Complete initial phase of website development (finalize all existing pages)	●				
3. Develop new webpages: Fisheries data sections; Council Actions pages; Publications database	●				
4. Complete development of stakeholder contact database	●				
5. Update and expand stakeholder group lists (commercial fishing associations, recreational fishing clubs, environmental groups)	●				
6. Refine the Council's email distribution system to allow stakeholders to choose what types of news they receive from the Council (e.g. only press releases, only meeting agendas, etc.)	●				
7. Revise the "Navigating the Council Process " brochure, and develop website version	●				
8. Develop and implement a checklist to assist staff in stakeholder outreach for council actions	●				
9. Develop a website-based public comment system	●				
10. Develop guidelines for collection and analysis of public input	●				
11. Continue to provide regular news and updates using social media tools	Ongoing				
12. Advise and support the Marine Resource Education Program (MREP)	Ongoing				

SCIENCE & RESEARCH

	Year				
	13	14	15	16	17
1. Host East Coast Climate Change and Science Workshop	●				
2. Initiate development of a comprehensive research priority plan	→				
3. Convene Scientific and Statistical Committee Meetings (as needed)	Ongoing				
4. Complete Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Updates for all species	●				
5. Develop a framework for level 2 assessment redefinition					

MANAGEMENT

	Year				
	13	14	15	16	17
1. Omnibus Amendment					
2. Multi-year specification framework					
3. Omnibus Amendment					
4. Framework for level 2 assessment redefinition					
5. SF/Scup/BSB Amendment X—Evaluate the goals, objectives, and strategies for the management of commercial and recreational summer flounder fisheries	●				
6. SF/Scup/BSB Framework Adjustment—Assess the effectiveness of Scup GRAs	●				
7. Address additional conservation of river herring and shad through an interagency working group	●	●	●		
8. MSB Amendment 16 (MSB)—Consider measures to protect deep sea corals	●				
9. MSB Framework 9 —Address disapproved Amendment 14 issues and/or BRP	→				

	revisions					
10.	Surfclam/Quahog Amendment 17—Cost recovery amendment	●	●			
11.	Develop EAFM Guidance Document	●	●			
12.	Monkfish Amendment 6	●	●			
13.	Consistency Amendment - Vessel Baseline Regulations (NERO Lead)	●	●			
14.	Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM) Omnibus Amendment	●				
15.	Refine scup allocation model (contract)	●				
16.	Complete 5-year Tilefish FMP review	●				
17.	Develop management measures to reduce Atlantic Sturgeon bycatch (pending assessment review)					
18.	Support the development of a MSA certification program for U.S. harvested fish					

GOVERNANCE

		Year				
		13	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**
1.	Climate change and governance workshop	●				
2.	Complete advisory panel fishery performance reports for each fishery	●	●	●	●	●
3.	Conduct a workshop to identify best practices for wind energy siting and construction (in coordination with BOEM)					
4.	Continue to provide input into the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization process	→				
5.	Participate in Partnership for Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Science	Ongoing				
6.	Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program	Ongoing				
7.	Marine Recreational Information Program	Ongoing				
8.	Mid-Atlantic Regional Association for Coastal Ocean Observing System	Ongoing				
9.	Participate on the Chesapeake Bay Goal Implementation Team	Ongoing				
10.	Participate in Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning activities through coordination with Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Body	Ongoing				
11.	Participate in Protected Resources Take Reduction meetings	Ongoing				
12.	Continue to coordinate with the NEFSC, particularly in relation to the goals, objectives, and strategies of the NEFSC strategic plan	Ongoing				

2014-2018 STRATEGIC PLAN

APPROVED OCTOBER 2013

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Background

Marine fisheries are an important source of food, income, employment, and recreation in the Mid-Atlantic region. In 2011, the commercial fishing industry in the Mid-Atlantic harvested 858 million pounds of fish and shellfish valued at $605 million, and more than 5 million recreational fishermen took nearly 21 million fishing trips. The commercial and recreational fishing industries also provide about 80 thousand full- and part-time jobs.

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (also referred to as the Council, Mid-Atlantic Council, or MAFMC) is responsible for the conservation and management of fish stocks 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 law created a 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), eliminated foreign fishing effort within the EEZ, 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 become final. All of the Council's fishery management recommendations must be consistent with the ten national standards as defined by the MSA.

The Council's managed fisheries include summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, Atlantic mackerel, short-finned squid, long-finned squid, butterfish, surfclams, ocean quahogs, tilefish, spiny dogfish and monkfish. Spiny dogfish and monkfish are managed under joint fishery management plans developed in coordination with the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC). The Council also coordinates the management of summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, and spiny dogfish with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC).

The Council is composed of 25 members, including citizens from each of the seven mid-Atlantic states as well as representatives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Coast Guard, State Department, and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The Council also has a full time staff which is based in Dover, Delaware. The staff assists with planning and facilitation of meetings, development of fishery management plans, coordination with other management agencies, and performing other tasks as needed by the Council. The Council also has a number of advisory bodies, including a Scientific and Statistical Committee and advisory panels for each fishery.

Over the last 36 years the Council has made significant progress toward its goals of establishing effective management programs for Mid-Atlantic fisheries and rebuilding stocks that were once overfished.

Despite the successes of rebuilding fish stocks, the Council still faces social, economic, and ecological challenges that threaten the stability and sustainability of Mid-Atlantic fisheries. The strategic planning process is critical for defining the future for the Council and has become increasingly important in the face of these many challenges. Developing a strategic plan will enable the Council to respond proactively and strategically.

Strategic Planning Objectives

- Maintain sustainable fisheries, ecosystems, and habitats in the Mid-Atlantic;
- Address specific issues identified by the Council and its constituents;
- Improve communication with constituents and other organizations;
- Improve the Councils ability to collect and use input from constituents and management partners;
- Increase efficiency in the management process;
- Promote stability in Mid-Atlantic fisheries; and
- Establish a more proactive process for addressing management challenges.

Strategic Planning Process

Visioning

The Council developed this plan in coordination with, and with substantial input from, its stakeholders and management partners. To ensure that the plan accurately reflected the diverse interests affected by management of Mid-Atlantic fisheries, the Council engaged in a large-scale stakeholder outreach effort prior to the actual strategic planning process. The purpose of this outreach initiative, entitled the "Visioning Project," was for the Council to gain a better understanding of stakeholders' challenges and concerns as well as their visions for Mid-Atlantic fisheries.

This task was accomplished by collecting input from stakeholders through surveys, port meetings, and position letters. From September 2011 through February 2012 more than 1,500 stakeholders participated in the Visioning Project, offering a broad range of ideas and recommendations for improving management of Mid-Atlantic fisheries. This input was summarized in the *Stakeholder Input Report* which was presented to the Council and distributed to the public in June 2012.

KEY THEMES OF THE VISIONING PROJECT

- There is a lack of confidence in the data that drive fishery management decisions.
- Stakeholders are not as involved in the Council process as they can and should be.
- Different jurisdictions and regulations among the many fishery management organizations result in complexity and inconsistency.
- There is a need for increased transparency and better communication in the fisheries management process.
- The dynamics of the ecosystem and food web should be considered to a greater extent in fisheries management decisions.
- Stakeholders are not adequately represented on the Council.
- Pollution is negatively affecting the health of fish stocks.

The Visioning phase of the project was completed with assistance from S.R.I. International.

Strategic Planning

In July 2012, the Council established a working group to spearhead the strategic planning process. The working group was made up of Council members, leaders of management partner organizations, and stakeholders representing commercial, recreational, environmental, and regional planning interests.

From August through December 2012 the group met five times to develop the components of a draft strategic plan. During the first meeting, the working group reviewed the *Stakeholder Input Report* and agreed to a framework of 7 themes based on the top issues and concerns expressed by stakeholders. These themes—science, governance, regulatory process, communication, social and economic considerations, ecosystems, and management strategies—were used throughout the planning process to guide the development of goals, objectives, and strategies for the plan. These seven themes were eventually reduced to four priority areas: (1) Communication, (2) Governance, (3) Science, and (4) Management.

The strategic planning process was facilitated by RESOLVE Consulting.

Mission, Vision, Core Values, and Goals

Vision

Healthy and productive marine ecosystems supporting thriving, sustainable marine fisheries that provide the greatest overall benefit to stakeholders.

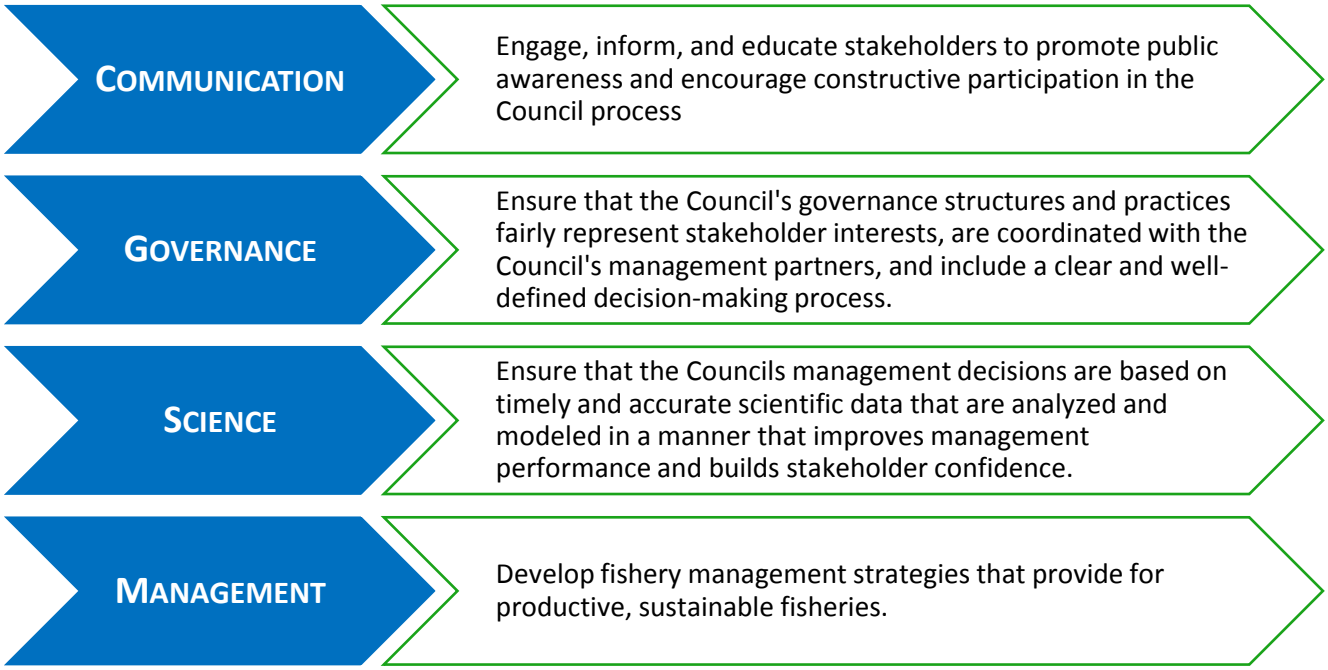
Mission

The Council manages marine 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 effective stewardship of these fisheries and associated habitats by incorporating scientific information and informed public input in transparent processes that produce fishery management plans and programs.

Core Values

- Stewardship
- Integrity
- Effectiveness
- Fairness
- Competence
- Clear Communication

2014-2018 Strategic Goals



Communication

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Goal:	Engage, inform, and educate stakeholders to promote public awareness and encourage constructive participation in the Council process.	
Objective 1. **Develop and implement a strategic communications plan to provide clear and accurate information to a broad range of stakeholders.**	**Strategy 1.1.**	Employ a variety of written, visual, and oral communication methods appropriate for a diverse audience of stakeholders.
	Strategy 1.2.	Expand the use of technology to streamline the communication process**.**
	Strategy 1.3.	Use the Council's website to provide stakeholders with easy access to accurate and up-to-date information.
	Strategy 1.4.	Provide stakeholders with timely news and updates via email distribution list and website.
	Strategy 1.5.	Ensure that all communication products meet the federal plain language guidelines.
	Strategy 1.6.	Develop communication templates and communication guidelines for staff and Council members.
Objective 2. **Engage a diverse audience of stakeholders.**	**Strategy 2.1.**	Conduct a stakeholder analysis to identify target audiences for Council communications.
	Strategy 2.2.	Develop and maintain a database of stakeholder contact information, including a list of key industry leaders.
	Strategy 2.3.	Coordinate communication efforts with management partners and other organizations to reduce redundancy and expand the distribution of messages to a broader audience.
	Strategy 2.4.	Use targeted communication to increase the number of stakeholders in the Council's contact database.
Objective 3. **Increase stakeholder trust and facilitate greater stakeholder engagement by making the Council process accessible and transparent.**	**Strategy 3.1.**	Provide conference lines or Webinar access to Council and advisory body meetings whenever it is feasible.
	Strategy 3.2.	Maintain an online calendar of meetings and events with links to meeting materials and supplemental information.
	Strategy 3.3.	Establish a consistent process for collecting and analyzing public input and incorporating it into the decision-making process.
	Strategy 3.4.	Summarize public comments received on specific actions and explain how public input was used in management decisions.
	Strategy 3.5.	Ensure that briefing books, presentations, and other meeting documents provide sufficient background information to be understood by the general public.

Objective 4. **Increase awareness and understanding of fishery science and management.**	**Strategy 4.1.**	Partner with academic institutions and non-governmental organizations to develop workshops and other interactive educational opportunities for stakeholders.
	Strategy 4.2.	Collaborate with academic and research institutions to develop outreach materials that explain fisheries science and data collection.
	Strategy 4.3.	Develop plain-language outreach materials to educate the public about the Council's legislative mandates and the fisheries management process.
	Strategy 4.4.	Use the results of the Visioning Project to promote general public understanding of fisheries science and management.
Objective 5. **Increase stakeholder involvement in the development of fishery management actions.**	**Strategy 5.1.**	Hold workshops to facilitate collaborative development of innovative management approaches among fishermen, managers, and scientists.
	Strategy 5.2.	Identify and implement additional opportunities for stakeholders to ask questions and make general comments.
	Strategy 5.3.	Ensure that meetings are advertised and conducted in such a way that encourages and enables stakeholder attendance and participation.
	Strategy 5.4.	Provide stakeholders with sufficient background information to provide constructive input
	Strategy 5.5.	Educate stakeholders about the Council process.
	Strategy 5.6.	Utilize an informal, small group meeting format to gather input from "hard to reach" interests via Listening Sessions or Q&A sessions.
	Strategy 5.7.	Ensure that scoping and public hearings are held in locations with high concentrations of interested stakeholders.
	Strategy 5.8.	Use targeted communication methods to solicit public input on management actions.

Science

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Goal:		Ensure that the Council's management decisions are based on timely and accurate scientific data that are analyzed and modeled in a manner that improves management performance and build stakeholder confidence.
Objective 6. **Promote the collection and analysis of accurate and timely scientific data to support the Council's management plans and programs.**	**Strategy 6.1.**	Evaluate current data collection, monitoring, and reporting programs for the Council's managed fisheries and associated data needs.
	Strategy 6.2.	Develop a comprehensive research plan that prioritizes the Council's data and research needs.
	Strategy 6.3.	Coordinate with the NEFSC to develop research plans that include specific timelines and goals (i.e. roadmap) that produce acceptable benchmark assessments for all of the Council's managed species.
	Strategy 6.4.	Enhance the Council's Research Set-Aside Program to support the Council's research needs.
	Strategy 6.5.	Evaluate the use of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program data and protocols for their potential utility in Council management decisions.
	Strategy 6.6.	Encourage the science center to conduct a risk assessment to identify the potential threats of climate change on our marine ecosystem.
Objective 7. **Improve our understanding of the social and economic dimensions of Mid-Atlantic fishing communities.**	**Strategy 7.1.**	Perform a gap analysis to identify areas where additional or improved social and economic data collection and analysis are necessary.
	Strategy 7.2.	Support the collection of relevant economic and social data to produce analyses that meets current and future Council needs.
	Strategy 7.3.	Develop partnerships with research institutions (e.g., Sea Grant) with the expertise to collect social and economic data to support the Council's management objectives.
	Strategy 7.4.	Develop terms of reference for the SSC to develop social and economic metrics for analysis of management alternatives.
Objective 8. **Promote the collection and analysis of data needed to support the Council's transition to an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management.**	**Strategy 8.1.**	Encourage the collection of habitat data that will support methodologies and subsequent management measures that link habitat protection more directly to increased fish production.
	Strategy 8.2.	Support the collection of oceanographic data that support the development of an ecosystem approach to fisheries management and support management decisions related to climate change and ocean acidification.
	Strategy 8.3.	Coordinate with the NEFSC to conduct a regional evaluation of species interactions within the marine ecosystem.
	Strategy 8.4.	Fully consider species interactions in the assessment process and in the determination of catch limits.

Objective 9. **Encourage effective stakeholder participation in data collection and analysis.**	**Strategy 9.1.**	Seek funding for expansion of study fleet and other similar types of programs, and work with our management partners to secure long-term funding for the NEAMAP survey.
	Strategy 9.2.	Promote and expand opportunities for cooperative and collaborative research and surveys in the Mid-Atlantic region.
	Strategy 9.3.	Encourage the collection and use of real-time commercial data to support stock assessment and management decisions.
	Strategy 9.4.	Explore the potential use of volunteer angler data in recreational management decisions.
Objective 10. **Promote efficient and accurate methods of monitoring and reporting.**	**Strategy 10.1.**	Support increased at-sea observer coverage in Mid-Atlantic fisheries.
	Strategy 10.2.	Support the development of innovative technologies (e.g., electronic monitoring, smart phones, etc.) to improve the accuracy and/or efficiency of data collection.
	Strategy 10.3.	Support the development and implementation of electronic VTRs / log books in the commercial and for-hire sectors.
	Strategy 10.4.	Effectively communicate stakeholders' concerns or recommendations regarding monitoring/observing to the NEFSC.
	Strategy 10.5.	Seek legislative solutions to expand observer funding options.

Management

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Goal: Develop fishery management strategies that provide for productive, sustainable fisheries.		
Objective 11. **Evaluate the Council's fishery management plans.**	**Strategy 11.1.**	Establish a timeline for FMP review.
	Strategy 11.2.	Review and update FMP objectives as appropriate to ensure that they remain specific, relevant, and measurable.
	Strategy 11.3.	Develop a list of performance variables that can be used to track FMP performance.
	Strategy 11.4.	Develop a performance management system that tracks the progress of management decisions and their impacts.
Objective 12. **Incorporate economic and social analysis of management alternatives into the decision-making process.**	**Strategy 12.1.**	Include Terms of Reference that will allow a Fishery Management Action Team to identify and consider relevant economic and socio-cultural issues in the development and analysis of management alternatives.
	Strategy 12.2.	Develop a process to formally compare economic and social impacts of management alternatives prior to Council decisions.
	Strategy 12.3.	Support the development of bioeconomic models to evaluate allocation strategies and management measures.
	Strategy 12.4.	Evaluate the cumulative social and economic impacts of proposed and existing management alternatives.
Objective 13. **Develop management strategies that enable efficient operation of commercial and recreational fishing businesses.**	**Strategy 13.1.**	Consider the development of multi-year management approaches for all managed species.
	Strategy 13.2.	Support the development of a Magnuson-Stevens Act certification program and label for U.S. harvested fish.
	Strategy 13.3.	Consider energy efficiency in the development of management measures.
	Strategy 13.4.	Support the development of innovative gear designs for commercial fisheries to increase efficiency, reduce discards, and reduce costs.
Objective 14. **Develop innovative management strategies for recreational and commercial fisheries.**	**Strategy 14.1.**	Develop management approaches that account for uncertainty in recreational catch estimates.
	Strategy 14.2.	Support the development of models and analyses that evaluate alternative bag, size, and seasonal limits.
	Strategy 14.3.	Review and revise current approaches to management of recreational fisheries that consider governance issues, data limitations, and differences among fishing modes.
	Strategy 14.4.	Develop management measures to reduce regulatory discards.
	Strategy 14.5.	Develop management strategies that ensure fair access to recreational fisheries throughout their range.

Objective 15. **Advance ecosystem approaches to fisheries management in the Mid-Atlantic.**	**Strategy 15.1.**	Complete and implement the "Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management Guidance Document."
	Strategy 15.2.	Incorporate consideration of species interactions into fishery management plans and coordinate these considerations across appropriate management plans.
	Strategy 15.3.	Determine and incorporate the relationship between essential fish habitat and productivity of marine resources into management decisions.
	Strategy 15.4.	Develop regional workshops that consider the various aspects of ecosystem approaches to management.
	Strategy 15.5.	Develop management approaches that minimize adverse ecosystem impacts.

Governance

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Goal:	Ensure that the Council's governance structures and practices fairly represent stakeholder interests, are coordinated with the Council's management partners, and include a clear and well-defined decision-making process.	
Objective 16. **Establish a formal decision-making process for the development and evaluation of management actions.**	**Strategy 16.1.**	Evaluate the Council's existing decision-making process and identify areas of ambiguity, inefficiency, and inconsistency.
	Strategy 16.2.	Increase consistency in the process for developing amendments, frameworks, and specification documents.
	Strategy 16.3.	Enhance the process for incorporating scientific data into the evaluation of management alternatives.
	Strategy 16.4.	Establish a consistent process for evaluating and incorporating stakeholder input in the decision-making process.
Objective 17. **Develop and strengthen partnerships to promote greater efficiency and enhance coordination among management partners and other relevant organizations.**	**Strategy 17.1.**	Establish new and strengthen existing relationships with organizations involved with water quality, wind energy, waste management, marine transportation, and other marine related issues in the Mid-Atlantic region.
	Strategy 17.2.	Initiate the development of a comprehensive project in cooperation with the other East coast management agencies to address the management implications associated with shifts in species distribution resulting from climate change.
	Strategy 17.3.	Develop operating agreements with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to strengthen coordination and clarify roles and responsibilities.
	Strategy 17.4.	Participate in regional planning initiatives associated with the National Ocean Council, Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean, and the Northeast Regional Ocean Council.
	Strategy 17.5.	Coordinate with BOEM to ensure that fisheries impacts and concerns are effectively addressed in the offshore energy development process.
Objective 18. **Ensure that stakeholder interests are accurately understood and meaningfully considered in the Council process.**	**Strategy 18.1.**	Regularly evaluate the composition of committees and advisory bodies to ensure a balanced representation of interests.
	Strategy 18.2.	Use advisory bodies and stakeholder input to inform the decision-making process and actively monitor changing conditions in the fisheries and ecosystem.

Conclusion

Achieving a balance between biophysical, ecological, and socioeconomic objectives will continue to be a challenging aspect of fisheries management as the Council works to attain a vision of a healthy, responsive, and sustainable future for Mid-Atlantic fisheries. The greatest opportunity for progress can be found in the evaluation of our past successes and mistakes, seeking insight into the challenges of our present, assessing and understanding evolving dynamics within the marine ecosystem, and identifying opportunities for addressing these challenges in the years to come. The visioning and strategic planning efforts over the last two years have given the Council an opportunity to do just that—identify successes and failures of the past and translate that knowledge into a better future for our managed fisheries.

Looking forward, the Council's managed fisheries face uncharted impacts and consequences associated with climate change and large scale offshore wind energy development. In order to deal effectively with these future challenges, the Council will have to leverage all of its relationships with its management partners and stakeholders, relying on each for their respective expertise and information for possible solutions. Assessing and managing these risks will not happen automatically; rather, it will require diligent planning and close internal and external working relationships at the Council level.

Based on the strategic plan, it is anticipated that the Council will actively seek greater stakeholder engagement and involvement in the Council process, set more specific social and economic management objectives, establish more effective review processes for management plans, and improve the transparency of Council operations. Building public confidence in the management process will ultimately require a sustained commitment to excellence and continuous improvements from the first point of data collection to final decision-making.

PROPOSED 2015 DELIVERABLES

Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass

- ☐ 2016 – 2018 specifications (develop and approve)
- ☐ 2016 Recreational Management Measures
- ☐ Fishery Performance Reports
- ☐ Comprehensive Summer Flounder amendment (ongoing)
- ☐ Scup Gear Restricted Area Framework
- ☐ Summer Flounder allocation project
- ☐ Black Sea Bass MSE and adaptive management project

Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish

- ☐ 2016 Squid and Butterfish specifications (review)
- ☐ MSE review of Mackerel
- ☐ 2016 – 2017 specifications for Mackerel (develop and approve)
- ☐ Fishery Performance Reports
- ☐ Longfin Squid Mesh Increase Review
- ☐ Butterfish Cap Review

River Herring and Shad

- ☐ Cap for mackerel 2016 and 2017
- ☐ Committee/Working Group products (TBD)

Bluefish

- ☐ 2016 – 2018 Specifications (develop and approve)
- ☐ Fishery Performance Report

Tilefish

- ☐ 2016 specifications (review)
- ☐ Fishery Performance Reports
- ☐ 5 year IFQ review
- ☐ Framework to modify recreational possession limit

Surfclams and Ocean Quahogs

- ☐ 2016 Specifications (review)
- ☐ Fishery Performance Reports
- ☐ Cost Recovery Amendment (complete)

Spiny Dogfish

- ☐ 2016 – 2018 specifications (develop and approve)
- ☐ Fishery Performance Report

Monkfish

- ☐ Amendment 6 and Framework 9 (ongoing)

Ecosystem and Ocean Planning/Habitat

- ☐ Deep Sea Coral Amendment (complete)
- ☐ National and International Habitat Practices Report
- ☐ Council Habitat Policy Documents
- ☐ Habitat Objectives for EAFM Document
- ☐ EFH Review Paper (Evaluates EFH and HAPC designations, and Fishing Impact Analyses for all species)
- ☐ Omnibus action to incorporate EFH/HAPC changes into FMPs

General

- ☐ EAFM guidance document (complete)
- ☐ Omnibus Observer Funding Amendment (GARFO Lead)

Communication and Outreach

- ☐ General Council communications plan (finalize)
- ☐ Issue/action communication plans
- ☐ Council process fact sheets and outreach materials
- ☐ Document library/archive on the Council website
- ☐ Stakeholder group contact list updates (rec clubs, commercial associations, ENGOs, etc.)
- ☐ Council comments on proposed MSA reauthorization legislation
- ☐ Website FAQ page

Science and Research

- ☐ Comprehensive research priority plan
- ☐ Mid-Atlantic Cooperative Research Program (revise RSA program)
- ☐ Comprehensive review of for-hire data

Workshops

- ☐ National SSC meeting
- ☐ Species and fisheries interactions workshop

Possible Additions

- ☐ Scup Amendment (scoping)
- ☐ Support a new collection process for party/charter data
- ☐ EVTR Omnibus Framework
- ☐ Review of Surfclam/Ocean Quahog ITQ program (5 year review)
- ☐ Additional Modification of Vessel Baseline Regulations (with NEFMC)
- ☐ Virtual workshop on website utility

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September 22, 2014

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Re: Oversight and Management of Gillnet Fisheries in the Northeast Region

Chairmen Stockwell and Robins and Mr. Bullard:

Please accept this letter on behalf of Oceana urging the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils to take action in conjunction with the National Marine Fisheries Service to amend the Multispecies, Skate and Monkfish Fishery Management Plans to reform the use of gillnets in the Northeast region. This action should be done in 2015 and ensure:

- gillnet soak time restrictions are effective and appropriate
- limits on gillnet length, height and quantity are appropriate
- monitoring of gillnet effort and catch is accurate and precise
- stock assessment and catch advice explicitly considers the effects of gillnet catch

Sink gillnets have been under-regulated in the NE region for decades. Managers have assumed that sink gillnets are a lower-impact alternative to the well-described habitat and bycatch problems with bottom trawls. However, gillnets have unique conservation and management issues of their own, which present serious problems for scientists and fisheries managers and must be addressed.

It is time for the region's fishery managers to address the shortcomings of gillnet management and take action to review, revise and reform the use of gillnets for the 21st century.

BACKGROUND

In early 2014, the National Marine Fisheries Service published the first update of the National Bycatch Report (NBR),[1] representing the most comprehensive review of bycatch occurring in the nation's fisheries. This report showed, among other issues; that the northeast gillnet fisheries have ongoing bycatch problems that need management attention.

Following the publication of the NBR Update, Oceana explored the various regulations that control the use of gillnets in the northeast region. This research shows that the NE gillnet fisheries continue to have ineffective catch and bycatch management and continue to use outdated management techniques. These approaches may undermine the ability of the Councils and the agency to effectively manage the fisheries of the NE region and achieve goals and objectives of the Multispecies, Monkfish and Skate FMPs.

As the Councils begin the annual processes of setting the management priorities for 2015, Oceana requests that each council add an action to review, revise and reform gillnet fisheries as an "above the line" priority for 2015. Oceana suggests that the Councils complete this as a joint action under the FMPs that use sink gillnets to ensure that any changes to the FMPs are consistent and effective, without regulatory loopholes or exemptions.

This action is long overdue and made even more pressing and timely by the recent developments related to Gulf of Maine cod that show that this stock is not only severely depleted but mortality has not been effectively controlled and may be nearly 700 percent of F_{msy} in recent years.[2]

PROPOSAL

Oceana highlights the following issues to be resolved related to gillnets but understands that more issues may be identified during the development of this action. At the very least a gillnet action should address:

Excessive Soak times: Gillnets are the only gear in use in the region that inevitably catch fish continuously throughout the "soak time"-from the time they are deployed to the time they are retrieved. Establishing effective limits on soak time is therefore a critical element of gillnet management to control catch, reduce bycatch, and ensure management goals are met.

[1] National Marine Fisheries Service. 2011. U.S. National Bycatch Report [W. A. Karp, L. L. Desfosse, S. G. Brooke, Editors]. U.S. Dep. Commer., NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-F/SPO-117E, 508 p.
[2] Gulf of Maine Atlantic Cod 2014 Assessment Update Report, downloaded from: http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/saw/cod/pdfs/GoM_cod_2014_update_20140822.pdf

An exploration of the existing regulations for gillnet soak times[3] and personal communication with Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO)staff[4] show that there are very few restrictions currently in place. Moreover, it is an accepted practice to leave gillnets in place for extended periods of time instead of hauling the gear, a practice that is done to prevent other fishermen from fishing in a desired spot or to simplify fish as what is known as "wet storage" leaving untended gear in the water for weeks or months at a time

Although the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan guidance advises that a prohibition on wet storage is a "universal requirement" for gillnets, the *most restrictive* regulations for the NE region require gear to be hauled only once every 30 days[5] - allowing for weeks of untended fishing.

This lax soak time regulation has immeasurable negative impacts on the management of these fisheries and the species that interact with the gears. Council discussions have periodically considered "fall out mortality" (where fish are caught in a gillnet, die and fall out without ever being counted), depredation of catch left in nets, and most recently, the need to allow for discretionary discarding of fish once it has degraded and been rendered unmarketable. [6]

A well-managed gillnet fishery that is targeting stocks under rebuilding plans should not have these problems. Furthermore, considering the dire stock status of many species susceptible to gillnets such as Atlantic cod and the need to minimize interactions with protected species, these gillnet regulations must be amended.

Oceana suggests that as part of the suggested gillnet action, the Councils should develop soak time restrictions to more effectively control catch, bycatch, overfishing and impacts on stock assessments. Oceana encourages the Councils to develop a range of alternatives to regulate soak times and prohibit any "wet storage" of gillnets. This is not 'storage' but rather continuous fishing or a bold attempt to prevent others from fishing in a given area the expense of the ocean ecosystem. The Councils should also consider a requirement that gillnets be tended at all times, an approach that was considered for Massachusetts state waters in 2009.[7]

Gear Limits: Current regulations on gillnets allow for up to 150 gillnets to be used by vessels at one time to target monkfish and Multispecies.[8] When each gillnet is at the regulatory maximum 300 feet in length, these vessels are each allowed to use up to 8.5 miles of netting.

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[3] *See* 50 CFR 648.2, 50 CFR 648.80, and Special Instructions for Gillnet Vessel Owners information sheet (attached)
[4] Doug Christel, GARFO Fishery Analyst Pers. Comm. August 14, 2014
[5] Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan:
http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected/whaletrp/docs/northeast_gillnet_final.pdf
[6] *See* 2011 Sector Operations Plans and Contracts, and Allocation of Northeast Multispecies Annual Catch Entitlements. (76 Federal Register 23076April 25, 2011)
Cite to discretionary discard rule
[7] Fishermen ask state to keep untended gillnets in check. MetroWest Daily News. Jan 30, 2009.
http://www.metrowestdailynews.com/x977239172/Fishermen-ask-state-to-keep-untended-gillnets-in-check
[8] 50 CFR 648.92 (8)(B)

When multiplied by the number of vessels using gillnets, it represents incredible fishing power and source of fishing mortality in the region.

Additionally, it should be noted that apart from regulations for 'flatfish nets,'[9] there is no limit on the vertical height of a gillnet. NMFS has advised that the best way to estimate effort of gillnets is soak time multiplied by length of the net. This ignores the flexibility allowed to make gillnets taller and increase the amount of the water column affected by the net.

In light of the management needs of the region's fisheries, including the recent update to Gulf of Maine cod, this amount of netting may not be needed or appropriate. Furthermore, Oceana asserts that the environmental impacts of these gear restrictions have not been adequately assessed and should be reevaluated.

Oceana strongly recommends the Councils use a gillnet action to evaluate the efficacy of gillnet limits and modify these limits to ensure that this level of fishing is appropriate and warranted to meet the goals of the FMPs. Regulations should have appropriate limits on length, height and quantity of all nets.

Gillnet Catch Monitoring: During recent Council conversations about improvements to at-sea monitoring, various stakeholders have advised Oceana that the at-sea monitoring protocols for gillnets allow considerable discretion. Specifically, Oceana has been advised that when an observer is on board, it is common for captains to only haul a portion of their gear and cease hauling when catch (or bycatch) becomes too large, in an effort to conserve the vessel's available quota.

This manipulation of the observer program is unique to fixed gears, and gillnets in particular. If this is occurring as described, this prevents observers from collecting information that reflects the true catch of that vessel. This, in turn, undermines the effectiveness and intent of catch and bycatch monitoring on each of these vessels and similar vessels that are subject to Assumed Discard Rates in the NE Multispecies Sector program.

Oceana has contacted the agency in an attempt to quantify the percentage of nets that are hauled on a typical gillnet trip but was unsuccessful. Oceana learned that this information is collected by ASM/observers and that this analysis would "be relatively straightforward[10]" if access to data was/were allowed , but has not been done to date.

The Councils should use their ability to access fishery-dependent data to fully explore the frequency of this phenomenon in these fisheries and consider management measures that will ensure that all data collected in gillnet fisheries is representative of the catch of that vessel and vessels like it across the fishery.

[9] 50 CFR 648.2,
[10] Email from Chris Orphanides, Northeast Fisheries Science Center. April 30, 2014

Effectively controlling mortality is critical to sustainable fisheries management. It is assumed in most FMPs that mortality is well-understood. However, if data collected by observers are not reflective of the true catch of a vessel, these assumptions quickly unravel and introduce new uncertainty into the assessment and management of the affected fisheries.

The Councils should give serious consideration to requiring *all gear* to be hauled when an observer is aboard unless the trip is cancelled or terminated. This is consistent with Council action in other fisheries to maximize monitoring efficacy, such as limits on unobserved 'net slippage' in the herring and mackerel fisheries.

Gillnet Effort Monitoring: In recent reports and updates, the agency has advised that estimating gillnet effort is very difficult as the metrics used to estimate effort and the data associated with these metrics are not clear or straightforward. As an example, the agency reported at the 2013 gillnet workshop that current Vessel Trip Reports (VTR) are insufficient for the task. Instead, the agency recommends against reporting effort, a fundamental measure of any fishery, because calculating its preferred measure of effort (soak time*total length) is not possible with current data.[11] This inability to calculate effort makes oversight of this gear impossible, yet the Council and the agency continue to authorize the use of gillnets.

To fix this and address suggestions made at the workshop cited above, the Councils and agency must eliminate this weakness with clear revisions to the FMPs that include measures to 1) include gillnet-specific data to improve VTR reporting of gillnet effort and 2) establish baselines of gillnet effort to be monitored over time.

Managers, scientist and all stakeholders must have access to a reliable description of the FMPs that use gillnets in the region. In fact, the MSA requires it.[12]

Changes to Assessment of stocks caught by gillnets-

The use of gillnets as described and discussed above introduces unique uncertainty into the assessment and management of marine species including target, non-target and protected species. This uncertainty and difficulty quantifying gillnet behavior has been cited in work to address bycatch of ESA-listed species[13] as well as various stock assessments. However, it appears that this uncertainty has never been explicitly factored into any assessment, catch specification or management action.

[11] National Marine Fisheries Service and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. 2013. Workshop on Sea Turtle and Atlantic Sturgeon Bycatch Reduction in Gillnet Fisheries. Jan 22-23, 2013, Ocean City, MD. 48 pp.
[12] *See* Magnuson-Stevens Act, sec 303 (a)(2), Required Provisions.
[13] National Marine Fisheries Service and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. 2013. Workshop on Sea Turtle and Atlantic Sturgeon Bycatch Reduction in Gillnet Fisheries. Jan 22-23, 2013, Ocean City, MD. 48 pp.

As the Councils work to address and minimize management and scientific uncertainty in the northeast gillnet fisheries, the Councils and the agency must recognize the persistent uncertainty that is associated with gillnet catch data and take action to guard against this uncertainty in the management of each affected FMP.

Oceana recommends, at a minimum, that the Councils develop the following solutions:

Assessments- The Councils should request that all assessments explicitly consider "fallout mortality" and gillnet depredation, and work with the assessment teams for each species caught in gillnets to ensure that all catch, bycatch and associated mortality is appropriately considered in stock assessments.

Catch Advice- The Councils should consider policy that accounts for all forms of gillnet mortality in the calculation of Allowable Biological Catch (ABC), Annual Catch Limit and Annual Catch Entitlement (ACE) to account for both management and scientific uncertainty that is connected with this gear.

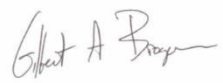
Summary:

Oceana is not calling for a prohibition on gillnets. We understand from conversations with agency staff and gillnet fishermen that fishing up to the regulatory limits for gear and soak time may not be the norm for many of the directed gillnet fishermen in the region. However, considering the effects that more than 130 declared gillnet vessels fishing full-time can have on mortality of fish and protected resources, it is time for the Councils and the agency to turn the best practices into the standard and required practice for the use of this gear.

These necessary changes are warranted and will improve the management of the directed FMPs, the FMPs whose target species are caught by gillnets, and the range of protected species that are vulnerable to gillnets.

Oceana looks forward to working with the Councils and the agency to help move this needed action forward in 2015 and thanks you for your consideration of this proposal.

Sincerely,



Gib Brogan
Fisheries Campaign Manager
Oceana
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Cc: Executive Committee Members, Executive Directors, New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils

MID-ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Richard B. Robins, Jr., Chairman | Lee G. Anderson, Vice Chairman
Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

June 25, 2014

Mr. Tom Nies
New England Fishery Management Council
50 Water Street, Mill 2
Newburyport, MA 01950

Dear Tom:

Thank you for your letter of 3 June 2014 regarding the Omnibus Baseline Amendment currently under development by the GARFO. The Mid-Atlantic Council also expressed concerns about the vessel upgrade restrictions that would remain in effect if only the vessel tonnage restrictions were addressed. As such, the Mid-Atlantic Council would support efforts to consider additional alternatives in a follow-up action to the current amendment working with both the New England Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

We could discuss how best to coordinate our efforts at the NRCC meeting in October or earlier if we have time. Please let me know if you have any questions or require additional information.

Sincerely,

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D.
Executive Director

cc: Robins, Anderson, Beal

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
GREATER ATLANTIC REGIONAL FISHERIES OFFICE
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AUG 21 2014

Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D.
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Dear Dr. Moore Chris

Thank you for your letter dated July 7, 2014, which requested members of my staff to participate in a Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) to conduct a formal review of the Tilefish Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program. Representatives from the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office should include Doug Potts from the Sustainable Fisheries Division, and Anna Macan and Jerome Hermsen from the Analysis and Program Support Division. Staff from our Protected Resources Division and the NOAA Office of General Council will be able to lend their expertise as needed.

As you know, these 5-year reviews are required of all limited access privilege programs (LAPPs) under §303A(c)(1)(G) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Nationwide, only a few of these formal LAPP reviews have been completed. NOAA Fisheries is currently working to develop formal guidance on LAPP reviews. However, that effort may not be completed before we need to begin our work to review the Tilefish IFQ Program. I hope this LAPP review report will be a collaborative effort between NOAA Fisheries and the Council, with significant input from the industry and the public, that provides a valuable assessment of the progress of this program in meeting its goals.

As the Council is planning future workloads and staffing requirements, please keep in mind that a similar review of the Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) Program would be appropriate. While the LAPP review requirement in the Magnuson-Stevens Act was added in 2007, we believe the intent of Congress was for this legal requirement to also apply to programs that previously existed, including the Surfclam/Ocean Quahog ITQ Program. Because the Surfclam/Ocean Quahog ITQ Program has been in operation since 1990, additional time and effort may be necessary to collect and analyze the information needed to properly evaluate that program.

If you have any questions about these selections, please feel free to contact me or Doug Potts.

Sincerely,

John Bullard
Regional Administrator