

## August 2025 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met August 11-14, 2025, in Annapolis, MD. The following is a summary of actions taken and issues considered during the meeting. Presentations, briefing materials, motions, and webinar recordings are available on the Council's [August 2025 meeting page](#).

### HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- Approved a list of recommendations for submission in response to Executive Order 14276 on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness.
- Adopted 2026–2027 specifications for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. \*
- Reviewed an SSC white paper on sector-specific OFLs and ABCs and agreed not to prioritize development of this concept at this time. \*
- Reviewed draft conceptual alternatives and preliminary analysis for the Recreational Sector Separation Amendment and removed two options from further consideration. \*
- Maintained status quo 2026–2028 *Illex* squid specifications and received results from the collaborative SQUIBS longfin squid biological sampling program.
- Agreed to form a joint subcommittee with SAFMC on blueline tilefish allocation north of Cape Hatteras while moving forward with 2026 specifications approved in June.
- Initiated a framework to consider modifications to the Atlantic mackerel rebuilding approach.
- Welcomed three new Council members and one reappointed member.
- Elected Joe Cimino as Council Chair and Skip Feller as Council Vice Chair.

*\* Items denoted with an asterisk (\*) were undertaken during joint meetings with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass Management Board, Bluefish Management Board, or ISFMP Policy Board.*

### Executive Order on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness

The Council discussed [Executive Order \(EO\) 14276 on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness](#) and approved a list of recommended actions for submission to the Secretary of Commerce, as required under Section 4 of the EO. The actions are intended to address the EO objectives of reducing burdens and increasing production within U.S. fisheries. Specifically, the recommendations should “stabilize markets, improve access, enhance profitability, and prevent fishery closures.” During the meeting, the Council considered public comments and reviewed a staff options paper describing new and ongoing actions that may be responsive to EO 14276. The Council approved twenty recommended actions covering a broad range of topics. A summary of these recommendations is available [here](#). Staff is preparing the Council's formal response for submission to NMFS prior to the September 30 deadline.

## Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass, and Bluefish Specifications

The Council met jointly with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission’s (Commission) Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board (Board) to set 2026-2027 specifications and commercial measures for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. The Council also met jointly with the Commission’s Bluefish Management Board to set 2026-2027 specifications and recreational measures for bluefish. The table below summarizes commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits (RHL) for all four species (2025 values are provided for comparison). The Council will forward its recommendations to NOAA Fisheries for final approval, while the Commission’s actions for state waters are final. See the sections below the table for additional details about the recommendations for each species.

	Commercial Quota <i>millions of pounds</i>			Recreational Harvest Limit <i>millions of pounds</i>		
	2025	2026	2027	2025	2026	2027
<b>Summer Flounder</b>	8.79	12.78	12.78	6.35	8.79	8.79
<b>Scup</b>	19.54	17.70	15.57	12.31	13.17	11.58
<b>Black Sea Bass</b>	5.00	7.83	7.83	6.27	8.14	8.14
<b>Bluefish</b>	3.03	4.66	4.75	15.70	22.02	22.50

### ***Summer Flounder 2026-2027 Specifications***

The 2025 management track assessment found that summer flounder was not overfished, and overfishing was no longer occurring in 2024. Spawning stock biomass was estimated to be about 83% of the biomass target. The Council and Board considered varying Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) limits as well as a constant ABC across 2026-2027. After reviewing SSC recommendations under both approaches, they selected the SSC-recommended constant ABC approach. This results in an ABC of 30.01 million pounds for both years – a 55% increase compared to the 2025 ABC.

Under the allocations specified in the fishery management plan, 55% of the ABC is allocated to the commercial sector and 45% is allocated to the recreational sector. During the discussion, Council and Board members discussed the large volatility in summer flounder ABCs over the past decade, noting that sharp increases have often been followed by sharp decreases. They also noted the continued below average recruitment, and concerns about management uncertainty and stability. After much discussion, the Council and Board adopted a 12% management uncertainty buffer for both sectors to be deducted from the sector-specific annual catch limits (ACL) to derive the annual catch targets (ACT).

After applying the buffer and accounting for each sector’s expected dead discards, the Council and Board adopted a commercial quota of 12.78 million pounds and an RHL of 8.79 million pounds for 2026 and 2027. They agreed that no changes are needed to the commercial management measures, which include a 14” minimum fish size, minimum mesh size (5.5” diamond or 6.0” square mesh), and mesh exemption programs. Recreational bag, size, and season limits for upcoming years will be discussed during the December 2025 Council and Board meeting.

### ***Scup 2026-2027 Specifications***

The 2025 management track assessment found that scup was not overfished, and overfishing was not occurring in 2024. Spawning stock biomass was estimated to be about 3.23 times the biomass target. For 2026, the Council and Board approved an ABC of 42.09 million pounds, a 2% increase compared to the 2025 ABC. For 2027, they approved an ABC of 37.01 million pounds.

Under the allocations specified in the fishery management plan, 65% of the ABC is allocated to the commercial sector and 35% is allocated to the recreational sector. No deductions were made in either sector to account for management uncertainty. After accounting for each sector's expected dead discards, the 2026 ABC results in a commercial quota of 17.70 million pounds and an RHL of 13.17 million pounds. The 2027 ABC results in a commercial quota of 15.57 million pounds and an RHL of 11.58 million pounds. The Council and Board agreed that no changes are needed to the commercial management measures which can be modified through the specifications process. Recreational bag, size, and season limits for upcoming years will be discussed during the December 2025 Council and Board meeting.

#### ***Black Sea Bass 2026-2027 Specifications***

The 2025 management track assessment found that black sea bass was not overfished, and overfishing was not occurring in 2024. Spawning stock biomass was estimated to be about 2.84 times the biomass target. The Council and Board approved an ABC of 21.34 million pounds for both 2026 and 2027, a 28% increase compared to the 2024-2025 ABC.

Under the allocations specified in the fishery management plan, 45% of the ABC is allocated to the commercial sector and 55% is allocated to the recreational sector. No deductions were made in either sector to account for management uncertainty. After accounting for each sector's expected dead discards, the resulting commercial quota for 2026 and 2027 is 7.83 million pounds (a 31% increase compared to 2024-2025), and the resulting RHL for 2026 and 2027 is 8.14 million pounds (a 30% increase).

The Council and Board adopted a 5% in-season commercial closure buffer for 2025, meaning the commercial fishery will close if 105% of the quota is projected to be landed prior to the end of the year. They made no changes to any other federal commercial management measures. Recreational bag, size, and season limits for 2026-2027 will be considered during the December 2025 Council and Board meeting.

#### ***Bluefish 2026-2027 Specifications and Recreational Measures***

The 2025 management track assessment for bluefish concluded that overfishing was not occurring in 2024, and while the stock was not overfished, it has not yet fully rebuilt to the biomass target reference point. Spawning stock biomass was estimated to be about 89% of the biomass target. The stock is projected to be rebuilt in 2025; however, since this is a projection, the stock will not be considered rebuilt until a future stock assessment determines that the rebuilding target has been achieved.

Based on the SSC's recommendation, the Council and Bluefish Board approved an ABC of 44.61 million pounds for 2026 and 45.41 million pounds for 2027. Under the allocations specified in the fishery management plan, 86% of the ABC is allocated to the recreational sector and 14% to the commercial sector. After considerable debate, the Council and Bluefish Board adopted management uncertainty buffers of 25% for the commercial sector and 30% for the recreational sector. These buffers, applied to the sector-specific annual catch limits to derive the annual catch targets, are intended to prevent management volatility and ensure the continued rebuilding of the stock. Council and Board members also noted that the upcoming changes to the MRIP estimates are a significant source of uncertainty. After applying the buffers and accounting for expected discards, the Council and Board adopted a commercial quota of 4.66 million pounds and an RHL of 22.02 million pounds for 2026, and a commercial quota of 4.75 million pounds and an RHL of 22.50 million pounds for 2027. Compared to 2025, these values represent increases of approximately 50% for the commercial quota and 40% for the RHL.

Recreational measures for bluefish were also modified for 2026 and 2027, with the private recreational bag limit increasing from 3 to 5 fish and the for-hire bag limit increasing from 5 to 7 fish.

## SSC White Paper on Sector-Specific OFLs and ABCs for Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass

At the direction of the Council, the SSC developed a [white paper](#) titled “Scientific Considerations of Developing Separate OFLs and ABCs for the Commercial and Recreational Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fisheries.” The Council and the Commission’s Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board reviewed the final white paper and discussed next steps.

The Council tasked the SSC with development of this white paper in response to concerns from commercial fishery representatives that the current process for setting overfishing limits (OFLs) and acceptable biological catch limits (ABCs) creates the potential for overages in the recreational fishery to negatively impact the commercial fishery. The white paper demonstrated that a purely scientific basis for allocating ABCs by sector can be developed. However, these allocations would differ from the current commercial/recreational allocations and would likely change with each assessment update. A considerable amount of additional analytical work would be needed to more fully develop the concepts in the white paper and there would be a number of both foreseeable and unforeseeable effects.

The Council and Board agreed that the white paper is valuable for better understanding the implications of sector-specific OFLs and ABCs. However, they decided not to prioritize further development of this concept at this time. They noted it may be more appropriate to consider if sector-specific management uncertainty buffers can address the concerns that lead to development of this white paper. The Council and Board agreed to consider how to best further consider this topic while balancing other priorities during upcoming discussions on the Council’s 2026 Implementation Plan and the Commission’s 2026 Action Plan.

## Recreational Sector Separation Amendment

The Council met jointly with the Commission’s Interstate Fishery Management Plan Policy Board (Policy Board) to review draft conceptual alternatives and preliminary analysis for the [Recreational Sector Separation Amendment](#). This amendment considers options for managing for-hire recreational fisheries separately from other recreational fishing modes, as well as options related to for-hire permit and reporting requirements.

The Council and Policy Board removed two approaches from further consideration:

- 1) Separate allocations under recreational sector separation – These options were removed due to concerns about extending the amendment timeline and adding complexity to the fishery management plans, as well as concerns about uncertainty in the mode-specific data that would inform separate allocations.
- 2) Temporary limitations on the ability to renew inactive federal for-hire permits – This conceptual alternative was removed due to concerns that it would not address the needs of this action and that permit inactivity can be driven by regional and temporal variations in availability.

The Fishery Management Action Team/Plan Development Team (FMAT/PDT) will continue to develop a draft range of alternatives for the remaining approaches for tentative Council and Policy Board approval in December.

The Council and Policy Board also received an update on a plan for developing a white paper on the recreational data collection issues that were previously removed from this amendment. The purpose of the white paper is to clarify the relevant problem statements and objectives, and to assess the feasibility of various approaches for addressing concerns with recreational data collection and use. Staff expects to develop this white paper in 2026, with tentative plans to present a draft outline to the Council and Policy Board in early 2026.

## 2026-2028 *Illex* Squid Specifications

The Council set 2026-2028 *Illex* squid specifications, maintaining the status quo from 2025. Although the *Illex* stock status remains unknown, a variety of analyses suggest the stock is generally lightly exploited. The quota would stay at 38,631 MT, based on maintaining a 40,000 MT ABC and a 1,369 MT deduction for estimated discards.

## SQUIBS Longfin Squid Data Collection Program

Dr. Anna Mercer, Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Cooperative Research Branch Chief, highlighted the results of the Longfin Squid Biological Sampling Program (SQUIBS). Between April 2023 and June 2025, this research engaged 32 fishing vessels in collecting 24,474 longfin squid for biological analysis and aging. Data from SQUIBS advanced understanding of longfin squid life history and assisted development of novel squid stock assessment approaches, demonstrating the power of collaborative research for advancing scientific understanding.

## SAFMC Blueline Tilefish Request

The Council discussed a recent request from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) to form a joint subcommittee to address how the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) for blueline tilefish north of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina should be apportioned between the two Councils.

The most recent assessment for blueline tilefish (SEDAR 92) split the stock at Cape Hatteras, NC. The region north of Cape Hatteras includes a portion of the blueline stock managed by the SAFMC as well as the full management unit managed by the Mid-Atlantic Council. Following SEDAR 92, leadership from both Councils agreed on a process for setting catch and landing limits in their jurisdictions. This process included formation of a joint SSC subgroup to recommend an ABC for the stock north of Cape Hatteras. The sub-group also provided a method for apportioning the stock between regions, resulting in a recommended allocation of 70% of the ABC to the area north of the North Carolina/Virginia border and 30% to the area south.

At the June 2025 meeting, the Mid-Atlantic Council approved blueline tilefish specifications for 2026 based on the recommended 70/30 split. When these recommendations were reviewed at the June 2025 SAFMC meeting, members raised concerns with both the basis of the allocation and the fact that the decision was made by a technical group without Council involvement. The SAFMC subsequently sent a letter to the Mid-Atlantic Council proposing the creation of a joint sub-committee, including members of both Councils, to collaboratively determine how the ABC should be divided.

At this meeting, the Mid-Atlantic Council agreed to support the formation of such a joint Council subcommittee to help inform future specifications. Council members emphasized the importance of continued coordination with the SAFMC, given that blueline tilefish is a single stock along the Atlantic coast. The Council also recommended moving forward with the 2026 specifications approved at the [June meeting](#), noting that they were developed through a mutually agreed-upon process, supported by a joint SSC recommendation, and reflect the best scientific information available. Moving forward with these specifications will ensure timely submission of the final package to NMFS and provide effective management for the upcoming fishing year.

## Atlantic Mackerel Rebuilding

Under New Business, and in response to public comment, the Council agreed to consider modifications to the Atlantic mackerel rebuilding plan. The current rebuilding plan, which has been in place since 2023, has a 61% probability of rebuilding the stock by 2032. The proposed modification will consider an alternative rebuilding path that maintains at least a 50% probability of rebuilding by 2032 while allowing for more fishery yield in upcoming years than the current approach would provide (both depend on pending assessment). The Council

was already scheduled to set specifications for upcoming years at its December 2025 meeting. The Council agreed to utilize a framework adjustment to integrate consideration of the revised rebuilding approach into the planned specifications-setting. An initial review will take place at the October 2025 Council Meeting, with final action expected in December 2025.

## Other Business

### ***New and Reappointed Council Members***

Three newly appointed members were sworn in to begin three-year terms on the Council: Elizbeth "Lisa" Wooleyhan (Delaware), Todd Janeski (Virginia), Jake Wiscott (New Jersey). In addition, reappointed Council member Scott Lenox (Maryland) was sworn in for his third term.

### ***Officer Elections***

During the yearly election of officers, the Council elected Joe Cimino as Chair and Skip Feller as Vice Chair. Mr. Cimino is the Administrator of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Marine Resources Administration. He has served as New Jersey's designated state official since 2018. Mr. Feller is currently in his second term as an appointed member holding Virginia's obligatory seat. He operates a fleet of head boats out of Rudee Inlet in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

## Upcoming Meetings

The next Council meeting will be held **October 7-9, 2025**, in Philadelphia, PA. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.