

April 2026 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met April 7-9, 2026, in New York, NY. 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 [April 2026 meeting page](#).

HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- **Approved the Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Amendment** for submission to NOAA Fisheries, including revised EFH designations for 14 Council-managed species and new Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPCs) based on updated habitat information.
- **Took final action on the Recreational Tilefish Permitting and Reporting Framework**, selecting preferred alternatives to streamline reporting requirements, reduce unnecessary burden, and improve clarity and enforceability of the recreational tilefish permitting program.
- **Agreed to initiate a framework action to address scup Winter I quota management**, following a review of trip limit performance and a 2026 Winter I quota overage of approximately 22 percent; the framework will consider revisions to trip limit regulations, commercial accountability measures, and additional reporting requirements.
- **Agreed to initiate an omnibus FMP amendment on multi-year specifications**, to consider revisions to specifications frequencies, documentation requirements, and other measures to improve efficiency, with most work planned for 2027.
- **Endorsed a Committee recommendation to discontinue the scoping process for a potential monkfish and/or skate wings IFQ program**, deferring to the New England Fishery Management Council on next steps.
- **Received updates on two Council-sponsored projects** focused on spiny dogfish ageing and sturgeon bycatch reduction in the dogfish gillnet fisheries.
- **Received updates on habitat activities of interest in the region.**
- **Recognized Peter Hughes as the recipient of the 2025 Ricks E. Savage Award** for his exceptional contributions to fishery management and conservation in the Mid-Atlantic region.
- **Agreed to send a letter to NOAA Fisheries and Department of Commerce leadership** expressing serious concern about the delay in finalizing the Recreational Measures Setting Process Framework.
- **Clarified its intent on the Atlantic mackerel possession limit** for crew on for-hire trips.

Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment

The Council approved its Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Amendment for submission to NOAA Fisheries. The Council preferred action alternatives include revisions to EFH for 14 Council-managed species and recommends new Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPCs), as a subset of EFH. The new EFH text and mapping approaches included in this amendment vastly improve the designations with up-to-date, enhanced habitat information and will amplify the impact that HAPCs have on the EFH consultation process by designating several new HAPCs, in addition to the two HAPCs that are already in place. Visit the [EFH Amendment page](#) for additional information and updates.

Recreational Tilefish Permitting and Reporting Framework

The Council took final action on the [Recreational Tilefish Permitting and Reporting Framework](#). After reviewing public comment received during the March 2026 Public Input meeting as well as recommendations from the Tilefish Committee, the Council selected Sub-Alternatives 4.1 (remove requirement to report effort-only trips), revised Sub-Alternative 4.2 (simplify the required reporting fields with the ‘species’ field maintained), and Sub-Alternative 4.5 (require eVTR submission before offloading fish) as their preferred alternatives. The preferred alternatives are expected to improve recreational tilefish permitting and reporting program to ensure that the regulatory approach is appropriate, effective, and proportionate to the data needs for managing blueline and golden tilefish. This action is intended to reduce unnecessary burden, improve clarity and enforceability, and supports the collection of reliable information needed for stock assessment and management.

During the Council discussion, NOAA fisheries indicated that the implementation of Sub-Alternative 4.2 would require substantial revisions to the current reporting system structure. They noted that under current circumstances of competing resources coupled with the substantial lift that would be required under Sub-Alternative 4.2 that changes to the current reporting fields would be highly unlikely to occur prior to 2028 at the earliest.

As a reminder to all tilefish anglers, current permitting and reporting requirements will remain in place until NOAA Fisheries approves and implements the Council’s proposed regulatory changes. Visit our tilefish [permitting and reporting page](#) to learn more about how to apply for a permit or submit a trip report.

Scup Winter I Quota Period Landings Threshold Analysis

The Council reviewed an evaluation of Winter I scup trip limit reduction performance and recent landing patterns. Following the staff presentation, the Regional Administrator provided additional details regarding the impact of late dealer reports on in-season management of the 2026 Winter I fishery. The Winter I trip limit reduction was not implemented as required; delayed data availability, compounded by late dealer reports and an unusually rapid pace of landings compared to recent years, contributed to an early closure of the fishery on March 16. Based on preliminary data, the 2026 Winter I quota allocation was exceeded by about 22 percent.

The Council agreed to initiate a framework action to consider building management flexibility into the scup Winter I regulations. The framework will consider the following options: 1) revisions to the Winter I trip limit regulations, 2) adjustments to the scup commercial accountability measures, and 3) an additional reporting requirement for federal limited access scup permits (e.g., daily catch reports via VMS or an IVR system). Potential modifications to the Winter I commercial measures (i.e., initial 50,000-pound trip limit, 80 percent quota threshold activating a trip limit reduction, reduced 1,000-pound trip limit) would be addressed separately through the annual specifications process.

Multi-Year Specifications

The Council reviewed a staff memorandum on multiple-year specifications frequencies and agreed to initiate an omnibus FMP amendment. This amendment will consider the following topics: 1) potential revisions to the multi-year specifications frequencies, 2) clarification on the meetings and documentation required each year to support the specifications process, 3) potentially expanding the lists of measures which can be modified through a framework adjustment for several species, and 4) other measures to improve efficiency. Most work on this amendment will take place in 2027.

Individual Fishing Quota Program Scoping for Monkfish and/or Skate Wings

Monkfish is jointly managed by the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils, with the New England Council serving as lead. In December, the New England Council voted to initiate scoping for a potential individual fishing

quota (IFQ) program for the monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries. At this meeting, Ms. Jenny Couture (New England Council staff) presented a draft scoping document, along with a summary of recommendations from a March 19, 2026 joint meeting of the Monkfish and Skate Committees and Advisory Panels. Among Committee and Advisory Panel members, there was near-unanimous support for discontinuing development of this action. The Committees concluded that an IFQ program would not address the primary challenges facing these fisheries and that monkfish and skate issues may require different management approaches. Advisory Panel members and public commenters similarly expressed a lack of support for continuing the scoping process. After considering this input, the Council passed a motion endorsing the Monkfish and Skate Committee's recommendation to discontinue further scoping for an IFQ program for these fisheries.

Because scoping meetings have already been scheduled, New England Council staff proposed pivoting these meetings to a series of structured listening sessions to gather input on potential improvements in the monkfish and skate fisheries. The Council agreed to defer to the New England Council on next steps, while expressing general support for obtaining additional input from industry on ways to improve monkfish and/or skate management. Council staff also [communicated to the New England Council](#) that it may be beneficial to hold a workshop with fishery participants from across regions before initiating any additional management actions.

Habitat Activities Update

Karen Green (NOAA Fisheries GARFO Habitat and Ecosystem Services Division) provided an update on regional habitat activities of interest to the Council. She highlighted several major infrastructure projects, including the Key Bridge replacement, Chesapeake Bay Crossing, and other port and navigation projects. She also noted ongoing efforts such as the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers Coastal Storm Risk Management projects, NASA's Wallops Island Shoreline Protection Program, offshore sand borrow areas for beach renourishment, and proposals to place dredge materials for beneficial habitat use. The division recently provided conservation recommendations on the Aurora Submarine Fiber Optic Cable, which will run from New Jersey to Denmark, and a technical assistance letter to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on a proposed blue mussel mariculture operation in federal waters. In addition, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management received an unsolicited mineral lease sale for mining heavy mineral sands and phosphorites in offshore Virginia. The next anticipated step is publication of Request for Information in the Federal Register to solicit public comment. Lastly, she noted the public can track NOAA Fisheries Essential Fish Habitat and Endangered Species Consultations through the [Environmental Consultations Organizer \(ECO\)](#).

Council-Sponsored Projects

Spiny Dogfish Ageing

Dr. Michelle Passerotti (NOAA) and Ms. Madison Philipp (Formerly A.I.S., Inc. in support of NOAA), presented the results of a multi-year effort to advance spiny dogfish age determination using dorsal spines. This work addressed a gap in ageing expertise, reduced a backlog of archived samples, created instructional and reference materials, and modernized cleaning procedures, workflows, and data management systems. Project deliverables included proceedings from an ageing workshop that included scientists from multiple countries, a curated reference collection of aged spines, a comprehensive guide on cleaning, storage, and ageing of spiny dogfish dorsal spines, and approximately 9,000 new ages from dogfish collected between 2006 and 2024.

Sturgeon Bycatch Reduction

Dr. Dewayne Fox (Delaware State University) presented the results of cooperative research trials of modified low profile sink gill nets for smooth and spiny dogfish, designed to minimize catch of endangered Atlantic sturgeon. While statistical analyses are still underway, preliminary results indicate that gear performance differed between fisheries. In the spiny dogfish fishery, the modified nets substantially reduced Atlantic sturgeon bycatch with only minor impacts on target catch. In the smooth dogfish fishery, there was no

measurable reduction in sturgeon bycatch, but the experimental net increased smooth dogfish catch. As the research team analyzes the results fully, they will also reach out to fishery participants to evaluate these and other potential gear modifications to refine gear solutions to reduce Atlantic sturgeon bycatch.

Ricks E Savage Award

The Council recognized Peter Hughes as the recipient of the 2025 Ricks E Savage Award. The award is given annually to an individual who has made exceptional contributions to the management and conservation of fishery resources in the mid-Atlantic region.

Hughes was appointed to the Council in 2016 and served with distinction for nine years before completing his service in 2025. During this time, he became one of the Council's most steadfast leaders, bringing broad, practical knowledge of fisheries to every discussion. As Chair of the Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Committee for eight years, Hughes guided the Council through the development of several challenging management actions, including two Atlantic mackerel rebuilding actions, an amendment to establish long-term management of chub mackerel, and a framework that established measures to limit future capacity increases in the *Illex* squid fishery. He also served as Chair of the Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Committee for five years, providing steady leadership throughout the development of a major amendment to modify species separation requirements in the Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahog fisheries. Hughes also served as the Council's liaison to the New England Fishery Management Council throughout his entire tenure, representing the Mid-Atlantic Council on several New England committees. In that role, he ensured that the Mid-Atlantic Council's decisions and priorities were clearly communicated to its New England counterpart, while effectively conveying New England's actions and concerns back to the Mid-Atlantic Council.



The Council extends its gratitude to Peter Hughes for his years of dedicated service and congratulates him on this well-deserved honor.

Other Business

Recreational Measures Setting Process Framework Delays

During the meeting, the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Administrator informed the Council that the agency cannot approve the 2026 recreational measures for summer flounder and black sea bass, adopted through the Council, Commission, and state process, due to the delay in publication of the proposed and final rules for the Recreational Measures Setting Process Framework. As a result, the agency must enforce the 2025 non-preferred coastwide measures. Council members expressed serious concern and frustration about this situation, noting that it has been more than eight months since the Council submitted final documents for rulemaking and that the non-preferred measures for both species are much more restrictive than the recommended 2026 measures for multiple states. The Council agreed to send a letter conveying these concerns to NOAA Fisheries and Department of Commerce leadership. The letter is available [here](#).

Atlantic Mackerel Possession Limit Clarification

NOAA Fisheries is finalizing rulemaking for expanded commercial and recreational opportunities for Atlantic mackerel, [per December 2025 Council action](#). There was some ambiguity about the possession limit for crew on

for-hire trips, so the Council passed the following motion to clarify its intent: “When carrying passengers for hire, the recreational Atlantic mackerel possession limit for vessels issued a squid/mackerel/butterfish charter/party permit is 50 Atlantic mackerel per person per trip, including captains and crew. When not carrying passengers for hire, the recreational Atlantic mackerel possession limit for vessels issued a squid/mackerel/butterfish charter/party permit is 25 Atlantic mackerel per person per trip.”

Next Council Meeting

The next Council meeting will be held by webinar **June 16-18, 2026**, in Alexandria, Virginia. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.