



October 2024 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met October 8-10, 2024, in Dewey Beach, DE. The following is a summary of actions taken and issues considered during the meeting. Presentations, briefing materials, motions, and webinar recordings are available at <http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/october-2024>.

HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- Reviewed and approved a strategic plan for 2025-2029
- Adopted butterfish specifications for 2025-2026
- Recommended status quo 2025 specifications for Atlantic mackerel in 2025
- Deferred action on 2025 spiny dogfish specifications pending further consideration by the Scientific and Statistical Committee
- Received an update on the private recreational tilefish permitting and reporting program and considered recommendations for improving angler awareness and compliance
- Recommended that NOAA Fisheries pause soliciting for new monkfish RSA projects until the program's underlying economic and programmatic issues are addressed
- Received a presentation on a proposed rule to modify and/or expand reporting requirements for Atlantic HMS species and agreed to submit comments
- Received an overview of draft outcomes, recommendations, and possible action items from the 8th National Scientific Coordination Subcommittee (SCS) Workshop
- Received presentations on several topics related to offshore wind energy development
- Received an update from the NOAA Fisheries regional office on habitat and offshore wind activities of interest in the Mid-Atlantic region
- Approved several changes to the guidelines for the Council's three awards
- Reviewed and provided feedback on proposed actions and deliverables for the 2025 Implementation Plan (Executive Committee)

2025-2029 Strategic Plan

The Council reviewed and approved a strategic plan for 2025-2029. The plan builds upon the foundation of the 2020-2024 plan, integrating lessons learned, progress achieved, and input from Council members and stakeholders. The document is organized around five goal areas: Communication, Science, Management, Ecosystem and Governance. The Council will use the plan to guide its management activities and operations over the next five years. The final document will be posted at <https://www.mafmc.org/strategic-plan> in the coming weeks.

2025-2026 Butterfish Specifications

The Council reviewed the stock status and performance of the butterfish fishery and adopted multi-year specifications for 2025-2026. Based on the recommendations provided by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), the Council adopted Acceptable Biological Catches (ABC) of 17,115 metric tons (MT) for 2025 and 13,842 MT for 2026. These ABCs are products of the Council's risk policy and projections using the [2024 management track assessment](#), which found the butterfish stock is above its target biomass. The Council is removing a 5% management uncertainty buffer given catches appear well constrained. After potential discards

are deducted, the commercial quotas would be 11,324 MT (25.0 million pounds) in 2025 and 8,051 MT (17.7 million pounds) in 2026 (both substantially above recent landings).

The Council also considered a modification to the butterfish mesh regulations to add flexibility in the types of mesh that can be used for directed fishing. The Council deferred action until the next meeting after NMFS raised concerns about enforcement's ability to discern differences in some relevant mesh configurations. A Law Enforcement Committee meeting will be held in November 2024 to further evaluate any issues.

2025 Atlantic Mackerel Specifications

The Council reviewed the stock status and performance of the Atlantic mackerel fishery and recommended maintaining the previously adopted 2025 specifications and management measures, including a commercial quota of 868 MT. Next year's 2025 stock assessment will assess rebuilding progress and will be used to inform 2026-2027 specifications.

2025 Spiny Dogfish Specifications

The Council reviewed the stock status and performance of the spiny dogfish fishery and deferred action on modifying 2025 spiny dogfish specifications until the next meeting. Updated catch information led to lower projections for 2025, and industry provided input that the resulting lower quotas could collapse the spiny dogfish fishery by forcing the last processor out of business. The Council requested its SSC calculate an ABC equal to the catch associated with a 50% probability of overfishing under a suspension of the Council's risk policy (which would otherwise dictate a lower 46% chance of overfishing and a lower catch).

Private Recreational Tilefish Permitting, Reporting, and Program Evaluation

In August 2020, new recreational permitting and reporting requirements were introduced for private tilefish anglers. During this meeting, the Council received several presentations offering key insights into the program's performance and areas for improvement. These included an overview of the Council's historical and recent efforts, followed by an update from the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) on the current status of permitting and reporting. The [GARFO update](#) provided detailed information on the number of permits issued, recreational trips taken, and landings reported since the program's inception.

Dr. Willy Goldsmith (Pelagic Strategies) and Jill Stevenson (Stevenson Sustainability Consulting) also presented a [final evaluation](#) of the angler permit and reporting program. The report highlighted significant gaps in the program, pointing to persistently low compliance and annual reporting rates. The evaluation provided actionable recommendations for enhancing the program's effectiveness.

Following the presentations and subsequent discussion, the Council endorsed several recommendations identified through program evaluation final report. These recommendations will be incorporated into the Council's 2025 Implementation Plan, aiming to address the identified challenges and improve the overall compliance and efficiency of the tilefish permitting and reporting program.

Monkfish Fishery Performance Report and Monkfish Research Set Aside Improvements

The Council reviewed recent monkfish fishery performance and several ongoing efforts to improve the Monkfish Research Set Aside (RSA) program. The Council mirrored a motion from the New England Fishery Management Council recommending that NMFS pause soliciting for new monkfish RSA projects until the program's underlying economic and programmatic issues are addressed. The Councils also requested that NMFS consider letting the two current Monkfish RSA projects continue selling RSA days-at-sea into 2025 and 2026 to fund their work on developing monkfish catch per unit of effort (CPUE) indices in support of upcoming assessments.

Proposed Rule: Electronic Reporting Requirements for Atlantic Highly Migratory Species

Guy DuBeck and Karyl Brewster-Geisz from NOAA Fisheries Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) presented an update on a recent proposed rule on electronic reporting. The proposed rule is intended to modify and/or expand reporting requirements for Atlantic HMS, including reporting by commercial, for-hire, and private recreational vessel owners and dealers. Following the presentation, the Council agreed it would be important to provide formal written comments on the proposed rule given the Council's existing electronic reporting requirements and the overlap in stakeholders.

Scientific Coordination Subcommittee 8th National Workshop Outcomes

The Council received an overview of draft outcomes, recommendations, and possible action items from the 8th National Scientific Coordination Subcommittee (SCS) Workshop. The SCS is a subcommittee of the Council Coordination Committee (CCC) and consists of the chairs and other selected members of the SSCs from each of the eight regional fishery management councils. The 8th SCS workshop was hosted by the New England Fishery Management Council and was held on August 26-28, 2024, in Boston, Massachusetts. The theme for the workshop was "Applying Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) Control Rules in a Changing Environment" with the goal of providing actionable guidance to support the Councils in their management considerations given the environmental change and scientific uncertainty each region is experiencing. The Council will receive an update on the final workshop recommendations and action items once the proceedings report is available in the spring of 2025.

Offshore Wind Energy Updates

The Council received presentations on several topics related to offshore wind energy development, including updates from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean, the New Jersey Offshore Wind Research and Monitoring Initiative, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, and the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office. Council members expressed concern about observations this summer of dead Atlantic croaker near pile driving activities for the Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind project and dead hake near pile driving activities for Revolution Wind. Council members asked about the causes of these fish kills and how to prevent similar issues in the future. BOEM staff indicated that evaluations of the potential causes, including necropsies, are ongoing. Council members and public comments also expressed concerns that offshore wind energy development may be contributing to reduced squid catches in recent years.

Habitat Updates

Karen Greene, with NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) Habitat and Ecosystem Services Division (HESD), provided project updates on port development (including Key Bridge collapse recovery efforts), infrastructure, energy, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers federal navigation and civil work projects within the Mid-Atlantic. Of note, the Environmental Protection Agency is considering a possible offshore fishery enhancement beneficial use site using dredged material from the New York Bight, as the Historic Area Remediation Site (HARS) is nearing capacity. In addition, several hydropower dams on the Delaware River and Susquehanna River are under consideration for hydropower retrofits and/or relicensing; HESD is engaging in discussions to ensure safe and efficient upstream and downstream passage of diadromous species, while balancing invasive species concerns. NOAA/US Fish and Wildlife Service also released a guidance document on tidal wetland restoration in the Mid-Atlantic that stresses more holistic marsh restoration approaches.

Council Awards Discussion

The Council approved several changes to the guidelines for the Council's three awards (Ricks E Savage Award, Award of Excellence, James A. Ruhle Cooperative Research Award). The approved changes are intended to

clarify the purpose of each award and improve the nomination and selection procedures. The revised guidelines include updated/expanded award descriptions for the Ricks E Savage Award and the Award of Excellence. Additionally, the Council endorsed staff's recommendation to shift the timing for the Ricks E Savage Award due to the February meeting being held virtually beginning in 2025. Under the revised process, the Executive Committee will review nominations for the Ricks E Savage Award at the October meeting, and the award will be presented at the December meeting. The revised guidelines also specify that any nominations received throughout the year for the Award of Excellence and Cooperative Research Award will be considered at the October meeting. Additional information about Council awards is available at <https://www.mafmc.org/awards>.

Executive Committee – 2025 Implementation Plan

The Executive Committee met to review and provide feedback on a draft list of actions and deliverables for the 2025 Implementation Plan. The Council develops Implementation Plans each year to ensure progress toward achieving the goals and objectives of its 5-year strategic plan. During the meeting, the Committee received a progress update on the 2024 Implementation Plan and then reviewed a draft list of actions and deliverables for 2025. The full Council will review a draft 2025 Implementation Plan at the December meeting.

Next Meeting

The next Council meeting will be held **December 9-12, 2024**, in Annapolis, Maryland. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.