

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Update to MAFAC

September 2024

Fishery Management Issues

Striped Bass – The stock is overfished with a rebuilding deadline of 2029. An updated assessment will be presented to the Management Board in October. The Board will make management adjustments if needed to meet the 2029 rebuilding goal. Note: Recruitment has been at record low levels for the past five years (2024 recruitment data are not available yet).

Menhaden – Stakeholders continue to express concern about harvest levels in the Chesapeake Bay. A working group of Commissioners has been formed to explore potential options for management changes in the Bay.

American Lobster – Potential interactions between fixed-gear fisheries, including lobster, continue to be a prominent issue for the Atlantic states. The majority of federally permitted vessels are using cellular vessel trackers to provide high resolution spatial and temporal data to support future risk reductions strategies. There are two legal challenges to the use of trackers on lobster vessels. Also, the Management Board approved a series of minimum size increases to improve resiliency of the Gulf of Maine population. The minimum size increases have been delayed due to potential economic impacts and concerns regarding impacts to imports from Canada.

Other Issues

Fundamental Data Collection – There is concern by the Atlantic states that fundamental data collection programs do not receive adequate support to operate at historic levels. Biological sampling in the mid-Atlantic and northeast is down by more than 50% in the past few years. States are exploring options to supplement federal biological sampling. ASFMC is seeking funding to support a pilot program for an industry-based survey pilot program to supplement existing federal surveys. Also, the biological sampling for menhaden at the Reedville, Virginia plant may be discontinued at the end of this fishing season.

Climate Change Scenario Planning – The multi-year effort between NOAA Fisheries, the Councils, the states and ASMFC continues. The groups are now focusing on specific actions to better inform science and management responses to climate change. The Councils have prioritized climate ready fisheries when applying for Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding. The products from CEFI will also be incorporated into the climate ready activities.

North Atlantic Right Whales – Through funding appropriated by Congress, the Commission and the states are conducting multiple studies on the use of on-demand (ropeless) gear for fixed gear fisheries. Also, surveillance and monitoring efforts are ongoing to better describe the migration patterns of right whales along the east coast.

Offshore Energy Development – With additional wind energy projects coming on-line, the states and the Commission continue to engage in deliberations on impacts to fishery surveys, fishing activities, compensation/mitigation of impacted fishery participants, and potential nearshore habitat impacts of transmission lines.