



# Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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## NEAMAP Annual Meeting 2024

12:00 PM March 11, 2024 – 12:00 PM March 12, 2024

### Meeting Summary

**Committee Members in Attendance:** N. Lengyel-Costa, G. Hinks, J. Gregg, R. Peters, R. Zobel, P. Chase, S. Wilcox, W. Patten, A. Wiley, C. Fede, B. Muffley

**ASMFC Staff:** J. Patel

#### Survey updates

*Northeast Fisheries Science Center (Bottom Trawl Survey) – P. Chase*

For the 2023 spring bottom trawl survey, the Bigelow was delayed coming out of the yard and was not available for survey work until early May. Additionally, crew-related issues only allowed for a 12-hour operation schedule (instead of 24). They were only able to sample 70 stations on George's Bank with this schedule. The sister ship, the Pisces, in the Southeast was unavailable. The SE doesn't do much trawling so some of the systems on the Pisces need maintenance. Plans for updating these systems on Pisces are under discussion. Fall marked the 60th year of the bottom trawl survey with 335/377 tows completed. There were some weather impacts in September and fixed gear in strata 39 is an ongoing issue. For 2024, they plan on a 60-day survey with 377 stations from March 6 to May 15. The survey is currently underway and on track.

During discussion, the group asked about the helpfulness of tow communications with the offshore lobstermen. In stations off Penobscot Bay, there is a lot of fixed gear present. Communications with the Offshore Lobstermen Association has been helpful in the past in some areas. It was also mentioned that wind mitigation plans for this survey are being drafted for review by the SSC in May. The primary issues for this revolve around having a random-stratified survey design. It will not be possible to plot random stations within wind energy areas, so this has an impact on overall survey design. It is also unknown how much trawling will be possible within these areas, even if fixed stations are used, or how large of a vessel will be able to safely navigate within those areas. The Bigelow will not be going into WEA's. There are sometimes delays in learning if the cables are placed at the appropriate depth. Surveys in the Gulf of Maine are concerned about sampling around floating wind and assume that fishing cannot happen in wind areas for industry or surveys. There are lots of unknowns and concerns about the cable configurations for floating platforms and about the impacts of the floating cables on survey operations and marine life. The area of the wind project was discussed and the BOEM map was used as a reference. The area is predicted to impact the shrimp survey, the fall and spring bottom trawl surveys, and the bottom longline survey. NOAA is currently working on an AUV that can fly 2 m off bottom and take images to cover WEA's for our scallop survey. The AUV is unlikely to be used on Georges Bank or in the Gulf of Maine due to high currents and difficult bathymetry. It may be possible to drop off the AUV at a beach for launch and have it return to that same beach since it can travel for about 6 days. More testing on the AUV will occur in summer of 2024. NOAA also has discussed leaning heavily on hydroacoustics in the GOM as a wind mitigation

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strategy, particularly for the Northern Shrimp Survey, but a modified GOM shrimp survey is still at least a couple of years away from being implemented. No current plan of doing any video trawls.

#### *Maine/New Hampshire – R. Peters*

For the spring, the survey was completed, but had issues with weather in the beginning. There were also generator issues that prevented them from reaching the Canadian border. In the fall, they completed 120 tows completed even with weather issues and fixed gear issues. There is a question of funding for 2024 and high survey staff turnover. However, old staff is available to train the new staff for this year. As of now, there are no wind issues in survey area.

Discussion revolved around congressional funding for independent surveys among the science centers and how there is none yet. This led to a question about doors for the MENH survey and how calibration studies with commercial vessels have a lot of considerations. NOAA west coast only uses commercial vessels. They also rotate through nets to make sure they meet specifications even when using a wide range of vessels. MENH may not be able to get the same doors anymore and need doors that match the same specifications. It was mentioned that for Massachusetts, the R/V Gloria Michelle has been using the same net and doors since the 1970s, but still has a set of new backup doors. A point was also raised about issues with fixed gear and interactions with independent fishermen now that MENH has lost its daily Marine Patrol escort. There no compensation to the fishermen if their gear is caught in the survey. The survey mainly catch ghost traps and is not aware of damaging traps. There are concerns with lobster VMS in some areas that are possibly impacting relationships with fishermen due to regulation.

#### *Massachusetts*

The MA DMF survey had a 98% completion rate in the spring and 100% completion in GOM. It lost two stations due to massive amounts of macroalgae. The catch was dominated by scup. In the fall, they had an 88% completion rate and a 100% completion in GOM. The loss in coverage was due to a medical emergency amongst the NOAA vessel crew, wind issues, and vessel availability. Scup dominated southern stations in the fall as well. Little and Winter Skates continued decline over the last decade. This is the 45<sup>th</sup> year of both the spring and fall surveys. Collectively there have been 8,630 accepted tows and 204 unique species caught. The MA DMF worked with (Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association) MLA to get area specific information about the direction fixed gear is set. This info is stored in ArcPro on the vessel and used to diagnose lanes between fixed gear which has resulted in increased tow completion rates. AGOL used to advertise tow locations and it has some success but not as successful in other states. 2024 is planned as normal.

In discussion, it was mentioned that NOAA & NEFSC are planning to replace the Gloria Michelle and continue partnership with MA DMF. They are looking for a replacement vessel. It was also noted that they are not seeing many black sea bass north of Cape, but they are showing up more frequently in federal surveys. Scup was very notable last year and there were observations of spawning scup in 2022 in Gulf of Maine. This survey lost at station in the fall due to Vineyard Wind cable installation as Vineyard Wind requested MADMF avoid towing near a section of unarmored cable.

#### *Rhode Island*

The R/V John H. Chaffee samples seasonally and monthly. Since 1990 they conduct monthly sampling at 13 fixed stations and seasonally at 14 randomly selected seasonal stations. For 2023, for the monthly

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sampling, they conducted 143 total tows and caught 70 species. They saw decreases in weakfish and menhaden and increases in silverside. For the seasonal tows, 44 tows and caught 68 species with decreases in menhaden and increases in bay anchovy and silversides.

In discussion, it was mentioned that they replaced doors years ago and after a brief calibration study, results indicated that no calibration factor was needed.

#### *New York*

This survey has a 10-year MOU with Stony Brook. This is its 6<sup>th</sup> year. There are no changes to survey, but they lost a technician and experienced a small delay due to a sea turtle interaction in the fall. In 2023, their winter survey was cancelled due to boat maintenance and the summer survey was cancelled due to crew. This survey has a specific fall survey to tag striped bass, but this year had lower catches than normal. In the first two years, the boat used to return to port every night, but now stays out so the number of stations have increased. They caught a lot of spiny dogfish in 2022 which reduced trawl times and saw little skates in most tows.

#### *New Jersey*

##### *New Jersey*

NJ completed all of their stations for this year for a total of 39 stations. They caught 2 white sharks and sturgeon. Funding is an issue and expenses are increasing enough that it is close to the threshold of funding source (Sport Fish funding). Considering a reduction in sampling to handle the funding issues and looking for supplementary funding. Wind projects are currently only impacting 1 strata. They still doing eDNA work through Monmouth University with OSW mitigation funding to help detect presence/absence. They take one sample at the surface of the water and one at depth. This doesn't slow down the survey as they already monitor water quality and their deepest station is 90 ft.

In discussion, there was an idea to maybe request compensation from wind projects for the lost strata and possible ways to collect eDNA samples for other surveys using methods developed by a graduate student who 3D printed balls with absorbent padding that could be attached to gear. It was also recommended to start documenting volunteering hours to demonstrate survey interest and necessity when applying for grants.

#### *Maryland*

2023 is their 51st year and marks the 34th year with a standardized protocol. This survey samples in the coastal bays between MD/DE and MD/VA state lines – Assawoman, Isle of Wight, Sinepuxent, Newport, and Chincoteague bays. Collected 20 samples per month and 140 per year. They just started analyses of 2023 data so there are no major highlights yet. Over the past several years, they have noticed higher summer flounder catches in the beach seine survey. They are also finding that abundance of species traditionally associated with the trawl survey like black sea bass have been higher in the SAV beach seine survey (especially tautog). They have also started collecting pH in 2022. Previous reports are available online and can be found [here](#).

#### *Mid-Atlantic/Southern New England (VIMS)*

For the spring of 2023, 150/150 stations were completed with notable catches of scup, butterfish, and longfin squid. They lost three field staff including 2 chief scientists. In the fall, all 150 stations were

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completed in 29 days despite the passing of Capt. Jimmy Ruhle, completed the survey in 29 days. Notable fall species included scup and butterfish. In 2024, they're scheduled to start on April 20<sup>th</sup> and have no major changes or additions. For their dropped station, this survey has found success in using a series of random alternates, especially in the Block Island/Rhode Island Sound area. If the prime stations can't be sampled, they'll use a random alternate in the same depth strata.

In discussion, it was mentioned that this survey experiences macroalgae in the New England area in the spring and has run into lobster pot lines in the past. There are also many stations in the NY area where dredging is an interference. The group also liked the idea of using alternates and many surveys already do when possible. In MA, there is at least one alternate for every strata, but some alternate sites are far away from current area. In East Rhode Island sound, they often run into areas with pot issues or their alternates are in areas where their doors just barely fit. In NJ, beach dredging is usually reason for needing an alternate. A question was raised about what to do about macroalgae. MA mentioned that issues aren't apparent until the trawl slows and this has been a significant issue in the spring. The west side of Block Island sometimes has algae issues, so VIMS has rigged a tripper to release it in water before moving to an alternate site. ME and MD tracks macroalgae species using subsamples. There was some discussion of data storage for recording "trash" and notable species. There was some interest in consolidating these data and working to make it publicly available.

#### *North Carolina*

The Pamlico Sound Survey, has run from 1987 to present. The survey has strata by depth and region. In the past, they've removed stations due to repetitive instances of high tunicate catches. They contracted the previous R/V captains and hired a new captain and crew for September, but still find it difficult to find someone with the correct qualifications. This survey experienced mechanical failures, but still were able to complete sampling before hurricane season. They saw high shrimp catches and noted bycatch hotspots for shrimp fishery as well as migration corridor options. Data is being used for ASMFC compliance and life history studies at various NC institutions.

#### SEAMAP Update

For the Coastal Trawl Survey (SCDNR), 83% of stations were completed in spring and 90% in the fall. FL-Onslow Bay was sampled but Raleigh Bay was missed due to weather. Catches were dominated by Atlantic croaker, spot, and white shrimp. For the Reef Fish Survey (SCDNR, MARMAP), the season stretches from May to October and the range is from NC to FL. There are 1,547 Chevron traps and 99% of stations were completed in 2023. They missed stations in NC because of weather and engine failure. Survey was dominated by tomate, vermilion snapper, black sea bass, and red snapper. All longline surveys (NC, SC, GA) completed 100% of stations and were dominated by red drum and coastal shark species, as expected.

#### Survey Technical Committee & Maturity Workshop Update

The NEAMAP STC is planning a maturity workshop from July 9<sup>th</sup> – July 10<sup>th</sup> at VIMS. The first day will be in a conference room (lecture-style) and the second day will be hands-on (assigned sex and maturity). As requested by the states, they will be black sea bass, bluefish, summer flounder, menhaden, spiny dogfish, winter flounder, weakfish, scup, and horseshoe crab (and possible other invertebrates) available for the workshop. They may add shad, alewife, black herring, tautog, windowpane flounder, and northern kingfish if they have enough. However, they need help collecting Spanish mackerel, Atlantic cod, Atlantic mackerel, and American eel. ME, RI, and NJ offered to send VIMS some of their needed species.

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**Next Steps:**

1. Contact J. Gregg and J. Patel if you can ship VIMS 10-15 frozen fish from the needed list above.
2. J. Patel will request reimbursement from the Commission for shipping costs.
3. Let J. Patel know if someone from your agency is planning on attending the workshop. Current states represented at the workshop include ME/NH, RI, MD, NY, NJ, NC, and SC.

**Vessels Workshop Best Practices Document**

This discussion revolved around the current draft of the [NEAMAP/SEAMAP Best Practices for Vessel and Gear Changes document](#). The main question posed was where we wanted to keep the guidance in the document more general or get specific to each survey. There was a consensus to keep it a bit more general and add examples and a link to the resources folder to the document. For the next version of this document, we should be getting it ready to become a white paper by asking presenters from the workshop to create a short, written summary of their presentations and then highlight the main takeaways after each summary that are currently in the document.

There was also a consensus that this paper and the resources from the workshop need to be advertised to the agencies and kept in a location that is accessible to everyone interested without being tied to a log in or link. Ideally, the white paper and resources could go under their own section on the NEAMAP website or the Commission website. J. Patel is also writing an article for the Fisheries Focus March/April edition to advertise main workshop takeaways but may talk to the Commission about pushing this article back until the white paper is written.

One of the workshop takeaways was increased communication about technical and logistic aspects of the surveys between agencies. The group agreed that this didn't need to be a regular meeting, but could be an agenda item for every Survey Technical Committee annual meeting, where west coast industry members and SEAMAP operations could be invited to contribute and weigh-in on any changes that they may be experiences for vessels and gears and ask questions. For smaller or more immediate questions, states or survey leads can just email the NEAMAP and SEAMAP Operations or Survey Technical committees.

There was also the question of creating a list of technicians/staff on each survey for future references, but this creates a heavy update burden, so instead, it may just be easier to have the survey lead contact on the NEAMAP website for each agency.

Additionally, outside of the actual white paper, it was agreed that it would a good idea to have an information FAQ document where surveys could 1) list what gear they use for their surveys with links to the manufacturers and 2) document side conversations or questions that they get asked about their surveys so that if the same question arises in the future, we have consistency in protocol and advice. This can be populated as needed and doesn't need a formal process to update. There will be occasion reminders to update the list of questions/gear.

Jim Thorson has also just created tinyVAST and has offered to send draft code upon requests so potentially using the ASMFC GitHub to create a vessels calibration folder as a database for draft code may be helpful in the future. This could then be updated with draft code that other agencies have used for their calibrations.

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On a more general note, NEAMAP needs a repository for documents that are in work that isn't public-facing. Some use Microsoft or SharePoint, but we need something that everyone can access for our protocol, vessels documents, and meeting minutes that we don't want to share with the public yet.

Additionally, SEAMAP has expressed interest in potential funding sources.

**Next Steps:**

1. J. Patel will send out a survey to determine the best host for a NEAMAP-wide accessible repository for files before creating a vessels and gear folder to migrate files off of ShareFile.
2. J. Patel will contact workshop presenters to provide a summary and create a white paper that includes the summaries and takeaways. The white paper will be sent around to the NEAMAP Operations committee for review.
3. J. Patel will create a FAQs document so that the surveys can list their gear and create a list of frequently asked questions and answers.
4. J. Patel will reach out to Jim Thorson about draft code and ask ASMFC about GitHub access to create draft code for vessels and gear.
5. J. Patel will touch base with SEAMAP about funding sources at the SEAMAP-SA annual meeting.

NEAMAP Principles Doc

This discussion revolved around the current draft of the [NEAMAP Principles Document](#). Offshore Wind companies were citing that they were following NEAMAP protocols when there wasn't a specific protocol. A few years ago, it was decided that NEAMAP surveys should be defined and follow specific protocols. Protocols can significantly vary so we decided it was better to be broad.

Now that we have a workable draft, this should be turned into a white paper and posted online once everyone reviews it and formatting is fixed for consistency. This document should then be reviewed annually to ensure that no major edits are needed and to keep an updated version history when changes are needed.

The NEAMAP definition and objectives (see 2022 presentation to the Policy Board) should also be added to the document as well as a list of surveys that currently meet the definition. Initially, there was a lot of confusion about what authority NEAMAP has a program. We don't need to have Policy Board approval, but it is important to keep them updated. The Policy Board believes in being cautious about widening the umbrella to include all the surveys outside of just MENH, MA DMF, and VIMS, but the NEAMAP Operations Committee believes that if the following outlined principles are followed and the survey is state-run, then the survey can be called a NEAMAP survey. This will prohibit any developer from being called a NEAMAP survey.

The [NEAMAP MOU](#) can also be made public-facing, after all documents are uploaded to the NEAMAP shared repository.

There was some discussion about list of annual agenda items that should be reviewed at every meeting. They included: an annual operations plan and budget to outline goals and items to review by the policy board, the MOU, the NEAMAP principles document, reminders to fill out the vessels FAQ, and items for the STC to review.

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**Next steps:**

1. J. Patel to create a shared repository of files for NEAMAP to access (see Vessels Workshop Best Practices next steps).
2. NEAMAP Operations to decide which files are public-facing after repository is created.
3. J. Patel to update Principles Doc opening to include definition and goals.
4. NEAMAP Operations to review protocols outline in the Principles Doc.
5. J. Patel to create a white paper from the Principles Doc once finalized
6. J. Patel to keep a list of agenda items for next year's meeting.

**Other Business***Website discussion*

A draft of the SEAMAP website was review and the group came to a consensus in support of creating a similar website for NEAMAP.

**Next steps:**

1. J. Patel will talk to ASMFC about the budget for the website. After SEAMAP website is finalized,
2. J. Patel will send out a link to the SEAMAP site and a survey to collect information about what the NEAMAP website will display.
3. J. Patel will send out requests for texts/images in accordance with survey results.

*In-person vs. virtual meetings*

Group discussed merits of in-person vs virtual meetings. The NEAMAP Operations Committee will likely meet in-person next year in March in either Baltimore, D.C., or Maine.

*Chair election*

As N. Lengyel-Costa has been the chair since 2017 and R. Peters has been vice chair since 2018, they stepped down. The Operations Committee unanimously elected J. Gregg and G. Hicks to be chair and vice chair respectively after they volunteered for the positions.

*Survey Technical Committee*

The group agreed that the STC should meet shortly to touch base about vessel operations and updates for the NEAMAP surveys as well as discuss a potential gear workshop at VIMS.

**Next Steps:**

1. J. Patel to find STC members from all states as well as an Operations Committee member from DE.
2. J. Patel to send out schedulers for STC meeting and discussion agenda with J. Gregg and G. Hicks. One item includes setting goals and planning for a gear workshop.
3. J. Patel to ask ASMFC for budget for the potential gear workshop at VIMS.