

INTERSTATE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

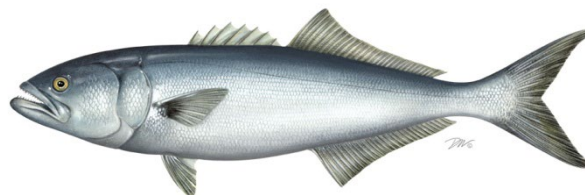
Bluefish

Species Range

Coastwide (Maine through Florida)

Management Unit

Maine through Florida



Stock Status

The 2025 Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) bluefish management track stock assessment indicates that the stock is not overfished and overfishing was not occurring in 2024 relative to the updated biological reference points. The assessment updates commercial fishery catch data, recreational fishery catch data, research survey indices of abundance, and the analytical state-space WHAM assessment model and reference points through 2024. While the bluefish stock is no longer overfished, bluefish will remain under the provisions of the Amendment 2 rebuilding plan until the stock reaches the target level of spawning stock biomass.

Reference Points

- F Threshold = $F_{MSY\ PROXY} = 0.232$
 - Current (2024) = 0.108
- Spawning Stock Biomass threshold ($1/2\ SSB_{MSYPROXY}$) = 95 million lbs
- Spawning Stock Biomass target ($SSB_{MSYPROXY}$) = $SSB_{35\%} = 191$ million lbs
 - Current SSB (2022) = 170 million lbs

Spawning Stock Biomass is estimated at 170 million pounds, approximately 89% of its target. Fishing mortality is estimated to be 0.108, below the fishing mortality threshold (0.232). Although fishing mortality was below the threshold in 2024, fishing mortality exceeded the updated threshold for a majority of the timeseries. The largest recruitment in the time series occurred in 1989 at 350 million fish, and the lowest recruitment was in 2019 at 67 million fish. Recruitment over the last 10 years has been below the time series average of 124 million fish every year except 2024. A management track stock assessment is scheduled for June 2027.

Next scheduled stock assessment

June 2027

Involved States and Jurisdictions

ME, NH, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, DE, MD, PRFC, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL, NOAA Fisheries, USFWS

Active Boards/Committees

ASMFC Bluefish Management Board, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC), ASMFC Bluefish Technical Committee, MAFMC Bluefish Monitoring Committee, ASMFC Bluefish Advisory Panel, ASMFC Bluefish Plan Review Team

Chairs

Board, Chair – Eric Reid (12/2025); Vice-Chair – Vacant

Technical Committee, Chair – Mike Celestino (1/2025); Vice-Chair – Vacant

Advisory Panel, Chair – Vacant

Stock Assessment Subcommittee – Mike Celestino (8/2011)

Staff Lead

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Management Plan History

[Amendment 1 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Bluefish Fishery \(1998\)](#)

Amendment 1, prepared by MAFMC and ASMFC, is intended to manage the bluefish (*Pomatomus saltatrix*) fishery under both the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA) of 1976, as amended by the Sustainable Fisheries Act (SFA), and Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (ACFCMA). The goal of the management plan is to conserve the bluefish resource along the Atlantic coast. The Council and Commission have adopted five major objectives to achieve this goal: (1) increase understanding of the stock and of the fishery; (2) provide the highest availability of bluefish to U.S. fishermen while maintaining, within limits, traditional uses of bluefish; (3) provide for cooperation among the coastal states, the various regional marine fishery management councils, and federal agencies involved along the coast to enhance the management of bluefish throughout its range; (4) prevent recruitment overfishing; and (5) reduce the waste in both the commercial and recreational fisheries.

[Addendum I: Biological Monitoring Program \(February 2012\)](#)

Addendum I establishes a coastwide monitoring program for bluefish to improve the quantity and quality of ageing information used in future bluefish stock assessments.

[Amendment 2 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Bluefish: Bluefish Allocation and Rebuilding Amendment](#)

Amendment 2 updates the FMP goals and objectives, initiates a rebuilding plan, establishes new allocations between the commercial and recreational sectors, implements new commercial allocations to the states, revises the process for quota transfers between sectors, and revises how the management plan accounts for management uncertainty.

Given the stock's overfished condition, the Amendment establishes a 7-year rebuilding plan to be achieved through a constant fishing mortality approach. Rebuilding progress will be analyzed through management track stock assessments every two years. The Amendment also revises sector allocations, increasing the recreational allocation from 83% to 86% of the acceptable biological catch and decreasing the commercial allocation from 17% to 14%. Catch data from

1981-2018 were used as the basis for sector allocations since this time series captures the cyclical nature of the fishery, while providing each sector with sufficient access to the resource considering historical usage.

The Amendment revises state-by-state commercial allocations to better reflect the current distribution of the stock and the needs of the states' commercial fisheries. The Amendment allocates a baseline quota of 0.1% to each state, and then allocates the rest of the commercial quota based on landings data from 2009 to 2018. Recognizing that several states will be losing quota during a time when the coastwide commercial quota is already at an historic low, the Amendment phases-in the allocation changes over 7 years in order to reduce short-term economic impacts to the affected commercial fishing industries. State allocations will be reviewed by the Commission and Council within 5 years.

The Amendment updates the sector transfer process to allow for quota transfers in either direction between the commercial and recreational sectors. Previously, quota could only be transferred from the recreational sector to the commercial fishery. The transfers will now be capped at 10% of the acceptable biological catch for a given year.

Finally, the Amendment modified the management uncertainty tool within the FMP to a sector-specific approach. It allows the Commission and Council to apply a buffer to either sector, in the form of a quota reduction, to account for management uncertainty during specifications. While this tool has not been used often, the modified approach allows managers to better target areas of uncertainty within one sector without reducing the quota or harvest limit in the other sector.

[Addendum II: Harvest Control Rule \(June 2022\)](#)

Addendum II makes changes to the recreational fisheries management program for bluefish. The changes include a new process for setting recreational measures (bag, size, and season limits) and modifications to the recreational accountability measures. However, the new process will not be implemented for bluefish until the stock is declared rebuilt. Approval of this new process is part of a broader long-term effort by both Commission and Council to improve recreational management. The new management program aims to provide greater stability and predictability in recreational measures from year-to-year while accounting for uncertainty in recreational catch estimates. Addendum II will sunset in 2025 and be replaced by Addendum III.

Addendum III: Recreational Measures Setting Process (April 2025)

Addendum III further modified the process for setting recreational measures outlined in Addendum II. Additionally, Addendum III made modifications to the recreational accountability measures. The Policy Board and Council selected a modified version of the Percent Change Approach implemented through Addendum II, which better accounts for stock status when setting measures and creates more opportunities for stability in management measures. The addendum will be implemented in two phases. During the first phase starting in 2028 for bluefish (or when the stock is declared rebuilt, if after 2028), a harvest-based target will be

used, which focuses on achieving a specific level of predicted harvest. The second phase of modifications, which will be implemented for setting 2030 recreational measures and beyond, will update the process to use a catch-based target. Unlike the current process, a catch-based approach aims to achieve a target level of total dead catch, including both harvest and dead discards. This approach will allow for more explicit consideration of how measures affect discards. The Policy Board and Council delayed the transition to a catch-based target until 2030 to allow time for additional analysis on the potential impacts of a catch-based target to measures.

Annual Events

- May 1: Annual compliance reports are due. The PRT reviews compliance reports and prepares an FMP Review. The FMP Review is presented to the Board in August.
- July: Monitoring committee meets to outline recommendations for the upcoming year's commercial and recreational fishing regulations, as well as to recommend changes to the quotas to account for management uncertainty. This includes any proposed changes to the minimum fish size, mesh size, escape vent sizes, or other compliance criteria for the commercial fishery, and minimum size, season, and bag limits for the recreational fishery. The Monitoring Committee forwards recommendations to the Board and Council.
- August: Board and Council meet jointly at the MAFMC August meeting to adopt an Acceptable Biological Catch, a commercial quota, and a recreational harvest limit, and to set commercial and recreational management measures.
- January: NOAA Fisheries reviews the joint recommendation and sets the final annual federal specifications.