



Bluefish Fishery Performance Report

June 2025

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (Commission) Bluefish Advisory Panels (AP) met via webinar on June 12, 2025 to review the Fishery Information Document and develop the following Fishery Performance Report. The primary purpose of this report is to contextualize catch histories by providing information about fishing effort, market trends, environmental changes, and other factors. A series of trigger questions listed below were posed to the AP to generate discussion of observations in the bluefish fishery. Please note: Advisor comments described below are not necessarily consensus or majority statements.

MAFMC Advisory Panel members present: Jeremy Hancher (PA, recreational), Steve Heins (NC, recreational), Gus Lovgren (NJ, commercial), Will Poston (DC, recreational), Robert Pride (VA, recreational), Michael Waine (NC, recreational).

ASMFC Advisory Panel members present: Scot Calitri (NH), Peter Fallon (ME).

Others present: José L. Montañez (MAFMC Staff), Chelsea Tuohy (ASMFC Staff), Kiley Dancy (MAFMC Staff), Elise Koob (MA DMF), Savannah Lewis (GARFO Staff), Mike Celestino (NJ DEP), Eric Reid (Vice Chair, Bluefish Management Board), Chris Batsavage (MAFMC & ASMFC), Cynthia Jones (MAFMC SSC), Anna Beckwith (MAFMC), Laura Deighan (GARFO Staff), Andrew Scheld (MAFMC SSC), Cam Lamphere, Nichola Meserve (ASMFC), Alan Bianchi (NC DMF), Sarah Cvach (MD Sea Grant), Maureen Davidson (MAFMC), Lisa Wooleyhan, Corrin Flora (NC DMF).

Trigger Questions

1. What factors have influenced recent catch (markets/economy, environment, regulations, other factors)?
2. Are the current fishery regulations appropriate? How could they be improved?
3. What would you recommend as research priorities?
4. What else is important for the Council to know?

General Comments/Questions

An advisor noted the upcoming revisions to the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) estimates and questioned if a conversion factor should be used to account for the inaccurate MRIP numbers given public mistrust in the current estimates. Staff provided updates related to the Fishing Effort Survey follow-up-study ([Fishing Effort Survey Research and Improvements](#)). Staff also indicated that we do not have a conversion factor to adjust MRIP values as suggested.

During the presentation, staff showed the 2025 recreational harvest limit (RHL) noting that it increased between 2024 and 2025. One advisor asked if the RHL is expected to increase again in 2026. Staff noted that the results of the management track assessment have not yet been peer reviewed, but preliminary indications are that the stock continues to rebuild. However, we cannot yet comment on what the acceptable biological catch (ABC) will be in 2026 given uncertainty about the management track assessment peer review, projections and SSC discussion. Finally, the advisor asked about the process for setting ABCs and the timing for setting new recreational measures. Staff explained that recreational and commercial management measures for bluefish are both set in August, unlike what is done in other mid-Atlantic fisheries like summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. This advisor indicated it is difficult as an advisor to provide recommendations on recreational measures when we do not know the results of the assessment. This advisor wanted to see the results of the assessment before making these recommendations. This advisor also recommended a timeline that provides advisors more time to provide input on what recreational measures should be after the stock assessment is peer reviewed and commercial quotas and RHLs are set, this would allow advisors to be more informed and have better participation in the process. If the timing of the Advisory Panel meeting and the Council and Bluefish Management Board (Board) meeting for setting recreational measures is modified, it would help advisors form recommendations on recreational specifications. Staff reviewed the timeline of the specifications process and reminded the AP that the development of this fishery performance report was intended to capture recent changes in fishing or market trends or other observations that would help the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), the Monitoring Committee (MC) and the Council/Board better understand what is happening in the fishery.

Environmental Factors Influencing Catch

An advisor indicated that we know that bluefish come up off the coast of Virginia chasing sand eels and bluefin tuna chase the bluefish, etc. The advisor noted a better understanding of predator/prey interactions along with impacts of other environmental factors are needed to better assess the life cycle of this species.

An advisor from New Hampshire stated that due to cold weather and cold water this year, they have not seen any bluefish yet which is not abnormal. However, in New Hampshire, they are seeing fewer and fewer bluefish each year, the catch numbers are a little funky in the state, but talking to captains and guides it is rare to see fish now. It may be environmental or geographic impacts affecting availability. Each year for the last 20 years has continued to get worse and worse. This advisor also indicated that he agrees with the comments submitted by email regarding the negative environmental impacts of large-scale menhaden fishing being conducted by Omega Protein.

An advisor from North Carolina stated that there are a lot of bluefish around of all sizes. In the Cape Lookout area, there are fish up to 10 pounds and a lot of small 1-2 pound bluefish from his experience. The high catch numbers in North Carolina for 2024 are perplexing. There are a lot of bluefish around, but the 8.2 million fish catch number for 2024 seems very high. More specifically, while there are a lot of fish around, poor weather and windy conditions limit access to the fish throughout the year. The advisor noted there is no point in questioning the MRIP data because it is all we have, but thinking about the catch number and dividing it out over the year with the number of bad weather days, it is hard to believe.

An advisor from New Jersey (commercial trawler) indicated that the bluefish run usually lasts about 2 weeks out of year ~40 miles offshore. He also indicated that the whole migration pattern in New Jersey shifted after Superstorm Sandy. He used to see fish congregated often near the shore/beach every year, but not anymore. When we (commercial trawlers) catch them, we tend to catch a lot. Bluefish are highly sought after recreational fish, but since biomass shifted from running the beach to running offshore, the recreational sector does not chase them as much.

Market/Economic Conditions and Management Issues

An advisor from New Jersey (commercial trawler) indicated that bluefish is mostly bycatch and not targeted for trawlers. However, when they are caught “they are money” and trawlers are happy to have them. The fresh market can handle thousands of pounds at a time, but as landings increase, prices start falling. They might see high prices in the \$2 per pound range, but it does not take long to knock that down as landings increase and saturate the market. They have experienced a steady increase in price in recent years.

Other Recreational Issues

Multiple advisors indicated disagreement with the comments submitted by email stating that bluefish are not a target species by recreational anglers. It was indicated that bluefish are targeted when they are present and available. In New England, when people hear that bluefish are around, it increases the number of for-hire trips. They are more of an exotic fish in that area and some anglers would give up the opportunity to catch striped bass to go catch a bluefish. Another advisor indicated that they are good to eat if prepared properly and are targeted.

An advisor from Maine indicated that they had a very poor bluefish season last year, the year prior there were a lot more fish around, but nothing like what we would see 15-25 years ago, but enough that they were targetable and it did help sell trips for the for-hire fishery mid-summer. This advisor further indicated that he also fishes out of Massachusetts, and in the fall most of the other for-hire captains that he speaks with are targeting false albacore, but if there are big bluefish around, they can really help out. For a lot of charter trips South of Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, and even Long Island Sound in the middle of the summer when striper fishing is poor, bluefish are a really important species to target. He was not sure why we are not seeing the bluefish inshore or offshore.

Research Priorities and Data Issues

One advisor expressed support for further assessing bluefish predator/prey interactions as a means to understand bluefish variability and population dynamics in relation to other species (e.g., bunker YOY, etc.).¹

Several advisors indicated that MRIP estimates are unreasonable given their observations.

¹ Dr. Cynthia Jones (SSC member) indicated that she will check with the Lenfest Ocean Program to see if they have done work on predation of bluefish on menhaden.

Public Comment

No additional comments.

Advisor Comments Received Via Email

Montanez, Jose

From: Capt. TJ Karbowski <tedkarbowski@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 2, 2025 8:11 AM
To: Advisors - Bluefish; Montanez, Jose
Cc: Chelsea Tuohy; laura.deighan@noaa.gov; Savannah Lewis - NOAA Federal; Dancy, Kiley
Subject: Re: June Bluefish Advisory Panel Meeting - Doodle poll

You don't often get email from tedkarbowski@yahoo.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Good morning.

I will not be able to participate in the meeting. I am a charterboat Captain and am on the water every day from May - November.

My comments will be the same as every other meeting.

Bluefish are not a desired species for recreational anglers. With few exceptions, they are either bycatch when targeting stripers, an incidental catch or they are targeted for a short period of time just to bend the rod when nothing else is cooperating. 90% are released.

I do not recommend making regs more restrictive for them. It will do nothing to increase the population. All it will do is make the foul taste anglers have for fisheries management even worse.

Bluefish, especially large bluefish, chase menhaden schools, as do striped bass.

Until something is done about Omega Protein and the militaristic manner in which that one single Canadian company is destroying our ecosystem we are all just wasting our time. The hypocrisy is sickening in which the ASMFC turns a blind eye. One day there will be a whistleblower, the intentional mismanagement will be made very public and people will be arrested.

Thank you,
Capt. TJ Karbowski
Rock & Roll Charters
Clinton, CT
203.314.3765
<https://rockandrollcharters.com/>

From: John M <mannixnyc@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 2, 2025 8:52 AM
To: Montanez, Jose
Cc: Karbowski, TJ; Advisors - Bluefish; Chelsea Tuohy; laura.deighan@noaa.gov; Savannah Lewis NOAA Federal; Dancy, Kiley
Subject: Re: June Bluefish Advisory Panel Meeting - Doodle poll

You don't often get email from mannixnyc@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

I will second Capt Karbowski's view that Bluefish are the least of our collective problems. Because they are not edible for many anglers, like False Albacore, they are only a by-catch, " caught by accident", or by light tackle " catch release" guides, like Albies. Getting the inshore draggers under control is a far better target. I have been light tackle guiding/fishing in Montauk for decades and for example Gardiners Bay is now devoid of most species and the draggers are still out there everyday scraping the bottom. Literally. A more important topic may be that of False Albacore/Bonito, which has no regs at all in the Atlantic states despite the species being mass plundered for bait and fertilizer in florida and the Caribbean. Just my thoughts. Thanks

John M.
JohnMannix.eth