



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Law Enforcement Committee Meeting Summary

October 10, 2025

Committee Members: Scott Pearce, Chair, FL; Delayne Brown, NH; Jeff Mercer, RI; Thomas Gadomski, NY; Nicholas Couch, DE; David Bailey, MD; Matt Rogers, VA; Jason Walker, NC

ASMFC Staff: Emilie Franke, Madeline Musante and Kurt Blanchard

Other Participants: Captain Daniel Ipock and Lt. Sean Reilly

The Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) conducted a virtual meeting on October 10, 2025, to discuss a request by the Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board to review the Plan Review Team's (PRT) Commercial Tagging Ten-Year Review Meeting Report. Specifically, the task was to review the report and discuss any further LEC recommendations on point of tagging and potential improvements to state tagging programs.

Emilie Franke, ASMFC FMP coordinator, provided the following background to the development of this report. The Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board tasked the Plan Review Team (PRT) with reviewing the striped bass commercial tagging program since it has been over a decade since the program was implemented. The PRT and state commercial tagging contacts met via webinar on July 24 and July 30, 2025, with the following objectives:

1. Inform the Board: Compile a summary of each state's tagging program.
2. Look Across Programs: Report any key observations and takeaways across programs, including common challenges faced by multiple states and the various biological metrics used to determine the number of tags for each season.
3. Share Information: Opportunity for states to share best practices and information on common issues, challenges, and solutions.
4. Streamline Reporting: Minimize duplicate information submitted in annual commercial tagging reports vs. annual state compliance reports. Confirm what information is most useful to law enforcement in tagging reports (e.g., tag color) vs. what is more relevant in state compliance reports (e.g., tag accounting).

Each state provided a written overview of their tagging program and presented an overview of their state program during the meetings. This report summarizes the subsequent discussion of observations and differences across state commercial tagging programs for striped bass.

The LEC appreciates the effort taken by the PRT to provide such a detailed report on this topic and welcomes the opportunity to review this report and offer comments as requested by the Board.

Discussion

The general discussion by the LEC was that the current state programs are effective and each in their own way offer a level of protection to the resource and meet the spirit of Addendum 3 to Amendment 6 of the Atlantic Striped Bass Interstate Fishery Management Plan and Amendment 7. This plan in part is derived from recommendations from the 2012 Interstate Watershed Taskforce Investigation which offered the following recommendations.

LAW ENFORCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the comprehensive investigation and criminal proceeding, the following recommendations were made by the Interstate Task Force and are endorsed by the Law Enforcement Committee of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

Recommendations to Improve Enforceability & Accountability:

- *Implement a uniform commercial tagging system among all states where striped bass are harvested and landed for sale. This includes:*
 - *Uniformity by year, style, color, and inscriptions.*
 - *Tags should be valid for one year only.*
 - *Inscriptions should include the year, state, state size limits, and a unique number.*
 - *Use standardized, tamper-proof tags.*
- *Require all fish harvested for sale to be tagged immediately upon possession.*
- *Issue a set number of tags based on a scientific sample of the average (mean) weight of legal-sized fish harvested during the open season for that gear type, divided into the weight quota.*
- *Require all unused tags to be returned annually or seasonally and prohibit license renewal if unused tags are not returned.*
- *Strengthen reporting of tag numbers used on dealer reports or trip tickets.*
- *Implement license revocation or suspension as a primary penalty for state or federal violations.*
- *Ensure that law enforcement officers have real-time access to the tag numbers issued to each fisher.*

Many of these recommendations still have merit in the striped bass fishery today. The following is a more detailed response to the questions posed by the Board.

LEC Recommendation on Point of Tagging

Point of Tagging - The historical perspective of the above recommendations has softened in respect to time of tagging. In general, the ability to inspect a commercial catch of striped bass at multiple points from take to consumption provides law enforcement the ability to be most effective in our protection of the resource. Recent management measures in the ocean fishery have made the commercial take of striped bass more easily distinguished from a recreational take of striped bass. Management measures in the ocean fishery creating different size and possession limits between sectors gives law enforcement the ability to clearly define a commercial take from a recreational take while at sea and at the dock. This reduces the enforcement concern in a point-of-sale (POS) program. Point of Sale or Point of Landing tagging is less desirable for enforcement in states that are managed through individual quotas, and/or that allow for multiple commercial limits on board a vessel, or that have overlapping size limits between the commercial and recreational fishery. In these instances, states should strongly consider point of harvest (POH) tagging. The report shows that one state, Delaware, has a point of landing (POL) provision. State law enforcement has indicated that due to their fishery being small, they have experienced good compliance with this provision. If a POL provision were to be considered more widely, law enforcement would recommend that a clear and consistent definition of landing be used.

Tag Distribution – The LEC does not have a concern with how states are managing their respective tag distribution. Although there are several processes being used, they all meet the requirements of the plan. A concern arose amongst the LEC regarding the use of weigh stations and the accurate reporting of striped bass weights attributed against an individual's quota. For distributing additional tags in-season in states that have individual quotas, the LEC recommends the current strategy of the Potomac River Fisheries Commission. The assigning of tags based on an estimated average fish weight that each fisher receives a set number of tags where extra tags in-season are only provided in the case of lost/defective/broken tags. This encourages better compliance with regulations. By distributing a single annual allotment of tags, fishers have less reason to underreport their catch weights. In contrast, if additional tags are distributed throughout the season according to weights reported by fishers or private weighmasters, there is a higher temptation to understate actual landings.

Tag Accountability – all jurisdictions have a process in place to account for the lost, damaged, or delinquent tags. Again, these processes differ among agencies, but all meet the standards of the plan. Tag accounting through commercial tagging reports is a valuable management tool. This report offers insight into how this accounting of tags is conducted and the length of time it takes to gather the appropriate level of data. The PRT and State Commercial Tagging Contacts have offered that although it may take more time, more accurate data can be provided in the

annual striped bass compliance reports versus preliminary reports. The LEC supports this recommendation.

Potential Improvements to State Tagging Programs

Tag Traceability – While this report did not specifically address tracking tag numbers, the LEC wanted to emphasize the importance of being able to trace a tag back to the fisher. Most states with a POH program seem to follow this practice, but not all states with a POS program allow for tags to be traced to the fisher.

The following is an excerpt from the Guidelines for Resource Manager on the Enforceability of Fisheries Management Measures in reference to tagging, labelling, or marking of marine species.

TAGGING, LABELING OR MARKING OF MARINE SPECIES

Definition: The act of placing an approved manufactured tag, label, or a manipulation/alteration of the respective marine species for the purpose of marking a marine species for a management purpose.

Average Overall Rating: 4.00

Recommendation:

- *The tag should be an approved device that is identifiable, traceable, and tamper proof.*
- *The tag should be placed on a marine species in a location that will cause least harm to the species whether alive or dead.*
- *When any alteration to a marine species (i.e., fin clipping, v-notching or other) the requirement should be consistent among all jurisdictions.*
- *Improved documentation and labeling of fish and fish products would enable law enforcement to track such products back to the harvester and/or the initial purchaser and to intercept unlawful seafood product at various points between harvest and final sale for consumption.*