

# Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

## ISFMP Policy Board

February 5, 2026  
11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

### Draft Agenda

The times listed are approximate; the order in which these items will be taken is subject to change; other items may be added as necessary.

1. Welcome/Call to Order ( <i>D. McKiernan</i> )	11:00 a.m.
2. Board Consent ( <i>D. McKiernan</i> )	11:00 a.m.
• Approval of Agenda	
• Approval of Proceedings from October 2024	
3. Public Comment	11:05 a.m.
4. Executive Committee Report ( <i>D. McKiernan</i> )	11:15 a.m.
5. Review and Discuss 2025 Commissioner Survey Results ( <i>A. Law</i> )	11:25 a.m.
6. Update from the Declared Interests and Voting Privileges Work Group ( <i>R. Beal</i> )	11:45 a.m.
7. NOAA HMS Update on Recent Coastal Shark Actions ( <i>K. Brewster-Geisz</i> )	11:55 a.m.
8. Consider Habitat Management Series Report on Atlantic States Shell Recycling ( <i>S. Kaalstad</i> ) <b>Final Action</b>	12:05 p.m.
9. Review Noncompliance Findings (If Necessary) <b>Action</b>	12:15 p.m.
10. Other Business	12:20 p.m.
11. Adjourn	12:30 p.m.

The meeting will be held at The Westin Crystal City (1800 Richmond Highway, Arlington, VA; 703.486.1111) and via webinar; click [here](#) for details.

# MEETING OVERVIEW

ISFMP Policy Board  
Thursday February 5, 2026  
11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Chair: Dan McKiernan (MA) Assumed Chairmanship: 10/25	Vice Chair: Doug Haymans (GA)	Previous Board Meetings: October 30, 2025
Voting Members: ME, NH, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, PA, DE, MD, DC, PRFC, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL, NMFS, USFWS (19 votes)		

## 2. Board Consent

- Approval of Agenda
- Approval of Proceedings from October 2025

**3. Public Comment** – At the beginning of the meeting public comment will be taken on items not on the agenda. Individuals that wish to speak at this time must sign-in at the beginning of the meeting. For agenda items that have already gone out for public hearing and/or have had a public comment period that has closed, the Board Chair may determine that additional public comment will not provide additional information. In this circumstance the Chair will not allow additional public comment on an issue. For agenda items that the public has not had a chance to provide input, the Board Chair may allow limited opportunity for comment. The Board Chair has the discretion to limit the number of speakers and/or the length of each comment.

## 4. Executive Committee Report (11:15 -11:25 a.m.)

### Background

- The Executive Committee will meet on February 4, 2026
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### Presentations

- D. McKiernan will provide an update of the Executive Committee's work

### Board action for consideration at this meeting

- None

## 5. Review and Discuss 2025 Commissioner Survey Results (11:25 -11:45 a.m.)

### Background

- Commissioners completed a survey of Commission performance in 2024 (**Supplemental Materials**). The survey measures Commissioner's opinions regarding the progress and actions of the Commission in 2025.

### Presentations

- A. Law will present the results of the 2025 Commissioner survey highlighting significant changes from the previous year.

**Board discussion for consideration at this meeting**

- Determine if any action is required based on the survey results

**6. Update from the Declared Interest and Voting Privileges Work Group (11:45 - 11:55 a.m.)****Background**

- The Executive Committee will discuss the Work Group Progress that has been working on Board voting procedures and declared interest procedures and definitions.

**Presentations**

- Staff will present the work group progress

**Board action for consideration at this meeting**

- None

**7. NOAA HMS Update on Recent Coastal Shark Actions (11:55 a.m. – 112:05 p.m.)****Background**

- The NOAA Fisheries published a [proposed rule](#) to revise the commercial Atlantic blacknose shark and recreational Atlantic shark measures. These measures impact commercial or recreational shark fisheries in the northwestern Atlantic Ocean, including the Gulf of America and Caribbean Sea, as well as dealers who buy or sell sharks or shark products in these areas.

**Presentations**

- K. Brewester- Geisz will present the measures in the [proposed rule](#)

**Board action for consideration at this meeting**

- Provide feedback to NOAA on the proposed shark measures

**8. Consider Habitat Management Series Report on Atlantic States Shell Recycling (12:05 – 12:15 p.m.) Final Action****Background**

- The Habitat Committee drafted the most recent Habitat Management Series Report on shell recycling (**Supplemental Materials**). The report is a practitioners guide to shell recycling on the Atlantic coast. It highlights shell recycling programs across member states and offers recommendations for best management practices, including permitting guidelines, lessons learned, strategies to minimize the risk of disease introduction, and a variety of useful links and contacts.

**Presentations**

- S. Kaalstad will present the Habitat Management Series Report on Atlantic States Shell Recycling

**Board action for consideration at this meeting**

- Approve the Atlantic States Shell Recycling Habitat Management Series Report

**9. Review Non-Compliance Findings, if Necessary Action****10. Other Business****11. Adjourn**

**DRAFT PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION  
ISFMP POLICY BOARD**

**The Hyatt Place Dewey Beach  
Dewey Beach, Delaware  
Hybrid Meeting**

**October 30, 2025**

These minutes are draft and subject to approval by the ISFMP Policy Board.  
The Board will review the minutes during its next meeting.

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## INDEX OF MOTIONS

1. **Approval of agenda** by consent (Page 1).
2. **Approval of Proceedings of August 2025** by consent (Page 1).
3. **Move to approve the Commission's stock assessment schedule as presented today** (Page 3). Motion by Doug Grout; second by John Clark. Motion passes (Page 4).
4. **Move to adopt the 2026 coastal shark specifications matching the default season start date and retention limits as specified by the National Marine Fisheries Service final rule published on November 8, 2023 (88 FR 77039).** The fishing season will open on January 1, 2026 with a commercial possession limit of 55 large coastal sharks (LCS) other than sandbar sharks per vessel per trip (i.e., aggregated LCS and hammerhead shark management groups) and 8 blacknose sharks per vessel trip. The commercial possession limit is subject to change; states will follow NMFS for in-season changes to the commercial possession limit (Page 13). Motion by Erika Burgess; second by Doug Haymans. Motion passes by consent (Page 14).
5. **Move to adjourn** by consent (Page 17).

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## ATTENDANCE

### Board Members

Carl Wilson, ME (AA)	John Clark, DE (AA)
Renee Zobel, NH (AA)	Roy Miller, DE (GA)
Doug Grout, NH (GA)	Lynn Fegley, MD (AA)
Dan McKiernan, MA (AA)	Jamie Green, VA (AA)
Jason McNamee, RI (AA)	Chris Batsavage, NC, proxy for K. Rawls (AA)
Eric Reid, RI, proxy for Sen. Sosnowski (LA)	Ben Dyar, SC, proxy for B. Keppler (AA)
Matt Gates, CT (AA)	Mel Bell, SC, proxy for Sen. Cromer (LA)
Marty Gary, NY (AA)	Doug Haymans, GA (AA)
Joe Cimino, NJ (AA)	Spud Woodward, GA (GA)
Jeff Kaelin, NJ (GA)	Erika Burgess, FL, proxy for J. McCawley (AA)
Adam Nowalsky, NJ, proxy for Sen. Gopal (LA)	Gary Jennings, FL (GA)
Loren Lustig, PA (GA)	Ron Owens, PRFC

**(AA = Administrative Appointee; GA = Governor Appointee; LA = Legislative Appointee)**

### Staff

Bob Beal	Tracy Bauer	Pat Campfield
Toni Kerns	James Boyle	Katie Drew
Tina Berger	Chelsea Tuohy	Jeff Kipp
Madeline Musante	Emilie Franke	Jainita Patel
Caitlin Starks	Geoff White	Samara Nehemiah

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The ISFMP Policy Board of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission convened in the Ballroom East/West via hybrid meeting, in-person and webinar; Thursday, October 30, 2025, and was called to order at 10:35 a.m. by Chair Dan McKiernan.

#### **CALL TO ORDER**

CHAIR DANIEL McKIERNAN: Good morning, everyone, I'm going to call to order the Policy Board meeting this morning. My name is Dan McKiernan from the state of Massachusetts and this Board's Chair. First, I would ask when folks do speak, they bring their microphones closer. I was listening this morning up here at the front, and it was fairly difficult to hear some of you, so please be mindful of that. Toni, who is remote this morning?

MS. TONI KERNS: We have Renee Zobel online and Marty will need to head out around 11:00, and John Maniscalco will take over for him online.

#### **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Very good. Next the approval of the agenda. Has everyone seen the agenda and are there any recommended changes to the agenda? Eric Reid.

MR. ERIC REID: At this time, I think it would be appropriate if all of us said a rousing show of appreciation to our staff, because without them none of this would ever happen. (Applause)

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Thank you, Eric. I assume there are no changes to the agenda.

#### **APPROVAL OF PROCEEDINGS**

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Can I get approval of the proceedings from our last meeting in August? I see a motion by Lynn, is there a second? I see Ben Dyar, nope it's Joe Grist. Sorry, you're a long way off. Any objections to approving the agenda? Hearing none; approved.

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#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Public comment, do we have anyone in the audience or remote who would like to speak on items not on this agenda this morning? I see no one in the room, is there anyone remote? Very good, we can move on.

Next, I'm going to invite Gary Jennings to provide some resolutions. This was scheduled for the Business Meeting, but I think we're going to dispense with the Business Meeting, so therefore Gary, if you would like to take the mic and provide the resolutions on behalf of your committee.

#### **ANNUAL MEETING RESOLUTIONS**

MR. GARY JENNINGS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

WHEREAS, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission conducted its 83rd Annual Meeting hosted by Delaware Commissioners John Clark and Roy Miller, Rich Wong with the Delaware Fish and Wildlife, and Representative William Carson on October 26th through 30th, in Dewey Beach, a coastal town known for its beautiful beaches, water activities, gale force winds and restaurants that are closed in October.

WHEREAS, Delaware, known as the first state for being the first state to ratify the U.S. Constitution on December 7, 1787, and for having the state motto, Liberty and Independence, especially for seagulls, who freely exercise their right to steal your french-fries without consequence.

WHEREAS in Delaware poultry are the real birders. The state bird is the blue hen, presumably chosen after the other 300 million resident chickens clucked their approval, after beating the human vote by almost 200 to 1. If you're a fish and wildlife official here, oh I'm sorry that's your next stakeholder meeting. It might involve a beak and some seed.

WHEREAS each spring tens of thousands of migratory birds stop to gorge on horseshoe crab eggs, making Delaware's beaches the east coast best all you can eat buffet, if your idea of fine dining

is ancient arthropod caviar, bon appetit red knots and sandpipers.

WHEREAS Delaware's horseshoe crabs have seen more history than the state archives, these living fossils have been trudging along Delaware shores for 450 million years, which coincidentally is how long the ASMFC menhaden and stripers meetings go. They've survived mass extinctions and Continental Drift, but they still can't get a decent parking spot in Rehoboth in the summer.

WHEREAS Delaware has more corporate entities than residents, including Dupont, which explains why John Clark is the Teflon Man with Kepler lactic skin.

WHEREAS milk is Delaware's state beverage, and Delaware lays claim to the first commercially produced ice cream in 1857, which explains the plethora of ice cream shops.

WHEREAS at the 32nd Annual Laura Leach Fishing Tournament, Spud Woodward and the South rose once again my spanking the competition.

WHEREAS at the annual dinner Lynn Fegley received accolades and had her last hoorah before sailing off into the sunset.

WHEREAS while at the Big Chill Beach Club ASMFC recognized as the 2025 Melissa Laser Award recipient, Annie Roddenberry of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, and now

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission once again expresses its appreciation to the Delaware contingent, and especially Rich Wong, for the terrific assistance in the planning and execution of this outstanding 83rd Annual Meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Thank you so much, Gary, well done. All right, moving on the agenda is the Report of the Executive Committee, which I will give. The Executive Committee met to discuss several issues, including the fiscal year '25 audit, the discussion paper on declared interest in voting privileges, notifying actions on agendas, a legislative update and a future annual meeting update regarding locations. The following action items resulted from the committee's discussion. First, Executive Committee reviewed and accepted the fiscal year '25 financial audit of the Commission, noting it was a clean audit and no negative findings were reported.

Mr. Beal reported a declared interest in Voting Privileges Work Group, which formed to flesh out the discussion paper presented in August, to further frame the Executive Committee discussion. The Committee will report back to the Executive Committee in February. Mr. Beal discussed the issue of notifying actions on meeting agendas.

After a thorough discussion, staff was tasked with developing language for agendas, and possibly the charter detailing the process in noting when public input was available. Mr. Alexander Law presented an update on the status of the fiscal year '25 federal funding, the government shutdown and the status of two recently introduced bills, the Fisheries Data Modernization Act and the Quahogs Act.

Laura Leach provided an update on future annual meeting locations. Next year Rhode Island will host the annual meeting, in 2027 it will be South Carolina, in 2028 Massachusetts, 2029 Pennsylvania, 2030 Georgia and 2031 Connecticut. Finally, an Executive session was held to discuss ongoing CARES challenges, notably a few grants made by two states and the issue that NOAA Grants has communicated ASMFC should pay back.

The second issue that was discussed was the status of lawsuits that the Commission is involved in. In the area of Striped Bass Addendum II, lobster v-notch conservation measures and lobster vessel

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trackers. I'll take any questions on those matters at this time. Very good .

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Next on the agenda we've got some reports.

### ASSESSMENT SCIENCE COMMITTEE

CHAIR McKIERNAN: First is Jainita Patel of the Assessment Science Committee.

MS. JAINITA PATEL: Today the only Assessment Science Committee update I would have for you is in regard to the Stock Assessment Schedule. I believe the last time the Board saw this was last year, and there have been quite a few updates to the schedule since then. You all should have received a copy of these changes in your supplemental materials for this meeting.

But I just wanted to go over them with you today and point out any major changes that have occurred since we received those materials. This is a copy of the schedule, I know it is extremely difficult to read, so I am just going to quickly highlight the major changes for you. There have been quite a few changes.

Several assessments have been changed from updates to benchmarks or vice versa since last year, and several have been moved and pushed back. The changes are listed up there, but they are as follows. The 2025 croaker benchmark has been moved to next year, and will be presented to the Sciaenids Board at the summer meeting.

The '26 cobia benchmark has been moved to the following year and been changed to an update to be presented at the 2027 summer meeting. The 2026 striped bass update has been moved to 2027 and been changed to a benchmark. The '26 dogfish update has been moved to 2027. The 2026 winter flounder benchmark has been moved to 2027 and changed to an update, and that assessment is still tentative. The 2026 spot benchmark has

been moved to 2027 and will be presented to the Board at the summer meeting of that year. The 2027 black drum benchmark has been changed to an update.

Then something slightly different from what was in the supplemental materials, but the Horseshoe crab ARM update was previously completed annually. Before this week's Horseshoe Crab Board Meeting it was discussed that this assessment should take place once every three years, but after discussions this week the Board has decided that this assessment will be completed at their discretion with the longest time period between assessments being three years.

The next update for Horseshoe Crab ARM is scheduled for 2027. Some added assessments, Spanish mackerel will receive an update in 2027, and weakfish will be receiving a benchmark in 2028. Looking further into the future. For 2029 we'll have tentative assessment updates for black sea bass, bluefish, river herring, scup and summer flounder, and we'll have a benchmark for Horseshoe crab and tautog.

For 2030 there are tentatively scheduled benchmarks for shad and American lobster, and an update for sea herring. That is all I currently have. I am happy to take any questions about these changes or additions. If I can't answer your question, hopefully someone on science can.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Thank you, are there any questions for Jainita? Seeing none; I do need a motion to approve this schedule, I believe. I have a motion from Doug Grout to approve the schedule as presented today and seconded by John Clark.

MR. DOUGLAS E. GROUT: Do you want me to read it into the record?

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Toni? Yes, please.

MR. GROUT: **Move to approve the Commission's stock assessment schedule as presented today.**

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Is there any discussion on the motion? Seeing none, **is there any objection to the motion or nulls or abstentions? Seeing none; it's approved.** Seconded was John Clark, yes.

#### LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Next up we have the Law Enforcement Committee, Kurt Blanchard.

MR. KURT BLANCHARD: The Law Enforcement Committee convened a hybrid meeting as part of the 83rd Annual Meeting of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The Committee discussed the following topics. In the species discussion we discussed the Atlantic striped bass.

Specifically, the LEC convened a meeting on October 10 to consider Striped Bass Management Board's request regarding the Plan Review Team's report on the Atlantic Striped Bass Commercial Tagging Ten-Year Review. The Committee focused on evaluating the report, discussing additional LEC recommendations pertaining to tagging procedures and potential enhancements of state tagging programs. A detailed summary of the meeting was presented to the Striped Bass Management Board during the annual meeting week. Staff also presented an update regarding Draft Addendum III of the Striped Bass Fisheries Management Plan. A review was conducted of the LEC recommendations on Addendum III as documented in our meeting summary from March 27, 2025. The LEC did not offer any further comments.

We also discussed red drum. Staff presented the LEC with an update regarding progress of Draft Addendum II of the Red Drum Fisheries Management Plan. There were no LEC concerns for the proposed addendum. Under Other Topics, the LEC Chair provided an update to the Committee regarding ASMFC support, considering the absence of JEA funding,

program funding in the Fiscal Year '26 Presidential budget.

He reported receiving favorable feedback during Congressional meetings, and noted the NOAA OLE responded positively to our inquiries concerning this matter. The states remain committed to the JEA program and hope to see this funding restored. We discussed sector separation. Staff consulted with the LEC regarding sector separation, representatives from the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council's FMAT Team and ASMFCs PDT held an initial meeting with the LEC to address key issues identified during earlier discussions.

During this session, FMAT and PDT solicited input from the LEC concerning enforceability and anticipated compliance outcomes for draft alternatives under review. LEC members actively participated, providing feedback and specific inquiries related to proposed management measures that were shared with the Committee.

The LEC will continue its involvement as these proposals progress, offering further insight as appropriate. Some training opportunities, staff shared the upcoming training schedule for National Association of Conservation Law Enforcement Chief's Academies, covering calendar years 2025 through 2027.

Both Leadership Academy and the introduction of Conservation Leadership Academy have grown in popularity within the conservation law enforcement community. Members of the U.S. Coast Guard highlighted training opportunities for partner agencies at the Northeast Regional Fisheries Training Center.

The 2026 Living Marine Resource class schedule was shared with members of the LEC. A closed session was convened during our meeting to facilitate open discussion or guiding new and emerging issues in law enforcement, as well as each agency was given an opportunity to showcase its work and share updates on ongoing enforcement initiatives.

Some notable casework, the New York Environmental Conservation Police. Officers recently completed another successful Striped Bass Enforcement Initiative that resulted in nearly 100 tickets. Now in its third year, the detail focused on anglers fishing from vessels and along the shorelines of Hudson River during the months of April and May, big time for striped bass activity.

Officers checked hundreds of anglers and vessels on foot and by boat for compliance with the New York recreational regulations. They issued 98 tickets during the detail for violations, including failure to possess fishing licenses and/or being registered in the marine registry. Other violations documented were violations of boating safety laws. Officers addressed some of the more minor violations with written warnings and education rather than enforcement, issued more than 50 written warnings as nearly many verbal warnings.

Officers also assisted two vessels in distress during the detail, and participated in one search for a missing kayaker, and encountered one incident involving an intoxicated boater. For our friends with the Maryland Natural Resource Police. Officers responded to a call for a boater who had snagged an illegal gillnet with his boats motor.

Officers determined the gillnet belonged to two men on a boat in a nearby creek who were seen with additional gillnets on board. Officers located these men and upon inspection officers found 41 striped bass, 11 of which were outside the legal-size limit of 19-24 inches, 8 undersized croakers and several spot onboard with cuts and marks consistent with being caught in a gillnet.

The men, both from the area, were cited for the following violations; fishing without a license, use of a gillnet or monofilament gillnet, possession of illegal size striped bass, possession over limit striped bass, possession of

undersized croaker and several additional boating safety violations.

Officers found that one of the men were wanted on another crime, and he was arrested and transported. Both men face maximum fines of \$5,000.00. Finally, from our friends with the Massachusetts Environmental Police working in conjunction with the Westport Harbor Master. A new policy from the town of Westport to incoming harbor masters, Department with the State Environmental Policy.

This helps lead to a major illegal fishing bust. Officials say the fishermen, four from Maryland and one from Pennsylvania were caught with five coolers, packed with more than 1,000 illegally caught fish. The haul included undersized black sea bass, tautog and scup. Basically, if it bit the hook they took it, stated the Assistant Harbor Master.

The encounter started when the Assistant Harbor Master returned from a joint patrol with an environmental police officer. He was docking a town boat near the Harbor Master's Office when he noticed a 25-foot boat floating nearby. The operator asked for some gas or where he could get some gas.

The Harbor Master grew suspicious when he realized the boat engine was still running. He then called the EPO and asked him to return to his location. Just as the group was pulling their boat out of the water, the EPO arrived at the ramp. Upon inspection the officer opened the cooler and found what the Harbor Master called a boatload of illegal sized fish.

The fishermen were cited for fishing without a license and/or permits, as well as possession of undersized fish and exceeding the daily limit of fish. The five out of state fishermen were issued \$52,000 in civil fines. I'll let the chairman discuss the administrative penalties in the state of Massachusetts. Side notes on this, four of the five fishermen have paid their fines, and one has appealed the offense. Mr. Chair, that is my report, I'm available for any questions.

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CHAIR McKIERNAN: Thank you, Kurt, are there any questions for Kurt? John Clark.

MR. JOHN CLARK: Thank you for the report, Kurt, and my commendations to Massachusetts for having some pretty strict fines there. That should help. Kurt, I was just wondering, I heard that no fishing license came up in several of those, but particularly on the recreational one in the Hudson.

I know that is one thing we've been hearing more and more about is like younger people, Delaware has a general fishing license, so you should have a fishing license to do any type of recreational fishing that more and more people are thinking. Well, they are claiming they don't know about it, but otherwise they are fishing without licenses. Is this a widespread problem of recreational anglers fishing without licenses?

MR. BLANCHARD: I'm not hearing that it is. I know when the registry went through several years back, that many of the jurisdictions were very aggressive in their educational aspect of getting the word out on the new licenses and registration. I'm not seeing or hearing that that is any more prevalent than what we've seen in past years. Maybe just because of these couple cases I picked up on just happened to be no license cases.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Any other questions? Loren.

MR. LOREN W. LUSTIG: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Kurt for a fascinating report. I really appreciated the fact that the magnitude of the Massachusetts fine hopefully will hurt enough that such lawbreakers will discontinue their illegal operations. I was wondering though if the Massachusetts law could have provided for confiscation of the vessel as well.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: The basis for the high fines was statutory change we enacted about five years ago, where we added a \$10.00 violation

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per illegal fish. If you take, let's say black sea bass, if it's in excess of the limit well that is a violation of that reg and if it's a short fish that would be in violation of that reg. You would be paying \$20.00 per fish, and I think the fines just escalated, because there were so many fish.

As far as seizing a boat. I mean I'll let Kurt speak to that, but it's my understanding the courts typically don't like to seize assets that might be worth more than the fines. That is a whole legal, some legal principles that I'm not capable of really addressing. But I'll let Kurt speak to the potential for seizures of equipment.

MR. BLANCHARD: I have seen seizure of vessels and equipment, based on state statute in different jurisdictions. In this particular case there was no seizure of a vessel, but they did seize and libel the illegal fish, which was ultimately sold also. That actually came back to the state. The other piece of this prosecution was that Massachusetts has a law on the books.

The Mass representative to our committee was very favorable to this and highlighted this back to us was that they have an aiding and abetting statute. With the five fishermen onboard this vessel, they did not have to prove who contributed to what take. The fact was the evidence of the illegal act was there, so they were all charged under aiding and abetting, and therefore had to share in that penalty.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: I will recognize Eric Reid. I did want to mention one aspect about vessel seizures. Early in my career I know there was a lobsterman who had his vessel seized, and it seemed like a great idea at the time. But then the state had to take care of that boat, and the court case took a fairly long time to solve. I think many of the Police Officers or the agencies are less enthralled to do that, because they have to take care of it and be responsible for it while it's in storage. Kurt

MR. BLANCHARD: I can support that statement. When I was still an active officer I ran our warehouse, and annually had to inventory, make sure that the vessels that we seized were cared for,

winterized and things like that. Then also, what was ultimately turned over to the state, we would have to go through auctions and all those types of processes. It does get burdensome, and I'm not sure always what the bang for the buck is on the seizure. But al- in-all the penalty and the license sanctions really have strong merit, as far as deterring these offenses.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: I'm going to go to Eric Reid, okay, all right, any other questions? Seeing none; we'll move on to the Habitat Committee Report, Simen Kaalstad.

#### **ATLANTIC COASTAL FISH HABITAT PARTNERSHIP**

MR. SIMEN KAALSTAD: I'll start with the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership Steering Committee. I gave an update in August and I guess the only notable update between then and now is we have one more project in our portfolio, and that is the Chesapeake Bay Foundation received \$75,000.00 for continuing their oyster restoration efforts in the South River in Annapolis, Maryland.

This comes through the NOAA Fisheries Increasing Recreational Fisheries Engagement through the Fish Habitat Partnership Program. As I mentioned, that goal is to build on a previously ACFHP supported project to evaluate how to restore oyster reefs and enhance fish and forage habitat, compared to non-restored sites.

A big component is community engagement. Some of the activities include scientific monitoring of reef habitat and fish use, and angler led Citizen Science and data collection. There will be a series of educational workshops and community events for the local anglers to present some of their work and be involved with the restoration work.

Then a quick reminder of sort of what is in the pipeline. We have recommended five projects for funding through the National Fish Habitat

Partnership, and that totals to about \$437,000.00 in project funds. That would be in states including Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Delaware and Maryland.

In total those projects, if all executed, would conserve and restore 15 acres or 31 miles of fish habitat. As I mentioned, the Steering Committee did meet on Monday and Tuesday. We received some updates from a national level on activities. The 20th anniversary for the National Fish Habitat Partnership is around the corner, so lots of events and outreach activities coming next year. We had guest speakers, Leah Morgan from the partnership for the Delaware estuary presented on some of their restoration work, as well as Alison Rogerson from DNREC Division of Watershed Stewardship presented on the Indian River Beneficial Use Dredging Project they have been working on. Then on Tuesday a main bulk of the conversation in the morning was planning for a Seagrass Workshop in the fall of next year.

As I mentioned, sort of the big plans right now for the Science and Data Committee of the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership is to work on Eelgrass Seed Transfer Best Management Practices, developing a guidance document and forming a workshop. This will be focused on interstate and regional seed transfer practices for SAV, focusing mostly on *Zostera marina* or eelgrass.

We'll be compiling the latest science and best management practices to support seed-based research, restoration and management. The idea is that the document to come out of this workshop will serve as a resource for agencies and organizations considering policy or regulatory decisions.

It will not be a regulatory document as much as it is a compilation of recommendations for techniques. The Planning Committee that was formed out of this endeavor involves folks from VIMS, Stonybrook University, Northeastern University as well as UPA.

## HABITAT COMMITTEE

MR. KAALSTAD: Moving on to the Habitat Committee, we met yesterday afternoon.

Just a kind of quick recap of what we discussed. The Habitat Management Series on Atlantic States Shell Recycling. We were hoping to have that in front of the Policy Board this time around. There was still some work to be done, so we're putting the finishing touches on that.

But at the next Commission meeting we will be seeking approval on the final draft of the Atlantic States Shell Recycling Document, and that focuses on shell recycling best management practices, permitting guidelines et cetera, things to consider for beginning a new program or expanding on your current program.

We also reviewed ongoing and emerging Atlantic Fish Habitat issues. We had long discussions about the Fish Habitat's concern if there are any things in there that need to be updated. We had some discussion on outreach, as far as getting some habitat information out to various audience members. Conversation I guess I'll have with Tina regarding the Fisheries Focus, and maybe including a regular habitat update in those newsletters.

We had Jessica Coakley from the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council. She provided a presentation on their EFA Source Document, that is an IRA funded project. We also had Jay Odell from the Urban Coast Institute at Monmouth University, who joined in on the conversation and discussed Ocean Data Portals and Habitat Mapping.

We considered the need for some basic level Fish Habitats of Concern maps to be included in our Habitat Program. We'll be in touch with you guys, as far as high priority items, but that is the end of the slides, that's all I've got. I'm happy to take any questions.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Any questions from the Board?  
John Clark.

MR. CLARK: Thank you for the presentation, Simen. Just curious about the eelgrass. I saw that one of the projects was for the inland bays right behind us here. I know the efforts have been going on for, it's been decades, right, Roy, to restore eelgrass there. It has not been all that successful. Have the techniques improved? Are we getting to the point that some of these areas that are getting planted where it's really taking and proliferating well?

MR. KAALSTAD: Thank you for your question. There are some areas that have shown to be successful in some of the restoration techniques, mainly through seed dispersal. When we got a tour of the Louis SAV Shed Facility yesterday morning, you know the joke was about how scientific it is, which is just shaking the seagrass seeds and growing them back out. Depends on what corner of the Bay you're in, but there is some success.

This project that you're referencing that we've recommended for funding is more of a sort of monitoring and suitability project. Before putting things in the ground, they are really trying to hone in on where the most successful areas would be. It's a relatively inexpensive project, but we feel it's pretty important to really figure out where the best area is and use those areas as either a donor bed or as a reference for other areas.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Loren Lustig.

MR. LUSTIG: I'm very interested in the restoration report that we just heard about. A number of years ago I was a Lake Manager in Central Maryland, and there was an excellent program, it was called Grasses in Classes, and it was a cooperative venture with local junior highs or high schools for example.

There was the double benefit, not only with the grasses that the students produced beneficial for the lake that I was a manager at, but there was also the educational value for the students themselves, a hands-on sort of lake management. Is the

program that you were describing, is there any complement that relates to the local school system?

MR. KAALSTAD: Thanks for your question. In the inland bay's monitoring project that I was referencing, not as much. There was one project that we did not recommend for funding, that didn't mean that we were not interested in it, and that is in Cohasset Harbor in Massachusetts, which is a very similar endeavor as you mentioned.

There they are, it's a smaller area but the outreach and education component they are involving high school students, growing sea grasses in the classroom and going out and planting them in the ground. We're trying to sort of find an opportunity to support that project through other funding sources. But this specific Delaware Inland Bay's one is more of a scientific and habitat suitability project.

MR. LUSTIG: Thank you very much for your support for that particular school opportunity. I really appreciate what you're doing on that.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Joe Cimino.

MR. JOE CIMINO: Thank you, Simen, for that. Not quite to your question, Loren, but our New Jersey Shell Recycling Program has a school component to it as well.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Is there anyone else with questions on this topic? I think Toni would like to weigh in.

MS. KERNS: Just a reminder to the Policy Board that if there are endeavors or actions that the Board is interested in Habitat Committee pursuing, to please reach out to Simen or myself. The Committee is always interested in finding out what the Board is looking for from the Habitat Committee's work.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: All right, we'll move on, oh, John Clark.

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MR. CLARK: This isn't about the Habitat Committee. I just noticed there is no update from the CESS this time, and I don't think I've ever heard more discussion of socioeconomics than we heard in both the Menhaden Board meeting and the Striped Bass Board meeting, and I'm just wondering how we as a Board move ahead with maybe coming up with some tasks to look at that, because as I said it was just mentioned time after time after time in both meetings.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Toni, care to address that?

MS. KERNS: The CESS works at the Policy Board's endeavors, so whatever the Policy Board would like to task the CESS with we can do so. Jainita and I have been chatting a lot about how the CESS can be more engaged when we're doing management documents. As this Board knows, what we put into management documents is dependent on the data that are available, which is often a hindrance of what we can do, as well as sometimes timeframes in which the Board is looking to move a management document.

The volunteers that work for us on the CESS Committees, there are very few states that actually have economists that work for them, so a lot of our CESS members are volunteers. Sometimes the timeframes do not fit in with the lack of data that are available, and the time that it would take to do some digging for that information. But that said, if we want to task the CESS with some items, we can do that and come back and talk that over with the Board.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Go ahead, John.

MR. CLARK: One of the questions that comes up right away. As we saw at the Menhaden Board meeting, the reduction fishery Omega brought a busload of their employees up here and brought up the point that you know these reductions could put a lot of people out of work. That would seem like a logical place for us to ask for an analysis.

How does a 20% reduction in the TAC affect this business? I think I heard some comments at the

meeting that they didn't know how many people they would have to lay off because of that. Now that is just one aspect of it, and I know from our crabbers this year that the price of menhaden has gotten to the point that they reported days that between the reduction and the amount of crabs out there, and the cost of fuel, the cost of bait that there were days that they were really not making anything.

I just think we need to look at that with menhaden. Of course, with striped bass, we're going to have to balance reductions, when we discuss like reducing the catch to change the regulations, how does that impact the fisheries that depend on striped bass? I mean obviously we had another crowd here again. It's kind of tough, because we're just hearing one side from people telling us this, but we don't have any analysis to tell us that well, maybe it will be bad, maybe it won't be bad.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: I've got Doug and then Patrick and Lynn. Go ahead, Doug.

MR. DOUG HAYMANS: I agree with John's comments, as one of the people who called up the need for some of the socioeconomic information during menhaden. I would throw it out, is it possible, and I realize CESS is a volunteer organization, but perhaps the Commission consider contracting some of that work out, and then have CESS review the results of the contract, if that is possible and there is lots of those put your palms out there.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Toni or Bob. We'll go to Toni first.

MS. KERNS: Let Bob speak to the funds to contract that work. I think one of the harder parts for us is, like I said having that source data to be available so that we can come to a Board meeting where we know an action is going to be taken to potentially reduce a fishery or to expand a fishery.

Without having that source data, like I am not aware of an overall economic, a study being done on striped bass for at least ten years. It's difficult for CESS to provide you all with something other than a general report on what is going to happen to that fishery, because we don't have real time, you know bait, data, fuel costs and all that in some sort of analysis for the coast.

But as I said, Jainita and I can work together to try to figure out how we can get CESS to potentially have some information that we can utilize in a quicker way, to bring to the Board when we're making these big decisions. I'll let Bob speak to the contract work.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ROBERT E. BEAL: Yes, the short answer is maybe. We do have a little bit of funding available right now, it is surprisingly left over from when folks couldn't travel during COVID. It's a long grant cycle that we have and that's a little bit of money left over there. We could look into doing some contract work for that.

That money will have to be used by June of next year, so we don't have a lot of time. But we could probably get something done. While I'm speaking, one of the difficult things for socioeconomic data or analysis is kind of the lack of just the fundamental data to plug into the analysis.

It's usually a two-part process for any of these things. You have to go collect the data, survey people, whatever it takes to get that data and then have someone analyze it. If there is some data around that we can use for menhaden and striped bass, you know getting the analysis done, I think is almost sometimes the easier part. The hard part is getting that data.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Bob, I would add the confidentiality issues are probably going to be quite severe, at least among the entities that were here, there is one company. I have Pat Campfield next.

MR. PATRICK A. CAMPFIELD: To John's question. In addition to what Toni summarized. CESS has been meeting annually, so if you have specific tasks you

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come to mind, please send them along through the staff. They will be having a call in a couple weeks, November 10.

If there is anything on the forebrain that you would like them to add to the agenda, again feel free to send that along. I think Toni sort of eluded to this, but we have the CESS member with expertise in menhaden fisheries engaged in evaluating some of those socioeconomic tradeoffs, you know management action.

CHIAR McKIERNAN: Next in my queue I have Lynn Fegley.

MS. LYNN FEGLEY: I wanted to just remind this Board that we did contract out a socioeconomic study on menhaden several years ago. It might have even been ten years. The idea was, and it was an academic out of North Carolina. The idea really was to try to understand the economic impact and drivers of the different sectors of the menhaden fishery, to help the Board inform allocation decisions.

It did not go really well, precisely because of the data issues and to be honest, particularly in Maryland, a lot of fishermen didn't even want to talk about it. They did not want to provide their information. I also wanted to point out that there is, if you get on the ACCSP website there is a list of data elements needed for socioeconomics.

It's everything from Captain's wages, labor cost, annual insurance cost, dockage. What might be helpful. I would say that this is really an issue for the states. You know how we can better get this sort of information from our people. What might be helpful from the CESS is to take this list that exists and help prioritize it for the states, because we're not going to get all of it.

It is very difficult information to get, but if there is sort of this list contains things like marital cohabitational status, you know. Would that be our priority, maybe not. It might just be helpful to hear a little bit from the CESS. As they are

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doing these analogies what is sort of the low hanging, it might not be low hanging, but what is the most helpful fruit out there.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Joe Cimino.

MR. CIMINO: I'm glad Lynn went first, because I was going to make reference to some of that as well. Basically, the same exact notion behind a task is, amongst that what are the priorities. I feel a little bit deflated, because one of the things I was hoping for was that there are notions that that group could help us understand that if the states are looking to volunteer.

Because you hear that there are folks willing to volunteer information. Lynn saying that that is not always the case is a little deflating, but to understand the priorities that if states have that ability to reach out there for that data, that is something that could help us in the future. Particularly, even on the voluntary level. I would say that I think that some of that stuff gets volunteered gets past part of an issue on confidentiality. You know the other notion is that the analysis, that data could still be kept confidential, even if it was voluntarily given to a group to analyze and what they presented was still confidential data.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Eric Reid.

MR. ERIC REID: This is an interesting conversation. I do agree that some of the data that is out there, you really have to look at it with, I don't know, blinders on or something, because it is not always accurate. You know when people come down to Dewey Beach, Delaware for a week, and they go fishing for two hours, they tend to say all the money they spent was on that fishing trip, which of course is not exactly true.

Some of the data is hard to find, but there is another set of data the Feds put out a status of the fishery every year, and there is some pretty good data in there. But the number that is probably the simplest, it's a down and dirty number, it's the value added per dollar of fish. You know a dollar's

worth of fluke is worth \$6.75 when you take it through the chain.

There is supposed to be, the Department of Commerce is supposed to have that number for probably all the fish we have. I've never seen it, but you've got to look for it. But you can find these different value-added numbers. It's just that you can do a little bit of arithmetic and figure out what a pound of menhaden is or a dollar's worth of menhaden is, if you have that multiplier. That's a pretty simple way to do it. It's not perfect but it's quick.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: John Clark and I can't see that far. Okay, Jeff Kaelin.

MR. CLARK: One of the things I've been thinking is actually, I think simpler. As Lynn was saying, when we get the real economic studies, they tend to really get into the weeds about, I was thinking more just take menhaden for example and the price of crab bait or the price of lobster bait, for example.

How does our management action affect things like that, which then has ripple effects through these other fisheries? I mean just using that as one example. With striped bass we've been reducing for ten years, as we know the stock is sort of limping along. It's not really recovering. How do we weigh the economic cost of all the reductions, when the response of the stock is not what was expected, you know those types of things?

You know I think what I'm looking at are things that are not quite as detailed, but just, you know for example, if the TAC is reduced in menhaden, if it was reduced by 50% like was one of the options. How would that have affected both the reduction, the bait fishery and then all the fisheries that depend on the bait fishery, that type of thing?

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Jeff Kaelin.

MR. JEFF KAELIN: Just considering New Jersey. You know it's about a 50-million-pound fishery. We lost 10 million pounds with a 20% cut. At 20 cents a pound that is about a 2-million-dollar loss. to a handful of boats, it's a limited access program. I'm not sure, it's confidential, how many boats there are, but I think it's less than 30 or something like that permits. It's a lot of money. That doesn't consider the value-added aspects of putting that in the freezer and then selling it to their markets, whether it's those little things that look like lobsters that they produce in Louisiana, crawfish, right.

We sell down there. Stone crab, you name it, we sent menhaden to Turkey last year to feed bluefin tuna. Atlantic menhaden was one of our most valuable fisheries last year at Lunds, and we just lost millions of dollars of money the other day. Personally, I did think, even though I wasn't able to really vote or anything. I think the 20% adjustment was probably reasonable, given the signals that we had from the BAM model in particular.

But at least 2 million dollars ex-vessel losses I would estimate in round numbers a 20-cent fish, and it may be more than that now, and it will be more than that. From our perspective we look at it, okay we got a little bit of a haircut, but yes, the price will go up, absolutely it will. There are a lot of markets, a lot of competition. I really appreciate you bringing this issue up, Mr. Clark, because it does need a focus here. That's just a back of the envelop estimate that I did a minute ago.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: To Bob and Toni, since this issue is not on our agenda and we've had some very interesting conversations. How do I land this plane?

MS. KERNS: I think what I've heard is for that CESS call that is coming up we are going to look at the ACCSP list and prioritize that list for what states could be collecting for data. Then we will also look to see if we can do some contractor work that might assist in CESS in sort of providing some basic socioeconomic information as the Commission takes actions into the future. Am I missing anything else? Then if we obviously hear from anybody, we'll add that to the CESS agenda.

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CHAIR McKIERNAN: Toni, you are inviting members to reach out.

MS. KERNS: I think yes, we definitely are happy to hear from you all. You can either send that to Pat, me or Jainita and we will get that on as a reminder, the call is November 10.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: I'm going to move on to the next agenda item if there are no objections.

### **CONSIDER FISHING YEAR 2026 COASTAL SHARKS SPECIFICATIONS**

CHAIR McKIERNAN: It would be Consider the Fishing Year 2026 Coastal Sharks Specifications, and that is from Caitlin Starks.

MS. CAITLIN STARKS: There was a memo in your materials with the proposed coastal shark's specifications for the 2026 fishing year, which are based on the default federal regulations for Atlantic coastal shark fisheries. As a reminder, effective January 1st, 2024, NOAA Fisheries changed the federal regulations for Atlantic shark fisheries to automatically open the commercial fishing year on January 1st of each year under the base quotas and default retention limits.

The Final Rule established a default commercial retention limit of 55 large coastal sharks other than sandbar sharks per vessel per trip, and a commercial possession limit of eight blacknose sharks per vessel per trip at the start of the season. NOAA may make in-season adjustments to the commercial possession limits, depending on the catch rates. These are the NOAA fisheries base quotas and retention limits for the Atlantic Region. The Coastal Sharks Board does not set quotas actively for species in the non-blacknose small coastal sharks, blacknose aggregated large coastal sharks, hammerhead or pelagic species groups. But under the FMP the Commission will close the fishery for any species in these groups when it closes the fishery in federal waters.

We do set quotas for the states for smooth dogfish, which I'll get to in a bit. These are the NOAA Fisheries base quotas for the species groups with no regional quotas. All of these are status quo from last year. These would be the state shares of the 2026 Atlantic smooth dogfish coastwide quota of 3,973, 902 pounds based on Addendum II to the Coastal Sharks FMP.

To wrap this up, the Board's action for consideration today is to set coastal shark specifications for the 2026 fishing year, based on the default season start date and retention limits established by NOAA Fisheries. I can take any questions.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Any questions for Caitlin? I don't see any questions, are you seeking a motion? Erika.

MS. ERIKA BURGESS: On behalf of the, as Chair of the Coastal Sharks Board, I would like to **make a motion on behalf of the Board, and that is Move to adopt the 2022226 coastal shark specifications matching the default season start date and retention limits as specified by the National Marine Fisheries Service final rule published on November 8, 2023 (88 Federal Register 77039).**

**The fishing season will open on January 1, 2026 with a commercial possession limit of 55 large coastal sharks other than sandbar sharks per vessel per trip (as in aggregated large coastal sharks and hammerhead shark management groups) and 8 blacknose sharks per vessel trip. The commercial possession limit is subject to change; states will follow NMFS for in-season changes to the commercial possession limit.**

CHAIR McKIERNAN: I had a second, Doug Haymans. Any discussion on the motion? Toni.

MS. KERNS: Erika, I think that you would just make that motion, not make it on behalf of the Board, since the Board technically hasn't met to discuss it.

MS. BURGESS: Then I am making it on behalf of Erika Burgess.

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CHAIR McKIERNAN: John Clark, you're endorsing that change. Well, I have a second from Doug Haymans, but are we good with that amended motion? All right, any discussion on the motion? I see no hands. **Is there any objection to the motion? Again, I see no hands. Are there any abstentions or nulls? There is an abstention from New Hampshire. It passes unanimously with one abstention.**

#### **UPDATE ON NORTH CAROLINA'S PAMLICO SOUND TRAWL SURVEY**

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Next on the agenda is the Update on North Carolina's Pamlico Sound Trawl Survey. Chris Batsavage.

MR. CHRIS BATSAVAGE: A lot of you may know this information already, but just to make sure everyone is aware. I'll formally do this here today. This spring we were informed that the RV Carolina Coast, the vessel used to conduct the Pamlico Sound Trawl Survey is no longer structurally sound. The Survey is conducted each June and September in Pamlico Sound and its tributaries. Another similar vessel was unavailable, so the survey wasn't conducted this year, and it's uncertain if or when it will resume. Staff are exploring options for resuming the survey under current budget limitations.

If the survey resumes in the future, then it is likely that it will be a new time series, due to the lack of vessel calibration with the Carolina coast. Data from this survey are used in the summer flounder and weakfish stock assessments and the spot and croaker traffic light analyses as well as the ongoing assessments for those two fish.

This survey began back in 1987, so this is a major loss for the assessment and management of several species, not only managed by ASMFC, but also by the state of North Carolina. Just in closing, I'm sorry and very disappointed to share this news with you. Please let me know if you have any questions or would like to find out

more about this. I can get you in touch with staff who deal more directly with this survey than I do.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Are there any questions for Chris on this issue? John Clark.

MR. CLARK: Thanks, Chris, sorry to hear that. I know you brought it up earlier. What size trawl was this, and is it a highly specialized boat you need, or could this be something that you could have a boat in your current fleet that might be able to do it?

MR. BATSAVAGE: This is a pretty good-sized vessel. I forget the length, it's probably in the 40 foot "Ish" range, it's basically a shrimp boat towing two trawls. We don't have any other boats of that class available to us, not only in our possession but in the state. Just the budget limitations too are our major concern, and on top of we probably need to calibrate this somehow, even if there was a vessel available. We have several steps we've got to take in order to try to find a solution for this problem.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Any other questions for Chris? Jason.

DR. JASON McNAMEE: Thanks, Chris, I'm sorry to hear that as well. You offered a couple of assessments that use that data stream. In the same area, is there another fishery independent data stream that also occurs in it? I know this is a trawl survey. I have a vague memory that there is like maybe a gillnet survey that kind of occurs in that area? Is there some opportunity to like swap in a different survey, at least as an alternative so we don't lose a signal coming out of that area?

MR. BATSAVAGE: Yes, Jay, you're correct. We do have a gillnet survey in that area. It fishes in shallower water, a different selectivity for that gear, compared to what the Pamlico Sound Trawl Survey captured. We also have another trawl survey that occurs in our nursery areas, it's a much smaller trawl, and again, different habitat than the main part of Pamlico Sound and its tributaries. The challenge there is just trying to find something comparable to basically make up for what we've lost from this survey. I think the other existing

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surveys we have are kind of working in different habitats and collecting either different species or very different selectivities of those species, compared to the trawl survey.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: All right, thank you.

#### **UPDATE ON ONGOING STOCK ASSESSMENTS**

CHAIR McKIERNAN: We'll move on to Update on On-Going Stock Assessments.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Emilie Franke.

#### **ATLANTIC MIGRATORY GROUP COBIA**

MS. EMILIE FRANKE: Thank you, Chair. I will be giving a brief update on the Cobia Stock Assessment and what is going on there. You may recall that a stock assessment for the Atlantic migratory group cobia was started last year in 2024 through SEDAR. However, a couple months in the lead assessment analyst from NOAA Fisheries moved to a different position, so the assessment was paused.

It's been paused for a little over a year. We did just learn that Dr. Amy Shcueller will now be taking over as the Lead Assessment Analyst starting in 2026. We'll be sort of restarting the assessment in the coming months. We will be transitioning the assessment from the SEDAR process to the Commission process.

The Commission will be forming a Stock Assessment Subcommittee, taking the terms of reference from SEDAR, putting them into the Commission format, and the Commission will be coordinating a data workshop, assessment workshop et cetera, and then if a peer review is needed, SEDAR will coordinate that peer review. It will be a similar format to the ERP and red drum assessments.

With Dr. Schuler coming on in 2026, the new anticipated completion date for the assessment is somewhere in 2027. That depends on a couple things. The first is the terminal year of the assessment. If the terminal year is 2024

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and we're using the current MRIP estimates, the assessment could be done a little bit earlier in 2027.

If the assessment uses 2025 as the terminal year, and we're able to incorporate the revised MRIP estimates that are supposed to be coming out next spring. That will likely push the assessment a little bit later into 2027. However, given the duration of the government shutdown so far, if the MRIP estimates are delayed next year that may push the timeline even further.

A little bit TBD on the timeline, depending on the MRIP data and also depending on Dr. Schuler's availability to extend further into 2027. Also, as you may recall, Cobia is a little bit data limited. We may have to develop a new Index of Abundance. There are a lot of unknowns right now, in terms of how long this will actually take. But it is great to have Dr. Schuler onboard starting next year.

In the immediate term I'll be reaching out to the Pelagics Board to nominate Stock Assessment Subcommittee members. I believe at the next Pelagics Board meeting in the winter the Board will review the terms of reference and we'll get this assessment going again. I'm happy to take any questions.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Any questions for Emilie? Jason.

DR. McNAMEE: Thanks, Emilie, and that's Amy is great, that's fantastic news. That is good. Just, can you remind me. This is a benchmark, so there is an opportunity, as you said, to kind of bring in. I think the existing model is in BAM, which I think is why Amy is like a logical person to jump in there. But you also noted some of the limitations. That's my question is, there is an opportunity here to like look at other methods for this beside just the existing model. It's not just an update.

MS. FRANKE: Correct. Right now, it's living a little bit in between an update and a benchmark, because we're just not sure whether the existing model will be able to be continued, because of the lack of some of the data that was used before with

the Southeast Headboat Survey Index, which is I believe no longer able to be used.

It just depends on a little bit of the decisions around if the BAM can still be used. But we're basically allocating the resources from the Commission side since we would have all the workshops that would be in a typical benchmark. Then I think just one factor we have to sort of follow up on, once Dr. Schuler is available again is just the extent of her timeline in 2027 and how that may impact things.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Joe, do you have your hand up?

MR. CIMINO: Yes, thank you, and thanks, Emilie. I share Jay's comments. It's great to have Any's participation. We do need management advice; it's something I mentioned at the Sciaenids Board that this is a species that we're a long way from a terminal year. We've walked away from projections, because we're so far away from the last peer reviewed assessment that it's inappropriate.

But it's just, I don't see this as a species that it makes any sense to get ahead of recalibrated MRIP for a benchmark. As much as I support some information for the management board to work on, I don't see a value in doing a benchmark without recalibrated MRIP.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: I have Ben Dyar in the back and then John Maniscalco.

MR. BEN DYAR: I would like to second that, which I said. I strongly support and encourage utilizing that new calibrated information. I know and understand that some things, as far as the shutdown and the timeline of those doing assessments are out of our hands. But what we can control potentially is making sure that it's implemented with that included.

I think if it makes sense for us to try to make management decisions based on something that potentially by the time it comes out to

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review, peer review, may not be the best available information, and therefore have to maybe pause more staff time to then turn around and maybe to do another assessment right on the heels with an already busy schedule.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: John Maniscalco online.

MR. JOHN MANISCALCO: I am just voicing my support for Joe Cimino's sentiments regarding recalibrated MRIP data.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: All right, any other discussion on this topic? Seeing none.

## ATLANTIC STURGEON

CHAIR McKIERNAN: We'll go to the Sturgeon Update from Dr. Katie Drew.

DR. KATIE DREW: Yes, the Sturgeon Technical Committee has met earlier this year to begin the planning process for our next benchmark stock assessment. We are planning to have this assessment peer reviewed at the end of 2028 through the ASMFC External Peer Review Process.

After this meeting we'll be sending out an e-mail to our administrative commissioners to solicit nominations for the Stock Assessment Subcommittee, and we will likely have that SAS approved over e-mail. Then we'll begin work on developing the terms of reference shortly thereafter, so thank you, happy to take any questions.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Any questions for Katie? I see no hands. Thank you, Katie.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Next on the agenda is any noncompliance findings, I assume there are none.

## OTHER BUSINESS

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Other Business, I would like to take this moment to thank you all on behalf of Doug Haymans for the opportunity to serve as Chair and Vice-Chair. Thank you very much. I did see a hand go up. Go ahead, John.

MR. CLARK: On behalf of the Delaware delegation, I would just like to say it's been an absolute pleasure having ASMFC meet here in the fabulous first state. Don't mean to throw him under the bus, but Rich and I put Roy in charge of the weather. He promised us sunny days, so if you've got a problem with this rain take it up with Roy.

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Thank you.

**ADJOURNMENT**

CHAIR McKIERNAN: Motion to adjourn. Doug Grout seconded by John Clark. Thank you everyone, great meeting. Thank you to staff and have a safe trip home.

(Whereupon the meeting adjourned at 1:15p.m.  
on Thursday, October 30, 2025)