



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

ASMFC 2026 Winter Meeting

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

ASMFC 2026 Winter Meeting
February 3-5, 2026

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Meeting Summaries, Press Releases and Motions

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AMERICAN LOBSTER MANAGEMENT BOARD (FEBRUARY 3, 2026)

Meeting Summary

The American Lobster Board met to review annual data updates for Jonah crab and American lobster indices; a report from the Technical Committee (TC) on Board tasks; a report from the Advisory Panel (AP); an update from NOAA Fisheries on the Request for Information related to the Joint New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Alternative Gear Marking Framework; and updates from Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts on engagement with the Gulf of Maine lobster industry. The Board also approved a new Advisory Panel (AP) member.

The Jonah Crab TC provided the annual data update of indicators for the Offshore Southern New England (OSNE) stock with data through 2024, as recommended following the 2023 stock assessment. Indicators include the number and proportion of trips landing Jonah crab, the number and proportion of lobster/crab permits landing Jonah crab, landings, catch per trip, price per pound, and fishery-independent abundance indicators from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center bottom trawl survey. Additionally, fishery-dependent catch rate data from the Commercial Fishery Research Foundation's (CFRF) Research Fleet ventless trap sampling were revisited during this second update. The results of the data update indicate stock conditions are consistent with the findings of the stock assessment where abundance was not depleted to historic lows and fishery performance indicators, such as catch per unit effort, were poor. These conditions suggest unfavorable market factors continue to be dominant factors influencing effort to target and land Jonah crabs. The TC recommended additional efforts to aid in interpreting the data update, including 1) comparing offshore wind farm survey data to available indicators, and 2) identifying a process to track buyer-imposed Jonah crab trip limits that might provide context for changes in fishing effort or landings.

The American Lobster TC presented the annual data update with data through 2024, following the recommendation from the 2020 stock assessment to more closely monitor changes in stock abundance and at the Board's request following its review of the 2025 stock assessment. Data sets updated during this process indicate exploitable lobster stock abundance conditions expected in subsequent years, including young-of-year (YOY) indicators, recruit abundance, survey encounter rate, and ventless trap survey (VTS) sex-specific abundance indices. This data update also includes a combined index for tracking recruit abundance in the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank (GOM/GBK) stock, which averages relative recruit abundance across three survey indices. Overall, GOM indicators show marginal changes since the stock assessment and GBK indicators are unchanged since the stock assessment, with some improvements in YOY and ventless trap indices, and minor deterioration in trawl survey encounter rates. The GOM/GBK combined recruit indicates that recruit abundance has declined by 44% since peak levels in 2017. Southern New England (SNE) indicators show continued unfavorable conditions since the stock assessment, with most updated indicators at or near time series lows.

The Board discussed additional data that could be updated annually to monitor environmental changes and suggested collaborating with NOAA Fisheries to identify information available in the State of the Ecosystem Report that may be relevant to the lobster stock. The Board also tasked the TC and Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) with developing possible biological reference points for the GOM/GBK stock that account for changing environmental conditions and productivity by the

2027 annual meeting. This work is intended to precede the next stock assessment and allow for reference points to be fully evaluated through the peer review process.

In response to recommendations in the 2025 stock assessment, the Board tasked the TC with reviewing the process for conducting a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for the GOM/GBK stock. As a critical first step, the TC recommends initiating a formal process to identify management goals and objectives for the future of the GOM/GBK lobster fisheries, including a series of meetings at local and regional scales led by a third-party facilitator. The TC recommends the Board form a Steering Committee through a nomination process, with representation from the Board, TC, Commission staff, the Commission's Committee on Economics and Social Sciences, industry stakeholders, and the Commission's Assessment and Science Committee or Management and Science Committee with past experience in MSE. The Board recognized the importance of aligning management with fishery objectives and supported pursuing the first step; the Board agreed to form a steering committee to further develop the scope of this process.

The American Lobster AP met to review the results of the 2025 Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report and provide input to the Management Board on the assessment findings and state of the fishery. Several advisors noted that they do not support further management restrictions in the SNE stock, despite the depleted stock status, because effort is at such low levels and other factors like predation and habitat loss are impacting the stock. Advisors speaking about GOM/GBK noted the importance of improving enforcement and considering regional differences within the stock area when considering changes to management measures.

As requested by the Board, Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts reported out on recent meetings with stakeholders to better understand concerns for the fishery and discuss possible directions for management for the GOM stock. The three states are continuing to meet with stakeholders to review the results of industry surveys and discuss issues affecting the fishery and will provide additional updates to the Board at the next meeting.

The Board received an update from NOAA Fisheries on actions related to the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils' Joint Alternative Gear Marking Framework Adjustment. Last year, the Councils postponed final action on the Framework until additional information on ropeless gear and visualization technology is available to better inform stakeholder input and Council decision-making. NOAA Fisheries intends to gather information through a Request for Information (RFI), however, the timeline for the RFI was delayed by the lapse of federal appropriations last fall. NOAA Fisheries expects to complete the RFI and comment period in time to report to the Board at its May meeting.

Finally, the Board approved a nomination to the AP for Joe Fiorentino, a recreational diver from Pennsylvania that will represent New Jersey on the AP. For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org.

Motions

Move to task the Technical Committee/Stock Assessment Subcommittee to develop and evaluate GOM/GBK candidate biological reference points that account for non-stationarity of environmental conditions/productivity. Report back to the Lobster Management Board in advance of the Fall/Annual 2027 meeting, and annually before the next stock assessment.

Motion made by Mr. Train and seconded by Dr. McNamee. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Move to form a Steering Committee (SC) to

- 1. Review existing management objectives, as outlined in Amendment #3 and subsequent addenda, relative to the current GOMGBK stock status, and social/economic conditions facing the fishery today.**

- 2. Develop a process that would clearly identify new management objectives (across all stakeholders), to better understand socioeconomic status and concerns, and to identify potential management tools**

Representation on the SC shall follow recommendations outlined in the January 20, 2026 Technical Committee memo. The SC will recommend a process for both tasks for the August 2026 Lobster Management Board.

Motion made by Mr. Wilson and seconded by Dr. McNamee. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Move to approve the nomination to the American Lobster Advisory Panel for Joe Fiorentino, a recreational diver from Pennsylvania, representing New Jersey.

Motion made by Mr. Cimino and seconded by Mr. Abbott. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

WINTER FLOUNDER MANAGEMENT BOARD (FEBRUARY 3, 2026)

Press Release

Winter Flounder Stock Assessment Updates Find GOM Stock Not Experiencing Overfishing & SNE/MA Stock Not Overfished or Experiencing Overfishing

Arlington, VA – The Commission’s Winter Flounder Management Board received the results of the 2025 Stock Assessment Updates for the Gulf of Maine (GOM) and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) winter flounder stocks and set specifications for the 2026-2028 fishing years.

For the GOM stock, it is unknown if the stock is overfished. However, the exploitation rate is estimated to be 19% of the overfishing exploitation threshold proxy, indicating the stock is not experiencing overfishing. The commercial fishery has experienced sharp declines in landings since the peak in 1982 at just over 6 million pounds. Landings declined steadily to approximately 770,000 pounds in 1999 and is estimated to be approximately 354,283 pounds in 2024. Recreational landings represented a significant portion of total harvest on the GOM stock during the 1980s, ranging between 2.5 and 10.5 million pounds. Recreational landings dropped below 440,000 pounds in 1992 and continued to drop to a time series low of approximately 49,824 pounds in 2024. This significant reduction in landings is largely attributable to low availability and/or low effort.

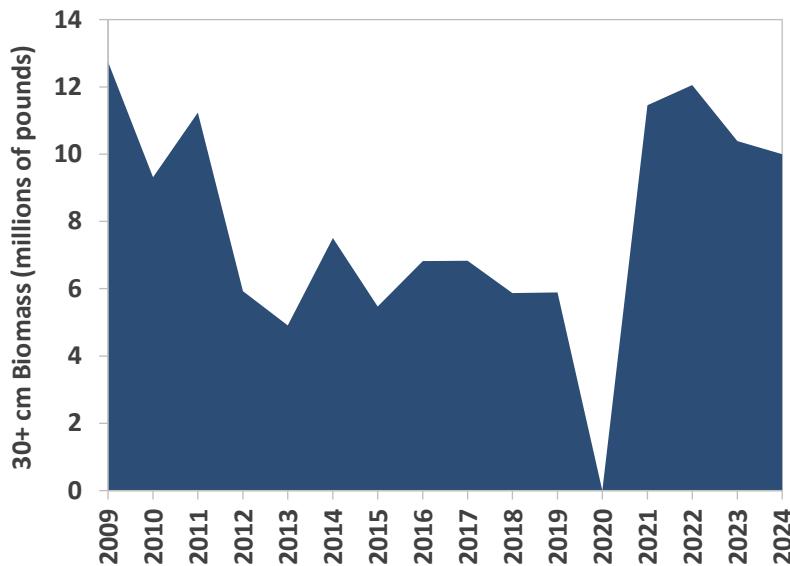
Survey indices for the GOM stock have shown little change in the composition of age classes over time. This is concerning given the declining level of annual landings and low exploitation rate in the GOM. Overall, these indices of abundance have not shown any positive response to the large declines in commercial and recreational removals since the 1980s. However, recent increases (2021-2024) in biomass, if continued, may be the beginning of a response to low fishing effort.

The SNE/MA stock is considered not overfished nor experiencing overfishing. Spawning stock biomass (SSB) is estimated at 6.14 million pounds, 89% of the SSB target of 6.86 million pounds. Total fishing mortality is estimated at 0.048, which is 21% of the overfishing threshold of 0.233. Natural mortality, defined as the removal of fish from the stock due to causes not associated with fishing, is a source of uncertainty in the stock assessment and may be contributing to declining abundance. Although the stock is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing, trends in survey indices and model estimates all continue to indicate the stock is in poor condition.

SNE/MA commercial landings have declined significantly from the record high of 22.6 million pounds in 1981 to an all-time low of approximately 76,941 pounds in 2023. In 2024, commercial landings are estimated at 167,772 pounds. In response to the poor condition of the stock, a moratorium in the SNE/MA fishery was implemented in federal waters between May 2009 and April 2013. Concurrently, a 50-pound commercial bycatch limit was implemented in state waters and still remains in place today.

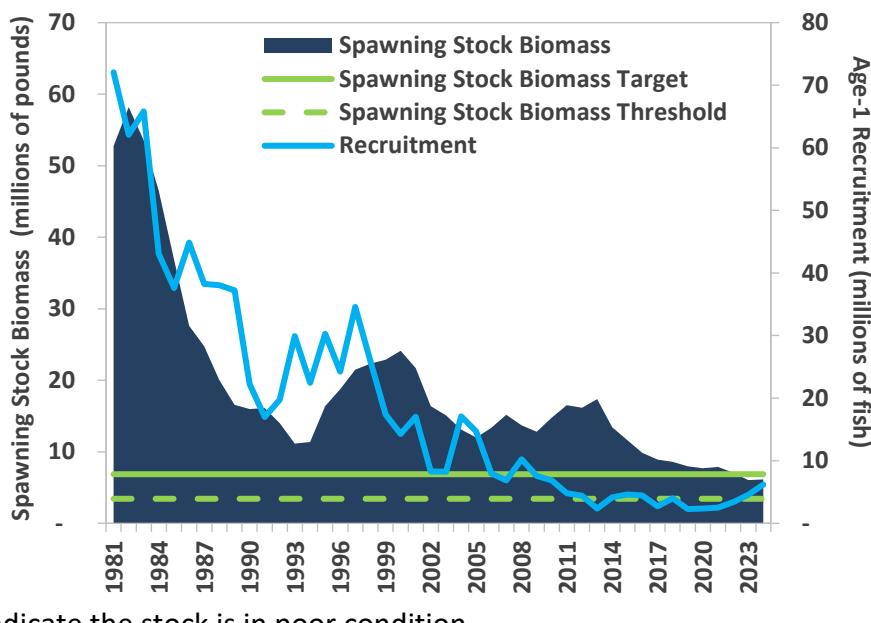
Gulf of Maine 30+ cm Biomass

Source: Northeast Fisheries Science Center Fall Survey, 2025



Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Spawning Stock Biomass

Source: Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 2025



The SNE/MA recreational fishery has also experienced significant declines over time due to decreases in abundance. Landings were around 12 million pounds in the early 1980s, increased to 18.5 million pounds in 1984, and then precipitously declined to between 2 and 4.5 million pounds from 1992 to 2001. Landings continued to decline over the next two decades, from a high of 1.4 million pounds in 2002 to a low of 1,102 pounds in 2019. In 2024, recreational landings were estimated at 4,409 pounds.

Considering the results of the assessment updates and [catch limits recommended by the New England Fishery Management Council](#), the Board maintained 2025 recreational and commercial measures for the GOM and SNE/MA winter flounder stocks for the 2026-2028 fishing years (see Table 1). However, the Board discussed the 2 fish recreational possession limit currently in place for the SNE/MA stock, including concerns the low possession limit was discouraging targeting of winter flounder by the recreational fishery. The Board tasked the Winter Flounder Technical Committee to examine the potential impacts of increasing the SNE/MA recreational possession limit and corresponding open seasons, and report its findings to the Board by the Commission's August 2026 meeting.

Table 1. 2026-2028 Winter Flounder Commercial and Recreational Measures for the Gulf of Maine and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Stocks

Stock	Sector	Trip Limit/ Possession Limit	Size Limit	Season	Gear
GOM	Commercial	500 lbs/ trip/day	12"	Maintain closures	Minimum 6.5" square or diamond mesh in cod-end
	Recreational	8 fish	12"	Open all year	
SNE/MA	Commercial	50 lbs/38 fish/trip/day	12"	Maintain closures	Minimum 6.5" square or diamond mesh in cod-end; 100-lb mesh trigger
	Recreational	2 fish	12"	Maintain closures	

Both assessment updates, as well as a more detailed overview of the updates, can be found on the Commission website at <https://asmfc.org/species/winter-flounder/> under News and Resources. For more information, please contact Tracey Bauer, Fishery Management Coordinator, at tbauer@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

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PR26-03

Meeting Summary

The Board also approved state compliance reports and the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Review for the 2024 fishing year. All states' regulations were found to be consistent with the FMP, and the Board approved *de minimis* status for New Jersey's commercial fishery.

The Board also approved the nomination of Nicole Lengyel Costa from Rhode Island for Vice Chair to the Winter Flounder Management Board. For more information, please contact Tracey Bauer, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at TBauer@asmfc.org.

Motions

Move to approve status quo commercial and recreational Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic and Gulf of Maine winter flounder measures for the 2026-2028 fishing years.

Motion made by Mr. Reid and seconded by Mr. Kane. Motion passes by unanimous consent.

Move to approve Winter Flounder FMP Review for the 2024 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* status for New Jersey's commercial fishery.

Motion made by Mr. Grout and seconded by Mr. Kane. Motion passes by unanimous consent.

Move to elect Nicole Lengyel Costa as Vice Chair of the Winter Flounder Management Board.

Motion made by Mr. Gates and seconded by Mr. McKiernan. Motion passes by unanimous consent.

SPINY DOGFISH MANAGEMENT BOARD (FEBRUARY 3, 2026)

Press Release

ASMFC Spiny Dogfish Board Sets Quota for 2026/2027 and 2027/2028 Fishing Seasons

Arlington, VA – The Commission's Spiny Dogfish Management Board approved a coastwide commercial quota for the 2026/2027 and 2027/2028 fishing seasons (May 1-April 30) of 9.2 million pounds (state-specific allocations are provided in table below), pending approval by NOAA Fisheries. The quota is consistent with the measures recommended to NOAA Fisheries by the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils (Councils). The Board also maintained the commercial trip limit in state waters of 7,500 pounds for the northern region states of Maine through Connecticut. The states of New York through North Carolina have the ability to set state-specific trip limits based on the needs of their fisheries. The Commission's actions are final and apply to state waters (0-3 miles from shore). The Councils forwarded their recommendations for federal waters (3 –200 miles from shore) to NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Administrator for final approval.

Spiny Dogfish State Allocations (in pounds) for the 2026/2027 and 2027/2028 Fishing Seasons

	Northern Region (ME-CT)	NY	NJ	DE	MD	VA	NC
Possession Limit	7,500	To be specified by the individual southern region states					
Allocation	58%	2.71%	7.64%	0.90%	5.92%	10.80%	14.04%
2025-2026	5,416,487	252,875	713,917	83,679	552,858	1,008,140	1,310,815
2026-2027 and 2027/2028	5,334,652	249,054	703,131	82,415	544,505	992,909	1,291,010

* Any overages in the above quota allocations will be deducted from that region's or state's quota allocation in the subsequent year. Similarly, any eligible rollovers from one season can be applied to that region's or state's quota allocation the following year.

The approved coastwide quotas represent a 1.5% reduction from the current fishing season's coastwide quota of 9.3 million pounds. The decreased quota is based on the Councils' maintaining the acceptable biological catch estimate from 2025/2026 but setting aside a slightly higher amount for discards. For more information, please contact James Boyle, FMP Coordinator, at jboyle@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

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PR26-03

Meeting Summary

In addition to setting the specifications for the 2026/2027 and 2027/2028 fishing years, the Spiny Dogfish Management Board met to discuss the Spiny Dogfish Accountability Measures Framework and consider complementary action.

In December 2025, the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils took final action on a framework adjustment to change accountability measures in the federal Spiny Dogfish FMP, pending review and approval by NOAA Fisheries. If approved, Annual Catch Limit (ACL) overages would be calculated using a 3-year average of total catch from all sources compared to a 3-year average of ACLs and payback amounts would be scaled to biomass level as follows:

- At or above target biomass: No payback would be required for ACL overages.
- At or below 75% of target biomass: 100% paybacks would be required from the next applicable year
- Between 75% and 100% of target biomass: The payback amount would be calculated on a sliding linear scale based on biomass level (e.g. a 50% payback would be required when the stock is at 87.5% of the target biomass)

The Board discussed the payback provision of the Interstate FMP, which requires a pound for pound payback from the region or state that incurred the overage in the subsequent fishing season, and how it may interact with the revised federal measures. Under certain circumstances, the Board raised concern about the possibility of a double payback, where an overage would be repaid under both the federal and Interstate FMPs. However, Staff noted the flexibility of the Board to set a coastwide quota separately from the federal quota and alleviate the issue. The Board chose not to initiate any complementary action at this time and will review the Framework once NOAA has completed its rulemaking process.

For more information, please contact James Boyle, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator at jboyle@asmfc.org.

Motions

Move to set the spiny dogfish quota for the 2026/2027 and 2027/2028 fishing years at 9,197,675 pounds, pending approval by NOAA Fisheries.

Motion made by Ms. Meserve and seconded by Mr. Reid. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Move to establish a 7,500 lb. trip limit for the 2027/2028 fishing year for the northern region.

Motion made by Ms. Zobel and seconded by Mr. Gates. Motion passes by unanimous consent.

Move to nominate Renee Zobel as Vice-Chair of the Spiny Dogfish Board.

Motion made by Mr. Clark and seconded by Mr. Kane. Motion passes by unanimous consent.

AMERICAN EEL MANAGEMENT BOARD (FEBRUARY 3, 2026)

Meeting Summary

The American Eel Management Board met to receive an update on recent discussions related to American eel in the Convention in International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and consider a report from the Technical Committee (TC) on several tasks assigned by the Board. The 20th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP20) convened last fall in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. At the CoP, the Parties rejected a proposal to include the genus *Anguilla* in Appendix II, but adopted a Resolution On Trade, Conservation And Management Of Anguillid Eel Species.

The TC Chair reported on work addressing two Board tasks. The first task was to review Addendum V criteria related to site selection for aquaculture harvest under a Board approved plan for glass eel aquaculture. Addendum V indicates that preferred aquaculture harvest locations should have (1) established or proposed glass eel monitoring, (2) be favorable to law enforcement, and (3) have watershed characteristics that are prone to relatively high mortality rates. The TC did not recommend changes to the Addendum language, noting the Addendum does not require sites to meet all three criteria. The TC also provided guidance on how the criteria should be used and considered in the development and evaluation of aquaculture proposals. In response to Florida's proposal to discontinue its young-of-year (YOY) survey due to persistent low catches and lack of funding, the second TC task was to evaluate the utility of continuing Florida's YOY survey and its contribution to the Commission's management and assessment. The TC discussed the survey to better understand its limitations and use in the assessment, and plans to gather input from the Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) before making a recommendation to the Board. Specifically, the TC intends to gather information to compare the utility of the Florida YOY survey to other surveys and assess the impacts of eliminating the survey from the assessment. Further, the TC will evaluate Florida's electrofishing and age data to determine whether they can be used in the future to assess recruitment, identify improvements that could be made to the surveys, and analyze the YOY time series to calculate the proportion of zero catches of American eels. The TC will report back to the Board at its next meeting.

For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org.

Motions

No motions made.

CAPTAIN DAVID H. HART AWARD (FEBRUARY 3, 2026)

Press Release

Patrick Keliher Named 2025 Captain David H. Hart Award Recipient

At its Winter Meeting in Arlington, Virginia, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) presented Patrick Keliher, former Commissioner with the Maine Department of Marine Resources (ME DMR), the Captain David H. Hart Award for 2025 for his longstanding contributions to and exceptional leadership towards the sustainable management of marine resources along the Eastern Seaboard.

Since becoming Commissioner with ME DMR and Administrative Commissioner to the ASMFC in 2012, Pat has worked tirelessly to support marine fisheries stakeholders, both in Maine and along the Atlantic coast. His unwavering work ethic extended well beyond the Commission table. He is a consummate professional – always prepared and expertly engaged in every setting with a straightforward, no-nonsense approach. This approach earned him the respect of all those who have worked with him.

From 2017 – 2023, Pat served in a leadership position with the Commission, helping address a wide range of issues. One of the most unique and challenging times during his tenure was guiding the Commission through the pandemic. This was a time that truly reflected Pat's steady leadership and deep commitment to the Commission. Throughout that period, he stayed closely connected with staff and fellow Commissioners, oversaw a seamless transition to virtual meetings, and consistently made decisions with the safety of Commissioners and staff in mind. Other notable accomplishments during this time include quick action by the states to end overfishing of Atlantic striped bass and implementation of ecological reference points to manage Atlantic menhaden.

On the home front, Pat has been credited with strengthening and sustaining Maine's commercial fisheries through effective management, responsible policy, and improved enforcement. His collaborative effort to secure a six-year pause on federal whale regulations and to provide millions in federal funds for marine mammal research has benefited both Maine's lobster industry and the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale. During his tenure, DMR implemented enhanced management and enforcement measures to protect Maine's valuable elver resource and fishery. His work to secure funding and establish strategic partnerships was instrumental in efforts to restore access to habitat for Maine's sea-run fish species. Pat also oversaw the administration of state



From Left: ASMFC Executive Director Bob Beal, Hart Award Recipient Pat Keliher, and ASMFC Chair and Vice Chair Dan McKiernan and Doug Haymans, respectively

funding that has protected many vital working waterfront properties, and federal funds that provided much needed direct relief to industry and investments in critical infrastructure.

"I can't think of a more deserving recipient of this honor," said Department of Marine Resources Commissioner Carl Wilson. "Throughout his career, Pat has demonstrated a dedication to science-based decisions, effective policy, and strong enforcement necessary to protect our valuable marine resources and industries."

"Pat's strong advocacy for Maine's marine resources and fisheries was exceeded only by his commitment to the people who make their living on the water," said Maine Governor Janet Mills. "Maine's coastal economy, environment, and communities are stronger because of his leadership, and this award reflects his many career accomplishments."

Prior to joining DMR, Pat served as Executive Director of the Atlantic Salmon Commission and Executive Director of the New England States of the Coastal Conservation Association, Greater New England.

The Commission instituted the Hart Award in 1991 to recognize individuals who have made outstanding efforts to improve Atlantic coast marine fisheries. The Hart Award is named for one of the Commission's longest serving members, who dedicated himself to the advancement and protection of marine fishery resources, Captain David H. Hart, from the State of New Jersey.

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PR26-02

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (FEBRUARY 4, 2026)

Meeting Summary

The Executive Committee met to discuss several issues including, a report from the Declared Interests and Voting Privileges Work Group; "notifying" actions on agendas; and updates on legislation, CARES and future annual meeting locations. The following action items resulted from the Committee's discussions:

- Staff reported the *Declared Interests and Voting Privileges* work group had met and made good progress on declared interest, but no formal progress on voting privileges yet. The work group is exploring the development of Best Management Practices (BMPs) on voting. The work group is discussing the pros and cons of establishing the BMPs as advisory or mandatory. The work group will report back to the Executive Committee in May.
- Staff reported on the issue of "notifying actions" on meeting agendas. The Committee agreed to add language at the beginning of board agendas to notify the public action may be taken on any items included on the agendas. The agendas will continue the current process of identifying "action" and "possible action" items.
- Staff presented an update on recent legislative activity, including the contents of the FY26 Commerce, Justice and Science Appropriations Bill. He also provided a brief update on a number of other fishery bills.
- The Commission received an extension through December 4, 2026 on the CARES cooperative agreement to continue to collect funds from those who received funds deemed ineligible.

- Lastly, staff provided an update on future Annual Meeting locations. In 2026, Rhode Island will host the annual meeting, November 8-12 at the Viking Hotel in Newport. In the following years the host states are: 2027 South Carolina; 2028 Massachusetts; 2029 Pennsylvania, 2030 Georgia and 2031 Connecticut.

For more information, please contact Laura Leach, Director of Finance & Administration, at lleach@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

Motions

No motions made.

COASTAL PELAGICS MANAGEMENT BOARD (FEBRUARY 4, 2026)

Meeting Summary

The Coastal Pelagics Management Board met to consider terms of reference for the 2027 Atlantic Cobia Stock Assessment; review next steps and timeline for Atlantic cobia management; consider Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Reviews for Atlantic cobia and Spanish mackerel; receive an update from the

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council on Spanish mackerel; consider nominations to the Spanish Mackerel Plan Review Team and South Atlantic Species Advisory Panel; and elect a Vice Chair.

Work on the next Atlantic Cobia Stock Assessment has begun with anticipated peer review in 2027. This stock assessment is re-starting after initial stock assessment work in 2024 through the SouthEast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) process was paused due to changing availability of the lead analyst. A new lead analyst from NOAA Fisheries was identified to begin work on the assessment in early 2026, and it was decided the Commission will lead the assessment process (Data, Methods, and Assessment Workshops) and SEDAR will coordinate a Peer Review Workshop (SEDAR 107). The Technical Committee (TC) and Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) developed draft terms of reference for the assessment and peer review for the Board's consideration. The Board approved the terms of reference as recommended by the TC-SAS.

The Board reviewed next steps and timeline for Atlantic cobia management. With the harvest quota specifications expiring at the end of 2026, the Board will consider setting specifications for at least 2027 and the option for up to five years. One timing consideration is the new stock assessment, which is anticipated to inform 2028 quota levels. When new specifications are set, there will be an evaluation of each region's recreational harvest against the regional targets to inform any changes to regional recreational measures, but with the measures having changed in 2025, the 2027 evaluation will only have one year of data. Additionally, there could be further changes considered for 2028 recreational measures if the assessment informs an updated quota in 2028. Further, the Board could update regional recreational allocations after the revised MRIP time series becomes available. Given these challenges and timing considerations, the Board tasked the TC with evaluating the impact of maintaining status quo recreational measures in 2027, in addition to conducting the typical evaluation against the recreational harvest targets.

The Board also received an overview of the confidence interval approach for recreational harvest evaluations, which is an FMP provision that can be implemented via Board vote at any time. The provision allows for a switch from the current rolling average approach using point estimates for recreational harvest evaluations to a confidence interval approach using the 95% confidence intervals around the point estimate instead. Board discussion was more focused on the above timing challenges of setting future specifications, the stock assessment, and revised MRIP than the confidence interval approach at this time.

The Board approved the Atlantic Cobia FMP Review for the 2024 fishing year, *de minimis* requests, and state compliance reports. The Board also approved the Spanish Mackerel FMP Review for the 2023-2024 fishing years, *de minimis* requests, and state compliance reports.

The Board received an update from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council on Spanish mackerel. The Council conducted a series of in-person and virtual port meetings for the king and Spanish mackerel fisheries from April 2024 through January 2025. In June 2025, the Council considered how to respond to recommendations made during port meetings as well as to the most recent Atlantic Spanish mackerel stock assessment (SEDAR 78). The Council decided to postpone any management action, including addressing catch level recommendations from the last stock assessment, until the

revised MRIP time series is available and the next stock assessment is complete. The next Spanish mackerel stock assessment through SEDAR is scheduled to begin in early 2027. The Board discussed the potential need to consider changes to the Interstate FMP to address longstanding differences between the Interstate and Federal FMPs and to address any recommendations from port meetings that may be more applicable to state waters. The Board discussed whether any potential action at the Board level should occur before the Council completes its next federal Spanish mackerel action. The Board agreed to revisit this discussion about potential action when the next Spanish mackerel assessment is complete.

The Board approved the nominations of Sara Pace from North Carolina and Chris McDonough from South Carolina to the Spanish Mackerel Plan Review Team. The Board approved the nomination of Robert Hale, a recreational angler from Georgia, to the South Atlantic Species Advisory Panel.

Finally, the Board elected Erika Burgess of Florida as the Vice Chair. For more information, please contact Emilie Franke, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at efranke@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

Motions

Move to approve the Terms of Reference for the 2027 Atlantic Cobia Stock Assessment and Peer Review.

Motion made by Mr. Haymans and seconded by Dr. McNamee. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Move to approve the Atlantic Cobia FMP Review for the 2024 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* requests from Rhode Island, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Georgia, and Florida.

Motion made by Mr. Clark and seconded by Mr. Grist. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Move to approve the Spanish Mackerel FMP Review for the 2023 and 2024 fishing years, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* requests from Rhode Island, New Jersey, Delaware, and Georgia.

Motion made by Mr. Miller and seconded by Mr. Haymans. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Move to approve Sara Pace of North Carolina and Chris McDonough of South Carolina to the Spanish Mackerel Plan Review Team.

Motion made by Mr. Grist and seconded by Mr. Dyer. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Move to approve Robert Hale of Georgia to the South Atlantic Species Advisory Panel.

Motion made by Mr. Haymans and seconded by Mr. Sikorski. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

Move to elect Erika Burgess as Vice Chair.

Motion made by Mr. Dyer and seconded by Mr. Sikorski. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

ATLANTIC MENHADEN MANAGEMENT BOARD (FEBRUARY 4, 2026)

Meeting Summary

The Atlantic Menhaden Management Board met to receive a progress update on the development of Draft Addendum II; an Advisory Panel (AP) report on the 2025 single-species and Ecological Reference Points (ERP) stock assessments; and a Technical Committee (TC) update on the Board task to review changing environmental conditions.

In October, the Board initiated Draft Addendum II to Amendment 3 to develop options to more evenly distribute harvest of the Chesapeake Bay Reduction Fishery Cap (Bay Cap) into quota periods as well as consider reductions in the Bay Cap up to 50%. The Plan Development Team (PDT) met four times in December and January and developed a memo outlining questions and considerations for the Board to review and provide guidance in further developing the draft addendum.

Regarding quota periods, the Board direction included the addition of the following issues/items in the Draft Addendum:

- Compare reduction effort with harvest data within quota periods
- Investigate pound net and reduction catch rates to determine if pound net landings are correlated with the timing of the reduction fishery
- Eliminate the limitation on individual quota periods containing no more than 1/3 of the total Bay Cap to allow for more flexibility in shifting harvest later in the year to protect menhaden's ingress into the Bay
- Options that divide the fishing season into even time periods to spread out concentrated harvest over more time

- Discuss declining pound net catch per unit effort and quota attainment in statement of the problem
- Data for pound net participation over time
- Consider how the combinations of rollover and overage payback options may lead to a concentration of harvest contrary to the intention of the addendum
- Options to apply overage paybacks in the final quota period to the subsequent fishing year
- Options to apply any quota period overages to the subsequent fishing year

For reducing the Bay Cap, the Board will have the ability to choose any value within the range of 0 to 50%, but for analysis and public consideration, the Plan Development Team is drafting options for status quo (0% reduction), and reductions of 10%, 20%, 30%, and 50%. The Board will review and consider approving the draft addendum for public comment at the 2026 Spring Meeting.

The Board received a report of the AP's review of the results of the 2025 single-species and ERP stock assessments. In addition to a comment requesting further consideration of a multispecies-statistical-catch-at-age model for the next ERP benchmark assessment, comments from the AP and members of the public focused on potential reallocation of state quotas to provide more opportunities for bait harvest in New England, particularly Maine. The AP will meet prior to the 2026 Annual Meeting to review state quota utilization over time and provide comments for the Board to consider reallocation at the Annual Meeting.

The TC provided an update on two tasks from the Board to evaluate the effects of changing environmental conditions on the Atlantic menhaden stock. The TC considered a range of options to proceed in responding to the Board task, including performing a literature review, a correlation analysis, and developing a spatial distribution model. Each of which represents significantly different workloads and timeframes. In its discussion, the TC considered the data limitations for more quantitative analyses, particularly the disconnect between targeted ages and sizes between osprey and the fishery, as well as the seasonal limitations of fishery-independent data. Additionally, it noted that having a management goal would provide more information on what level of analysis is necessary and a detailed analysis may be better incorporated into the assessment process. The TC will perform an initial literature review and present a report to the Board at the 2026 Spring Meeting.

The TC also provided an update on its review of the bait fishery biological sampling requirement. The TC discussed two paths forward: continue analyses of the requirement with NOAA sampling data or pause further analyses until there is an acceptable data set of state bait ages (as states are preparing to transition to processing samples). It was noted the most recent ageing exchange continued to show inconsistencies between different readers, and in the northern end of the range, where there are larger menhaden, there is a greater variance of ages within a certain size. Given the TC's concern about the applicability of the ageing results if analyses are performed prior to the change from NOAA to state data sets, it decided to pause further analyses until there is a more consistent data set from state processed samples. The TC recommended maintaining the current requirement size of 10-fish samples but will re-evaluate the sampling size requirement, including whether different sample sizes are necessary for different states to account for the greater variance in age and size, following its analysis of the data sets. For more information, please contact James Boyle, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator at jboyle@asmfc.org.

Motions

No motions made.

SUMMER FLOUNDER, SCUP AND BLACK SEA BASS MANAGEMENT BOARD (FEBRUARY 4, 2026)

Meeting Summary

The Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board (Board) met to approve the regional distribution of a 20% coastwide liberalization in black sea bass recreational harvest for 2026-2027.

In December 2025, the Board and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council jointly approved a 20% liberalization from status quo recreational harvest for black sea bass in 2026-2027. The Board noted that [Addendum XXXII to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan](#) provides guidance for when recreational liberalizations are available for black sea bass.

Addendum XXXII indicates the Board should consider distributing a liberalization among the three black sea bass management regions (Massachusetts through New York, New Jersey, and Delaware through North Carolina north of Cape Hatteras) in a manner that aims to reduce interregional and intraregional disparities in recreational management measures where possible.

In addition to the guidance in Addendum XXXII, the Board considered analyses by the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Technical Committee (TC). The analyses included black sea bass coastwide harvest trends, coastwide distribution, and discards and catch-per-trip by state and region. For example,

in general, black sea bass discard rates are higher in the northern region (Massachusetts through New York), due in part to higher minimum sizes (between 16-inches and 16.5 inches) compared to other states, where the minimum size ranges between 12.5-inches and 13-inches. The TC also advised the Board that the distribution of the liberalization could be accomplished several different ways, including (1) an equal 20% liberalization for each region; (2) assigning a region or regions a specific percent liberalization amount, and the remaining region(s) receiving the remaining liberalization; or (3) assigning a region or regions specific recreational management measures, and the remaining region(s) receive the remaining liberalization.

After much deliberation, the Board approved the following distribution of the 20% coastwide liberalization: the southern region (Delaware through North Carolina north of Cape Hatteras) will take a 16.5% liberalization, the northern region (Massachusetts through New York) will not exceed a 27% liberalization, and New Jersey will receive the remaining liberalization not utilized by the southern and northern regions.

Following the February Board meeting, states will work with the other states within their region and between regions to develop proposals with a suite of recreational black sea bass management measure options. The Board will meet again via webinar on March 5 from 1:00 – 2:30 p.m. to approve state proposals.

For more information, please contact Tracey Bauer, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at TBauer@asmfc.org.

Motions

Main Motion

Move to allow the Northern region to exceed a 20% liberalization by adding unused liberalizations from the NJ and Southern regions with the combined regional liberalizations not exceeding a coastwide 20% liberalization. The NJ and Southern regions shall not exceed 20% liberalizations and shall collaborate with the Northern region following the standards and guidelines set forth in Addendum XXXII, Section 3.2.1, paragraph 2 when developing proposed measures to be brought forth for Board approval in March.

Motion made by Mr. Nowalsky and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion substituted.

Motion to Substitute

Move to substitute to “approve a 30% liberalization for the Northern Region (MA-NY) with the remainder of the coastwide liberalization to be split proportionately between NJ and the Southern Region (DE-NC) as to allow equal liberalizations for both.”

Motion made by Mr. Maniscalco and seconded by Dr. McNamee. Motion passes (6 in favor, 5 opposed, 1 abstention).

Main Motion as Substituted

Move to approve a 30% liberalization for the Northern Region (MA-NY) with the remainder of the coastwide liberalization to be split proportionately between NJ and the Southern Region (DE-NC) as to allow equal liberalizations for both.

Motion to Substitute

Motion to substitute to distribute the 20% coastwide liberalization as follows:

- **Southern region 16.5%**
- **NJ as a region not to exceed 18%**
- **Northern region to receive the remaining liberalization from the NJ and Southern regions**

Motion made by Mr. Luisi and seconded by Mr. Miller. Motion passes (6 in favor, 5 opposed, 1 abstention).

Main Motion as Substituted

Move to approve to distribute the 20% coastwide liberalization as follows:

- **Southern region 16.5%**
- **NJ as a region not to exceed 18%**
- **Northern region to receive the remaining liberalization from the NJ and Southern regions**

Motion to Substitute

Motion to substitute to approve to distribute the 20% coastwide liberalization as follows:

Southern region 16.5%

- **Northern region not to exceed 27%**
- **NJ region to receive the remaining liberalization from the Northern and Southern regions**

Motion made by Mr. Hyatt and seconded by Ms. Meserve. Motion passes (10 in favor, 1 abstention, 1 null).

Main Motion as Substituted

Move to approve to distribute the 20% coastwide liberalization as follows:

- **Southern region 16.5%**
- **Northern region not to exceed 27%**
- **NJ region to receive the remaining liberalization from the Northern and Southern regions**

Motion to Amend

Motion to amend to replace “NJ region to receive the remaining liberalization from the Northern and Southern regions” with “NJ region not to exceed 18%”

Motion made by Mr. Nowalsky and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion fails (4 in favor, 7 opposed, 1 abstentions).

Main Motion as Substituted

Move to approve to distribute the 20% coastwide liberalization as follows:

- **Southern region 16.5%**
- **Northern region not to exceed 27%**
- **NJ region to receive the remaining liberalization from the Northern and Southern regions**

Motion passes (10 in favor, 1 abstention, 1 null).

ATLANTIC STRIPED BASS MANAGEMENT BOARD (FEBRUARY 5, 2026)

Meeting Summary

The Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board met to consider approval of Addendum III state implementation plans; provide guidance on the forthcoming Work Group on future striped bass management; receive an overview of the current biological reference points (BRPs) and request for Board guidance on BRPs and spatial management; and receive a report from NOAA Fisheries on considerations for aquaculture of Atlantic striped bass.

State implementation plans for Addendum III to Amendment 7 to the Interstate FMP were due on December 31, 2025. The plans outline each state's proposed implementation of the new total length definition which includes two elements: (1) squeezing the tail and (2) a straight-line measurement. States must implement the new definition by January 1, 2027. The Plan Review Team found all state implementation plans to be consistent with Addendum III total length measures. Maryland's implementation plan also notified the Board of the state's decision on its Chesapeake Bay striped bass recreational season. Maryland has chosen to move forward with implementing the new recreational season baseline and is working through its state process for implementation.

The Board provided initial guidance to the Work Group (WG) on future striped bass management, which was established by the Board in October 2025. The WG is intended to discuss management beyond 2029 considering the impact of recent low recruitment as those weak year-classes become the majority of the spawning stock biomass in the coming years. Staff requested Board guidance on the WG composition, task details, and timeline. Board members had several ideas on WG composition but acknowledged the challenge of keeping the WG at a manageable size while also having adequate representation from each sector and region. Some Board members suggested expanding the WG process to include sub-groups focused on different tasks and/or a larger process with specific avenues for gathering input (e.g., facilitated workshop). For the WG tasks, some Board

members noted a distinction between assessment-related tasks and other tasks which could be discussed sooner. Based on this initial Board guidance, staff will develop more specific options for WG composition, process, and timeline for the Board to consider and provide additional guidance in May 2026.

The Board received an overview of the current biological reference points and request from the Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) for Board guidance on developing options for alternative reference points and spatial management framework through the 2027 benchmark stock assessment. The primary guidance requested by the SAS is how the Board wants to balance preserving female spawning stock biomass and allowing fishing, and what the Board is looking for from a spatial management framework (i.e., region definitions? separate biological reference points by region?). The Board will meet to provide guidance in May 2026.

The Board received a report from NOAA Fisheries on considerations for aquaculture of Atlantic striped bass. This report follows an initial report from NOAA Fisheries in January 2024 to the ISFMP Policy Board. At that time, the ISFMP Policy Board raised several concerns and requested NOAA Fisheries provide further information including economic impacts to the wild caught commercial market, potential biological impacts on the wild population, spatial impacts to the fishing industry, and how enforcement would be addressed. In response, NOAA Fisheries developed a draft Technical Memorandum provided to the Board with more information on those issues. Initial Board discussion included concerns from some members about the negative socioeconomic impact to commercial harvesters of introducing farmed product to the market. Board members will review the draft Technical Memorandum over the next several months and may consider follow-up discussions with NOAA Fisheries at a future Board meeting.

For more information, please contact Emilie Franke, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at efranke@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

Motions

Move to approve Addendum III state implementation plans.

Motion made by Mr. Grist and seconded by Mr. Clark. Motion approved by unanimous consent.

INTERSTATE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM POLICY BOARD (FEBRUARY 5, 2026)

Meeting Summary

The ISFMP Policy Board met to receive an update from Executive Committee (see Executive Committee meeting summary); review results from the 2025 Commissioner Survey results; consider an update from the declared interest and voting privileges work group, receive an update from NOAA Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Division on recent coastal shark actions, and consider the Habitat Management Series report on Atlantic states shell recycling.

Commissioners completed a survey of Commission performance in 2025, which measures Commissioner's opinions regarding the progress and actions of the Commission in 2025. Participation declined to 23 respondents this year. Thirteen of 16 questions saw their average scores decrease this year. Cooperation with federal partners consistently scores as our lowest question. Utilization and availability of Commission resources consistently scores at the top of the

survey. Political involvement in our process became the top perceived impediment to rebuilding stocks. Other concerns listed include recreational data reliability and climate change. Commissioners believe the Commission should focus more on the incorporation of socioeconomics into our process, and constituent outreach and communication.

Earlier this week, the Executive Committee discussed and provided feedback to the work group that has been addressing Board declared interest and voting procedures and definitions. The work group has been considering proposed changes to guidance for a state declaring interest to serve on a species management Board and establishing a set of best management practices for voting on management boards, particularly when considering allocation issues. The work group will bring draft options to the Executive Committee at the Spring Meeting.

NOAA staff presented the proposed rule to revise the Atlantic blacknose shark commercial and recreational fisheries management measures, which impact commercial and recreational shark fishers in the Atlantic and dealers that buy or sell sharks and shark products in the Atlantic. For the commercial fishery, the rule proposes removing the Atlantic region blacknose shark management boundary, modifying the Atlantic region commercial retention limit for blacknose sharks, and removing commercial management group quota linkages. For the recreational shark fisheries, the rule proposes revising the Atlantic sharks recreational minimum size limits and retention limits. The states expressed an interest in the opportunity to harvest more sharks in state waters but requested NOAA allow for an extension in the comment period to allow for the Coastal Sharks Management Board to discuss the proposed rule prior to commenting. The Commission will send a letter requesting additional time to NOAA Fisheries. In addition, NOAA staff updated the Policy Board on the status of a proposed rule to prohibit retention of Mobulid rays, stock assessments for hammerhead and sandbar sharks, and outcomes from the CITES COP20 meeting impacting sharks species, including smoothhound sharks. CITES has listed smoothhound sharks under Appendix II, which will go into effect in May 2027. This could potentially impact industry harvesting and selling smoothhound sharks. US Fish and Wildlife Service staff will present information to the Commission at its Spring Meeting on the impacts to smoothhound fisheries and the permitting process for exporting.

The Board reviewed and then approved the most recent Habitat Management Series Report on shell recycling from the Commission's Habitat Committee. 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.

Under other business, the Chair noted concerns raised earlier this week by a member of the public about how the testing of on-demand gear is being conducted, specifically noting a safety issue and how payment for testing gear could introduce bias in overall results.

Motions

Move to approve the Habitat Management Series Report on Atlantic States Shell Recycling.
Motion made by Ms. Zobel and seconded by Mr. Grist. Motion approved by unanimous consent.