



# Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Atlantic Menhaden Management Board

**FROM:** Atlantic Menhaden Advisory Panel

**DATE:** January 21, 2026

**SUBJECT:** Advisory Panel Review of 2025 ERP Benchmark Assessment and Single-Species Assessment Update

The Atlantic Menhaden Advisory Panel (AP) met via conference call and webinar on Thursday, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2026 to review the results of the 2025 Ecological Reference Points (ERP) Benchmark Stock Assessment and the Atlantic Menhaden Single-Species Assessment Update.

**AP Members in attendance:** Meghan Lapp (Chair), Peter Himchak (VA), Patrick Paquette (MA), Scott Williams (NC)

**ASMFC Staff:** James Boyle, Katie Drew

**Other:** Aaron Williams, Alison Hawkes, Chris Andrews, Corrin Flora, David Stormer, Doug McLennan, Dustin Colson, Dustin Delano, James West, Jason Joyce, Jason York, Nick Heal, Shaun McLennan, Tess Browne

### AP Discussion

Peter Himchak recommended that for the next ERP Benchmark Assessment a multispecies statistical catch-at-age model is considered as an alternative to the current NWACS-MICE model. Additionally, he commented that the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) set for 2026 should be maintained for 2027 and 2028 when the Board next considers specifications at the 2026 Annual Meeting.

After noting that none of the surveys included in the assessments occur north of Rhode Island, Patrick Paquette commented on the varying consistency between the results of the assessments and his observations of the increasing availability in Massachusetts. Overall, he noted that the transition to an ecosystem model and its ability to adapt to new data is working appropriately, and the changes made in the new benchmark were correct. He also expressed a desire for the Board to consider reallocating more quota to New England states to match the availability and demand for local bait. He commented that the current allocations are not maximizing the yield and benefit to local economies.

Meghan Lapp requested that the AP review coastwide and state quota utilization over time at their next meeting to provide further comments on reallocation before the Board considers the topic at the 2026 Annual Meeting.

After the meeting, Jeff Deem submitted a comment in support of maintaining commercial harvest levels and rejecting further cuts to the TAC until more information on the impacts to the environment suggests changes are necessary.

#### Public Comments

In addition to the AP members, several members of the public were on the webinar and six provided comments. Commenters were generally in favor of preventing further cuts to the TAC and support considering reallocation to New England states, particularly Maine, to increase the supply and economic benefits of locally harvested bait. Commenters also noted concern with the absence of surveys north of Rhode Island in the assessments to accurately capture the overall size of the stock considering observations in Maine.