Atlantic States Marine Fisheries COMMISSION

Atlantic Menhaden Plan Development Team Update

February 4, 2026

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Background

- Oct 2025: Draft Addendum II to Amendment 3 initiated:
    1. Distribute the Chesapeake Bay Reduction Fishery Cap more evenly throughout the fishing season.
    2. Reduce the Bay Cap by up to 50%
- Time constraints due to government shutdown led to developing memo

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Quota Periods

Statement of the Problem:

- In 2023 and 2024, reduction fishery catch and effort have been well below the average until the end of June
- The shift in harvest later in the season has corresponded with significant declines in harvest of pound net bait fisheries in Maryland, Virginia, and the Potomac River, which typically peak during the summer months

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Management Approaches

- Divide Chesapeake Bay Cap into 3 to 5 periods
- No period exceeding 1/3 of the Bay Cap
- However, potential for increasing harvest later in the year to protect ingress into the Bay
  - May require some periods to be unequal in length or greater than 1/3 of the Bay Cap

Example Quota Periods

Table 1. Periods based on Average Harvest 2018-2024

		Number of Quota Periods						
Week of Year	Date 1st day of Week	Reduction Even 3	Reduction Even 4	Reduction Even 5	Reduction Cumulative	MD PN Ave Cumulative	PRFC PN AVE Cumulative	VA PN AVE Cumulative
19	5/7/2026	1	1	1	2.65%	25.33%	28.96%	27.64%
20	5/14/2026	1	1	1	5.45%	27.62%	31.47%	31.76%
21	5/21/2026	1	1	1	8.97%	29.89%	34.16%	35.31%
22	5/28/2026	1	1	1	13.48%	32.69%	36.82%	39.28%
23	6/4/2026	1	1	1	14.69%	36.53%	39.85%	42.78%
24	6/11/2026	1	1	1	19.60%	40.47%	43.03%	46.32%
25	6/18/2026	1	1	2	26.53%	44.17%	46.24%	49.29%
26	6/25/2026	1	2	2	30.29%	48.05%	49.15%	**51.30%**
27	7/2/2026	1	2	2	33.66%	**51.17%**	**51.32%**	52.85%
28	7/9/2026	2	2	2	37.52%	54.68%	53.22%	54.12%
29	7/16/2026	2	2	3	43.31%	57.77%	55.36%	55.44%
30	7/23/2026	2	2	3	48.80%	60.41%	58.01%	57.02%
31	7/30/2026	2	2	3	**52.49%**	63.19%	60.79%	59.73%
32	8/6/2026	2	3	3	56.98%	65.91%	63.20%	62.44%
33	8/13/2026	2	3	4	66.74%	68.93%	66.48%	65.40%
34	8/20/2026	3	3	4	**73.81%**	72.34%	69.28%	68.64%
35	8/27/2026	3	4	4	79.42%	**75.99%**	72.86%	71.27%
36	9/3/2026	3	4	5	84.12%	79.32%	**76.02%**	73.95%
37	9/10/2026	3	4	5	88.95%	83.03%	79.15%	**77.00%**
38	9/17/2026	3	4	5	93.14%	86.34%	81.52%	79.81%
39	9/24/2026	3	4	5	96.56%	89.15%	85.21%	82.00%
40	10/1/2026	3	4	5	97.22%	92.20%	88.05%	84.79%
41	10/8/2026	3	4	5	97.79%	95.01%	90.88%	86.61%
42	10/15/2026	3	4	5	98.17%	96.65%	93.39%	89.34%
43	10/22/2026	3	4	5	98.23%	97.47%	94.62%	92.20%
44	10/29/2026	3	4	5	98.77%	98.00%	95.86%	93.42%
45	11/5/2026	3	4	5	99.28%	98.69%	96.88%	94.71%
46	11/12/2026	3	4	5	99.88%	98.88%	97.54%	96.02%
47	11/19/2026	3	4	5	99.95%	98.97%	98.34%	96.81%

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Questions for the Board

1. Does the Board want to maintain a maximum of one-third of the Cap in each quota period?
2. Does the Board want to maintain equal season lengths or can unequal season lengths be considered?
3. Does the Board want to maintain a 5-period option?

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Overages/Rollovers

Rollover

1. No rollover: the remaining portion is unavailable for use later in the season
2. Proportional rollover: the remaining portion is divided proportionally across the remainder of the season and added to the remaining quota periods.
3. Delayed rollover: the remaining portion is added to the final quota period.

Overages

1. Pay back in full during the subsequent period (i.e., subtract the overage from the next quota period's suballocation)
2. Pay back distributed throughout the remaining periods (i.e., divide the overage and subtract from each remaining quota period's suballocation).

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Questions for the Board

1. If the Board maintains the limit of one-third of the Bay Cap per quota period, does the limit include rollover?
2. Are there options that the Board wants added or removed?

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Reducing the Chesapeake Bay Cap

- Statement of the Problem:
  - Bay Cap first implemented in 2006 as a precautionary measure
  - Cap updated in 2018 to 51,000 mt as an approximation of the average annual reduction landings in the Bay from 2012-2016.
  - Board initiated action to develop options to reduce the cap by up to 50% as a further precautionary action and reflect recent cuts to the TAC.

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Management Alternatives

- Option B. Reduce the Bay Cap by 10% (value may change) to 45,900 mt.
  - Provides a smaller option depending on action of quota periods and rollover
- Option C. Reduce the Bay Cap by 20% to 40,800 mt.
  - Matches reduction in 2026 TAC
- Option D. Reduce the Bay Cap by 30% to 35,700 mt.
  - Additional buffer compared to 2026 TAC reduction to account for the uncertainty in Chesapeake Bay abundance
- Option E. Reduce the Bay Cap by 50% to 25,500 mt.
  - This option provides the most conservative buffer requested by the Board

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Atlantic Menhaden Advisory Panel Report

February 3, 2026

Background

Advisory Panel Meeting January 8, 2026:

- 3 AP members in attendance, 1 additional AP member commenting via email after the meeting
- 14 members of the public in attendance
- Reviewed the results of the 2025 Ecological Reference Points (ERP) Benchmark Stock Assessment and the Atlantic Menhaden Single-Species Assessment Update

Advisory Panel Input

Advisory Panel Discussion:

- Two AP members advocated for maintaining the 2026 TAC for 2027-2028 and rejecting further cuts to the TAC
- One AP member 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
- One AP member noted that none of the surveys included in the assessment occur north of Rhode Island but observed increased availability of menhaden in Massachusetts, and advocated for reallocation of quota to New England States, citing bait needs, while supporting the ecosystem model
- No motions were made for lack of a quorum

Public Comment

Public Comment:

- Six public comments
- General support for preventing future cuts to the TAC
- General support for considering reallocation to New England states, particularly Maine, citing bait needs
- Concern that surveys used in the assessment do not occur north of Rhode Island, considering stock observations in Maine, and concerns regarding lack of coastwide and/or state quota utilization
- In response to quota utilization comments, one AP member commented that it would be helpful to have a time series of that data prior to discussion on potential reallocation

Questions?

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Atlantic Menhaden Technical Committee Tasking Update

February 4, 2026

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Background

1. Evaluate information available from NOAA's Ecosystem Dynamics and Assessment Branch and Chesapeake Bay Office, and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, to evaluate the possible effect of cold water on the Continental Shelf on menhaden migration and migratory patterns, particularly in relation to the timing of osprey arrival, nesting, and breeding.

2. Consider what role water temperature, dissolved oxygen levels, shoreline hardening, and other environmental factors play in the local abundance of menhaden and other forage species in the Chesapeake Bay.

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TC Discussion

Task	Timeline
Review existing literature on: • Cold water patterns in Bay and coast (e.g., ecosystem reports) • Timing of osprey arrival/nesting/breeding • Menhaden preferences for temperature, DO, other environmental factors • Other forage preferences	• TC call to review findings: mid-March • Update to Board at 2026 Spring Meeting

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Bait Sampling Task

- States want to know if current bait sampling requirements are appropriate

- Replicating the 2012 analysis results in recommended sample sizes higher than the 2012 results
  - Close to current sampling requirements for NE/MA region
  - Much higher than sampling requirements for Chesapeake Bay

- TC wanted to explore additional analysis, including an approach similar to the Nesslage et al. (2020) analysis with more recent data

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TC Discussion

- Currently in the process of transitioning bait ageing responsibilities from NOAA to the states

- Does this impact the analysis or timing of the analysis?

→ All available bait ages are from NOAA, so would sample size recommendations derived from NOAA ages be applicable to future samples that are aged by the states?

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Next Steps

- Maintain current sampling levels and pause additional analyses until we have an acceptable dataset of state bait ages
- TC noted that in the northern end of the range where there are larger menhaden, there is a greater variance of ages within a certain size and will consider different sample sizes by region when analyses resume

Questions?