Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Atlantic Menhaden Technical Committee
Meeting Summary

January 7, 2026

Technical Committee Members: Caitlin Craig (NY, Chair), Claire Pelletier (NC), Keilin Gamboa-Salazar (SC), Nichole Ares (RI), Jeff Brust (NJ), Matt Cieri (ME), Ingrid Braun-Ricks (PRFC), Micah Dean (MA), Kelli Mosca (CT), Catherine Wilhelm (VA), Chris Swanson (FL), Sydney Alhale (NMFS), Alexei Sharov (MD), Garry Glanden (DE)

ASMFC Staff: James Boyle and Katie Drew

The TC met via webinar on January 7, 2026 to review the tasks set by the Board at the 2025 Annual Meeting and receive an update on the task to review the FMP's biological sampling requirement for the bait fishery.

Review of Board Task on Changing Environmental Conditions

The Board provided two tasks to the Technical Committee to evaluate the effects of changing environmental conditions on the Atlantic menhaden stock:

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.

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 represented significantly different workloads and timeframes. In the 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, they noted that the intended management goal could provide more information on what level of analysis is necessary and that a detailed analysis may be better incorporated into the assessment process. The TC decided to perform an initial literature review with the goal to present a report to the Board at the 2026 Spring Meeting.

Update on Bait Sampling Task

The TC continued a discussion from the previous meeting evaluating whether the current biological sampling requirement for the bait fishery is sufficient. The TC discussed two paths forward: to continue analyses of the requirement with NOAA sampling data or to pause further analyses until there is an acceptable dataset of state bait ages as states are preparing to transition to processing samples. It was noted that the most recent ageing exchange continued to show inconsistencies between different readers, and there was concern with the applicability of the results if analyses are performed prior to the change from NOAA to state datasets. The TC decided to pause further analyses until there is a more consistent dataset from state processed samples and to maintain the current requirement size of 10-fish samples. They also 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. When analyses continue, the TC will review the sampling size requirement, including whether different sample sizes are necessary for different states to account for the greater variance in age and size.