

# Fisheries FOCUS



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## ASMFC and NOAA Seek Contractor to Facilitate the 2027 National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Summit: Proposals Due May 1, 2026

**T**he Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and NOAA Fisheries are issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the planning, facilitation, and execution of the 2027 National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Summit. The Summit will be held during the weeks of March 15-19 or March 22-25, 2027 in Alexandria, VA.

The Commission and NOAA Fisheries are committed to sustainable and collaborative management of fisheries resources and have jointly hosted four previous National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Summits, starting in 2010. Those Summits identified and described commonly held priorities of the saltwater recreational fishing community through guided and interactive discussions. In addition to strengthening dialogue and relationships, Summit findings and outputs subsequently helped to inform Commission and NOAA Fisheries actions and public engagement work.



Photo (c) Jason Stemple

Proposals must be submitted as an electronic proposal by email no later than 11:59 PM on May 1, 2026, to Alex DiJohnson. Please see the [RFP](#) for more details, qualifying requirements, and submission instructions.

**For more information**, please contact [Alex DiJohnson](#), ACCSP Deputy Director for Recreational Fisheries Data.

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Alexander Law** [Page 8](#)

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## Upcoming Meetings

April 28–29 (begins at 9 AM and ends at 1 PM)  
**Cobia Data Workshop #4, DoubleTree by Hilton New Bern Riverfront, 100 Middle St., New Bern, NC**

May 4–6  
**ASMFC 2026 Spring Meeting, Westin Crystal City, 1800 Richmond Highway, Arlington, VA**

May 11 (10 AM–Noon)  
**Atlantic Striped Bass Stock Assessment WHAM Work Group**

May 15 (10:30 AM–Noon)  
**Winter Flounder Technical Committee**

May 18 (10 AM–Noon)  
**Atlantic Striped Bass Tagging Subcommittee Check-In**

May 22 (1–3 PM)  
**Atlantic Striped Bass Tagging Subcommittee Check-In**

June 8–12  
**South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, World Golf Renaissance, 500 S. Legacy Trail, St. Augustine, FL**

June 9 (4–5:30 PM)  
**Bluefish Advisory Panel**

June 15 (10 AM–Noon)  
**Atlantic Striped Bass Tagging Subcommittee Check-In**

June 16–18  
**Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Sheraton Suites Old Town Alexandria, 801 North Saint Asaph Street Alexandria, VA**

June 22 (3–6 PM)  
**Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Advisory Panel**

June 23–25  
**New England Fishery Management Council, Hilton Hotel, Mystic, CT**

June 24 (10 AM–Noon)  
**Cobia Technical Committee**

June 24 (1–3 PM)  
**Atlantic Striped Bass Stock Assessment WHAM Work Group**

June 25 (1–3 PM)  
**Atlantic Striped Bass Stock Assessment Subcommittee Check-In**

July 13 (10 AM–Noon)  
**Atlantic Striped Bass Stock Assessment WHAM Work Group**

## Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as the deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous species.

The 15 member states of the Commission are: Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

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# Regional Assessments Show Varied Stock Status by Region

**K**nown for their distinctive teeth and delicious meat, tautog are a highly prized recreational species from Massachusetts through Virginia. A majority of total harvest is taken by recreational anglers, who catch these fish among hard structures such as rocky shorelines, piers, pilings, and natural and artificial reefs. Tautog are a slow growing, long-lived fish that tends to stay near “home reefs”; characteristics that make the species particularly susceptible to overfishing and localized depletion. These concerns led to the Commission approving an interstate management plan (FMP) for the species in 1996. The FMP was completely replaced by **Amendment 1 in 2017**, which implemented regional management and a mandatory commercial tagging program. The **2025 Regional Stock Assessment Update** shows varying trends in the populations of the four regions.

## Stock Status

Since the 2015 Benchmark Stock Assessment, stock status has been evaluated regionally due to differences in biology, fishery characteristics, and limited coastwide movement. Those regions include: MARI, LIS, NJ-NYB, and DMV.

In 2025, a Regional Stock Assessment Update was completed, using the same assessment methodology that was approved for management use as part of the 2016 Regional Benchmark Stock Assessment and subsequently used in the 2017 update. Stock status did not change for the MARI or LIS regions from the 2021 update but did change for the NJ-NYB and DMV regions. The NJ-NYB region went from being overfished but not experiencing overfishing in the 2021 update to not being overfished but experiencing overfishing in this



Photo (c) Bob Glenn, MA DMF

update. For the DMV region, the 2025 update changed stock status from not overfished nor experiencing overfishing to overfished and experiencing overfishing (see table on next page).

All regions showed major retrospective

*Continued on next page »*

## Tautoga onitis

**Stock Status:** Not overfished and overfishing not occurring in MARI and LIS regions; not overfished but overfishing occurring in NJ-NYB region; overfished and overfishing occurring in DMV region.

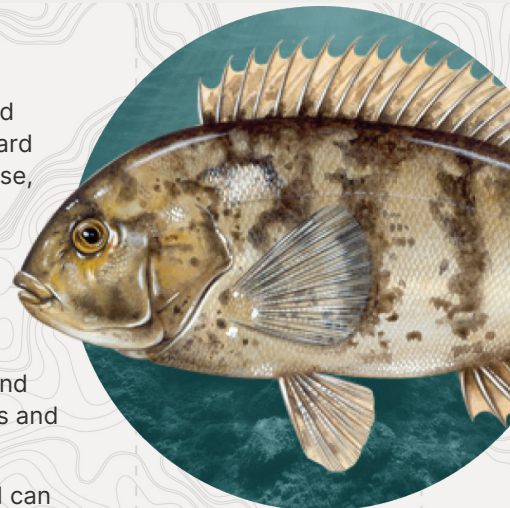
**Common Names:** blackfish, tog, white chinner, black porgy

**Management Unit:** Massachusetts through Virginia

**Maximum Age/Size:** 34 years/3.1 feet

## Interesting Facts

- Tautog have several specialized adaptations for living around hard structures, including a blunt nose, thick lips, and powerful jaws.
- They have conical teeth in front, crushing teeth in back, and a set of pharyngeal teeth in their throat, which allow them to pick-up, crush, and sort hard prey such as mollusks and crustaceans.
- They are particularly hardy and can survive for hours kept on ice – which makes them desirable for the live fish market.



patterns in fishing mortality (F) and spawning stock biomass (SSB), with MARI, LIS, and NJ-NYB assessments overestimating F and underestimating SSB, while the pattern was reversed in the DMV region. This pattern was also seen in the 2021 update but has become more pronounced in the 2025 update. Based on the Commission’s guidance document on retrospective analyses, the pattern was significant enough to require an adjustment of SSB and the 3-year average F in the last year of the assessment to account for the retrospective pattern.

Since the 2021 update, recruitment has increased in the LIS and NJ-NYB regions, and the MARI region shows a slight increase in SSB. In the DMV, fishing mortality had been low since 2012 before reaching a peak in 2021 followed by a sharp decline thereafter. Total removals have increased in all regions, driven primarily by increases in recreational harvest.

A more detailed overview of the Tautog Regional Stock Assessment Update with

graphs of removals by sector, SSB and recruitment, and fishing mortality for eachh region is available [here](#).

### Atlantic Coastal Management

Tautog is managed under Amendment 1, which delineated the stock into four regions due to differences in biology and fishery characteristics, and limited coastwide movement. Based on these delineations, the Amendment established new regional biological reference points, fishing mortality targets, and stock rebuilding schedules, and required each region to implement measures that have at least a 50% probability of achieving the regional fishing mortality target. If the current fishing mortality exceeds the regional threshold, the Board must initiate corrective action within one year.

In response to the findings of the 2025 Assessment Update, the Board initiated an addendum to address changes in stock status for the NJ-NYB and DMV regions, while allowing for the

Massachusetts-Rhode Island (MARI) and Long Island Sound (LIS) regions to modify management for precautionary or alignment purposes. The Board will consider approving releasing for public comment the Draft Addendum at the Commission’s [Spring Meeting](#).

### Commercial and Recreational Fisheries

While tautog are targeted by both commercial and recreational fisheries, over 90% of the total harvest comes from the recreational fishery, with a majority of landings occurring in state waters. Most tautog are landed in the spring and fall, although some Mid-Atlantic anglers pursue tautog year-round, and there is an active fishery off the Virginia coast in the winter. Historically, tautog were considered a “trash fish” until the late 1970s when demand increased and a directed commercial fishery developed. Landings quickly rose, peaking in

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**Stock Status of Tautog in the MARI, LIS, NJ-NYB, and DMV Regions**

Spawning Stock Biomass				
Region	Target	Threshold	2024	Status
MARI	6,143 mt	4,595 mt	9,572 mt	Not overfished
LIS	9,799 mt	7,349 mt	13,718 mt	Not overfished
NJ-NYB	7,910 mt	5,929 mt	7,900 mt	Not overfished
DMV	4,400 mt	3,236 mt	2,687 mt	Overfished

*Retrospective adjustment applied to 2024 SSB for all regions*

Fishing Mortality				
Region	Target	Threshold	2024	Status
MARI	0.27	0.46	0.26	Not overfishing
LIS	0.25	0.35	0.25	Not overfishing
NJ-NYB	0.20	0.33	0.44	Overfishing
DMV	0.18	0.29	0.36	Overfishing

*Retrospective adjustment applied to 2024 F for all regions.*

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1987 at nearly 1.2 million pounds, then rapidly began to decline as states implemented commercial regulations starting in the early 1990s. Landings have remained at approximately the same level for the past 30 years.

Commercial landings in 2024 were approximately 497,713 pounds, 4.4% of the total (commercial and recreational) coastwide harvest. The ex-vessel price (dollars per pound) for tautog has generally steadily increased since the late 1970s, with a coastwide average price in 2024 of approximately \$3.47 per pound. A majority of 2024 commercial landings (69%) occurred in New York followed by Massachusetts (14%). These fish are sold in both fresh and live markets in Northeast cities, with steady demand increasing the price for live tautog in recent years. The higher price and interest in undersized fish has led to significant illegal harvest.

Recreational harvest occurs primarily in the fall from September–December, with green and Jonah crabs as the bait of choice for many anglers. Over the past 40 years, coastwide recreational harvest has ranged from a high of over 20 million pounds in 1986 to a low of 3.4 million pounds in 2018. Harvest in 2024 was estimated at 10.7 million pounds. At the state level, Massachusetts through New Jersey account for the vast majority of recreational harvest, with New York and Massachusetts anglers harvesting the most tautog in 2024, although the highest harvesting states does vary year-to-year. While harvesting at much lower levels, fisheries in the states of Delaware through Virginia are primarily

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Photo (c) Paul Caruso

## Life History

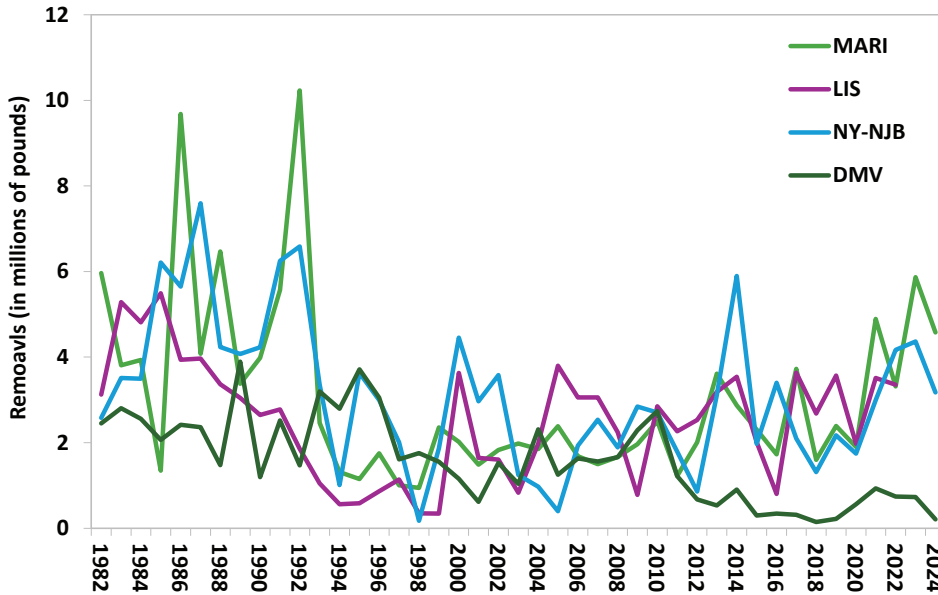
A member of the wrasse (*Labridae*) family, tautog are distributed along the Northeast Atlantic coast from Nova Scotia to Georgia, though they are most abundant from Cape Cod to Chesapeake Bay. Seasonal migration varies throughout the species' range. In the north, adults move from offshore wintering grounds in the spring to nearshore spawning and feeding areas in the fall, reversing their migration as water temperatures drop from fall to winter. In the south, tautog undergo a shorter seasonal migration and in some areas may remain either inshore or offshore year round. When water temperatures are very low, adults become torpid or lethargic, possibly allowing tautog to survive cold winter conditions, a unique trait compared to other wrasse species which typically inhabit tropical waters.

Tautog prey primarily on oysters, blue mussels, and other shellfish, using their large teeth to crack and crush shells. Juveniles feed on small benthic and pelagic invertebrates such as amphipods and copepods. Adults stay close to their preferred home site and although they may move away during the day to feed, they return to the same general location at night where they become dormant and may actually sleep. There are no species that preferentially feed on adult tautog, but birds such as cormorants prey on juveniles. Smooth dogfish, barndoor skate, red hake, silver hake, sea raven, and goosefish have been reported to feed on both adults and juveniles.

Tautog are sexually mature at three to four years of age and can live for more than 30 years. Throughout their life, tautog aggregate around structured habitats in estuaries and inlets to offshore reefs. Shallow, vegetated inshore areas serve as juvenile nurseries, while larger juveniles cohabitate with adults in deeper offshore waters. North of Long Island, tautog are generally found around rocks and boulders. Toward the southern end of their range, tautog often inhabit wrecks, jetties, natural and artificial reefs, and shellfish beds. This aggregation around structure makes tautog easy to find and catch, even when biomass levels are low.

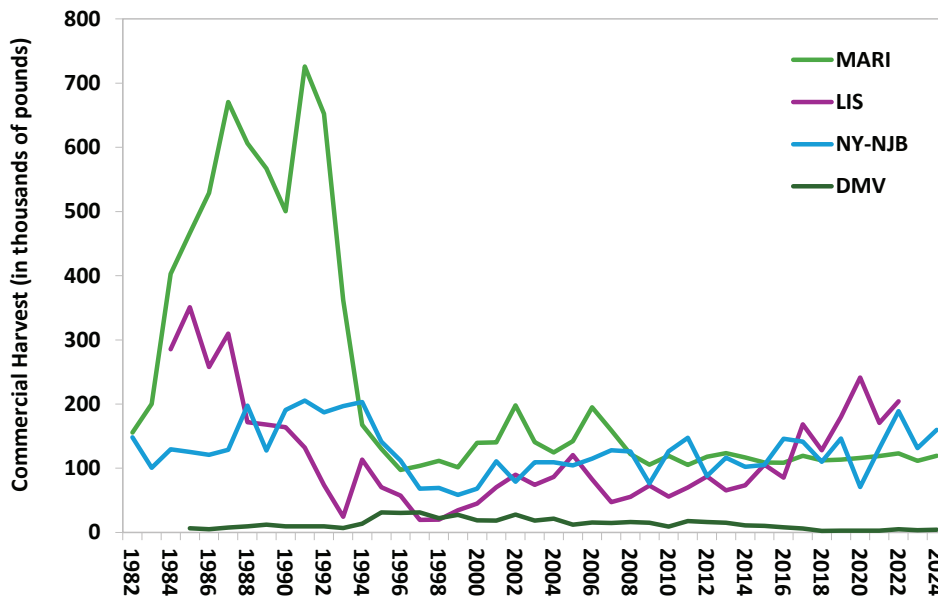
Recreational Removals (harvest + dead discards) by Region

Source: Regional Stock Assessment Update, 2025



Commercial Harvest by Region

Source: Regional Stock Assessment Update, 2025



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recreational. Coastwide recreational discards have increased over time, with an estimated 26.1 million fish discarded in 2024. A discard mortality rate of 2.5% is assumed for the recreational fishery, resulting in an estimated 652,871

recreational dead discards or 17.5% of recreational removals.

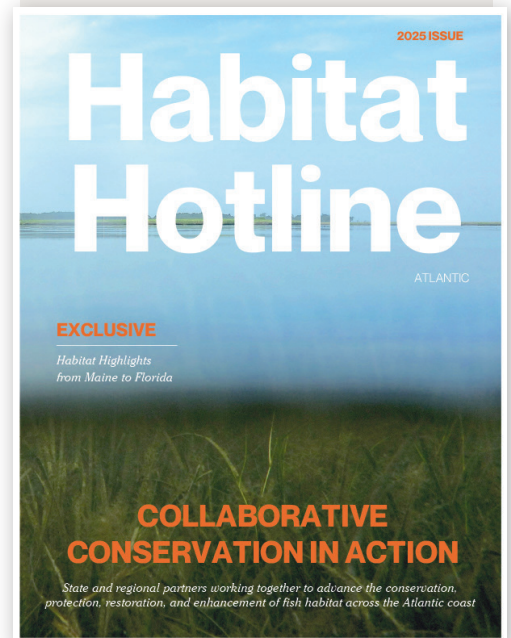
For more information, please contact **James Boyle**, FMP Coordinator.

In Other News

In February, the Commission’s Habitat Committee released the 2025 Issue of *Habitat Hotline Atlantic*, which is now available in a new digitally-interactive **flip book format**, though it can also be found in **PDF format**. We welcome your feedback on the flip book format!

The focal point of this issue is habitat restoration updates from the East Coast states. The issue also details Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP) updates, including: updates on restoration projects, science tools, and collaborations advancing fish habitat conservation across the region.

For more information, please contact **Simen Kaalstad**, ACFHP Director and Habitat Committee Coordinator.





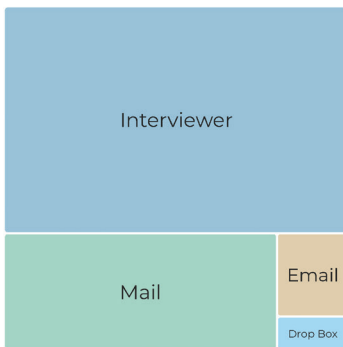
# Recreational Anglers Participate in Atlantic Coast Catch Card Pilot Project

## Catch Card Returns & Data Summary

**467**

**Cards Returned**

21% return rate coastwide



Black Sea Bass (241)



Scup (149)



Summer Flounder (134)



Red Drum (127)



Tautog (91)



Spotted Seatrout (75)

1,326 Fish Lengths Submitted,  
40+ Unique Species

In 2025, the ACCSP Recreational Technical Committee launched a pilot project across 8 Atlantic coast states to test a new way of collecting discard information. On average, recreational anglers release a large portion of what they catch, but those discards are difficult to fully capture with traditional data collection methods. To help fill those gaps, the project gathered additional information directly from anglers about what they're seeing on the water. Since discard data plays an important role in stock assessments and ultimately the management decisions that shape fishing regulations, this effort also gave anglers a more direct role in contributing to the science behind fisheries management.

Catch Card Pilot assignments were conducted in accordance with Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) design. Before anglers headed out for their fishing trip, interviewers handed them a paper catch card, pencil, and measuring tape and asked them to record information about any fish they released while actively fishing on the water. Anglers were asked to note the species, number of fish, length (rounded to the nearest quarter inch), release condition, and the general area/depth of fish released. Cards could be returned directly to the interviewer, mailed back using prepaid postage, submitted by email, or deposited in a drop box. A QR code on each card linked anglers to online resources about the project, fish measuring instructions, and best practices for releasing fish safely. Results and discussion of the first year of the project in 2025 can be found within the [final report](#), now available on the [ACCSP Partner Project page](#). One of the central questions behind this project was whether recording discards during the trip, rather than trying to recall them after the fact, would improve data accuracy. Results from the pilot offer encouraging early evidence that pre-trip notification may help anglers record species, quantity, and even specific lengths of fish.

The pilot will continue in 2026 with only a few changes. These include replacing South Carolina with Delaware; more flexible time to give out and collect catch cards; clearer instructions for anglers; the interviewer feedback process will be simpler; and angler responses will be examined in more detail. If this method works well throughout the pilot and is approved, it may be added to the standard APAIS design. This would make catch card sampling a regular way to involve anglers and measure discarded fish on the Atlantic coast.

**For more information**, please contact [Alex DiJohnson](#), ACCSP Deputy Director of Recreational Fisheries Data.

# Special Recognition

## Alexander Law

Alexander Law, Legislative Coordinator, received the Commission's Employee of the Quarter (EOQ) award for the First Quarter of 2026. In his three and a half years with the Commission, Alexander's dedication and legislative expertise have made a positive impact on the Commission and our member states. In particular, Alexander's recent work in communicating the Commission's appropriations and legislative priorities to Congress have resulted in a favorable FY26 budget during a highly uncertain fiscal time.

In addition to the FY26 budget supporting the Commission's base funding (Atlantic Coastal Act, Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, ACCSP, SEAMAP, NEAMAP, etc.), the budget included line items for three important Atlantic coastal priorities: Chesapeake Bay menhaden research, a Northeast industry-based trawl survey pilot study, and the retrofitting the R/V Lady Lillian in South Carolina. Funding for these three priorities is the result of multiple years of requests and dozens of meetings to communicate the need and value of completing these projects.

To foster support for the Commission's budget priorities, Alexander coordinated multiple meetings between Commissioners and their Congressional members to convey the value of these projects in their home states. Engagement of the Commissioners carries a lot of weight within Congressional offices as well as ensuring the Commissioners' buy-in to funding and legislative priorities.

In addition to his legislative work, Alexander has provided much needed support on ongoing projects, such as Northern right whale passive acoustic monitoring. His intellectual curiosity, thoughtful analysis of fisheries issues, and desire to explore innovative approaches has further enhanced his contributions to the Commission.



As an EOQ recipient, Alexander received a cash award and a letter of appreciation to be placed in his personal record. In addition, his name has been added to the EOQ plaque displayed in the Commission's lobby. Congratulations, Alexander!

# Comings & Goings

## Sarah Peake



This April, Sarah Peake returns to the Commission as Massachusetts' Legislative Commissioner, having been appointed Representative Jennifer Armini's permanent proxy. No stranger to the Commission's process, Sarah previously served as the state's ASMFC Legislative Commissioner from 2009 to 2024.

Sarah has nearly two decades of serving in the Massachusetts House, where she worked on myriad issues including civil rights, the environment, fisheries, and transportation. In September 2024, Sarah left her legislative seat to join the Governor Healey's administration as a Senior Advisor for Intergovernmental Affairs. Sarah retired from state service in the fall of 2025. Please join us in welcoming Sarah back to the Commission fold.

## Shanna Madsen



In March, with Shanna Madsen's appointment as Assistant Director for CT DEEP's Fisheries Division, she became Connecticut's Administrative Commissioner to the ASMFC. She comes with nearly two decades of experience in marine fisheries science, management, and policy along the Atlantic coast. As Assistant Director, Shanna leads the Marine Fisheries branch, where she oversees the management of the state's marine fisheries, directs science and monitoring programs, and guides regulatory and policy development to support sustainable fisheries and coastal ecosystems. She previously served as Deputy Chief of the Fisheries Management Division at VMRC, where she helped lead the management and regulation of commercial and recreational fisheries, oversaw a diverse team of scientists, and supported regulatory and policy development at both the state and interstate levels. Please join us in welcoming Shanna.

## Representative Jennifer Armini

Since 2024, Representative Jennifer Armini served as Massachusetts Legislative Commissioner to the ASMFC. With increasing legislative responsibilities at the state level, Jennifer has appointed Sarah Peake to serve as her permanent proxy. We are grateful to Jennifer's for her contributions to the Commission while she was active, and know we are in good hands with Sarah Peake taking her place.

Please join us in thanking Jennifer and wishing her the very best in all her future endeavors.

