

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION
AMERICAN EEL MANAGEMENT BOARD**

**The Westin Crystal City
Arlington, Virginia
Hybrid Meeting**

February 3, 2026

Approved May 6, 2026

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1. **Approval of agenda** by consent (Page 1).
2. **Approval of Proceedings of October 2025** by consent (Page 1).
3. **Move to adjourn** by consent (Page 6).

ATTENDANCE

Board Members

Megan Ware, ME, proxy for C. Wilson (AA)	Loren Lustig, PA (AA)
Steve Train, ME (GA)	John Clark, DE (AA)
Rep. Allison Hepler, ME (LA)	Roy Miller, DE (GA)
Renee Zobel, NH (AA)	Craig Pugh, DE, proxy for Rep. Carson (LA)
Doug Grout, NH (GA)	Carrie Kennedy MD, proxy for K. Charbonneau (AA)
Dennis Abbott, NH, proxy for Sen. Watters (LA)	Ethan Simpson, VA, proxy for J. Grist (Acting AA)
Dan McKiernan, MA (AA)	Chris Batsavage, NC, proxy for K. Rawls (AA)
Ray Kane, MA (GA)	Rep. Brian Turner (LA)
Phil Edwards, RI, proxy for J. McNamee (AA)	Ross Self, SC, proxy for B. Keppler (AA)
David Borden, RI (GA)	Malcolm Rhodes, SC (GA)
Eric Reid, RI, proxy for Sen. Sosnowski (LA)	Robert Boyles, SC, proxy for Sen. Cromer (LA)
Matt Gates, CT (AA)	Doug Haymans, GA (AA)
Bill Hyatt, CT (GA)	Spud Woodward, GA (GA)
Robert LaFrance, CT, proxy for J. Gresko (LA)	Jeff Renchen, FL, proxy for J. McCawley (AA)
Jesse Hornstein, NY, proxy for M. Gary (AA)	Gary Jennings, FL (GA)
Emerson Hasbrouck, NY (GA)	Daniel Ryan, DC, proxy for R. Cloyd
Heather Corbett, NJ, proxy for J. Cimino (AA)	Ron Owens, PRFC
Adam Nowalsky, NJ, proxy for Sen. Gopal (LA)	Chris Wright, NMFS
Kris Kuhn, PA, proxy for T. Schaeffer (AA)	Rick Jacobson, US FWS

(AA = Administrative Appointee; GA = Governor Appointee; LA = Legislative Appointee)

Ex-Officio Members

Kim Bonvechio, Technical Committee Chair	Rob Beal, Law Enforcement Committee Rep.
Mitch Feigenbaum, Advisory Panel Chair	

Staff

Bob Beal	Caitlin Starks	James Boyle
Toni Kerns	Tracey Bauer	Katie Drew
Tina Berger	Emilie Franke	Jeff Kipp
Madeline Musante	Chelsea Tuohy	Samara Nehemiah

The American Eel Management Board of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission convened in the Jefferson Ballroom of the Westin Crystal City Hotel, Arlington, Virginia, via hybrid meeting, in-person and webinar; Tuesday, February 3, 2026, and was called to order at 2:30 p.m. by Chair Jesse Hornstein.

CALL TO ORDER

CHAIR JESSE HORNSTEIN: I would like to call the American Eel Board to order. My name is Jesse Hornstein, and I am Proxy to the Administrative Commissioner from New York; and I am the current Chair of this Board. It's an honor to be here. Sitting next to me is Caitlin Starks of ASMFC. We also have our TC Chair online, Kim Bonvechio and our AP Chair, Mitch Feigenbaum. I guess I will turn it to Toni for Commissioners online.

MS. TONI KERNS: First, I would like to welcome the esteemed Robert Boyles back to the table. It may be brief, but we are happy to have you. I just wanted to let you know that I am going to be extremely disappointed that if I don't get a Robert Boyle "ism" at some point this week, I will walk away this week sad. Put you on warning, thank you.

I'm going to do my best to capture everybody that is online for this meeting. We have Steve Train from Maine, Carrie Kennedy from Maryland, Brian Turner and Chris Batsavage from North Carolina, Malcolm Rhodes from South Carolina, Spud Woodward from Georgia, Heather Corbett from New Jersey, Emerson Hasbrouck from New York, Joe Gresko from Connecticut, and Chris Wright from NOAA Fisheries. I think that is everyone.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Before I get started, I just wanted to thank our outgoing Chair, Kris Kuhn for his leadership the last couple of years as the Chair of this Board.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: With that, move on to the first item, approval of the agenda. Are there any changes to the agenda? Seeing none; the agenda is approved by consent.

APPROVAL OF PROCEEDINGS

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Next item is approval of the proceedings from the October 2025 meeting. Are there any modifications to those proceedings? Seeing none.

PUBLIC COMMENT

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: This next item is public comment for any items not on the agenda. Is there anybody wants to make public comment in the room or online? Seeing none.

UPDATE ON CONVENTION ON THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE OF ENDANGERED SPECIES

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Move on to the next item, which is we'll get an update on the CITES meeting that occurred in late 2025, and the proposal that would have listed American eel in Appendix II, and Toni Kerns is going to give that update.

MS. KERNS: As everybody knows, all eel species were being proposed to be listed under CITES Appendix II at the November CITES past meeting in Uzbekistan. I was told it was a very unique vote. The proposal did not pass and it was very heavily not favored. Very uniquely, all of the African countries voted as a block. I have been told that that has never happened before. But there was a resolution that was passed. There were some small modifications to the resolution that we did provide input through our partners at AFWA. We're going to pause until we don't have the feedback.

We were able to provide feedback to the resolution through our partners at AFWA to Fish and Wildlife Service and the changes that were made to the resolution I think were positive changes not anything that we would have had great concerns with. I've already reached out to Japan and our partners at AFWA to work on some aspects of the

resolution that we think will be easy wins. We will continue to do that in order to make progress on conservation of eel across the board and keep this fishery healthy. I'll take any questions.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Thanks, Toni, certainly positive news for our U.S. eel fisheries. Any questions for Toni? Megan Ware.

MS. MEGAN WARE: I just wanted to actually say thank you to Toni, you've really gone above and beyond on the CITES eel topic, including traveling to Uzbekistan, which I can't imagine what that was like. I surely like that you've been a real leader in keeping this on the forefront and working with AFWA and I just wanted to thank you on behalf of the Maine elver fishermen that probably don't know how much work you put into this, but are very appreciative of the results, so thank you.

MS. KERNS: Thanks, Megan, and I really appreciate the work that Caitlin and Deidre did in preparing me to go there and all the work that was put in leading up to this, as well as our partners at AFWA. They were super helpful when I was there.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Any other questions for Toni? Seeing none.

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON BOARD TASKS

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: We will move on to the next item on the agenda, which will be a report from the Technical Committee on their Review of the Aquaculture Plan Provisions and the review of the Florida Young of the Year Survey and its potential to be discontinued. In this we'll go to Kim Bonvechio, and you can take it away.

MS. KIM BONVECHIO: Just going to give an update on the key board tasks that were given to the Technical Committee. These tasks were specific to, the first one on Addendum V and

referring to the site selection language and how we should interpret those. I'm going to provide some guidance.

Then the second one it was looking at the request to eliminate the Florida glass eel survey, and to discuss its contribution and utility to the management of that stock. The Technical Committee met twice to address these Board tasks, first on December 15, and then again on January 6. I want to also provide a quick update also regarding Virginia's Young of Year Survey at Gardy's Millpond. I'm going to also provide a quick update on that as well.

REVIEW OF AQUACULTURE PLAN PROVISIONS

MS. BONVECHIO: The aquaculture harvest site criteria are the first task. The language specifically that we discussed is highlighted here in yellow, and that is this language that helps provide some guidance for locations for harvest. Those criteria are the first. Just as a recap, to choose sites that have established or proposed glass eel monitoring, the second that are favorable to law enforcement and the third that have watershed characteristics that are prone to relatively high mortality rates. I'll go into that definition next, but I just want to say we're going to talk about the first and third. We did not believe as a Technical Committee that Number 2 warranted and changes or updates.

Currently on the guidance that is provided is that watersheds known to have features, some examples provided there that would be expected to cause lower eel productivity or higher glass eel mortality would be preferred targets. That is specifically what we addressed in our committee meeting.

Overarching, we did not believe as a committee that we needed to make any addenda to this fishery management plan provision for aquaculture plans. Instead, we just wanted to provide some specific guidance wo interpret those site selection criteria. The first is the consideration of glass eel monitoring efforts.

Site selection can vary depending on whether a particular site also has a commercial glass eel harvest. There was some concern that that commercial glass eel harvest could influence the monitoring. Believe that that needed to be that the selection should be dependent upon, in some cases, that there should be an operative location at the exact site where the commercial glass eel harvest is occurring.

The second is that the watershed characteristics, in addition to what is currently in the language, also to talk about some other characteristics that would provide relatively high mortality, or where the watershed is unlikely to produce larger numbers of adult eels. That includes steep gradients, multiple dams or a small drainage area, so that additional language and description.

The third, the Aquaculture Proposal should describe how the criteria are considered and prioritized. But one thing to just kind of keep in mind is that the language does say preference for, which means that not all of the criteria need to be met, but all of them should be considered and used to inform any Technical Committee recommendations.

REVIEW OF FLORIDA YOUNG OF YEAR SURVEY

MS. BONVECHIO: Task 2 is looking at the utility and use of Florida Young of Year Survey. Currently Florida has a single Young of Year Survey site, it's at Guana River Dam, which is in northeast Florida. They have tried over decades to find alternatives using these different views and different locations, and have not been successful.

Currently at the site there is persistently low and going near 0 catches at this point. Although this may on the surface look like recruitment failure, other monitoring data that have been collected in the state do not support that this is actually occurring. FWC also addressed the fact that the cost of sampling is extremely high, on

the upwards of \$700.00 per eel that is collected and counted.

FWC has asked to prioritize other monitoring that potentially could be more useful for the management of eels. This task is not complete. We felt as a committee that we need additional discussion and input from our Stock Assessment Subcommittee, as well as to look at some of the other data that Florida can provide and has offered. The specific discussion points that were brought up, there was some concern about losing the southernmost young of the year monitoring site, and it has been ongoing for several decades. There is concern that discontinuing this without gaining some other kind of information on the recruitment could be problematic.

Florida did acknowledge that there are other data, including electrofishing and age data that are available and that they are willing to continue to provide. The Florida Young of the Year Survey performed well in assessment power analysis. There was some concern because of that longevity of that time series, even though catches have gone to near zero, there is the concern of removing something that is statistically a good time series.

There is also some discussion about, should we use the assessment criteria for accepting fishery independent datasets to evaluate the young of the year survey? There are several criteria that are offered in our stock assessment document and peer review document that kind of go into some of those things. We wanted to look high to assess those criteria and where this survey fits into those.

Then noted that young of the year survey is currently used to understand those are recruitment trends that are not currently used for the management of the stock. The next steps that were suggested from the Technical Committee was to gather additional input, like I said, from the Stock Assessment Subcommittee.

This would include looking at the young of the year survey in terms of that power and variability over time into those and other surveys. The impacts of

not using this survey data for future assessments, also looking into this reasoning why the electrofishing and age data were not included in the last assessment.

There was some uncertainty as to why those data were not included, including potential gear issues or other things like that. Then the potential for using electrofishing and age data in the future to assess recruitment, and if that could be done to help improve the survey that would be useful for the management in future stock assessments.

Then also to kind of go into that criterion for what time series to include or not, to kind of address the utility of these time series was to look at the proportion of zero catches of American eels in that survey. Then this last one is the Gardy's Millpond Young of the Year Survey. What happened there was a Dam Breach.

Where there was one entry point now there are two spillways to glass eels, and Virginia had asked the Technical Committee for guidance on how to proceed with that. The Technical Committee members suggested looking for keeping that monitoring site, but look at the two entry site dynamics, and look for that with historical data.

They recommended putting eel ramps at both of the current spillways and kind of monitor the young of the year eels at both of those locations. Then just monitor those making note obviously that there are changes to the system and potential survey impacts when comparing it to historical data. Keep this location intact, add another eel ramp to the other spillway, keep the monitoring ongoing. With that we'll open the floor for any questions.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Thank you, Kim, for your presentation. Anyone have any questions for Kim? Go to John Clark first.

MR. JOHN CLARK: Thank you for the presentation, Kim. I guess going back to the aquaculture provisions, I was just trying to remember why we had that criteria one in there about a site that already had established glass eel monitoring, because I know from the site that we monitor, we wouldn't want anybody taking glass eels out of that while we were monitoring, because it could affect the samples. I'm sure that must have come up years ago and again in the discussions with the TC. But just wondering how that was approached.

MS. BONVECHIO: Yes, there was some discussion concerning that, and there was really what had come up was that if there is an opportunity to collect more information in areas maybe where there is not a lot of information, that it provided kind of an opportunity to get additional data. That was one part of that also. But people did recognize kind of some of the issues that we had talked about earlier, but also that you mentioned.

One of the recommendations well with the state is kind of keep it within jurisdictions. If the state is already doing monitoring, then maybe nothing additional needs to be done. I think that is why there was, I think strong support for keeping it as a preference not a mandatory thing, but just to have some discussion in the proposals. Talking about why things are prioritized a certain size and certain actions. Then if Caitlin would like to add more to that.

MS. CAITLIN STARKS: Yes, thanks, Kim. I just want to note that the Technical Committee did talk about the need to have some either spatial or temporal difference between where that monitoring is occurring and where the harvest is occurring. If the monitoring is occurring downstream of where the harvest is occurring then hopefully that harvest wouldn't be impacting the numbers on an annual basis of glass eels coming into the system.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: We'll go to Ross Self.

MR. ROSS L. SELF: I've got a question about the aquaculture set aside as well. We seem to forget from time to time how this applies. But does the

200-pound aquaculture set aside or allocation count against or towards the 750-pound trigger for life history survey?

MS. BONVECHIO: I am going to let Caitlin answer that.

MS. STARKS: I believe it counts toward it. I can definitely go back in the addenda and verify. But I believe it does count towards the 750.

MR. SELF: We would appreciate a clarification on that, just so we are applying it appropriately in our fishery.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Any other questions for Kim or Caitlin? John Clark.

MR. CLARK: As you can tell, I like eels. I'm just curious, I guess it would be more of a Board discussion about the glass eel surveys. I mean I certainly understand why Florida, you know at \$700.00 per glass eel that is expensive sampling. I hope that their electrofishing survey could be used. But I know in the assessments that the glass eel surveys that all the states are doing have been kind of a limited use. I'm just wondering if that would be like a task for a stock assessment committee to look at whether we should maybe have a different number of surveys rather than glass eel, maybe some glass eel survey, some yellow eel survey.

You know just making sure that every state does something, because I know this was, I think the first plan that required each state that actually do some amount of field sampling. Just wanted to know whether that would be worth discussing with the Stock Assessment Subcommittee. Thanks.

MS. SAMARA NEHEMIAH: I'll answer that, I'm Samara, I'm the Stock Assessment Scientist at the Commission for Eel. One of our next tasks related to the Florida Survey is we wanted, I'd say for the SAS, but it is not that active right now, to kind of touch base, understand what we need from Florida to better understand their

electrofishing survey. We are going to put in a data request back to Kim at the TC so that we can get the necessary information to evaluate that.

I touched base with them to sort of understand why it wasn't included. There is not a lot of information I have right now to understand those decisions that were made when I wasn't part of this group. But we're trying to get all that information. Then our hope is, so we have an update coming up in the next couple of years and though obviously with a stock assessment update we're bound to the data that was approved for the benchmark.

What we can do as part of this process is just do a super dive into the data inputs, including the young of year surveys, and sort of better describe or just write down, I guess, the utility for potentially using 2% for this assessment. All that to say, the SAS is aware that this is kind of on our plate right now. We're hoping to have more information in the coming year or so with how to best tackle these data sources.

MR. CLARK: Thanks, Samara, that's great and I'm glad to hear that.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Any other questions? Jeff.

MR. JEFFRY RENCHEN: Florida, you know we're kind of hoping for some guidance on a request here, because it is really going to affect how we move forward on beginning the survey or not. Just to point out a couple things from our most recent benchmark stock assessment. It states that only surveys that operate during the time and place where American eels are available for capture should be considered.

Well, within the last three years there has been almost 0 glass eels, 99% of our surveys had 0 glass eels at this location. We've worked for a long time trying to find other viable locations and cannot find other locations in Florida, just due to the geography and due to the lack of constriction points for freshwater outflow.

We're in a very unique situation with Florida. I do agree with John that I think we could look at the utility of a glass eel survey moving forward, but waiting longer does not really help Florida's issue right now. We were hoping to have a little bit more guidance or discussion. I know there are even some people here that were part of the SAS for eel that we could maybe have a discussion here to kind of get some resolution on our request.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: I'm going to turn to Caitlin.

MS. STARKS: I did just want to note that during the Technical Committee discussion and decision to have another meeting with the SAS to look more deeply into the datasets. It was noted that we do want to get an answer back to you all by the next meeting.

Just noting that the timing of your survey is currently ongoing, if I'm remembering correctly, this winter, and that it is being conducted albeit at a lower level of effort by University of North Florida. We do; the TC and SAS do intend to get full recommendation response back by the next meeting. I did want to note that.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Any further questions? Not seeing any; any further discussion on either of these topics. That brings us to other business. Is there any other business to come before this Board? Not seeing any; John Clark.

MR. CLARK: Sorry, me again. I saw that Mr. Feigenbaum was on the call, and I was just wondering. I saw that American Unagi was sold, and I was just wondering. I know Mitch was. Oh Megan, you have? I was just going to ask like what will happen to that facility, because it said the bank actually took it. Just wondering what is happening there.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Mitch, if you can answer that question feel free to chime in.

MR. MITCH FEIGENBAUM: I can give a brief answer to the question. I am aware that the

bank did in fact buy the assets of American Unagi in the bankruptcy process. That is sort of like an interim step. The bank is trying to market those assets. I know that there are commercial eel companies that are involved in discussions with the bank about those assets.

But I'm not in a position to give any kind of report as to the nature of that discussion. I know there are a lot of people in Maine that are working and trying to figure out a plan to keep an eel farm in place. But there seems to be uncertainty too. That's really all I could offer today, John.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Thank you, Mitch.

ADJOURNMENT

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Any other business? Seeing none; is there any opposition to adjourning? Seeing none; we are adjourned. You made my first meeting really easy. Thank you.

(Whereupon the meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 3, 2026)