PROCEEDINGS OF THE

ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

ATLANTIC STRIPED BASS MANAGEMENT BOARD

The Westin Crystal City
Arlington, Virginia
Hybrid Meeting

August 6, 2026

Approved November 11, 2026

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1. **Approval of agenda** by consent (Page 1).

2. **Approval of Proceedings of May 4, 2026** by consent (Page 1).

3. **Move to recommend the ISFMP Policy Board approve and send the striped bass offshore aquaculture comment letter to NOAA Fisheries as modified today** (Page 6). Motion by Joe Grist; second by Jason McNamee. Motion passes by consent with 2 abstentions (NOAA and US FWS) (Page 7).

4. **Move to approve the Atlantic Striped Bass FMP Review for the 2025 fishing year and state compliance reports** (Page 11). Motion by John Clark; second by Mike Luisi. Motion approved by unanimous consent (Page 11).

5. **Move to approve Mike Waine of North Carolina to the Atlantic Striped Bass Advisory Panel** (Page 13). Motion by Adam Nowalsky; second by Doug Grout. Motion carries by unanimous consent (Page 14).

6. **Move to adjourn** by consent (Page 14).

ATTENDANCE

Board Members

Megan Ware, ME, proxy for C. Wilson (AA)
Rep. Allison Hepler, ME (LA)
Renee Zobel, NH (AA)
Doug Grout, NH (GA)
Dennis Abbott, NH, proxy for Sen. Watters (LA)
Nichola Meserve, MA, proxy for D. McKiernan (AA)
Raymond Kane, MA (GA)
Rep. Sarah Peake, MA (LA)
Jason McNamee, RI (AA)
Eric Reid, RI, proxy for Sen. Sosnowski (LA)
Shanna Madsen, CT (AA)
Bill Hyatt, CT (GA)
Robert LaFrance, CT proxy for Rep. Gresko, CT (LA)
Marty Gary, NY (AA)
Emerson Hasbrouck, NY (GA)
Sen. Monica Martinez, NY (LA)
Joe Cimino, NJ (AA)
Adam Nowalsky, NJ, proxy for Sen. Gopal (LA)
Kris Kuhn, PA, proxy for T. Scheaffer (AA)
Loren Lustig, PA (GA)
Jordan Zimmerman, DE (AA)
John Clark, DE, proxy for R. Miller (GA)
Craig Pugh, DE, proxy for Rep. Carson (LA)
Michael Luisi, MD (AA)
Robert T. Brown, MD, proxy for R. Dize (GA)
David Sikorski, MD, proxy for Del. Stein (LA)
Joe Grist, VA (AA)
Del. Adele McClure, VA (LA)
Chris Batsavage, NC, proxy for K. Rawls (AA)
Ben Dyar, SC, proxy for B. Keppler (AA)
Chris McDonough, SC, proxy for Sen. Cromer (LA)
Doug Haymans, GA (AA)
Spud Woodward, GA (GA)
Erika Burgess, FL, proxy for J. McCawley (AA)
Gary Jennings, FL (GA)
Daniel Ryan, DC
Ron Owens, PRFC
Max Appleman, NMFS
Lowell Whitney, US FWS

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

Ex-Officio Members

Jeff Mercer, Law Enforcement Committee Rep.

Staff

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

The Atlantic Striped Bass 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; Thursday, August 6, 2026, and was called to order at 8:30 am by Chair Nichola Meserve.

CALL TO ORDER

CHAIR NICHOLA MESERVE: Good morning, 8:30, so we're going to get started and call the August 6, 2026 meeting of the Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board to order. I am Nichola Meserve; I'm an administrative proxy from Massachusetts. Chris Batsavage is your real chair, he couldn't be here in person today, so for ease of meeting facilitation you are stuck with me.

He'll be back next meeting, I hope. I am going to first recognize that we have some of our Commissioners from South Carolina through Florida joining us this morning, given Agenda Item Number 4, when we'll be talking about the offshore aquaculture letter. Next turn to Toni, to let us know any of our Board members that are online.

MS. TONI KERNS: We have Chris Batsavage, Ron Owens, Dave Sikorski, Sarah Peake, and then Erika Burgess from Florida.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

CHAIR MESERVE: We'll turn to Agenda Item 2, Approval of the Agenda. Are there any additions or modifications to the agenda this morning? Seeing none; we'll consider the agenda approved by consent, and move on to the proceedings from May, 2026 that need to be approved.

APPROVAL OF PROCEEDINGS

CHAIR MESERVE: We did receive a couple minor corrections from Doug Grout on Page 9 that would be incorporated. Are there any other edits to the proceedings from May, 2026? Seeing none; we'll consider those approved as modified by consent, move on to public comment.

PUBLIC COMMENT

CHAIR MESERVE: This is an opportunity for the public to comment on items that are not on the agenda, and we'll look to the audience, in person. I see one hand and any online? Not seeing any there, so if you would like to come up to the microphone, sir and take two minutes for your comments. There is a public microphone right here, just hit the button, the light will turn on, and please introduce yourself.

MR. ROGER ANDERSON: Good morning, my name is Roger Anderson. Probably what I have to say may seem kind of parochial to you, because you are responsible for the entire Atlantic region of striped bass. I reside in Manassas, Virginia, but we have had property on the, I'm going to say in the Matthews County part of Virginia, waterfront property since 1980. We've been fishing this area for 50 years, so I consider myself somewhat of a recreational fisherman. It is particularly concerning to me, and other Virginia recreational fishermen, that gillnetting of rockfish is allowed on your spawning grounds.

As personally recognized and witnessed by my neighbor, netters were taking numerous large rockfish close to shore at the inlets of creeks and coves in the vicinity of our properties during February of 2026. They were discarding smaller rockfish, whereas otherwise it would have required tagging.

As a conservation measurement it is reasonable to restrict the rockfish season for recreational fishing, which ended in 31 December. We were allowed to keep one rockfish per day at a reasonable slot limit. However, commercial fishermen could continue to gillnet for rockfish through close to the end of March.

We consider this to be preposterous and we consider it to be a significant effect on the future spawning of rockfish in our areas. We specifically, the effect that I've personally seen, my neighbors have personally seen, since I do a lot of hook and line fishing, and I do put out minnow traps in the

summer. There is the almost absence of rockfish in our minnow traps this summer. Previous years I had caught quite a few.

I do catch a lot of rockfish in my traps, this year there was hardly any at all. We respectfully request that you immediately modify regulations to prohibit all rockfish gillnets in their spawning grounds beginning February, 2027 through the spawning season. We consider this critically needed to allow the restoration of the rockfish population. Every year action is not taken results in another lost critical spawning season. We don't want a study, we want action.

CHAIR MESERVE: If you can try to wrap up in the next 20 seconds or so, please.

MR. ANDERSON: Secondly, we request that it should be illegal for gillnets to discard any rockfish caught in gillnets. All rockfish should be tagged, kept and reported. I can understand why the commercial fishermen discard the smaller rockfish, as all fish kept require a tag, and the more weight per pound is in the larger fish. We all must sacrifice in order to save this valuable food source.

CHAIR MESERVE: Thank you for attending our meeting today and voicing your concern, take that into consideration. Seeing as there are no other hands for public comment.

CONSIDER COMMENTS TO NOAA FISHERIES ON ITS DOCUMENT: CHARTING A COURSE FOR STRIPED BASS: SCIENCE AND REGULATORY INNOVATION FOR OFFSHORE AQUACULTURE

CHAIR MESERVE: We can move on to Agenda Item 4 to Consider Comments to NOAA Fisheries on its Document Charting a Course for Striped Bass Science and Regulatory Innovations for Offshore Aquaculture. This is an action item for us.

The Board will be considering any edits to the letter and then forwarding it to the Policy Board for review as well. These comments were drafted by staff after compiling written information from Board members, after NOAA Fisheries had requested feedback on the Draft Technical Memorandum regarding Offshore Striped Bass Aquaculture. We will begin with a brief overview of the comment letter by Emilie.

MS. EMILIE FRANKE: Just a little bit of background here today. As Chair stated in February, NOAA Fisheries Office of Aquaculture provided a presentation to the Board on the Draft Technical Memorandum. NOAA Fisheries is seeking feedback from the Commission, and so we had 8 commissioners provide pretty detailed written feedback to staff over the past few months.

We compiled all those comments into the draft letter that was in your meeting materials for today. Overall, of the comments from the commissioners there is a lot of overlap, and there were a lot of concerns noted that the draft memo does not adequately address several issues, including economic, regulatory, enforcement, biological and ecological issues associated with potential offshore aquaculture of striped bass.

The commissioners also noted concerns about the risk to the wild population to seafood markets, protected species and marine ecosystems, as well as concerns about some of the regulatory and financial considerations. As you probably saw, the letter is pretty detailed, so I am not going to go over every single sentence in the letter.

But I am just going to go through some high-level summary of the various sections that the commissioners commented on. First there were comments on enforcement concerns, concerns that the striped bass aquaculture in the EEZ would create additional enforcement responsibilities. Since the EEZ is currently closed to striped bass fishing there was concern that offshore striped bass aquaculture could be used as a cover for some illegal fishing.

Comments noted there wasn't enough detail provided in the memo on the traceability, monitoring, compliance or enforcement aspects here, and that it wasn't clear which agency would be responsible for the enforcement and monitoring.

Next are the economic concerns. The Commissioners noted the potential for any striped bass aquaculture product to potentially flood the seafood markets and reduce the value of wild caught striped bass.

This would have impact on the wild fishery and on the harvesters. There were concerns that the memorandum didn't attempt to quantify those consequences, and that there needed to be an analysis of these types of market impacts. As far as user conflicts, the comments noted that this needed to be addressed in greater detail.

They noted that access to traditional fishing grounds would be reduced, and just in general needed more detail on what the offshore striped bass aquaculture farms would look like, and sort of what uses would be allowed or not allowed around those areas. As far as project siting there were some comments on the actual project sites themselves.

There was concern that the memo underestimated the challenges, sort of engineering and operational challenges needed for potential offshore striped bass net pens. There wee a couple comments noting that changing ocean conditions would likely shift where the most suitable production areas would be into the future.

It wasn't clear how the regulatory framework would address this issue. There were also some comments that noted that the areas that were identified as potentially suitable for potential striped bass aquaculture would also be highly susceptible to severe weather events. You need more information on the measures to minimize damage in those cases, and sort of what the impacts would be. There are also comments that the potential sites are being proposed outside of the aquaculture opportunity areas process. There was not a lot of information on what the public input process would be.

As far as aquaculture industry specifics, there were some questions from commissioners, first noting that any regulatory framework would need to be informed by the realistic operational practices and industry needs. Trying to understand better what the aquaculture industry is looking for here.

Commissioners noted that we need to evaluate the cost and scale required to support the economic viability of these potential operations, so sort of what would the profitability margin be. For ecological concerns some comments noted that the memo didn't address the concern that forage fish would be part of the feed, and also there were comments on the potential effect of these potential offshore sites on essential fish habitat.

For a protected species, some of the Commissioners noted that the memorandum had pretty limited information on the potential for entanglement and other interactions. They were looking for some more information there. As far as the biological risks, the comments noted concern about disease transmission, parasites, escapements and potential genetic interactions with the wild population.

Also, concerns about any therapeutants, antibiotics used and that is essential exposure for the wild population there. The comments noted that more information is needed on actually implementing genetic tracking and practice, what would that look like? Also, the comments noted that the risk of escapement or catastrophic failure of potential operations, for example due to a severe storm, is a real risk and should be given more consideration.

As far as the policy and regulatory roles, the comments noted that the memo was a little bit vague on sort of what this would all look like, and that there would need to be further discussion on which agencies would have oversight of bio security and potential impacts on the wild stock. The role of the Commission and states was sort of mentioned in the memo, but the commissioners noted it wasn't really clear how input from the Commission would be used in this process.

The conclusion of the letter, the draft letter notes that given these risks and unresolved issues that the Commission did not support moving forward with consideration of offshore striped bass aquaculture

at this time. That is all I have; I am happy to take questions. But again, several Board members submitted pretty detailed comments, so I would look to you all as well based on what you submitted.

CHAIR MESERVE: Are there questions from Board members about the content of the letter? Jay McNamee.

DR. JASON McNAMEE: Yes, we submitted pretty extensive comments from Rhode Island and you've captured them all. I really like the content of the letter. Just kind of like looking at the materials. I just wanted to throw something out and see if people pick up on it or not. I really like the letter and I'm guessing there is like a timeliness to this, so we should probably just get it out. But two of the sections, specifically user conflicts and project siting, they are separate sections in the letter, and I was just kind of thinking, really those two sections are about marine spatial planning.

We comment on that a number of times in the letter. The information that they sent us is really focused on site suitability, specifically for temperature for striped bass. Like that is the extent of it, but I think the points that we're trying to make in the letter is that there is like a lot more. The ocean is becoming a very busy place.

I guess what I was wanting to throw out there, does it matter, should we put those two sections under like a broader category of, you know a lack of marine spatial planning associated with where they were kind of proposing this stuff, or are people happy with it, and let's just get it out the door? I'm leaning towards the latter, but just wanted to offer the thought, in case folks thought it was important.

CHAIR MESERVE: I do think, Jay, that if the Board is interested to have the Policy Board look at it in about an hour and approve it, and the timeliness is the factor that any edits will need to be pretty specific, in order for staff to accommodate them. If it's just the Board changing a heading and putting some of the sections together, I think staff could probably accommodate that pretty easily, would be my take. But if you are overall, if you would like that or are okay with that, I think the more significant edits might impact that timeline.

DR. McNAMEE: Just a follow up. No, I appreciate that. I was thinking about that too, because I hadn't like drafted up something. I was like, this is too much. You know if people thought like a higher-level heading and then the two subsections that already exist, which are good, I like them.

Maybe it doesn't even matter, I am probably overthinking it. I had a lot of coffee this morning, so I'm fine with that. But I again, I didn't know if the term marine spatial planning was important, kind of putting it in there, that is why I wanted to offer it.

CHAIR MESERVE: I'm going to turn to Joe Grist.

MR. JOSEPH GRIST: First let's monitor Jay's coffee intake this morning, please. I think actually I agree with Jay's suggestion if it's manageable in the next hour, but otherwise I am good with how it is crafted now. I think it definitely conveyed many of our opinions from around the table that we've all offered, and we've repeatedly stated over this last year.

Previously when they came before us, I think it was maybe at the February meeting, at the State Directors meeting in New Orleans. I think we've been making this point very clear to the Federal Government, and they seem to keep needing to be reminded of our points. I'm looking forward to seeing this go out, and once again stating the same thing again. We don't want this.

CHAIR MESERVE: Thank you, Joe, so I think based on both those comments what staff is going to do is maybe get with you after the meeting quickly, Jay, and make sure that they can just insert a short sentence or two that would kind of capture what you have in mind. This will be going to the Policy Board next, so everyone will have a chance to look at it again there. Is there any objection to that revision? Seeing none; Megan Ware.

MS. MEGAN WARE: Just a quick suggestion on the letter. I thought it was strong. Keeping it focused to striped bass offshore aquaculture I think is key here, as opposed to someone being able to interpret this to broader offshore aquaculture.

I think just making sure anytime we use the phrase offshore aquaculture it says striped bass offshore aquaculture or in some of the conclusionary statements at the very end in those last few paragraphs, adding the work striped bass to every sentence, I think is helpful, just so it is super clear what we're referencing in this letter.

CHAIR MESERVE: Thank you for that, Megan, that one is certainly easy enough, and staff have already kind of combed through the letter and found about 15 places where they could insert striped bass to make it very clear that this letter is specific to striped bass offshore aquaculture. I see two hands online, Chris Batsavage and then Erika Burgess, so Chris, go ahead.

MR. CHRIS BATSAVAGE: Yes, I agree with the other comments regarding the fact that the letter, I think is in pretty good shape with some minor edits considering the short turnaround time. I would like to make one more suggestion, which I think would be minor, but maybe not necessary. But for the enforcement concerns there is language in there about integration of vessel monitoring systems for commercial boats.

Just make sure there is no illegal harvest in the EEZ, and we talked about the issues with that. The letter doesn't express the fact that I believe vessel monitoring systems are pretty expensive for small boats, right off the top as far as purchasing it, but also for the subscription to keep it running. I don't know if that needs to be added or not, or does the Board think there is enough meat on the bones, so to speak in this letter to just kind of work with what we have?

CHAIR MESERVE: Well, it is a meaty letter, but I think that would be something worth adding and could be done pretty quickly. If there is no objection to adding a sentence about the cost of VMS, we'll add that as well, and turn to Erika Burgess.

MS. ERIKA BURGESS: I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the discussions today, and the opportunities that we had in February. I have to admit, I was a little surprised by the conclusion of those letters that was presented to the Board. My takeaway from the February conversation was that there were a lot of concerns, a lot of lacking information.

I thought the outcome was going to be a letter saying that more information was needed and more points needed to be considered, rather than an outright opposition to this, full stop. I am curious, because it wasn't transparent to me at the February meeting if members of the Board could put on the record a more-clear through line of how they went from wanting more information to making the decision to oppose this venture.

CHAIR MESERVE: Thank you for that, Erika. I think that the process was laid out in terms of that the comments were collected by staff and put into the letter. But I would turn to the Board members, really to ask if the concluding statements of the letter are what you supported in your comments and they are reflected here. If there is a disagreement on that, then I think we will be looking at a motion at some point to approve the letter as modified today and move from there. Did I see a hand from Shanna Madsen?

MS. SHANNA MADSEN: I just wanted to express the same sentiments that my colleague across the table did, Mr. Grist. We are in full support of the way that this letter concludes. I would have love to have seen this with a different species, but with striped bass, quite frankly I am at a full stop on this.

CHAIR MESERVE: Any other comments? Thank you, Marty, go ahead.

MR. MARTIN GARY: I wanted to compose my thoughts. Several of the Commissioners noted I have a crabby tie on today, and I am going to try to keep my comments productive. But this is our third

discussion of this issue related to striped bass aquaculture offshore in the Atlantic coast of the U.S. New York was one of the contributors to the 8 letters that were submitted, and I agree with everything that was discussed here and the revisions and the modifications discussed.

From a technical perspective we're in lock step with that. I don't want to necessarily sturdily pile on, but I think we're here assembled. The Board members have had the privilege to discuss the management of this species, with all the supporting technical people that provide the insight to our management for this species, and the public.

I don't know how many people online, but typically we have hundreds. This is our flagship species, and we are arguably entering the most challenging period of time for this species in the last half century. Everybody hearing those, in the next year and a half, we're going to have some very difficult discussions for this species.

I myself have been working with this animal since day one of my career, more than 40 years ago, and there are people on this Board that have a greater depth of experience and knowledge than I do. But of all the people I've talked to, Board members, the technical folks that we all work with, the constituents. I have yet to hear one person say this is a good idea.

I am trying to understand where the idea comes from for this species in this place to go forward, when the entire community is in lockstep in their opposition to this. I just want to reiterate. I think Joe said succinctly, we are not in support of it. I think that's the end game. Maybe I'm wrong and somebody else will step up, but I've worked around, I've talked to a lot of folks.

I have yet to reach one person who thinks this is a good idea. My passion is spilling out of here a little bit, but this is the third time we've discussed it, and we're about to embark on a really difficult time for this species that we all care so much about. I'll just end it right there. The letter speaks for itself; I think it is well done. I appreciate, Emilie, your synopsis of that and I'll stop there, Madam Chair.

CHAIR MESERVE: In consideration of our time allotment, as well as providing an opportunity for any public comment, I would look to the Board for a motion at this time. Staff does have something drafted to make it easy if anyone would care to make that motion. Joe Grist, could you read that into the record for us?

MR. GRIST: I would be happy to. **Move to recommend the ISFMP Policy Board approve and send the striped bass offshore aquaculture comment letter to NOAA Fisheries as modified today.**

CHAIR MESERVE: I see a second from Jay McNamee.

MR. GRIST: And half the room.

CHAIR MESERVE: Any further discussion, Joe. I know you already got up there with some comments, but you're welcome to provide more if you like.

MR. GRIST: No, I think comments around the table speak for themselves, good consensus report for this. Again, well done for staff to help us put this all together.

CHAIR MESERVE: Jay, any further remarks?

DR. McNAMEE: Nothing more, thank you.

CHAIR MESERVE: Looking for any further Board hands. Not seeing any; I do want to provide an opportunity for members of the public to comment on this, if there is anyone. In the back, please come to the microphone, introduce yourself.

MR. DAVID O'BRIEN: Thank you, Board. My name is David O'Brien; I am with NOAA Fisheries Office of Aquaculture. I just wanted to come here and give a few remarks. First and foremost, I appreciate being invited to come today and say a few comments, and really want to express my gratitude to everyone at

ASMFC who put so much thought and effort into this, not just this letter but over the past what two years or so we've been having these conversations.

The feedback is very much appreciated; we want to make sure we work very closely with the ASMFC on all aspects of aquaculture in the Atlantic. I want to make sure that I relay a couple of things just for awareness. First of all, we will take your comments, looking forward to seeing them. We've seen the draft, of course, on your website.

Look forward to the final version. We'll be sure to go through those more carefully and incorporate the comments as appropriate. There are a lot of great comments in there, into a final version of that Tech memo. That is a next step for us to take on. But also want to point out two other things. There are a number of things we're working on and I won't go down the whole list, of course. But two things in particular I want to highlight for this group today.

One is, that I know in your letter you highlighted the value of aquaculture opportunity areas or ALA's. That is our flagship effort for aquaculture in marine waters, not just offshore but a lot of this is focused on offshore. I wanted to point out that there actually is an effort, an opening right now as an RFI went out, a request for information went out just about a week ago, I believe, asking for comments on the next round of ALAs somewhere in the country, it's not moving into the Atlantic, certainly.

But we expect some comments from, perhaps the folks around this table or your constituents. I'll make sure that is out there if some people want to add additional thoughts on any aspect of aquaculture, really, where it should go, where it shouldn't go, including striped bass. We welcome your comments during that process.

The other thing I wanted to point out is, there are some comments again in the letter about the market implications of striped bass aquaculture. For awareness, we are in the process of launching a new cooperative institute for aquaculture called sea farm, it is CI Farm, and one of the first projects out of the gate will be to look at the market implications of striped bass aquaculture in the context of commercial and recreational fishing.

Now this is not limited to this particular conversation. Striped bass aquaculture is happening already in other parts of the country, other parts of the world. It's happening in Mexico, in coastal ponds and in the Gulf, for example. This is a timely conversation regardless of what happens for offshore aquaculture in ASMFC jurisdiction.

I will make sure we are listening to those concerns and questions, and we are taking steps to address them. With that again, thank you very much, appreciate your comments. Looking forward to continuing to work with you.

CHAIR MESERVE: Thank you for attending today, Mr. O'Brien, that is some very helpful information for us to have as well, and hope the Board members will look for that RFI and for the comments if you have them. Are there any other members of the public online, I'm not seeing any hands, or in the room.

Do the Board members need a moment to caucus on the motion? Seeing no shaking of the heads for that, **is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, any abstentions? Two from NOAA Fisheries and Fish and Wildlife Service. The motion carries by consent with two abstentions**.

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW AND STATE COMPLIANCE FOR THE 2025 FISHING YEAR

CHAIR MESERVE: That will bring us to Agenda Item Number 5, to Consider Approval of the FMP Review and State Compliance for the 2025 Fishing Year. Emilie will lead us through a presentation of this, and then we'll be looking again for a motion to approve the document. Go ahead, Emilie.

MS. FRANKE: I will give our typical FMP Review presentation starting with quick status of the stock. Based on our 2024 stock assessment update the stock is overfished but not experiencing overfishing.

This assessment had a terminal year of 2023. We are of course working on the next Benchmark Stock Assessment, which will have a terminal year of 2025.

We'll hear an update from Dr. Drew right after this about the timeline of that assessment. As far as the FMP, you know we are still under these Addendum II to Amendment 7, the management measures which were implemented to achieve a reduction. As a reminder, those were implemented in May of 2024 with commercial quotas having a 7% reduction. The ocean fishery is at a 1 fish at a 20-to-31-inch slot. There are some different measures for the New York Hudson River, the Pennsylvania Delaware River and the Delaware River and Bay in Delaware. In the Chesapeake Bay the measures are 1 fish at a 19-to-24-inch slot, and then we had those two recreational filleting measures as well.

Then of course at the end of last year the Board approved Addendum III for Amendment 7, which allowed Maryland to change its recreational season baseline, which Maryland chose to do. Then states had to implement the total length definition by January 1st of next year, and then we also have commercial tagging by the first point of landing, which needs to be implemented by the end of 2028.

Moving on to status of the fishery. What did the fishery look like last year in 2025? In 2025, total removals were about 3 million fish. This is about a 25% decrease from 2024. You can see here this is part of the table we have in the FMP Review showing the breakdown of removals by sector. You can see here the commercial sector; the proportion of total removals is a little bit higher this year.

That is because there was a greater decrease on the recreational side in 2025 than there was on the commercial side. For the commercial fishery in 2025, the fishery harvested about 4.2 million pounds. Again, this is a decrease from 2024, it is about a 4% decrease by weight, about an 11% decrease by number.

As far as the commercial quota utilization last year, the ocean utilized about 75% of its quota. Of course, largely that underutilization is due to the lack of availability of fish in North Carolina, so North Carolina had zero landings for their ocean fishery.

Of course, a couple states do not allow commercial fishing so they are not using their quotas. But however, most of the ocean states that do allow commercial fishing used over 95% of their quotas last year. Chesapeake Bay used about 89% of its quota last year, and there were no state quota overages in 2025.

Here is a time series of commercial landings since 2015, you can see the top line is coastwide. That next sort of dotted line is the Chesapeake Bay, and the bottom dashed line is the ocean. You sort of see that dip in 2020, and then landings have remained relatively stable, a little bit decreasing, not surprising given the quota management.

On the recreational side, last year in 2025 harvested about 1.4 million fish or about 11.2 million pounds. This is about a 17% decrease by number from 2024 about a 27% decrease in weight. About 11.7 million fish were released alive, and based on our assumption of that 9% release mortality, about 1 million of those are assumed to have died from that fishing interaction.

These live releases were about a 39% decrease from 2024. Here is a time series since 2015. The dark blue line is recreational harvest; the dashed green line is release-mortality. Again, for harvest you can see that peak in 2022, with the 2015-year class coming through, and it's been declining since then, sort of similar with release, you can see that very slight peak in 2022, but that has also been declining since then. As far as directed trips last year, there are about 16.3 million trips with striped bass as either a primary or secondary target. This is about an 8% decrease from 2024, and overall, the coastwide directed trips for striped bass is the lowest in the past decade last year. Again, the time series, you can see that dark blue line is the ocean directed trips, you know a clear decrease since that peak in 2022.

The bottom orange line is the Chesapeake Bay, also sort of a decrease over time with a slight increase in 2025, but still low for the time series. As usual the PRT notes there are several factors that are likely contributing to the catch and effort levels. Specifically for last year the PRT talked about bad weather and high winds, especially in early fall, and lack of available slot size fish in peak season.

This is specifically for New York and New Jersey. Decreases in those two states last year really drove that coastwide decrease that we saw. Some of the other states in New England were either sort of stable from 2024 or even a slight increase, but those large decreases that we saw in New York and New Jersey really drove that decrease in 2025.

Then in the Chesapeake Bay, the PRT talked about the lack of strong year classes for the past several years and also the Addendum II measures that have been implemented since 2024 are likely contributing to the low harvest we're seeing in the Bay for '24 and '25. For North Carolina, Albemarle Sound, Roanoke River areas. North Carolina provides us with updates.

But this is actually the same update since last year. Their last stock assessment indicated the stock is overfished and overfishing was occurring, with very low recruitment. North Carolina implemented a harvest moratorium starting in 2024 for these two areas, and that is still in place. Another part of the FMP Review every year is the recruitment trigger from Amendment 7.

You may recall that if any of the 4 juvenile abundance indices used in the stock assessment is below 75% of sort of our high recruitment period, then the F reference points we use must use the low recruitment assumption. We are already doing that; we are already using the low recruitment assumption.

This trigger was tripped again, but we are already operating under low recruitment assumption. The trigger was tripped, we reviewed the last 3 years of values, '23, '24 and '25 and actually all 4 indices tripped the trigger this year. Here on the screen, you can see the 4 indices. New York Hudson River is in the top left.

Next to it is the New Jersey Delaware River Index, the bottom left is Maryland/Chesapeake Bay, and then the bottom right is Virginia, you can see those red circles are all of the years where those indices have been below their trigger level. As far as PRT comments and recommendations.

First, the PRT noted that all states in 2025 did implement management and monitoring consistent with the FMP. Then a couple of discussion point with the PRT this year. The PRT did note the issue of determining commercial quota overages based on preliminary harvest estimates. The PRT brought this to the Board's attention last year, there were overages in 2024 in New York and Maryland, so those two states adjusted their 2025 quotas based on preliminary harvest estimates, and then a little bit later when final harvest estimates were available, determined that there was an additional overage amount, which those states then planned to take in 2026.

With the compliance reports this year, sort of the PDT just noted how that played out. New York did reduce their 2025 quota based on their preliminary overage amount, which was about 15,000 pounds. Their final data indicated an additional 600 pounds of overage.

But New York noted that when they completed their reporting for 2025, they were under by more than their total overage, so they did not take any additional quota reduction in 2026. Maryland did reduce their 2025 quotas based on their preliminary overage amounts, and then followed with a 2026 quota reduction based on those additional overage amounts.

The PRT also had a brief discussion on the New Jersey Stiped Bass Bonus Program tags. As a reminder, New Jersey's bonus program is an approved conservation equivalency program and participants can harvest 1 fish between 24 inches and less than 28 inches per permit. Only 14% of issued permits were used in 2025.

The PRT did have a brief discussion on what happens to any of the unused Bonus Program tags. For-hire participants in New Jersey are required to return the tags, while private anglers are not required to return them. The PRT noted that this is inconsistent with the strict tag return requirements for the commercial fishery.

This is obviously not a commercial fishery, but the program is based on commercial quota, so the PRT wanted to point that out. But New Jersey did indicate that there is some ongoing discussion on how to improve reporting from private anglers for this program. That's all I have; I am happy to take any questions.

CHAIR MESERVE: Great thorough review. Of all the FMP reviews we look at this is on of the meatier ones for striped bass. I do appreciate the PRT digging in a little bit about how the 2025 harvest differed from what our assumptions had been about a year ago. I'll turn to the Board for questions and I see Robert Brown.

MR. ROBERT T. BROWN, SR: I've got a question, you were talking about Maryland harvest on the commercial part was 89%, which is 11% which was not caught. I heard you say that was because of low abundance of rockfish. Did I hear you correctly on that?

MS. FRANKE: The PRT talked about the several factors possibly driving this low harvest. I think the PRT discussion was a little more focused on the recreational fishery. There wasn't specific discussion on why 11% of the Bay quota wasn't utilized last year.

MR. BROWN: Okay, one of the reasons we have it with our commercial fishery, it's the way it's set up. If it is set up so we don't catch our quota, because there is no rollover if you don't catch it, but the problem is the way it is set up in Maryland, we don't allocate enough for everybody. You allocate your quota and somebody doesn't catch it full, not because there is not the fish there, it's because we've got some people who aren't fishing, we've got some people who started fishing early and then stopped and shifted over, go to oystering or whatever. The way it is set up, if they only allocate exactly the amount that we are to catch, we will never catch it, because there are a few people who don't fish anymore. Some people have such a low quota that they are not using it. That is one of the reasons that we are below.

The problem I have with it is this 11% that is not caught, not that we're not catching them. The problem I have with it is, we don't get no credit for not catching the fish. I'm not talking about a rollover, but when the following season comes you have two or three years. It's been a number of years; I don't know how many years in Maryland.

I think it's only been maybe two years since we've been doing this that we went over our quota, of course we paid it back. The last time we paid it back, we went over our quota was because the allocation came at the craw to the cut that we had to take, and that threw us over a couple percent, which we did pay back.

But I think that we need to get credit for not catching those fish when it comes to further times when we get a cut. Well, you didn't catch it for the past so many years, and now you've got to have a cut because things are bad. It just doesn't seem fair that we get cut so hard, and we are the most restricted, the commercial fisherman is. I mean we have to tag our fish; we have to weigh our fish; we've got to carry them to a check-in station.

All this stuff we do, we are so heavily regulated, and yet the recreational fisher, what do they have? MRIP. Everyone in here knows that MRIP is far from being a perfect situation. It's not real science, and I just wanted to bring this to everybody's attention. Thank you.

CHAIR MESERVE: Thank you, Robert, for the insights into the commercial harvest results there. I did see another hand from Loren.

MR. LOREN W. LUSTIG: Thank you to the presenter for a very interesting report. In one of your early

slides, I took note, I think the title was something like catch effort levels, and it related to angler behavior, which I found to be a very interesting phrase. Could you expand on what is the consideration there as it relates to angler behavior, and I appreciate the opportunity to ask a question.

MS. FRANKE: I think it can mean a lot of different things. I think one example is when the fish are more available, we tend to see an increase in effort, so folks are choosing to take trips when the fish are more available versus when they are not. I think it can mean a lot of different things. I think that is one example the PRT comes back to is sort of how does effort change, based on when the fish are available.

MR. LUSTIG: Follow up if that's okay. The word behavior often would indicate some perhaps maladaptive behavior like poaching or disregard of slot limits, that sort of thing. That was what I was wondering about.

MS. FRANKE: Got it. The PRTS, I think definition or use of the term behavior wasn't referring to things like poaching, referring more to angler's decisions on whether or not to go fishing.

CHAIR MESERVE: Appreciate that clarification, any other questions from the Board? Jason McNamee.

DR. McNAMEE: It's in the report and I think you mentioned it as well, Emilie, in the presentation about the New Jersey tagging program. The report says they are working on something, so I just wondered if the folks from New Jersey might want to offer what they are considering to help.

But the issue is I think, the issue tags have been there is no requirement to turn them in. I don't know what leverage they have to get those tags back, like you have in a commercial fishery, for instance. I am just curious as to what they are thinking about with respect to that tagging program and how they might improve it to sort of help with this issue of these tags just kind of disappearing after they are issued.

CHAIR MESERVE: Thanks for the question, Jay, similar one. I don't know if you caught all that Joe, as you are just coming back into the room, but Jason was asking abut he Bonus Program and the types of improvements that New Jersey was considering to improve the tag accountability.

MR. JOE CIMINO: The reason why it exists for charters is they are actually given like a bag of tags. With the remainder of the program for private anglers it was a single tag going out to folks. I think it may have been more administration type stuff than anything else, but it is something that we're working on, considering several different options.

One of the things that we're really interested in is just understanding the usage. Why are so many folks asking for them and not using them. Part of that tends to be, I think, kind of combined trips with folks, and so not all the tags are used. Can they all start coming back? That is what we're looking into, are we capable of handling and requiring if every individual gets the same tag back to us, worried about reporting lost tags and how to handle it kind of stuff now.

CHAIR MESERVE: Thanks, Joe, for that response there. I think it would be worth, the next time that New Jersey submits its conservation equivalency proposal for that program, that would be an opportunity to look at exactly what is being done, and whether or not there ought to be any improvements, what New Jersey is talking about now. Any further questions from the Board? Not seeing any, would anyone care to make a motion to approve the document. John Clark, go ahead.

MR. JOHN CLARK: I'm going to wait for it to pop up here. Don't make me adlib. **Move to approve the Atlantic Striped Bass FMP Review for the 2025 fishing year and state compliance reports**.

CHAIR MESERVE: I see a second from Mike Luisi, thank you, is there any further discussion. Seeing none, **is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none are there any abstentions? No, okay, the motion is approved by unanimous consent**.

UPDATE ON 2027 BENCHMARK STOCK ASSESSMENT

CHAIR MESERVE: We will move on to Dr. Drew's update on the 2027 Benchmark Stock Assessment.

DR. KATIE DREW: This will be pretty quick. First of all, we are having our Assessment Workshop in essentially two weeks, the week of August 24. There is a webinar option if people would like to listen in to that. But I think the bigger update is that as you know we were scheduled to go through the Spring SARC, and originally with monkfish.

But given that the monkfish Research Track is indefinitely on hold, we spoke to the NRCC and they are willing to move our review date back to late May, early June, to give us more time to include the new MRIP numbers, so that we are not quite so crunched for time when they come out, essentially.

During our Assessment Workshop we'll have more time to really fold those numbers in and understand how that can pass the assessment. That means the Board will receive the new assessment in August of next year instead of May, as was originally scheduled. Happy to take any questions on that or the rest of the assessment.

CHAIR MESERVE: Any questions? John Clark.

MR. CLARK: I think the word is around that you are going to be reconsidering the recreational release mortality. I was just wondered if briefly you could state how that may affect the estimates of the stock size.

DR. DREW: I think it is hard to say right now. We are considering changing the estimate of release mortality. As you all know, we use a constant 9% rate across space and across time and across ages. The Dean et al work out of Massachusetts suggests that the rate is lower than that.

But I think probably the more important impact is that it is a function of size of the fish, so that smaller fish have a lower release mortality, older larger fish have a higher release mortality, which is consistent with some other work that has been done on that in the past. I think that would change not just the scale of the population, the way that moving to a straight 4%, 5% rate would.

But it is essentially going to change the catch at age as well, so that we will have fewer small fish in the catch at age and more old fish in the catch at age. That combined with the potential scale change in MRIP, and how that is distributed across modes and across time of year. I think it is really too hard to say, but there will most likely be a scale change, but I think it is really difficult to say how that will play out or what that would say about trend or status at this point.

CHAIR MESERVE: Any other questions about the timeline or the assessment? Mike Luisi.

MR. MICHAEL LUISI: I'm just sitting here thinking about the timing of any action that would come from the result of the benchmark. In August, not that we have any control over that, but I feel like an August report is going to be challenging if there is some type of action that is needed and we want to do it quickly. We've gone through the process of making changes within a season and we've seen just through the FMP report, whether it was an emergency action years ago. We took commercial and recreational reductions while we were already within a season a few years back, and that caused challenges and complications with our commercial management. I'm just wondering if staff have been talking about a way.

Would there be a way that we could preload something a little bit, so that when we receive information in August. If that information leads to us having to consider taking reductions, and I'm kind of anticipating that, as I think most of you are, based on what we just saw about our coastwide recruitment.

It's been pretty poor for years, and I don't anticipate we are going to be looking at review that is going to be positive. Just thoughts about, if we were going to take action, is there any way we could in 2028, without really throwing a wrench

into kind of states developing fishing guides. All of the material, everything that goes out for a year is significant for striped bass. Just asking if there has been any thought and consideration as to the timeline for action?

DR. DREW: We talked about that a little, I think. Obviously, in our opinion, it's more important that you guys receive the best scientific information than like rush through to get something that you would then rush into management. But the other thing to consider is, I think the Board Workgroup, and sort of the longer-term planning, and also the potential for things like new reference points.

I think there are probably going to be larger questions that come to you about the long-term future that a short, immediate response in 2028 is maybe not what you would want, even if you got this in May. I think it is certainly something to consider, and the Board should be ready in August to like think through these things and discuss. I don't know that there will be a way, or even if a quick action in '28 would be beneficial to the long-term plans that this Board needs to make.

MR. LUISI: Appreciate that answer, thank you

MS. FRANKE: I'll just add a different point on sort of the long-term action versus immediate response. But as far as from a process perspective, the mechanisms for response, of course do you have an addendum or an amendment. If you have the stock assessment in August and the PDT were to come back with a draft addendum in October, and the Board approved that for public comment.

Of course, final action wouldn't be until the winter of 2028, unless there were some sort of special meeting. But I also want to point out that in Addendum II there is the Board action provision, which is still in play. It says that if an upcoming stock assessment prior to the 2029 rebuilding deadline indicates the stock is not projected to rebuild by 2029, with a probability of 350% the Board could respond via Board action. Again, it sort of gets back to Katie's point of immediate versus long-term action, but that Board action provision is still there.

CHAIR MESERVE: Thank you, both. Anything further, any further questions? Yes, Marty.

MR. GARY: Question for Katie. Is it too preliminary to understand whether or not, related to natural mortality for the upcoming assessment, any emerging science will read its way into the stock assessment? I'm thinking specifically mycobacteriosis in the Chesapeake Bay.

DR. DREW: I think we're definitely going to take another shot at that, especially with the spatial model, which gives us more ability to sort of take what we know about what is happening in Chesapeake Bay versus the ocean and do some stuff there. I think it is too early to decide whether that is going to be the base case, or whether that is just going to be a sensitivity run. But it is definitely something that we are looking into, given kind of the trends that we see coming out of our tagging models and other sources of information

CHAIR MESERVE: Not seeing any further hands, that's good. We're bumping up against our time.

REVIEW AND POPULATE ADVISORY PANEL MEMBERSHIP

CHAIR MESERVE: I am going to move to the next item and turn to Tina Berger to review a nomination for the Advisory Panel.

MS. TINA L. BERGER: I offer for the Board's consideration the nomination of Mike Waine, with the Commercial Sportfishing Association as a representative from North Carolina, he replaces John Worthington.

CHAIR MESERVE: Thank you, is there a motion on the Advisory Panel nomination? Adam Nowalsky.

MR. ADAM NOWALSKY: I **move to approve Mike Waine of North Carolina to the Atlantic Striped Bass Advisory Panel.**

CHAIR MESERVE: Is there a second, Doug Grout, thank you. **Any opposition to the motion? Abstentions? Seeing none; the motion carries by unanimous consent**, welcome, Mike. That brings us down to other business.

ADJOURNMENT

CHAIR MESERVE: Any other business to come before the Board? Seeing none; is there a motion to adjourn? So moved and second, and we will consider Board meeting adjourned. Thank you all for your time this morning.

(Whereupon the meeting adjourned at 9:30 am on Thursday, August 6, 2026)