

April 2022 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met April 5-7, 2022, in Galloway, New Jersey. This was conducted as a hybrid meeting, with virtual and in-person participation options. Presentations, briefing materials, motions, and webinar recordings are available at <http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/april-2022>.

HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- Approved for public comment a final range of alternatives for the Atlantic Mackerel Rebuilding 2.0 Amendment
- Revised the 2022 specifications for *Illex* squid, increasing the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) from 33,000 metric tons (MT) to 40,000 MT and increasing the closure threshold from 94% to 96% of the quota
- Reviewed 2023 specifications for golden and blueline tilefish and recommended no changes
- Reviewed the 2021 Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem Report and EAFM Risk Assessment
- Received an update on the East Coast Climate Change Scenario Planning Initiative
- Reviewed the preliminary results of a Council-funded research project on surfclam species diagnostics and population connectivity
- Received an update from NOAA Fisheries on recent public outreach efforts related to sea turtle bycatch and gear research in trawl fisheries
- Received presentations on offshore wind energy from two developers and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

Atlantic Mackerel Rebuilding Amendment

The Council reviewed a final range of alternatives for the Atlantic Mackerel Rebuilding 2.0 Amendment. After recommending several revisions, the Council approved the public hearing document for public comment. The Council is developing this amendment in response to a peer-reviewed 2021 Management Track Stock Assessment which concluded that rebuilding was unlikely to occur as originally anticipated. The stock size increased 180% between 2014 and 2019 but was still less than a quarter rebuilt, with overfishing occurring through 2019 (the last year of data in that assessment).

The Council is considering five rebuilding plans that have different probabilities of rebuilding the stock in 10 years (the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) advised a long-term approach). This action will set specifications for only 2023 because a new management track stock assessment should be available in 2023 to inform 2024-2025 specifications. Potential management measures include reduced commercial quotas, a 3-inch trawl mesh requirement, and recreational bag/possession limits of 10 or 15 fish. Seasonal closures are not being further considered for this action. The plan will also clarify whether any possession of Atlantic mackerel (including bait) in federal waters (beyond 3 miles) by all commercial or for-hire vessels triggers federal permitting and electronic vessel trip report (VTR) requirements. The permitting/reporting regulations are currently unclear if any possession beyond 3 miles is prohibited without a federal permit. The action would also set a 2023 river herring and shad cap for the Atlantic mackerel fishery, which has been a standard part of specifications since 2014.

Comments on the amendment may be submitted at any of five public hearings to be held between April 25 and May 2, 2022, or in writing by May 9, 2022. The public hearing document, hearing schedule, written comment instructions, and other details are available on the [Atlantic Mackerel Rebuilding Amendment action page](#).

2022 *Illex* Squid Specifications

The Council reviewed *Illex* squid specifications for the 2022 fishing year and recommended increasing the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) from 33,000 metric tons (MT) to 40,000 MT. This recommendation is consistent with recommendations from the Council’s SSC. After anticipated discards are deducted, the commercial quota would increase from 31,478 MT to 38,156 MT (84.1 million pounds). Because of the improved reporting, monitoring, and closure executions in recent years, the Council also recommended that the closure of the commercial fishery occur at 96% of the quota rather than the current 94%.

Golden and Blueline Tilefish

2023 Specifications Review

In 2023, golden and blueline tilefish will both be in year 2 of multi-year specifications previously adopted for the 2022-2024 fishing years. After reviewing updated fishery information and considering recommendations from its SSC, Tilefish Monitoring Committee, Advisory Panel, and staff, the Council recommended no changes to the 2023 specifications summarized below.

Summary of Golden Tilefish 2023 Specifications	
Annual Catch Limit (ACL):	1.964 million pounds
Commercial Quota (Individual Fishing Quota fishery)	1.763 million pounds
Incidental Quota	75,410 pounds
Incidental Trip Limit	500 pounds or 50 percent, by weight, of all fish (including the golden tilefish) onboard the vessel, whichever is less
Recreational Trip Limit	Bag Limit – 8-fish per angler per trip.

Summary of 2023 Blueline Tilefish Specifications	
Annual Catch Limit (ACL):	100,520 pounds
Commercial Quota:	27,140 pounds
Commercial Trip Limits	Initially 500 pounds gutted weight, reduced to 300 pounds once 70% of the quota is landed. No retention allowed once 100% of the quota is landed.
Recreational Trip Limits	Private vessels: 3-fish per angler per trip; Uninspected for-hire vessels: 5-fish per angler per trip; Inspected for-hire vessels: 7-fish per angler per trip.

Private Recreational Tilefish Permits

Private recreational vessels intending to target or retain golden or blueline tilefish are required to obtain a federal recreational tilefish permit and report catches. Council members expressed concern that some vessel operators may not be aware of these requirements, which were recently implemented in August 2020, and encouraged Council and NOAA fisheries staff to improve public awareness and compliance. Learn more about recreational tilefish permitting on the Council’s [Recreational Tilefish Permitting and Reporting page](#).

2022 Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem and EAFM Risk Assessment Update Report

Dr. Sarah Gaichas (NEFSC) presented the key results and findings of the [2022 Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem report](#). The report is provided to the Council each April and gives an overview of ecosystem-level indicators that evaluate the status and trends of ecological, environmental, economic, and social components of the Mid-Atlantic ecosystem. The 2022 report retains the new structure developed in 2021 that includes information detailing the linkages between ecosystem indicators and environmental variables, their performance relative to management

objectives, and the potential risks they pose to meeting management goals and objectives. Some of the key findings of the 2022 report include:

- Recreational effort shows a long-term increasing trend, but recreational fleet diversity is decreasing due to a shift away from for-hire to shore-based fishing.
- Ecosystem stability is showing mixed trends, with several climate and oceanography metrics changing.
- Climate change, most notably ocean warming and changes in the Gulf Stream, continues to affect the Mid-Atlantic ecosystem.

In addition, the report includes several new indicators related to catch relative to management targets, environmental justice and social vulnerability, and offshore wind development.

Dr. Gaichas also presented the [2022 EAFM Risk Assessment Update](#), part of the Council's EAFM structured decision framework to incorporate ecosystem considerations into the management process. Risk assessment helps identify and prioritize ecosystem interactions and risks to help the Council decide where to focus limited resources to address priority ecosystem considerations. The report is an adaptive document and updated annually with new science, analysis, and information, including many of the indicators included in the 2022 State of the Ecosystem report. The 2022 risk assessment indicated the risk ranking for seven elements decreased (i.e., lower risk) and the risk ranking for three risk elements increased (i.e., higher risk) and all other rankings remained unchanged. Additionally, the report now includes risk elements and rankings for chub mackerel. Later in 2022, the Council will initiate a comprehensive review of the risk assessment where new/different risk elements and analyses that could inform the risk criteria will be considered.

Climate Change Scenario Planning

The Council received an update on recent and upcoming activities for the [East Coast Climate Change Scenario Planning](#) initiative. The scenario planning core team recently completed the [Exploration Phase](#) of the initiative, including the development of background documents and a series of webinars exploring factors that are expected to drive changes in East Coast fisheries over the next 20 years. The next step in the initiative will be a scenario creation workshop to be held in the Washington, DC area June 21-23, 2022. Workshop participants will create a set of scenarios that describe how changing oceanographic, biological, and social/economic conditions could combine to create future challenges and opportunities for East Coast fisheries. In person workshop participation will be limited to approximately 75 individuals, to be selected based on an [application](#) open through April 18, 2022 (see the [announcement](#) of the workshop application for additional details).

Surfclam Species Diagnostics and Population Connectivity Research Project

Dr. Mathew Hare and Hannah Hartung of Cornell University presented the Council with the preliminary results of their project, "Surfclam species diagnostics and population connectivity estimates to inform management." The project examined genetic samples of the Atlantic surfclam (*S.s. solidissima*) and the Southern surfclam (*S.s. similis*), and the most dramatic new information is a population subdivision within the Atlantic surfclam resulting in 3 different taxa in the region. The final report from the project is anticipated in June 2022, with a presentation on those results to be given to the SSC at their July 2022 meeting.

Sea Turtle Bycatch in MAFMC Trawl Fisheries

The Council received an update from NOAA Fisheries staff on their recent public outreach efforts related to sea turtle bycatch and gear research in trawl fisheries in the Greater Atlantic Region. NOAA conducted virtual stakeholder webinars and call-in days throughout February and March to gather information from the fishing industry and other stakeholder groups to inform any future bycatch mitigation measures. Public feedback throughout this outreach consisted of questions on the sea turtle bycatch estimates, observer data, and research. Comments were received on the geographical range of the measures, tow duration issues, fishery definitions, and

economic impacts. Protected Resources staff indicated that there is more research to be done and they are approximately a year away from the proposed rule stage.

Offshore Wind Energy Updates

The Council received presentations on the [Ocean Wind](#) and [Atlantic Shores](#) offshore wind energy projects. Amanda Lefton, Director of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), also provided [updates](#) on several developments related to offshore wind energy development.

Research Set-Aside Update

The Research Steering Committee (RSC) Chair provided a brief report on the fourth and final Research Set-Aside (RSA) Workshop held on February 16th. These workshops explored the possible redevelopment of the RSA program, which has been suspended since 2014. Summary reports are all available on the [RSA Workshop page](#). The RSC Committee will meet on April 27 to develop recommendations for consideration at the June 2022 Council Meeting.

Next Meeting

The Council will meet with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Policy Board on May 5, 2022 to receive an update on the Recreational Harvest Control Rule Framework/Addenda. This meeting will be held in Arlington, VA with in-person and virtual participation options. The next full Council meeting will be held **June 7-9, 2022** in Riverhead, NY. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.