

2024 Proposed Actions and Deliverables – Project Descriptions

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This document provides additional background information and details about the draft actions and deliverables proposed for inclusion in the *2024 Implementation Plan*. Details in this table are subject to change. Item numbers in the far-left column are associated with the deliverable numbers in the Draft *2024 Proposed Actions and Deliverables* document included in the October 2023 briefing materials.

Action/Deliverable	Staff Lead(s)	Description
1. 2025 black sea bass specifications	Beaty	Results of the 2024 management track assessment will inform 2025 specifications. Measures to be considered include commercial and recreational catch and landings limits and commercial management measures. Specifications will only be set for one year given that an additional management track assessment should be available in 2025 for setting 2026-2027 specifications.
2. 2025 summer flounder and scup specifications review	Dancy, Hart	Summer flounder and scup specifications and recreational management measures were previously set for the 2024-2025 fishing years. The Council will review updated information for both stocks and determine if any changes are needed for 2025.
3. 2025 black sea bass recreational management measures	Beaty	2025 recreational management measures will be set following the process described in the Recreational Harvest Control Rule Framework. Measures will only be set for one year given that an additional management track assessment should be available in 2025 for setting 2026-2027 measures.
4. 2025 summer flounder and scup recreational management measures review	Dancy, Hart	See #2
5. Recreational Measures Setting Process Framework/Addenda (continuing)	Beaty	The Recreational Harvest Control Rule Framework modified the process for setting recreational management measures for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. The new “Percent Change Approach” will sunset no later than the end of 2025. Through this action, the Council is developing a new process to be implemented in time for use in setting 2026 recreational measures.
6. Recreational Sector Separation and Recreational Catch Accounting Amendment for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish (continuing)	Dancy, Hart	This amendment considers (1) options for managing for-hire recreational fisheries separately from other recreational fishing modes and (2) options related to recreational catch accounting, such as private angler reporting and enhanced vessel trip report requirements for for-hire vessels. The Council and Policy Board initiated this action in October 2020. Limited progress has been made due to prioritization of other actions.

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7. Summer flounder, scup, black sea bass advisory panel fishery performance reports	Dancy, Hart, Beaty	The Council's advisory panels develop Fishery Performance Reports (FPR) each year to provide the Council and Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) with an annual description of the factors that influenced fishing effort and catch within each of the Council's fisheries. These reports are intended to summarize fishermen's "on-the-water" perspectives, including information about fishing effort, market trends, and environmental changes, and other factors that may not be fully accounted for in the stock assessment process. To support development of FPRs, Council staff develop a Fishery Information Document (FID) for each species managed under the fishery management plan. The purpose of the FID is to summarize the most recent catch, landings, and effort data.
8. Black sea bass management track assessment support	Beaty	Management track (MT) assessments provide routine, scheduled, updated advice to directly inform management actions. MT assessments are designed to be simpler, quicker, and more efficient than research track assessments. Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) assessment scientists have primary responsibility for planning and carrying out management track assessments. Council staff involvement typically includes attending assessment meetings/calls, tracking assessment progress, and communicating assessment results to advisory bodies.
9. Framework action to consider modifications to the commercial scup Gear Restricted Areas (GRA) or other measures to help reduce scup discards (initiation)	Hart, Didden, Kentner	In August 2023, the Council reviewed an evaluation of commercial scup discards and the scup gear restricted areas (GRAs). The report noted that, given the more recent spatial patterns of scup discards, consideration of alternative measures or modifications to the GRAs may be warranted. The report recommended that continued use of GRAs should consider changes that have high probability of reducing where discards will be rather than reacting to where they have been. The Council agreed that the identified research as well as a related Framework action to consider GRA modifications, or other measures to further reduce scup discards, should be added to the Council's 2024 Implementation Plan.
10. Scup bycatch prediction and avoidance modeling and research*	Hart, Didden, Kentner	Related to the above deliverable (#9), the Council may initiate contract work to examine the predictability of scup bycatch and evaluate alternative approaches to reduce scup discards. Note: SSC provided feedback on possible future analysis – see Sept SSC report.
11. Black sea bass commercial state allocations (consider options for addressing disapproved portions of Amendment 23)	Beaty	In 2023, NOAA Fisheries disapproved the portion of Amendment 23 which would have added the commercial state black sea bass allocations to the Council FMP. Section 304(a)(4) provides Councils the opportunity to revise and resubmit amendments for Secretarial review after addressing the relevant legal requirements. If desired by the Council, Council staff can work with NOAA

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		Fisheries and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission staff to consider potential options for addressing the disapproved aspects of Amendment 23.
12. 2025 bluefish specifications review	Cisneros	Bluefish specifications and recreational management measures were previously set for the 2024-2025 fishing years. The Council will review updated information and determine if any changes are needed for 2025.
13. 2025 bluefish recreational management measures review	Cisneros	See #12
14. Bluefish advisory panel fishery performance report	Cisneros	See #7
15. 2025-2027 golden and blue line tilefish specifications	Montañez, Hart	Results of the 2024 MT assessment will inform 2025-2027 specifications for golden tilefish.
2025 blue line tilefish specifications (revised from draft list of 2024 deliverables in briefing materials)	Montañez, Hart	Blue
16. Golden and blue	Montañez, Hart	See #7
17. Update on private recreational tilefish permitting and reporting performance	Montañez, Hart	In August 2020 NOAA Fisheries implemented new permitting and reporting requirements for all recreational vessels targeting or retaining golden or blue
18. Outreach to improve awareness of, and compliance with, private recreational tilefish reporting requirements*	Montañez, Hart, Sabo, contract	Staff is working with a contractor to develop an outreach campaign for winter/spring 2024.
19. Blue	Hart	An operational assessment for blue
20. Golden tilefish research track assessment support	Montañez	Research track (RT) assessments evaluate new datasets that can either inform or be used in new or existing stock assessment models. These assessments are carried out over longer time frames and with fewer requirements for using the most recent data. The research track is intended to be the opportunity for extensive and comprehensive research and analysis. The Council staff lead for a

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		species typically participates on the assessment working group (WG) which is responsible for carrying out and making decisions about the stock assessment and addressing the assessment terms of reference. The golden tilefish research track assessment will be peer reviewed in the spring of 2024.
21. Golden tilefish management track assessment support		See #8
22. South Atlantic Deepwater Longline (SADL) Survey expansion into Mid-Atlantic waters*	Montañez, Hart	In 2023 the Council began collaborating with the NOAA Fisheries' Southeast and Northeast Fisheries Science Centers and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to expand the SADL survey north to include areas off Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey. The SADL survey currently uses industry fishing vessels to collect information on a variety of deepwater species, such as golden and blueline tilefish, from the Florida Keys to the NC/VA border. The expansion of the survey will allow scientists and managers to monitor potential distribution shifts of deepwater species and collect information on blueline tilefish throughout its range.
23. 2025-2026 butterfish specifications	Didden	Results of the 2024 MT assessment will inform 2025 -2026 specifications for butterfish.
24. 2025 Atlantic mackerel, chub mackerel, longfin squid, and <i>Illex</i> squid specifications review	Didden, Beaty	Multi-year specifications were previously set for Atlantic mackerel (2024-2025), <i>Illex</i> squid (2024-2025), longfin squid (2024-2026), and chub mackerel (2023-2025). The Council will review updated information for these stocks and determine if any changes are needed for 2025.
25. MSB advisory panel fishery performance reports	Didden, Beaty	See #7
26. Butterfish management track assessment support	Didden	See #8
27. Longfin squid research track assessment support*	Didden, contract	See #20 for general description. A RT assessment for longfin squid is scheduled to be peer reviewed in March 2026. The Council has engaged a contractor with expertise in quantitative stock assessment to participate on the assessment workgroup. The contractor will conduct data analyses and develop analytical models in support of the workgroup efforts. Council staff will also participate on the WG.
28. Longfin squid biological sampling project*	Didden, contract	A variety of data needs have been identified regarding longfin squid aging, growth, and seasonal productivity. In collaboration with the NEFSC, the Council has contracted with A.I.S, INC. to process biological samples from longfin squid

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		collected on commercial fishing vessels. Statoliths will be sent to Spain under a contract to estimate ages. The data collected via this project will be analyzed in this upcoming longfin squid RT assessment.
29. Squid modeling project*	Didden, contracts	The Council is supporting an effort, led by Michael Wilberg and Geneviève Nesslage (University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science), to develop and test length-based assessment models for U.S. east coast squid. The project is primarily a NOAA Fisheries’ Stock Assessment Improvement grant but the Council is partially supporting the project and Council staff will be participating.
30. RH/S run data portal development project*	Didden, contract	The Council has contracted with Manomet to build out a portal for centralizing information on river herring runs. The primary purposes of this platform are to serve as a communications tool to build a greater shared understanding of the status of river herring coast-wide, and to provide managers with an annual view of the status of the stock in between regular stock assessments.
31. RH/S bycatch prediction and avoidance modeling and research*	Didden, contract	During the August 2023 Council meeting, the Council agreed to consider exploration of modeling approach for shad and river herring bycatch avoidance approaches during 2024 priorities discussions. This work would likely be carried out by a contractor.
32. 2025 spiny dogfish specifications review	Didden	Spiny dogfish specifications were previously set for the 2024-2026 fishing years. The Council will review updated information and determine if any changes are needed for 2025.
33. Spiny dogfish advisory panel fishery performance report	Didden	See #7
34. Spiny dogfish ageing project*	Didden, contract	In collaboration with the NEFSC, the Council has contracted with A.I.S, INC. to process spiny dogfish spine samples from several sources.
35. Spiny dogfish ageing workshop	Didden	Linked to the ageing project, this workshop will bring together individuals familiar with ageing spiny dogfish from several locations – East Coast, West Coast, Europe
36. Joint framework action to reduce Atlantic sturgeon bycatch in the monkfish and spiny dogfish fisheries (final action)	Cisneros, Didden	This action was initiated due to the 2021 Biological Opinion (BiOp) that considered the effects of ten FMPs on ESA listed species. The BiOp requires that sturgeon bycatch be reduced in federal large mesh gillnet fisheries, however it does not prescribe specific measures or a target percentage of bycatch reduction. It is anticipated that the Council will take final action on this framework in 2024.
37. 2025 surfclam and ocean quahog specifications review	Coakley	Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahog specifications were previously set for the 2021-2026 fishing years. The Council will review updated catch and landings information for both stocks and determine if any changes are needed for 2025.

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38. Surfclam/quahog advisory panel fishery performance reports	Coakley	See #7
39. Atlantic surfclam management track assessment support	Coakley	See #8
40. Surfclam and quahog electronic monitoring project*	Coakley	This project is an initial test of the ability of machine learning and image analysis to differentiate the species and determine the length of the two primary clam species caught commercially in federal waters in the Northeast Atlantic. This project will fund placement of cameras and image recording equipment onboard the vessel contracted to conduct the 2023 NEFSC clam survey. The survey is conducted from, and operates like, a typical commercial clam fishing vessel.
41. Supplemental surfclam genetics project*	Coakley	In 2019 the Council contracted with Cornell researchers to investigate distributions of <i>Spisula solidissima similis</i> and <i>Spisula solidissima solidissima</i> in the nearshore waters of the US Northwest Atlantic. Cancellation of surveys during the pandemic prevented inclusion of recent samples from the continental shelf off Delmarva. This supplemental study will analyze population genomic variation in surfclams collected by the 2022 federal survey, including collections from Long Island to Delmarva.
42. Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Species Separation Requirements Amendment (continuing)	Coakley, Montanez	As surfclams have shifted toward deeper water in recent years, catches including both surfclams and ocean quahogs have become more common. Current regulations do not allow the two species to be landed on the same trip or in the same tagged cage. The Council is developing an Amendment to consider changes to species separation requirements in these fisheries.
43. 2025-2029 Council research priorities	Muffley	The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that each of the eight regional councils develop a five-year research priorities document. The research priorities developed by the Council should address “fisheries, fisheries interactions, habitat and other areas of research that are necessary for management purposes.” In 2024, the Council will develop and approve a research priorities document for 2025-2029.
44. Updates to the SSC’s Overfishing Limit (OFL) Coefficient of Variation (CV) Guidance Document	Muffley	First developed in 2019, the OFL CV guidance document is intended to provide a clear, consistent, and transparent process in documenting SSC conclusions regarding the scientific uncertainty of the OFL estimate. The process has evolved over the past few years and become more complex as more factors have been included. In 2024, the SSC will work on reviewing and updating the OFL CV guidance document.

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45. Supplemental port biological sampling*	Didden	In collaboration with the NEFSC, the Council has contracted with A.I.S, INC. to collect additional lengths from commercial catches as well as samples for later ageing. These data are critical for standard age and/or length-based quantitative assessments.
46. Mid-Atlantic fish ageing project*	Coakley	Aging technicians (2) will process and age samples for a variety of MAFMC species, including any back-logged samples and those acquired through supplemental port biological sampling (see #42 above). These data will support stock assessments and inform the scientific basis for determining of species stock status, biological reference points, and catch limits.
47. Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP) coordination and facilitation	Hart	The NTAP is a joint advisory panel of the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils. It is comprised of Council members, as well as fishing industry, academic, and government and non- government fisheries experts who provide advice and direction on the conduct of trawl research. The Mid-Atlantic Council serves as the administrative lead for NTAP.
48. Joint Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Council offshore wind web page management	Beaty, Sabo	The Council maintains a joint offshore wind page in coordination with the New England Council to communicate updates on offshore wind energy development with interested stakeholders.
49. Council comments on habitat and fishery issues related to offshore energy development	Beaty, Coakley	The Council will track offshore energy developments and develop comments as appropriate.
50. 2024 Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) risk assessment report	Muffley	The first EAFM risk assessment was completed in 2017 and has been updated annually since then. The 2024 risk assessment report will reflect the revisions and updates identified by the Council and EOP Committee as part of the comprehensive review completed in 2023 and include the most up-to-date information and indicators developed in the 2024 Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem report.
51. National Fishing Effects Database project*	Coakley, Kentner	The Mid-Atlantic Council will work with the New England Council and NOAA Fisheries to develop a national fishing effects database to support fishery management councils essential fish habitat (EFH) reviews as well as fishing effects consultations. The National Fishing Effects Database will be online, searchable, and publicly accessible.
52. Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment (continuing)	Coakley, Kentner	This action is an opportunity to utilize the best available fish habitat science to improve EFH designations and support the Council’s fish habitat conservation efforts while supporting the EFH consultation process. The consultation process

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		plays an important role in addressing the impacts of non-fishing projects (such as wind energy projects) on fish habitat. This action will concurrently conduct the 5-year EFH review required under the Magnuson Stevens Act while amending fishery management plans for the Council, as needed.
53. Northeast Regional Habitat Assessment (NRHA) maintenance and integration of products	Kentner, Coakley	From 2019 to 2022 the Council was engaged in the Northeast Regional Habitat Assessment – a collaborative effort to describe and characterize estuarine, coastal, and offshore fish habitat distribution, abundance, and quality in the Northeast. Core work products were completed in mid-2022 with the launch of the NRHA data explorer. Council staff continue to maintain and improve these products.
54. Thread herring Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) application review	Beaty	Lund’s Fisheries, Inc., H&L Axelsson, Inc., and Axelsson Seiner, Inc. submitted an EFP application for an experimental purse seine thread herring fishery. Thread herring are listed as an ecosystem component species under the Council’s Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment. The EOP AP, EOP Committee, SSC, and Council discussed this application in 2021 and 2022. The applicants are in the process of completing additional analyses at the request of GARFO. If GARFO decides to move forward with this application and publish a Federal Register notice with an associated public comment period, the Council will consider developing and submitting comments.
55. 2025-2029 Strategic Plan	Sabo	The Council’s strategic plan defines the Council’s vision, mission, and goals and provides a framework for development of specific activities and priorities each year. The current strategic plan will expire at the end of 2024. In 2024 the Council will develop a new 5-year strategic plan for the years 2025 through 2029.
56. Reappointment of all advisory panels	Sabo	Council advisory panel (AP) members serve 3-year terms. Current AP members’ terms will end on June 30, 2024. Advisors do not have term limits, but they must reapply to be considered for an additional term. The Council will begin the reappointment process in early spring 2024.
57. Update on commercial landings of unmanaged species (including consideration of possible landings thresholds for further evaluation for management)	Beaty	The Council will review an annual update on landings of unmanaged species compiled by GARFO. The intent is to look for signs of emerging unmanaged commercial fisheries. The EOP Committee will consider defining threshold levels of landings that trigger further consideration for potential management action.
58. Participation on Council Coordination Committee (CCC)	Staff	Staff currently participate on the CCC’s Habitat Workgroup, Area-Based Management Subcommittee, Legislative Workgroup, ESA/MSA Coordination

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Working Groups and Subcommittees		Workgroup, Climate Change Workgroup, and Equity and Environmental Justice (EEJ) Workgroup.
59. Participation on marine mammal take reduction teams and protected resources working groups	Cisneros	Council staff currently participate on several marine mammal take reduction teams (TRT), including the Atlantic Large Whale TRT (ALWTRT), Harbor Porpoise TRT, and Pelagic Longline TRT.
60. Activities related to Marine Stewardship Council certifications/audits for Council-managed fisheries (i.e., respond to requests for information)	Staff	The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) is an independent, third-party fishery certification program. Council staff are periodically asked to provide information as part of the certification process or for audits of currently-certified fisheries.
61. Legislative issue tracking (including development of comments upon request)	Sabo	The Council will track relevant fisheries/ocean legislation and provide comments if invited to do so by a member of Congress. NOAA General Counsel has instructed the RFMCs that (1) there must be a documented request from Congress, and (2) comments should be limited to technical or factual presentation directly related to performance of the grant.
62. Program review of Council/GARFO processes for fishery management action development*	Coakley/Muffley/Dancy	In August 2023 the Council solicited proposals for a contractor to conduct a program review of the MAFMC and GARFO process of developing federal fisheries management regulations from early action considerations up to initiation of the rulemaking stage. It is anticipated that work will be carried out between November 2023 and July 2024. See the RFP for complete details. This deliverable addresses scenario planning potential action G4. See page 11 of the Potential Action Menu for details.
63. Evaluation of Council committee structure, use, and decision making (in collaboration with other East coast Councils)	Dancy	This deliverable addresses scenario planning potential action G1. See pages 7-8 of the Potential Action Menu for details.
64. Activities related to Inflation Reduction Act funded-projects for climate-ready fisheries (proposal development and project management)	Staff	The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) includes an allotment of \$20 million to the eight regional fishery Councils to support fishery management and governance actions related to climate ready fisheries and climate related fisheries management in support of underserved communities. Preliminary plans indicate that \$3 million will distributed to the 8 Councils equally (each Council receiving \$375,000), by the end of 2023. Councils will be required to submit a grant proposal to detail the budget and activities supported by the funding. The remaining \$17 million will be distributed to the Councils through a competitive grant process (exact process and timing are TBD). In the context of the 2024 Implementation Plan, this task

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		encompasses all work associated with the development of project proposals, managing funded projects, and addressing any other funding requirements.
65. Ongoing communication activities to support understanding and awareness of the Council and its managed fisheries	Sabo	A variety of communication platforms and tools are used to engage stakeholders, including the Council website, interested-parties email lists, press releases, YouTube recordings, webinars, face-to-face meetings, and a variety of printed and digital communication materials.
66. Outreach campaigns to increase stakeholder awareness and understanding of Council actions under development and opportunities for participation	Sabo	Outreach is conducted during the development of each Council action to ensure that interested and affected stakeholders are informed about potential management changes and aware of comment opportunities. Communication approaches and outreach products are often tailored to meet the needs of the target audience(s).
67. Council website improvements (continuing)	Sabo	Staff will continue efforts to streamline Council web pages, develop new content, and increase usability of the Council website.
68. Completion/submission of any outstanding specifications packages for 2024	Staff	