

# Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council DRAFT 2020-2024 Strategic Plan

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### **Acronyms**

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| ASMFC                 | Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission                        |
| ACCSP                 | Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program                    |
| <a href="#">ACFHP</a> | <a href="#">Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership</a>          |
| BREP                  | Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program                              |
| <a href="#">EAFM</a>  | <a href="#">Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management</a>         |
| EFH                   | Essential Fish Habitat   |
| EEZ                   | Exclusive Economic Zone  |
| <a href="#">FMP</a>   | <a href="#">Fishery Management Plan</a>                            |
| HAPC                  | Habitat Area of Particular Concern                                 |
| GARFO                 | Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office                         |
| MSA                   | Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act           |
| MSE                   | Management Strategy Evaluation                                     |
| NCRP                  | Northeast Cooperative Research Program                             |
| NEAMAP                | Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program                   |
| NEFMC                 | New England Fishery Management Council                             |
| NEFSC                 | Northeast Fisheries Science Center                                 |
| NOAA                  | National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration                    |
| NRCC                  | Northeast Region Coordinating Council                              |
| OLE                   | Office of Law Enforcement  |
| <a href="#">SOPP</a>  | <a href="#">Statement of Organization Practices and Procedures</a> |

|     |                                      |
|-----|--------------------------------------|
| RSA | Research Set-Aside                   |
| SSC | Scientific and Statistical Committee |
| S-K | Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Program    |

## Introduction

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (~~also referred to as~~ [hereafter](#) the Council, ~~Mid-Atlantic Council, or MAFMC~~) is responsible for the conservation and management of [more than 64 fish and shellfish stocks that are found](#) within the federal 200-mile limit of the mid-Atlantic region (North Carolina through New York).

The Mid-Atlantic Council was established in 1976 by the Fishery Conservation and Management Act (later renamed the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, or MSA). The ~~law~~ [MSA](#) created a 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), eliminated foreign fishing ~~effort~~ within the EEZ, and charged eight regional councils with management of fishery resources in the newly expanded federal waters.

The Council develops fishery management recommendations which must be approved by the Secretary of Commerce before they [are finalized and implemented by NOAA Fisheries](#) ~~become final~~. All of the Council's fishery management recommendations must be consistent with the ten national standards as defined by the MSA and [must be](#) developed in an open, public process [as](#) prescribed by law.

~~The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council manages more than 64 species of fish and shellfish with seven fishery management plans (FMPs).~~ Fourteen species are directly managed with specific [fishery management plans](#) (FMPs). These include summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, Atlantic bluefish, Atlantic mackerel, ~~lllex~~ and longfin squids, butterfish, Atlantic surfclams, ocean quahogs, golden and blueline tilefish, spiny dogfish (joint with the New England Council), and monkfish (joint with the New England Council). In addition, more than 50 forage species are managed as "ecosystem components" in all seven FMPs. The Council partners with other fishery management organizations, including ~~the~~ states and NOAA Fisheries, in the development of effective management plans. For instance, spiny dogfish and monkfish are managed under joint ~~fishery management plans~~ [FMPs](#) -developed in coordination with the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC). The Council also coordinates the management of summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, and spiny dogfish with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC).

The Council is made up of 21 voting members and four non-voting members. ~~Eight~~ [Seven](#) of the voting members represent the constituent states' fish and wildlife agencies, ~~and the one represents~~ NOAA Fisheries ~~regional office~~, and 13 are private citizens who are knowledgeable about recreational fishing, commercial fishing, or marine conservation. ~~The f~~ Four non-voting members represent [and facilitate coordination with](#) the ASMFC, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Department of State, and the U.S. Coast Guard. The Council also has a full-time [support](#) staff ~~which that~~ is based in Dover, Delaware. The staff assists with [tasks such as](#) planning and facilitation of meetings, development of ~~fishery management plans~~ [FMPs](#), [and](#) coordination with other management agencies, ~~and performing other tasks as needed by the Council~~. The Council also ~~has a number of~~ [utilizes](#) advisory bodies, including a Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and advisory panels for ~~each fishery management plan~~ [fisheries or other specific issues](#).

Over the last 43 years the Council has made significant progress toward ~~its goals of establishing effective management programs for Mid-Atlantic fisheries and~~ rebuilding stocks that were once overfished [and ensuring sustainable fisheries that provide the greatest overall benefit to the Nation](#). However, the Council still faces social, economic, and ecological challenges that impact the stability and sustainability of Mid-Atlantic fisheries. The strategic planning process is critical for defining the Council's future and will enable proactive, efficient, and effective responses to the challenges that lie ahead.

This strategic plan will guide the Council's activities and priorities for the years 2020 through 2024. The goals and objectives described in this plan have been informed by the foundation created and progress achieved under the Council's previous strategic plan, as well as stakeholder ~~s~~, ~~and~~ ~~the~~ public, ~~input~~ and management partner ~~s~~ ~~outreach~~.

The Council's 2020-2024 Strategic Plan was developed to meet the following overarching objectives:

- Maintain sustainable fisheries, ecosystems, and habitats in the Mid-Atlantic;
- Address specific issues identified by the Council and its constituents;
- Improve communication with constituents and other organizations;
- Improve the Council's ability to collect and use input from constituents and management partners;
- Increase efficiency in the management process;
- Promote stability in Mid-Atlantic fisheries; and,
- Establish a more proactive process for addressing management challenges.

## The Strategic Landscape

The Council is operating in a rapidly changing world and faces increasing and competing demands on its time and resources. Over the next five years, the Council will confront new and ongoing challenges that will require it to prioritize management activities and make difficult decisions, including: ~~-A number of factors will potentially impact the Council's activities and ability to progress towards its goals. Some may provide incentive for creative solutions, while others are uncertainties to be acknowledged.~~

~~Challenges the Council may face include:~~

- Limited staff resources and capacity to respond to unforeseen circumstances.
- Competing constituent interests.
- Changing ocean conditions that impact the distribution, productivity, and sustainability of managed species.
- Competing ocean uses and their potential impacts on the Council's fisheries.
- Habitat loss and degradation.
- Interactions between protected resources and managed species.
- Availability of management partner resources to address the Council's needs/priorities.

Within this context, the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan is designed to provide a framework to guide progress towards the Council's long-term goals and allow the Council to be ~~while remaining~~ responsive to changing circumstances.

## Vision, Mission, Core Values, and Strategic Goals

### Vision

Healthy marine ecosystems and thriving, sustainable fisheries and fishing communities that provide the greatest overall benefit to the nation.

### Mission

The Council manages fisheries in federal waters of the Mid-Atlantic region for their long-term sustainability and productivity consistent with the national standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Council is committed to the stewardship of these fisheries, and associated ecosystems and fishing communities, through the collaborative development of effective, science-based fishery management plans and policies.

### Core Values

The Council's activities, operations, and decisions are guided by the following core values.

- Stewardship
- Integrity
- Effectiveness
- Fairness
- Competence
- Transparency

### Strategic Goals

The following goals have been identified to help the Council advance towards its Vision during the years 2020 through 2024.

**Communication:** *Engage stakeholders and the public through education and outreach that foster sustained participation in, and awareness of, the Council process.*

**Science:** *Ensure that the Council's management decisions are based on timely and accurate scientific information and methods.*

**Management:** *Develop effective management strategies that provide for sustainable fisheries and healthy marine ecosystems while considering the needs of fishing communities and other resource users.*

**Ecosystem:** *Support the ecologically sustainable utilization of living marine resources in a manner that maintains ecosystem productivity, structure, and function.*

**Governance:** *Ensure that the Council's practices accurately represent and consider the interests of fisheries, fishing communities, and the public interests through a transparent and inclusive decision-making process.*

For each of these goals, the Council has developed a suite of objectives and associated strategies to guide its progress over the next five years.

## Communication

**GOAL:** *Engage stakeholders and the public through education and outreach that foster sustained participation in, and awareness of, the Council process.*

**Objective 1. Use a wide range of communication tools and methods tailored to engage target audiences.**

- Employ a variety of traditional, web-based, and social media tools to disseminate relevant information, updates, and communication materials.
- Upgrade the content and organization of the Council website to enhance usability for target audiences.
- Coordinate communication efforts with management partners and other organizations to expand the distribution of messages to a broader audience.
- Seek opportunities to expand media coverage of Council actions, managed fisheries, and opportunities for stakeholder participation.
- Expand the use of “interested-parties” email lists to deliver fishery- and action-specific information and updates to interested stakeholders.
- Maintain the online calendar of meetings and events with links to meeting materials and supplemental information.
- Establish a Communication/Outreach Advisory Panel to assist in the review and development of communication and outreach tools and approaches.

**Objective 2. Increase stakeholder participation in the Council process.**

- Hold workshops to facilitate collaborative development of innovative management approaches among fishermen, managers, scientists, and other interested stakeholders.
- Develop outreach materials to facilitate constructive stakeholder input on proposed management actions (e.g. scoping guides, fact sheets, etc.).
- Schedule, advertise, and conduct meetings and public hearings in a manner that encourages and enables stakeholder attendance and participation.
- Maintain action-specific web pages to inform stakeholders about opportunities to participate in the development of [Council actions \(e.g., FMPs, amendments, and frameworks\)](#).
- Expand the use of online comment forms to gather public input.
- Utilize webinars, [conference lines, and other technology](#) to provide opportunities for remote access and participation.

**Objective 3. Broaden the public’s understanding and awareness of the Council and its managed fisheries.**

- Develop and distribute general outreach and education materials to increase awareness and understanding of Council-managed fisheries and the Council process.
- Partner with external organizations to develop and promote workshops and other interactive educational opportunities for stakeholders.
- [Collaborate with science and management partners and other academic or research institutions to develop outreach materials that explain fisheries science and data collection.](#)
- [Use plain language in Council documents to improve public understanding.](#)

## Science

**GOAL:** *Ensure that the Council's management decisions are based on timely and accurate scientific information and methods.*

**Objective 4. Collaborate with science partners and research institutions to ensure that the Council's science priorities are addressed.**

- Engage science and management partners to leverage opportunities for inclusion of the Council's research priorities in external funding programs (e.g. [Saltonstall-Kennedy \(S-K\)](#), ~~NCRP~~, [Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program \(BREP\)](#), ~~ACCSP~~, regional Sea Grant, etc.).
- Collaborate with management partners and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) to identify common research priorities and strategically address science, data, and information needs.
- Support implementation and continued development of the new Northeast Region Coordinating Council (NRCC) stock assessment process to improve assessment efficiency.
- Develop a process for cross-communication between the Council's ~~Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)~~ and other council SSCs to promote sharing of scientific approaches, methods, and information.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive research plan to address the research needs identified in the Five-Year Research Priorities document.

**Objective 5. Support the use of collaborative research to meet the Council's science, data, and information needs.**

- Collaborate with the NEFSC to expand and enhance existing cooperative research initiatives carried out under the umbrella of the NEFSC's Northeast Cooperative Research Program (NCRP)
- Identify research needs that can be addressed using collaborative approaches with commercial, for-hire, and recreational fishery participants.
- Cooperate with management partners to support and identify funding [opportunities](#) for science priorities identified by the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP) Operations Committee.
- Support development of [cooperative research](#) programs that use "vessels of opportunity" from all sectors to address science and research needs.
- Support innovations in gear development and configuration that increase efficiency and reduce catch of non-target species in commercial and recreational fisheries.
- Evaluate options for future research set-aside (RSA) program.

**Objective 6. Promote efficient and accurate data collection, monitoring, and reporting systems.**

- Support implementation of improvements in fishery data accuracy, efficiency, and timeliness as identified in the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO)/NEFSC Fishery Dependent Data Initiative.
- Work with science and management partners to develop and implement a unique trip identifier [to integrate different individual reporting programs \(e.g., fisherman, dealer, observer, port sampler, etc.\)](#).
- Collaborate with science and management partners to eliminate duplicative or unnecessary reporting.



- Address inconsistencies in permitting, reporting, and vessel inspection requirements across commercial and for-hire fisheries.
- Determine the utility of electronic reporting phone apps to improve recreational harvest estimates in the Mid-Atlantic region.

**Objective 7. ~~Support~~Promote the collection of relevant social and economic data and on-the-water observations.**

- Engage the Council’s SSC to identify existing [studies or other](#) sources of social and economic information ~~or studies~~ that could be used to inform management decisions.
- Support efforts to incorporate fishermen’s knowledge in the stock assessment process.
- Identify data/information gaps that can be addressed with on-the-water observations.
- Continue to support data collection efforts for improved social and economic impact analyses, such as cost-benefit analysis, for all fisheries.

**Objective 8. Identify and prioritize the Council’s research needs.**

- Conduct ~~an annual or a~~ biennial review of the Council’s Five-Year Research Priorities by the advisory panels, monitoring committees, and SSC to ensure the document is reflective of the current state of scientific knowledge and Council priorities.
- Review research needs identified in stock assessments for inclusion in the Council’s Five-Year Research Priorities.
- Develop a process to [better](#) track progress toward addressing the Council’s research priorities and to identify what research has been completed.

## Management

**GOAL:** *Develop effective management strategies that provide for sustainable fisheries and healthy marine ecosystems while considering the needs of fishing communities and other resource users.*

**Objective 9. Strengthen state, federal, and interstate partnerships to promote coordinated, efficient management of fishery resources.**

- Continue to use the NRCC process as a forum for Atlantic coast management entities to enhance communication, coordination ~~and management approaches~~, and pursue shared objectives.
- Coordinate with management partners to ensure efficient allocation of staff resources for jointly managed species and issues of common interest.
- Collaborate with management partners to address inconsistencies in regulations across state, federal, and regional boundaries.

**Objective 10. Adapt management approaches and priorities to address emerging issues and changing fishery conditions.**

- Monitor [the variability and changes](#) in species distribution, abundance, and availability and associated impacts on Council-managed fisheries.
- Use fishery performance reports and State of the Ecosystem reports as tools to develop management responses to changing fishery conditions.
- Regularly review the performance of existing management measures.

**Objective 11. Ensure that management decisions consider social, economic, and community impacts and opportunities.**

- Expand the use of Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) to determine/evaluate the impacts of management decisions on fishing communities and other resource users.
- Evaluate the impacts of current management approaches on recreational angler fishery participation and satisfaction through the use of focus groups or workshops.
- Continue and expand the use of multi-year management approaches to increase fishery stability and predictability to the extent practicable.
- Evaluate the impacts of management decisions on the economic efficiency and sustainability of commercial and for-hire businesses and associated shoreside operations.

## Ecosystem

**GOAL:** Support the ecologically sustainable utilization of living marine resources in a manner that maintains ecosystem productivity, structure, and function.

**Objective 12. Implement the Council’s Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) as described in the EAFM Guidance Document.**

- Establish a process to track implementation of the Council’s EAFM Guidance Document and ensure that progress is effectively communicated to the public.
- Use the [EAFM](#) structured framework ~~process approach~~, as described in the EAFM Guidance Document, as a tool to implement the Council’s EAFM policy and incorporate ~~ecosystem considerations~~ [species, fleet, habitat, and climate interactions](#) into the Council’s science and management programs.
- Collaborate with the Council’s science partners [and stakeholders](#) to increase the collection, utilization, and consideration of ecosystem-level biological, social, and economic information.

**Objective 13. Collaborate with management partners to develop ecosystem approaches that are responsive to the impacts of climate change.<sup>1</sup>**

- Determine the data and information necessary to evaluate and respond to climate-induced species and habitat changes for both managed and unmanaged species.
- Work with Atlantic coast management partners to evaluate potential management and governance responses to shifting species distributions through scenario planning workshops and/or other exercises.
- Evaluate the flexibility/ability of current management approaches, including the NOAA Fisheries climate-ready fisheries management process, to respond to shifting species distributions.
- Consider management strategies that are responsive to the impacts of climate change on current fishery allocations.

**Objective 14. Identify, designate, and protect habitat using an ecosystem approach.**

- Identify and document the contributions of inshore habitats to offshore productivity.
- Review and strengthen essential fish habitat (EFH) designations to account for species interactions, connectivity, and changing ocean conditions.
- Develop the linkages between habitat science and conservation and fishery outcomes with a focus on ecosystem resiliency and productivity.
- Participate with management partners in the Northeast Regional Marine Fish Habitat Assessment Project, Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP), and other regional habitat partnerships.
- Ensure that the Council’s habitat policies regarding both fishing and non-fishing activities reflect current scientific information and best management practices.
- Examine the use of the Council’s existing EFH/Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) authorities and designations to ensure ecosystem integrity and services are maintained.

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<sup>1</sup> ~~Note: t~~he term “climate change” encompasses related impacts such as global warming, ocean acidification, etc.

**Objective 15. Engage in the offshore energy development process to address impacts to Council-managed species and associated habitats.**

- Collaborate on offshore energy issues with state and federal management partners and other relevant organizations to identify information needs and evaluate potential impacts of offshore energy development on marine resources.
- Comment on proposed offshore energy projects to ensure developers and permitting agencies are aware of natural resource concerns and Council priorities.

**Objective 16. Support the maintenance of an adequate forage base to ensure ecosystem productivity, structure, and function.**

- Consider and account for, to the extent practicable, the role of Council-managed species in the ecosystem, including roles as prey, predator, and food for humans.
- Consider and account for, to the extent practicable, the impact of Council-managed fisheries on the forage base.
- Monitor landings of currently unmanaged forage species and respond to changes if necessary.

**Objective 17. Develop management approaches that minimize adverse ecosystem impacts.**

- ~~Incorporate~~ Annually review information from the NEFSC's annual State of the Ecosystem reports to identify potential ecosystem impacts of the Council's management approaches.
- Develop management measures that consider ecological interactions to ~~promote fewer~~ reduce regulatory discards, ~~and~~ promote greater utilization of catch, and minimize impacts to habitat.
- Consider fishery management approaches that avoid or reduce negative impacts on protected resources.

## Governance

**GOAL:** Ensure that the Council's practices accurately represent and consider the interests of fisheries, fishing communities, and the public interests through a transparent and inclusive decision-making process.

**Objective 18. Maintain an open, accessible, and clearly defined process.**

- Develop, refine, and communicate policies regarding operations of committees and advisory and technical bodies, including the SSC.
- Provide annual updates on Council activities and progress towards implementation of the Strategic Plan.
- Ensure that the Council's Statement of Organization Processes and Procedures (SOPP) are regularly reviewed, updated as needed, and made available on the Council's website.
- Provide conference lines or Webinar access to Council and advisory body meetings whenever feasible.

**Objective 19. Engage management partners to promote effective collaboration and coordination.**

- Review regional operating agreement with GARFO, the NEFSC, and Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) and revise if necessary.
- Collaborate with the ASMFC to define roles, responsibilities, and procedures for joint meetings and joint action development.
- Consider development of agreements with the New England and/or South Atlantic Councils to define management roles and processes for joint and/or cross-jurisdictional species management.
- Review the composition and operation of Council committees to ensure that the concerns of management partners are effectively understood and addressed.

**Objective 20. Ensure that stakeholder interests are understood and addressed.**

- Consider incorporating additional opportunities for general public comment (i.e. not related to specific agenda items) during Council meetings.
- Expand opportunities for stakeholders to provide input during the development of annual Implementation Plans.
- Regularly evaluate the composition of advisory bodies to ensure effective representation of diverse interests.
- Explore options to better communicate how public input was used in management decisions.

**Objective 21. Provide training and development opportunities for Council members and staff to enhance organizational performance.**

- Provide opportunities for Council member training and development on topics such as parliamentary procedure and best practices for effective meetings.
- Support the ongoing professional development of Council staff.
- Continue to promote collaboration with GARFO, NEFSC, and ASMFC staff through staff-to-staff meetings.