



**Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council**  
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## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** March 23, 2023  
**To:** Chris Moore, Executive Director  
**From:** Kiley Dancy, Staff  
**Subject:** East Coast Climate Change Scenario Planning Update: Summit Outcomes and Next Steps

On Tuesday, April 4 the Council will discuss the East Coast Climate Change Scenario Planning initiative, covering 1) a recap of the recent Scenario Planning Summit Meeting, and 2) next steps to wrap up the initiative and begin addressing the potential actions identified at the summit.

### *Summit Meeting Background*

The East Coast Scenario Planning Summit Meeting, held February 15-16, 2023, was attended by over 50 East Coast fishery managers. Summit participants consisted of representatives from each of the three U.S. East Coast Fishery Management Councils, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and NOAA Fisheries.

The goal of the summit was to develop a set of potential governance and management actions resulting from a scenario-based exploration of the future. During the meeting, participants discussed ideas already generated throughout the process, added new ideas, evaluated them, and identified some practical next steps.

All summit meeting materials, including the agenda, briefing document, supplemental documents, and list of participants, are available at: <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events/2023/scenario-planning-summit>. The following sections summarize the summit structure, overarching topics of discussion, preliminary outcomes, and next steps.

### *Summit Agenda*

The summit agenda was organized around the following structure:

- Core team members provided an overview of the overarching themes for discussion and questions for summit participants to focus on (see next section).
- Participants were divided into three breakout groups to discuss each theme in a rotation format. These groups generated new ideas and reviewed ideas from previous groups.

- At the end of Day 1, the Core Team facilitators reviewed the notes from the day’s breakout-groups and created a non-prioritized list of potential action areas identified throughout the day. The potential actions were shared with all participants at the start of Day 2.
- Participants were asked to prioritize the potential actions using a dot-voting exercise.
- In a plenary session, participants discussed the top prioritized items and their next steps. The dot-voting exercise revealed the potential actions areas that the group felt should be addressed as a matter of priority. This exercise was not meant to eliminate potential actions for further evaluation, but to focus the plenary discussion on practical next steps for the high priority ideas.

### ***Overarching Discussion Themes***

The summit discussions focused on **three overarching themes** highlighted by the Councils and Commission during their meetings in November and December 2022:

**Theme 1: Cross Jurisdictional Governance.** A major goal of this initiative has been to evaluate the current East Coast fishery governance structure and identify potential changes to increase our ability to respond effectively to changing conditions. “Governance” here addresses the structure of power, authority, and responsibility for fisheries and geographic areas. Guiding questions for the summit included:

- What is the best structure and representation for governance on the U.S. East Coast?
- When and how should management authority change?
- How can we improve the efficiency and the efficacy of joint fishery management plans?
- How can we improve coordination and collaboration among management entities?

**Theme 2: Managing Under Increased Uncertainty.** Environmental changes are leading to changes in the distribution and abundance of marine resources. In some cases, these changes mean that historical conditions can no longer be used to predict the future, increasing our uncertainty around appropriate catch limits and management responses. Guiding questions for the summit included:

- How can we increase flexibility, adaptability, and robustness in management?
- How can we better accommodate uncertainty in the stock assessment process and address related management challenges?
- How can we improve the ability for fishermen and other stakeholders to adapt to climate change?

**Theme 2: Data Sources & Partnerships.** In building the scenarios there was much consideration of how well science will be able to assess and predict changes in stock production, distributions, and other changing dynamics. This hinges on the ability to produce and evaluate accurate and timely data. Summit discussions focused on how to better coordinate data collection systems and develop partnerships to leverage existing funding. Guiding questions for the summit included:

- How should we prioritize data/information needed to manage in a changing environment?
- How can we use current funding more efficiently?
- How can we better utilize the fishing industry for data collection?
- What are the best ways to foster outside partnerships for sharing data, especially with other ocean users?

## *Summit Outcomes*

During the April Council meeting, staff will summarize some general themes of the summit discussions, and potential areas of action moving forward. A full report of all summit outcomes and list of possible next steps is still in development. In general, the following themes arose from each of the discussions around the three overarching themes:

### **Cross Jurisdictional Governance**

- While there was support for broader governance structure changes, many would require changes to the Magnuson Stevens Act. Many participants expressed an interest in starting with exploring changes within our existing structure that would be beneficial under changing conditions.
- There was substantial support for moving toward more consistency in the governance structure between management regions, particularly more consistency in the use and structure of Committees between the three Councils. This could allow some representation concerns to be addressed in a more meaningful way, and could be accomplished without legislative changes.
- Many participants supported better mechanisms for information exchange between SSCs, particularly when two Councils are working on the same species.
- There was support for identifying ways to improve coordination between NOAA offices within and particularly across regions.
- Other potential actions included reconsideration and clarification of the roles of Council liaisons, the potential to allow Council member proxies, reconsidering Advisory Panel representation, and developing improved agreements for joint management.

### **Managing Under Increased Uncertainty**

- Many participants were supportive of East Coast management bodies improving and better operationalizing their risk policies.
- In addition, many summit participants would like to see increased focus on robust management strategies instead of trying to capture all sources of uncertainty within our models, which may be impossible.
- Some participants felt additional spatial management considerations may be needed for species changing distributions, for example, considering if different approaches are needed at the leading and trailing edges of species distributions.
- Some participants supported developing best practices for including more “if/then” structures in management, with the aim of increasing predictability and nimbleness when quick responses are needed in response to changing conditions.
- Other potential actions include increased use of community vulnerability analyses, streamlining compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, identifying and removing institutional baggage, and improving the understanding of the permitting landscape across the East Coast.

## **Data Sources and Partnerships**

- There was broad support for more standardization of data collection to break down geographic barriers along the East Coast (both state and federal).
- Many participants wanted to prioritize recreational data collection improvements to reduce uncertainty, including exploring the possibility of developing a recreational study fleet.
- Modernizing data management systems is likely needed to facilitate better data sharing and to prepare for new data streams.
- Other potential actions included survey mitigation efforts for offshore wind areas, exploring artificial intelligence and other technologies to more rapidly process data for assessments, and developing a better process between management and science to prioritize data needs for climate ready management, including human dimensions data.

## ***Next Steps***

The core team is currently finalizing two different documents to be reviewed by the Northeast Region Coordinating Council (NRCC) during their May 9-10, 2023 meeting. These documents will include:

- **A summit report.** This report will focus on the proceedings of the summit meeting, including the main ideas identified during breakout and plenary discussions, the top issues prioritized for more in depth discussion, and the immediate next steps identified by summit participants.
- **A draft action plan for next steps.** This document is being developed by the core team to further develop action items identified at the summit, to identify practical next steps for key potential actions identified at the summit.

The draft action plan will also include some general/process recommendations for NRCC discussion, including the question of which group(s) should be responsible for driving continued work on this process and for developing more detailed plans to address the priority issues.

Due to the inter-jurisdictional nature of this initiative, there are a variety of different types of potential actions that were identified for further consideration. Some actions will be appropriate to pursue on an individual Council, Commission, or agency level, while many others would require either informal coordination, formal and structured coordination, or structural governance changes.

The Mid-Atlantic Council will review the final summit report and NRCC recommendations later in 2023, and consider how to incorporate potential actions from this process into their 2024 implementation plan and future strategic plans/implementation plans. The Council will also remain involved in coordinating or participating in any relevant actions or initiatives that require cooperation between multiple entities.

Additional updates will be posted to the scenario planning website as they are available, at: <https://www.mafmc.org/climate-change-scenario-planning>.