

June 2024 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met June 4-6, 2024, in Riverhead, New York. The following is a summary of actions taken and issues considered during the meeting. Presentations, briefing materials, motions, and webinar recordings are available at <http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/june-2024>.

HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- Postponed final action on the Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Species Separation Requirements Amendment until the December 2024 meeting to allow time for a workshop to discuss implementation approaches for Alternative 5
- Adopted additional alternatives for inclusion in the Summer Flounder Mesh Exemptions Framework/Addendum
- Recommended no changes to the previously-adopted specifications for chub mackerel, *Illex* squid, and longfin squid
- Approved revisions to the Scientific and Statistical Committee's Overfishing Limit (OFL) Coefficient of Variation (CV) Guidance Document
- Reviewed an annual report that summarizes landings of species in locations where they are not managed at the state or federal level
- Discussed and provided input on the development of the next strategic plan (Executive Committee)
- Recognized three departing Council members

Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Species Separation Requirements Amendment

The Council met to consider taking final action on an amendment to modify the species separation requirements in the Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahog fisheries. After reviewing a summary of public comments received during a 30-day comment period, the Council voted to postpone final action until the December 2024 Council Meeting. This delay is intended to allow time for a workshop to discuss implementation approaches for Alternative 5, which would require full retention of both surfclam and ocean quahog catch on the vessel with the sorting of clam cages to occur at the dealer with NOAA shoreside catch monitors. Workshop participants will include NOAA Fisheries Staff, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, Council members and staff, and other necessary experts. At the December meeting, the Council will review workshop outcomes and take up the postponed motion to consider Alternative 5 as the preferred alternative. The Council could consider submitting the action to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for approval and rulemaking at that time.

Summer Flounder Commercial Minimum Mesh Exemption Framework/Addendum

The Council met jointly with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (Commission) Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board (Board) to discuss the Summer Flounder Commercial Minimum Mesh Exemption Framework/Addendum. At their joint meeting in April, the Council and Board adopted a range of alternatives for inclusion in a public comment document. At this meeting, they adopted additional alternatives to consider modifying the annual evaluation methodology for the Small Mesh Exemption Program (SMEP). These alternatives consider changes to the current regulations which specify that the Regional Administrator may rescind the exemption if vessels are discarding on average more than 10% of their summer flounder catch per trip. The Council and Board also discussed future monitoring of the flynet exemption. They considered adding alternatives to establish a Letter of Authorization requirement for this exemption, but ultimately declined to pursue this approach.

and instead indicated support for adding a flynet/high-rise gear code to the Vessel Trip Report (VTR) data. Approval of a document for public comment is expected at the Council and Board's next joint meeting in August, with final action scheduled to occur at the Commission's Annual Meeting the week of October 21 in Annapolis, MD.

2025 Chub Mackerel Specifications

After considering the recommendations of the SSC, Advisory Panel, and staff, the Council agreed no changes are needed to the previously adopted 2025 specifications for chub mackerel. These specifications have remained unchanged since they were first implemented in 2020. The total allowable landings limit for 2025 will remain at 4.50 million pounds, which is well above recent landings.

2025 Longfin and *Illex* Squid Specifications

After considering the recommendations of the SSC, Monitoring Committee, and staff, the Council agreed that no changes are needed to the previously adopted 2025 specifications for the squids. The 2025 quotas will remain the same as 2024 quotas: 50.5 million pounds (22,894 metric tons (MT)) for longfin squid and 85.2 million pounds (38,631 MT) for *Illex*.

SSC's Overfishing Limit (OFL) Coefficient of Variation (CV) Guidance Document

The Council reviewed and approved modifications to the SSC's OFL CV guidance document based on recommendations provided by the SSC. Last updated in 2020, 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 when making Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) recommendations. The SSC identified three primary areas for modification within the document: review of current OFL CV uncertainty values, dropping certain existing decision criteria, and a new criteria tiering process to determine OFL CV value. The SSC also included a number of edits to the text to improve the flow, provide clarity, or reflect current processes and information. The SSC will begin to use the updated guidance document during their July meeting when making ABC recommendations for Atlantic Surfclam, Golden Tilefish, Black Sea Bass, and Butterfish.

Unmanaged Commercial Landings Report

The Council reviewed an annual report that summarizes landings of species in locations where they are not managed at the state or federal level with a possession limit, size limit, seasonal closure, or limited access. The report also summarizes commercial landings of the species designated as Ecosystem Components through the Council's Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment. The goal of this report is to look for signs of developing commercial fisheries for unmanaged species or Ecosystem Component species. This year, the report was improved with additional contextual information recommended by the Ecosystem and Ocean Planning Committee and Advisory Panel. The Committee and Advisory Panel considered establishing quantitative thresholds to determine if any landings trends warrant further evaluation or potential consideration for management; however, they agreed that additional contextual information and input from the Committee, the Advisory Panel, and other stakeholders would be preferable to a quantitative metric to help guide these considerations more holistically on a case-by-case basis. Council staff suggested that none of the landings in this year's report suggest immediate concern. However, it may be worth continuing to monitor Atlantic cutlassfish landings as landings have been increasing, have exceeded 1 million pounds in recent years, and are concentrated in the Mid-Atlantic. The Council did not express any concerns with the landings trends shown in this year's report.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee met in closed session to discuss appointments to the Council's advisory panels. New advisors will begin their three-year terms on July 1, 2024. The Committee also met in open session to discuss the Council's next strategic plan for 2025 through 2029. The Committee reviewed the organization and content of the current plan and provided initial input on possible areas for improvement and refinement. In the coming months, staff will conduct public outreach to collect additional input and ideas for the next plan. The Council is expected to review, and possibly approve, a complete draft strategic plan at the October 2024 Council Meeting.

Other Business

Departing Council Members

The Council bid farewell to two Mid-Atlantic Council members, Sara Winslow (North Carolina) and Adam Nowalsky (New Jersey), and New England Council liaison, Eric Reid (Rhode Island). All three individuals have served for three consecutive three-year terms and are ineligible for reappointment. Ms. Winslow has chaired the River Herring and Shad Committee for the past eight years and vice-chaired the Mackerel, Squid, Butterfish for the past seven years. Mr. Nowalsky served as chair of the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Committee and vice-chair of the Ecosystem and Ocean Planning Committee for the past three years. He also previously chaired the Collaborative Research and Research Steering Committees. Mr. Reid has been the New England Council's liaison to the Mid-Atlantic Council since 2017 and has served as chair of the New England Council since 2021. All three departing members were thanked for their years of dedicated service to the Council.



From left: Wes Townsend (Council chair), Eric Reid, Adam Nowalsky, and Sara Winslow.

Next Meeting

The next Council meeting will be held **August 12-15, 2024, in Philadelphia, PA**. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.