

## February 2025 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met by webinar February 11-12, 2025. The following is a summary of actions taken and issues considered during the meeting. Presentations, briefing materials, motions, and webinar recordings are available on the Council's [February 2025 meeting page](#).

### HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- Requested that NOAA Fisheries establish control dates for federally permitted recreational for-hire participants in the summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish fisheries
- Reviewed and provided feedback on a preliminary range of alternatives for the Spiny Dogfish Accountability Measures Framework
- Reviewed the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM) 3-year Review Report
- Received a presentation on a new database that compiles literature on the impacts of fishing gear on marine habitats
- Received updates on several Northeast Fisheries Science Center surveys and related topics
- Received a presentation on the LOC-NESS project, which aims to advance research into marine carbon dioxide removal approaches
- Appointed Dr. Holly Kindsvater (Virginia Tech University) and Dr. Yong Chen (Stony Brook University) to the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee

### Recreational For-Hire Control Dates

The Council voted to request that NOAA Fisheries establish control dates for federally permitted recreational for-hire participants in the summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish fisheries. A control date is a notice to the public that the Council may consider developing management measures to limit participation in the fishery in the future, and in doing so may use the control date as a reference point when determining fishery access criteria.

The [Recreational Sector Separation and Data Collection Amendment](#), which is currently in the scoping phase of development, will consider options for managing for-hire recreational fisheries separately from other recreational fishing modes (referred to as sector separation), as well as options related to recreational data collection and reporting. The Council and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Policy Board may consider whether modified requirements or access limitations for for-hire permits are needed to achieve the amendment's objectives. Control dates are intended to discourage speculative entry or fishing activity while managers consider if, and how, participation in the fishery may be affected.



The control dates will be published as soon as possible in the Federal Register, along with a request for public comments on this issue. **Publication of a control date does not have any immediate impact on fishery participants or fishing privileges.** The Council may choose to incorporate the control dates into federal qualification criteria if measures to limit fishery access are developed in the future, but the Council is not bound to these dates and could use alternative dates or criteria. The Council may also choose to take no further action

on federal for-hire access criteria. The motion made at this meeting to establish control dates applies only to federal for-hire permits; however, the Council and Policy Board may also discuss options for state level for-hire permits later in the amendment development process.

### Spiny Dogfish Accountability Measures Framework

The Council reviewed and provided feedback on several preliminary alternatives to be further developed as part of [Spiny Dogfish Accountability Measures Framework](#). The Spiny Dogfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) currently requires pound for pound paybacks of any Annual Catch Limit (ACL) overages as an accountability measure. This framework adjustment will consider if there are some circumstances where modified/relaxed payback accountability measures may be sufficient. Per Council discussion at the meeting, staff will work with the Spiny Dogfish Monitoring Committee to ensure the development of a reasonable range of alternative accountability measures and related impact analyses. Both the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils will review a revised set of alternatives in June 2025. Final action is expected in late 2025, and the Spiny Dogfish Advisory Panel will also have an opportunity to provide advice on the action.



### Fishing Gear Effects Database

Council staff and Dr. David Stevenson provided an overview of a new database that compiles literature on the impacts of fishing gear on marine habitats throughout the U.S. and territories. Developed with funding provided by the Mid-Atlantic Council and NOAA's Office of Habitat Conservation, the [Fishing Gear Effects on Marine Habitats Database](#) provides an easily accessible and searchable tool to assist Council/NOAA staff, researchers, and stakeholders in evaluating/managing the adverse effects of fishing gears on marine/estuarine habitats. The online application offers search and filter tools, detailed reference pages, and a map of study locations. Users can also submit new references for review via an online form.



### Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology 3-Year Review

Council staff summarized recent performance of the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM) based on a [3-Year Review report](#). This review considered SBRM operation from July 1, 2019, through June 30, 2022, though only the last year could be fully analyzed due to COVID-19 impacts on observer deployment. Fewer SBRM precision targets were met in that last year compared to the average found in the previous 3-Year Review, likely due to a mix of COVID-19 data gaps disrupting analyses of where to place observers, as well as general funding limitations. While not part of the SBRM performance criteria, the review noted that several stocks' discard estimates in recent assessments have been relatively imprecise. The majority of stocks, however, had discard estimates with less than a 30% coefficient of variation (CV) (above a 30% CV is a common threshold indicating precision concern). Section 9 of the report includes a variety of recommendations for future operations.

## Northeast Fisheries Science Center Survey Update

Dr. Kathryn Ford provided an update on several Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) fishery-independent surveys and related topics. [The presentation](#) included updates on 2024 survey performance, planning efforts for 2025, as well as an update on contingency planning for the Henry B. Biglow bottom trawl survey vessel. Dr. Ford also summarized recent discussions by the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP) and NTAP Working Group on developing an Industry-Based Survey, noting that the group continues to meet every three weeks to refine a phased pilot project design. Finally, the presentation included updates on several other survey related topics, including the National Survey and Data Acquisition Program and plans for offshore wind survey mitigation.



Photo Credit: NOAA Fisheries

## LOC-NESS Project

The Council received a [presentation](#) from Dr. Adam Subhas on the LOC-NESS project (short for Locking Ocean Carbon in the Northeast Shelf and Slope). This [project](#) aims to advance research into marine carbon dioxide removal (mCDR) approaches, such as ocean alkalinity enhancement (OAE), a potential type of mCDR that de-acidifies sea water while storing carbon away from the atmosphere. As a supplement to emissions reductions, OAE may help to mitigate the effects of climate change on the environment and society.

## SSC Membership

The Council appointed two new members to its Scientific and Statistical Committee:

- **Dr. Holly Kindsvater** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation at Virginia Tech. Dr. Kindsvater's research is focused on fisheries ecology and evolution, including marine and freshwater species. Her [lab](#) studies the connection between evolution and ecology to solve conservation challenges related to fisheries and climate change.
- **Dr. Yong Chen** is a professor in the School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences at Stony Brook University. His [lab](#) focuses on fisheries population dynamics, quantitative fisheries ecology, and stock assessments and management. His research investigates the interactions of commercial fishing, environmental drivers and dynamics of fisheries populations and communities.

The Council also approved reappointment of 13 existing SSC members. All new and reappointed members will begin serving a three-year term effective March 1, 2025.

## Upcoming Meetings

The next Council meeting will be held **April 8-10, 2025** in Galloway, New Jersey. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.