



## February 2015 Council Meeting Report

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**February 10 – 12, 2015**

*Raleigh, North Carolina*

The following summary highlights Council actions and issues considered at the February 2015 Council Meeting in Raleigh, North Carolina. Presentations, briefing materials, and audio recordings are available at [www.mafmc.org/briefing/february-2015](http://www.mafmc.org/briefing/february-2015).

### Deep Sea Corals Amendment

The Council met to consider taking final action on the Deep Sea Corals Amendment. After reviewing a summary of public comments and considering recommendations from the Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT), the Council voted to postpone final action on the amendment until the June 2015 Council meeting. This decision was driven in part by concerns that additional input was needed from the Advisory Panel and other members of the commercial fishing industry regarding the specific areas being considered for protection in the amendment. To address these concerns, the Council voted to convene a workshop that will consider potential revisions to the boundaries of proposed discrete coral zones. Workshop invitees will include the Squid, Mackerel, and Butterfish Advisory Panel, the Ecosystems Advisory Panel, FMAT members, Council members, coral scientists, and other interested stakeholders. The workshop will be followed by additional analysis and review by the FMAT.

The Council also approved several modifications to the amendment's alternatives, including:

- Addition of options for commercial tilefish and commercial red crab exemptions in discrete zones;
- Addition of transit provisions to the range of alternatives; and
- Addition of a prohibition on anchoring in deep sea coral zones to the list of frameworkable items.

The Council expects to review the outcomes of this workshop and take action on the amendment at the June 2015 meeting. Additional information about the workshop and future public comment opportunities will be posted on the [Deep Sea Corals page](#) of the Council's website.

### Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Cost Recovery Amendment

After reviewing public comments collected between December 15, 2014 and January 16, 2015, the Council selected preferred alternatives for the Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Cost Recovery Amendment and approved the amendment for submission to the Secretary of Commerce. The amendment addresses several issues in the surfclam and ocean quahog fisheries, including the cost recovery provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). The Council adopted the following preferred alternatives:

**Cost Recovery: Alternative 5 (Shareholder Pays; Tilefish Model).** Under Alternative 5, those surfclam and ocean quahog shareholders, permanent individual transferrable quota allocation holders, whose quota are used to land surfclams and ocean quahogs would pay the cost recovery fee. This is the same cost recovery process used in the Council's tilefish individual fishing quota fishery, and would bring the fishery management plan (FMP) to consistency with the cost recovery provisions of the MSA.

**Biological Reference Points Update Mechanism: Alternative 2 (Redefine the Status Determination Criteria).** This alternative would streamline the management process by allowing surfclam and ocean quahog stock status determination criteria to be automatically updated in the FMP without the need to go through a lengthy amendment process, as long as specific criteria are met.

**Optimum Yield (OY) Ranges: Alternative 2 (Remove OY Range from FMP; Advisors Develop OY Recommendations during Specifications).** Under this alternative, the OY ranges for surfclams and ocean quahogs would be removed from the FMP, and the Advisory Panel will develop OY recommendations as part of the specifications process. This will provide for a more efficient process when setting catch and landings limits through specifications.

## Cooperative Research

The Research Set-Aside (RSA) committee met to discuss the Council's role in cooperative research. The Council is working to determine how to best facilitate cooperative research on Council-managed species given the issues with the RSA program that [led to its suspension](#). During the committee meeting, Council staff presented a draft timeline for the review, clarified objectives and desired outcomes, and proposed next steps. The committee supported a proposal to hold an RSA workshop in mid-2015 with stakeholders and committee members. The Council will also conduct a pre-workshop informational webinar to identify stakeholders and gather initial ideas.

## Climate Change and Fisheries Management

The Council received several presentations on climate change and fisheries management. Roger Griffis presented an overview of NOAA Fisheries' Draft Climate Science Strategy, which was developed "to increase the production, delivery, and use of climate-related information to marine and coastal resource managers, resource users and others at regional to national scales." The draft document is currently open for public comment through March 31, 2015. Details are available at <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/ecosystems/climate/national-call-for-comments>.

In addition, the Council reviewed the first working draft of a Climate White Paper, which is being developed as part of the Council's ongoing development of an Ecosystem Approaches to Fisheries Management (EAFM) guidance document. The Council will use the information provided in the paper as it begins development and implementation of management approaches which take climate change and variability into account. The paper, which focuses on the impacts of climate change and variability on fish stocks relative to existing fishery science and management programs, identifies several priorities for Council consideration:

- Conduct assessment of risk/vulnerability to climate change by species;
- Include climate effects/drivers in single species stock assessments (with progression/transition to multispecies assessments);
- Incorporate climate effects on habitat and EFH considerations;
- Evaluate potential impacts on fleet dynamics (to include social and economic analyses); and
- Evaluate climate change impacts at the ecosystem level.

The Council will continue discussion about the implications of climate change and variability for fishery conservation and management at its April meeting in Long Branch, NJ.

## Joint Industry-Funded Monitoring Amendment

The Council received an update on the development of an amendment to allow cost-sharing for industry funding of observer coverage in Mid-Atlantic and New England fisheries. The Amendment also considers specific coverage targets for the Atlantic mackerel and Atlantic herring fisheries. Concurring with motions made by the New England Fishery Management Council at its January 2015 meeting, the Council requested additional development of the Amendment, especially as relates to additional types of observer coverage that may be more affordable. The Council also requested additional analysis on the potential impacts of the alternatives considered in the amendment. It is anticipated that the Amendment will be re-considered for final action at the June 2015 Council meeting.

## Other Business

### ***Listening Session: MRIP Recreational Effort Estimation Methodology***

The Council held a listening session that focused on new methods of estimating recreational fishing effort. Rob Andrews from NOAA Fisheries' Office of Science and Technology gave a presentation and answered questions from the Council and public about the new methodology.

### ***Data Collection Presentations***

Mike Cahall gave a presentation on recent and upcoming data collection initiatives being undertaken by the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP). Dan Morris, from NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO), gave an update on the Fishery Dependent Data Visioning Project—a collaborative effort between GARFO and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center to modernize the region's fishery dependent data collection systems. A draft Electronic Technology Implementation Plan was recently released as part of this project.

### ***Statement of Operating Practices and Procedures***

The Council reviewed proposed revisions to its Statement of Operating Practices and Procedures (SOPPs). In response to input from Council members, staff will make additional revisions to the section describing requirements and procedures for recusals. The Council will revisit the issue at the April 2015 meeting.

### ***Ricks E Savage Award***

George Darcy was named this year's recipient of the Ricks E Savage Award. The award is given each year to a person who has added value to the MAFMC process and management goals through significant scientific, legislative, enforcement, or management activities.

During his 14-year tenure as the NOAA Fisheries' Assistant Regional Administrator, George Darcy played an important role in the success of the Mid-Atlantic Council's fisheries management. In this position, Mr. Darcy worked closely with the Mid-Atlantic Council to accomplish a number of successes, including the rebuilding of most of the Council's managed fisheries. He also played an integral role in the Council's development of its Omnibus Annual Catch Limit and Accountability Measure Amendment that ensured FMP compliance with 2006 amendments to the Magnuson Act.

George Darcy retired in April 2014, after over 30 years of dedicated and responsible public service.



*Ricks E Savage award recipient George Darcy (center) with Council Chairman Rick Robins (left) and Regional Administrator John Bullard (right).*

## Next Meeting

***April 14-16, 2015: Long Branch, New Jersey***

Ocean Place Resort

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