



August 2026 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met August 11-13, 2026 in Philadelphia, PA. This document summarizes key actions taken and issues considered during the meeting. Presentations, briefing materials, motions, and webinar recordings are available on the Council's [August 2026 meeting page](#).

HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- Adopted 2027-2028 specifications for Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahog
- Reviewed and recommended no changes to previously adopted 2027 specifications and commercial measures for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass *
- Reviewed and recommended no changes to previously adopted 2027 specifications and recreational measures for bluefish *
- Approved modifications to the commercial scup Winter I trip limit requirements and landings-based accountability measures through the Commercial Scup Winter I Framework *
- Adopted 2027-2029 specifications for butterfish
- Reviewed and recommended no changes to previously adopted 2027 specifications for chub mackerel
- Reviewed input from listening sessions on potential monkfish/skate fishery improvements
- Received informational presentations on the Marine Resource Education Program and federal fishery-independent surveys conducted by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center
- Re-elected Joe Cimino as Council Chair and Skip Feller as Council Vice Chair

** Items denoted with an asterisk (*) were undertaken during joint meetings with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass Management Board or Bluefish Management Board.*

Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Specifications

The Council reviewed fishery performance and updated catch and landings information for Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahog and adopted multi-year specifications for 2027 and 2028. For both species, the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) recommendations provided by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) are much higher than current catch, so the Council recommended no changes to the Annual Catch Targets (ACT) and the commercial quotas for 2027-2028. The commercial quotas have remained unchanged since 2004 for surfclam and since 2005 for ocean quahog. The Council expressed concern that the clam survey, which collects information to support stock assessments for these species, has not been conducted in the last two years.

	Annual Catch Target <i>metric tons</i>	Commercial Quota <i>metric tons</i>
	2027-2028	
Atlantic Surfclam	29,363	26,218
Ocean Quahog	25,924*	24,689*

* For combined Maine and non-Maine quahog fishery

To maintain the current measures, the Council also voted to recommend that the Regional Administrator suspend the minimum shell length for surfclam in 2027. The Council will also send a letter to the Food and Drug Administration requesting an update on the steps and associated timing involved with the implementation of changes to molluscan shellfish Federal waters biotoxin protocols, to better understand how this affects the Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahog fisheries.

Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass, and Bluefish Specifications Review

The Council met jointly with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (Commission) Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board (Board) to review previously adopted 2027 specifications and commercial measures for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. The Council also met jointly with the Commission's Bluefish Management Board to review previously adopted 2027 specifications and recreational measures for bluefish.

After considering the recommendations of the SSC, Advisory Panels, and Monitoring Committees, the Council and Boards agreed that no changes are needed to the 2027 specifications for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. The 2027 commercial quotas and recreational harvest limits (RHLs) for all four species are shown in the table below.

Species	Commercial Quota <i>millions of pounds</i>		Recreational Harvest Limit <i>millions of pounds</i>	
	2026	2027	2026	2027
Summer Flounder	12.78	12.78	8.79	8.79
Scup	17.70	15.57	13.17	11.58
Black Sea Bass	7.83	7.83	8.14	8.14
Bluefish	4.66	4.75	22.02	22.50

The Council and Board also agreed to make no changes to the bluefish recreational bag limits (5 fish per day for private anglers and 7 fish per day for anglers on for-hire vessels). The recreational bag, size, and season limits for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass will be reviewed during the December 2026 Council and Board meeting.

In reviewing the 2027 scup specifications, the Council and Board discussed potential changes to measures during the Winter I quota period (January-April), including the tiered trip limit structure and the 1,000-pound reduced trip limit. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) staff advised that changing these measures could complicate the rulemaking process for the Scup Winter I Framework (see following section). Because the Council has prioritized an expedited timeline for the framework to ensure that any approved regulatory changes can be implemented by the start of the 2027 Winter I fishery, the Council and Board agreed to maintain the existing measures for 2027. Further trip limit discussions will be deferred until the next specifications cycle, allowing staff time to evaluate alternative scenarios and gather additional stakeholder input.

Scup Winter I Framework

The Council took final action on a framework to modify the commercial scup Winter I trip limit requirements and landings-based accountability measures. The proposed changes aim to increase management flexibility during the Winter I quota period and preserve harvest opportunities across all three quota periods (Winter I, Summer, and Winter II), when practicable.

Under current specifications, the Winter I trip limit starts at 50,000 pounds and is reduced to 1,000 pounds once 80 percent of the Winter I quota is landed. Any landings overages within a quota period must be deducted from the corresponding quota period in the following year.

In recent years (2023-2026), delays in the availability of in-season landings data, combined with limited flexibility under the existing regulations, have made it difficult for NMFS to implement the Winter I trip limit reduction in a timely manner. In 2026, unusually rapid landings, combined with these data and management challenges, resulted in a 23-percent overage of the Winter I quota and an early fishery closure. Under the existing accountability measures, this overage must be deducted from the 2027 Winter I quota. Fishery participants have raised concerns that, if the 2026 annual quota is not exceeded, repayment of the overage would impose an unnecessary economic burden on fishermen without providing a meaningful conservation benefit to the scup stock.

To address these challenges, the framework would allow the Winter I trip limit reduction to be implemented based on projected commercial scup landings, rather than requiring NMFS to wait for actual landings data. It would also provide the NMFS Regional Administrator (RA) with discretionary authority not to implement the reduction if it is expected to prevent full harvest of the Winter I quota. Together, these changes are expected to give NMFS greater flexibility to implement trip limit reductions in a timely manner when needed, while avoiding unnecessary reductions when the risk of exceeding the Winter I quota is low.

The framework would also allow the NMFS RA to waive the repayment requirements for quota period overages if the annual commercial scup quota was not exceeded in the same year. This provision is intended to preserve harvest opportunities across all quota periods while still constraining harvest to the annual quota.

During the meeting, the Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Board initiated a complementary addendum to consider revisions to the landings-based accountability measures. The Council will submit the framework to NMFS for review and implementation. Additional information about this action is available on the [Council](#) action page.

Butterfish Specifications and Other Management Measures

The Council reviewed the stock status and performance of the butterfish fishery and adopted specifications for 2027-2029. Due to resource limitations, an updated stock assessment was not completed in 2026. Instead, Northeast Fisheries Science Center staff provided a data update that included recent catch and survey information, as well as updated projections. The new information did not indicate a major change in the overall perception of stock condition, although stock status could not be formally updated.

Given the lack of an updated analytical stock assessment, the Council's SSC based its binding 2027-2029 ABC recommendations on the 2026 ABC of 13,842 metric tons (mt), applying an additional 2% reduction for each year beyond 2026. The SSC used this approach to account for increasing uncertainty as more time passes since the previous assessment. Based on the SSC's ABC recommendations, the Council adopted ABCs of 13,565 mt for 2027, 13,294 mt for 2028, and 13,028 mt for 2029, representing a 2% reduction each year. After updated, slightly lower, discard set-asides are deducted, the commercial quotas would be 8,268 mt in 2027, 7,997 mt in 2028, and 7,731 mt in 2029. These quotas are similar to the current 2026 quota (8,051 mt), and all are more than double the annual landings in any year since 2002.

The Council engaged in an extensive discussion regarding the SSC's use of the accumulating 2% ABC reduction to account for the increasing uncertainty in the absence of a recent butterfish assessment. The Council agreed to consider if additional risk policy guidance for the SSC is warranted to address similar situations in the future.

The Council noted that the 2026 Trimester 2 butterfish discard cap for the longfin squid fishery was being used unusually quickly. Once the new longfin squid assessment informs management in December, the Council may consider whether the butterfish cap should be increased or otherwise adjusted for 2027. NMFS could likely implement changes via an in-season action before a cap closure in 2027's Trimester 2 becomes imminent. Staff from NMFS and the Council are also investigating what caused the rapid 2026 Trimester 2 butterfish discard cap usage.

The Council also reviewed butterfish trip limits as planned under Executive Order 14276's mandate to reduce regulatory burdens. However, market constraints appear to be the primary limitation on butterfish landings, and the Council's Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Advisory Panel did not suggest any changes at this time.

Chub Mackerel Specifications Review

After considering the recommendations of the SSC, Advisory Panel, and the Monitoring Committee, the Council agreed that no changes are needed to the previously adopted 2027 specifications for chub mackerel. These specifications have remained unchanged since they were [first implemented in 2020](#). The total allowable landings limit for 2027 will remain at 4.50 million pounds, which is well above recent landings.

Monkfish and Skates

Jenny Couture (New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) staff) reviewed input from spring 2026 listening sessions on potential monkfish/skate fishery improvements, which followed the Councils' decision to discontinue an individual fishing quota (IFQ) scoping effort. The listening sessions highlighted ongoing industry concerns related to IFQs, area-specific management, effort controls, market conditions, latent effort, potential alignment of monkfish and skate management, protected resource regulations, and offshore wind development.

Based on the listening sessions, the Councils submitted a joint letter to the NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office requesting updated information on Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan measures and potential modifications to reduce fishery impacts. NMFS responded that it would review the requests and coordinate with the Northeast Fisheries Science Center as resources allow. NEFMC is not currently developing any monkfish actions, but the input received from the fishing industry and others during the listening sessions will inform potential future Council actions.

Informational Presentations and Updates

Marine Resource Education Program (MREP)

Sophie Swetz of Gulf of Maine Research Institute staff provided an overview of the MREP program and how interested fishermen can apply to the upcoming workshop January 11-15, 2027, in Falmouth, MA. MREP is designed by fishermen for fishermen, to foster understanding of and engagement in fisheries science and the Council process. Several Council members attested to the value they found in attending MREP, both as both Council members and as fishermen. For more information contact Sophie at sswetz@gmri.org or (207) 772-2321 ext. 8104. You can also visit <https://mrep.gmri.org/> or scan the QR code with your phone.



NEFSC Survey Update

Dr. Kathryn Ford provided an overview of several Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) surveys, including an update on the Fall 2025 and Spring 2026 survey seasons. During the update, Dr. Ford highlighted that the Spring 2026 federal bottom trawl survey was conducted on the NOAA Ship Pisces while the typical vessel used (the NOAA Ship Henry B. Bigelow) was unavailable because it was undergoing midlife repairs. Other topics included the Gulf of Maine Bottom Longline Survey, the scallop survey enterprise, and an update on the

Regional Industry-Based Bottom Trawl Survey (RIBTS), which NEFSC has been developing with the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP).

Other Business

Scientific and Statistical Committee Appointment

The Council appointed one new member to its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). Dr. Teresa Johnson is a full professor of marine policy at the University of Maine in the School of Marine Sciences. Dr. Johnson is a social scientist with extensive interdisciplinary research experience focused on understanding the societal and ecosystem challenges and changes facing fishing and coastal communities in the Northeast. Dr. Johnson is filling a vacancy on the SSC due to the recent resignation of Dr. Mark Holliday (NMFS Office of Policy, retired) and will serve the remainder of Dr. Holliday's three-year term (through February 2028).

New and Reappointed Members

New member Warren Elliott (Pennsylvania) was sworn in to begin a three-year term on the Council. In addition, three reappointed members were sworn in: Robert Ruhle (North Carolina, second term), Paul Risi (New York, third term), and Laurie Nolan (New York, first full term following a mid-term appointment in 2025). Another newly appointed member, Dave Blazer (Maryland), will be sworn in at the Council's October meeting.

Election of Officers

During the annual election of officers, the Council re-elected Joe Cimino as Chair and Skip Feller as Vice Chair. Mr. Cimino is the Administrator of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Marine Resources Administration. He has served as New Jersey's designated state official since 2018. Mr. Feller is currently in his second term as an appointed member holding Virginia's obligatory seat. He operates a fleet of head boats out of Rudee Inlet in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Recreational Sector Separation Amendment for Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass, and Bluefish

Following the review of 2027 bluefish specifications, the Council and Bluefish Board discussed the timeline for the Recreational Sector Separation Amendment. This discussion was prompted by the Commission's Policy Board discussion during their [Summer Meeting on August 4-6](#). Commission staff summarized the Policy Board's discussion of the action timeline, including the need for additional opportunities to review the outcomes of the upcoming [Recreational Sector Separation Workshop](#), provide feedback on development of the draft alternatives, and allow the FMAT/PDT sufficient time to incorporate that feedback. Based on these considerations, the Council and the Bluefish Board agreed that the Council and Policy Board would hold additional joint discussions at the Commission's November 2026 Annual Meeting and Winter Meeting in January 2027, with approval of the draft alternatives anticipated at the January meeting.

Next Council Meeting

The next Council meeting will be held **October 6-8, 2026**, in Duck, North Carolina. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.