

COMMISSIONER MANUAL



*Vision: Sustainable and Cooperative Management
of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries*

ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

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PREFACE

Welcome to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission! Thank you for your desire and willingness to take on the public trust responsibility of managing and restoring the public's coastal marine fisheries resources. This manual is designed to support you in this important job by providing the information you need to be an effective Commissioner. Key topics include:

- How and why the Commission was formed
- Our mission, vision and goals
- How the Commission functions and is organized
- What our major programs, activities, and funding sources are
- Who the people are within the Commission (fellow Commissioners and ASMFC staff).

This manual is a product of the hard work of a special committee of our Commissioners, some of whom are still current while others have moved on – Steve Bowman, Bernie Pankowski, April Price, Malcolm Rhodes and Ritchie White. They worked closely and tirelessly with staff members Laura Leach and Tina Berger to produce this completely revised Commissioner Manual. Their insight, creativity and attention to detail were invaluable. They all deserve our heartfelt thanks for both their efforts and a product that is well done.

I think you will find this manual to be a useful tool in quickly bringing you up to speed on the Commission and your role. We welcome your feedback on its contents and your recommendations for improvements. This is a dynamic document and will be revised as necessary through updates distributed via email and posted to our website at <http://www.asmfc.org/about-us/commissioners-manual>. Our website is intended to be a user friendly, one stop source for all critical Commission information, including almost all Commission publications. I suggest you visit it as soon as you can.

Your first opportunity to see what the Commission does, and observe how Commissioners interact, will be at the next quarterly meeting of the Commission. You will be seated with the other two Commissioners from your state. I would encourage you to contact them prior to your first meeting for any advice they might offer. Please contact me if you have any questions that are not readily answered in this manual or on the website – we can be reached at (703) 842-0740.

Our Commission was formed in 1942 by the 15 member states for the purpose of protecting and managing marine fisheries within the states' jurisdiction. Our states recognized that they could accomplish far more through cooperation than through their individual efforts. That founding principle has been maintained through the years thanks to the selfless dedication of citizens like you who have stepped forward to share their time, expertise, and judgment to advance our vision of sustainably managing Atlantic coastal fisheries!

Welcome aboard!



Robert E. Beal
Executive Director

The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased and not impaired in value. – THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Important Notes for New Commissioners

1. Status counts. We depend on written notification from the appropriate authority within the state to advise us of changes to a Commissioner's status. Legislative Commissioners' status, and that of their proxies, expires the day they resign, or if not re-elected, the day the new Legislature convenes. Proxy designations for all Commissioners must be made in writing.
2. A Commissioner and his/her on-going proxy may sit together at a Board meeting; however, only one may speak during that Board meeting. Any Commissioner is authorized to seek recognition from the Chair to speak at the public microphone.
3. Meeting-specific proxies cannot vote on final action. This rule was adopted following complaints from the public about perceived conflicts of interest of issue-specific proxies.
4. The Commission has been engaged in a series of lawsuits challenging Commission action. These cases are tried on the Administrative Record, that is, what is said on the record during Board meetings and deliberations. The majority of Commission meetings are recorded and transcribed. Commissioner words become permanent.
5. The Commission amended its Regulations to specify that a two thirds vote of board members is required to amend or rescind a previous action, regardless of whether prior notice is given of such action. This reflected concerns about backsliding on important and difficult decisions.
6. Species management board meetings have little flexibility to exceed their allotted time. Public comment is purposely taken through hearings held within the states and through written public comment period. All information collected is available for Commissioner review. Summaries are provided to each Board prior to their deliberations. Last minute testimony from advocates at Board meetings has raised questions of fairness and efficiency.
7. Commission staff is prepared to enable Commissioners to make best use of their time during board and Commission meetings. Staff can and will help with drafting motions to avoid the need for boards to wordsmith motions on the run. Having pre-drafted motions reduces the chances of errors and allows Commissioners to focus on understanding what the motion will do and exchange views on the merit of the proposal.
8. Given the large number of members for most boards, chairs will use various methods to provide the opportunity for all members to speak. One technique will be to alternate recognizing speakers for and against a motion. Another is to ask if anyone's mind will be changed by further discussion or debate.
9. A recommended reading list in prioritized order follows (all of which can be found in the Commissioner Manual or on the Commission website):
 - Compact – Rules and Regulations (Compact, Rules and Regulations tab of Commissioner Manual)
 - ASMFC 2019-2023 Strategic Plan (Action Plan & Strategic Plan tab of Commissioner Manual)
 - 2020 Annual Report
http://www.asmfc.org/uploads/file/640f5115ASMFC_2022AnnualReport_web.pdf
 - Chairman's Report from 2022 Annual Meeting (following Preface of Commissioner Manual)
 - Overviews of fish species that your state has declared an interest in (Interstate Fisheries Management Program tab of Commissioner Manual)
 - Meeting Summary from last Meeting Week available at: <http://www.asmfc.org/home/meeting-archive>

Key staff to assist you if you have any questions or require assistance are: **TONI KERNS** for fisheries management issues at tkerns@asmfc.org, **LAURA LEACH** for finance and administration issues at lleach@asmfc.org, **PAT CAMPFIELD** for science related issues at pcampfield@asmfc.org, **GEOFF WHITE** for data collection and management issues at geoff.white@accsp.org, and **TINA BERGER** for outreach and general information at tberger@asmfc.org.

Report from the Chair



SPUD WOODWARD

As my final report as Chair of the Commission, I want to thank my fellow Commissioners and proxies, members of Congress, federal partners, and stakeholders for the support you continue to provide us in our important work of sustainable and cooperative management of Atlantic coast species. Collectively, we have made significant strides in 2023 in the areas of fisheries management, fisheries science, and data collection and management.

Over my term as Chair, we have successfully revised three of the Commission's foundational policies – our Appeals Process, *De Minimis* Policy, and Conservation Equivalency Guidelines. Each are fundamentally important to ensuring that we treat each other fairly, with clearly articulated guidelines and processes, and without undue burden in the management process.

There has been a lot of stock assessment activity in 2023, with benchmark stock assessments for American eel, black drum, Jonah crab, and winter flounder, all endorsed through a peer review process and accepted for management use by the relevant species management boards. Another five benchmark stock assessments are in preparation for completion in 2024 and 2025.

In response to the American eel benchmark stock assessment finding that eels continue to be depleted, the Board initiated an addendum to consider reductions to the coastwide yellow eel harvest cap. At the same time, the American Eel Board is working on an addendum to address Maine's glass eel fishery quota, which sunsets in 2024.

Commissioners also took important steps to increase spawning protection for the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank stock of American lobster and rebuild Atlantic striped bass. Through the adoption on Addendum XXVII, the American Lobster Board established a trigger mechanism to implement management measures – specifically gauge and escape vent sizes – to provide additional protection of the spawning stock biomass.

In 2023, for the first time in 12 years, Commissioners used the emergency action provision of the Interstate Fisheries Management Program Charter to implement a 31" maximum size limit for striped bass recreational fisheries in order to control recreational harvest and protect a strong year class that could aid in stock rebuilding. The action responded to the near doubling of estimated recreational harvest from 2021 to 2022 and the strong likelihood that the 2029 rebuilding timeline would not be met unless fishing mortality was reduced. The emergency provision extends until October 28, 2024, while the Board considers management measures designed to reduce fishing mortality to the target and promote stock rebuilding under Draft Addendum II, which will be considered for approval in January 2024.

This was also a year of heightened stakeholder and media interest in the Commission's management of Atlantic menhaden and Delaware Bay-origin horseshoe crab. The Commission has invested considerable resources to manage these species in an ecological context, recognizing their role in providing an important food source to other species. For Atlantic menhaden, the Commission uses ecological reference points to set coastwide harvest levels that account for the forage needs of key predatory fish, while the Adaptive Resource Management Framework uses abundance estimates of both horseshoe crabs and migratory shorebirds to set harvest limits for horseshoe crabs in the Delaware Bay region. The Commission stands behind the science that supports these management programs and is committed to further refining the models as the science and our understanding of these species continue to evolve.

In closing, I want to thank the staff for their support during my tenure as Commission Chair. I also want to thank my Vice-Chair, Joe Cimino, for his willingness to serve as a leader and for his valuable perspective. In the year ahead, I look forward to working with our new leadership and all of you as we strive to ensure we have healthy fisheries along the Atlantic coast.