

ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

Draft 2024 Action Plan



For Review by the Business Session

October 18, 2023

Goal 1 – Rebuild, maintain and fairly allocate Atlantic coastal fisheries

Goal 1 focuses on the responsibility of the states to conserve and manage Atlantic coastal fishery resources for sustainable use. Commission members will advocate decisions to achieve the long-term benefits of conservation, while balancing the socio-economic interests of coastal communities. Inherent in this is the recognition that healthy and vibrant resources mean more jobs and more opportunity for those that live along the coast. The states are committed to proactive management, with a focus on integrating ecosystem services, socioeconomic impacts, habitat issues, bycatch and discard reduction measures, and protected species interactions into well-defined fishery management plans (FMPs). FMPs will also address fair (equitable) allocation of fishery resources among the states. Understanding global climate change and its impact on fishery productivity and distribution is an elevated priority. Improving cooperation and coordination with federal partners and stakeholders can streamline efficiency, transparency, and, ultimately, success. In the next five years, the Commission is committed to making significant progress on rebuilding overfished or depleted Atlantic fish stocks.

Fisheries management and stock assessment activities anticipated for 2024 and into 2025 are outlined below. Activities are divided into high priority species (those with significant management action, stock assessment activity, or are of critical importance to the states and their stakeholders) and medium-low priority species. For most species, there are several activities that occur on an annual or ongoing basis, including specification setting; FMP review and state compliance reports; and ensuring cooperation and consistent management programs among the states, regional councils, and NOAA Fisheries for shared resources. While ongoing activities are not listed below, they continue to be conducted. The focus of the Action Plan is to highlight new and high-profile activities where the Commission will focus its resources and energies for the next two years.

HIGH PRIORITY SPECIES FOR 2024

American Eel

- **Draft and finalize an addendum to consider changes to the coastwide catch level for yellow eel, in response to the recent benchmark stock assessment**
- **Draft and finalize an addendum to address Maine’s glass eel quota**
- Monitor international action on the Convention of International Trade of Endangered Species through communications with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

American Lobster

- **Initiate benchmark stock assessment for completion in 2025**
- Work with partners and ACCSP on implementing and integrating tracking device data collection as part of Addendum XXIX
- Update annual indices of stock abundance and settlement and respond, if **necessary, per Addendum XXVII**
- **Consider developing a management strategy evaluation to inform future management**
- Continue to monitor and respond as necessary to NOAA rulemaking on Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan modifications

- Continue to work with the Law Enforcement Subcommittee, the states, and NOAA Fisheries to improve enforcement of management measures in both state and offshore waters
- Work with NOAA Fisheries to ensure consistency in state and federal regulations

Atlantic Croaker

- **Conduct and present traffic light analysis, and respond if necessary**
- **Review and present benchmark stock assessment and peer review, and respond if necessary**

Atlantic Striped Bass

- Finalize and implement Addendum II on **reduction in recreational and commercial measures**
- **Conduct and present stock assessment update, and respond if necessary**
- **Develop alternatives for bag and size limit analysis for effort controls**

Black Sea Bass

- Continue addressing recreational management reform in collaboration with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC), including:
 - Conduct scoping hearings and begin developing Recreational Sector Separation and Catch Accounting Amendment
- Continue development of **Recreational Measures Setting Process Framework/Addenda and conduct public hearings Present** management track stock assessment, and respond if necessary

Bluefish

- Continue addressing recreational management reform in collaboration with MAFMC, including:
 - Conduct scoping hearings and begin developing Recreational Sector Separation and Catch Accounting Amendment
 - **Continue development of the Recreational Measures Setting Process Framework/Addenda and conduct public hearings**
- **Implement new** management uncertainty tool in collaboration with MAFMC

Horseshoe Crab

- **Set 2025 Delaware Bay bait harvest specifications using the Adaptive Resource Management Framework Revision**
- **Consider Work Group input on Delaware Bay management goals, and respond if necessary**
- **Conduct and present stock assessment update, and respond if necessary**
- Secure long-term funding for the Horseshoe Crab Benthic Trawl Survey for use in the ARM Framework

Red Drum

- **Present benchmark stock assessment and peer review, and respond if necessary**

Scup

- Continue addressing recreational management reform in collaboration with MAFMC, including:
 - Conduct scoping hearings and begin developing Recreational Sector Separation and Catch Accounting Amendment
 - **Continue development of Recreational Measures Setting Process Framework/Addenda and conduct public hearings**
 - **Monitor management and research activities of MAFMC including, but not limited to, scup discards and gear restricted areas analysis**

Shad and River Herring

- **Conduct and present** river herring benchmark stock assessment and peer review, and respond if necessary
- Complete updates to shad sustainable fishery management plans
- Complete updates to shad habitat plans
- Monitor management activities of MAFMC and New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) including, but not limited to, shad and river herring catch caps and bycatch avoidance programs

Summer Flounder

- Continue addressing recreational management reform in collaboration with MAFMC, including:
 - Conduct scoping hearings and begin developing Recreational Sector Separation and Catch Accounting Amendment
 - **Continue development of the Recreational Measures Setting Process Framework/Addenda and conduct public hearings**

MEDIUM-LOW PRIORITY SPECIES

Atlantic Herring

- Monitor and respond if necessary to NEFMC activities **including Amendment 10 to address spatial and temporal allocation and management of Atlantic herring at the management unit level to minimize user conflicts, contribute to optimum yield and support rebuilding of the resource** Continue to improve coordination and collaboration with NEFMC
- Conduct meetings as necessary to establish state effort control (days-out) programs for Area 1A
- Explore funding options for biological sampling program

Atlantic Menhaden

- **Initiate single-species stock assessment update to be completed in 2025** Continue work on ecological reference point (ERP) benchmark stock assessment for peer review in 2025

Atlantic Sturgeon

- **Conduct and present stock assessment update, and respond if necessary**
- Monitor state and federal activities in response to an Endangered Species Act listing, including 5-year status reviews and recovery plans
- Monitor federal activities in response to the Action Plan to Reduce Atlantic Sturgeon Bycatch in Federal Large Mesh Gillnet Fisheries

Black Drum

- Update and present indicators of fishery performance and indices of abundance, and respond if necessary

Coastal Sharks

- Monitor activities of NOAA Fisheries Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Division with regards to coastal shark management actions and consider development of complementary management actions as needed for consistency, including monitoring HMS Amendment 14 (annual catch limits and accountability measures), and proposed rule to consider prohibiting retention of sharks listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act
 - **Initiate addendum to consider moving oceanic whitetip shark to the prohibited species group, if necessary**

Cobia

- **Consider development of management action to address recreational quota reallocation based on increasing catch of cobia in Mid-Atlantic states**
- **Collaborate with the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) and the states to conduct 2026 stock assessment**

Jonah Crab

- **Work with ACCSP and partners on implementing and integrating tracking device data collection as part of Addendum IV**

Northern Shrimp

- Present results of 2023 traffic light analysis, and respond if necessary
- Continue to explore long-term management options given environmental changes in the Gulf of Maine and depleted stock status
- **Consider development of management action to consider implementation of an ongoing moratorium until resource improves**
- **Continue development of management triggers and “wake-up index” to indicate when the stock can support a commercial fishery**

Spanish Mackerel

- Consider development of management action to address differences between state and federal management plans in collaboration with South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC)
- **Monitor activities of SAFMC with regards to the Framework Amendment addressing acceptable biological catch limits**

- **Work in collaboration with SAFMC to plan and conduct Spanish mackerel and king mackerel port meetings**
- **Develop a white paper characterizing recreational and commercial Spanish mackerel fisheries along the Atlantic coast**

Spiny Dogfish

- **Present management track** stock assessment and respond, if necessary, in collaboration with NEFMC and MAFMC
- Collaborate with NEFMC and MAFMC on changes to the Interstate FMP if changes to the federal FMP are made in response to the Action Plan to Reduce Atlantic Sturgeon Bycatch in Federal Large Mesh Gillnet Fisheries

Spot

- Conduct and present traffic light analysis, and respond if necessary
- **Continue work on** benchmark stock assessment for peer review in **2025**

Spotted Seatrout

No new tasks

Tautog

- Continue to monitor the implementation of the commercial harvest tagging program to reduce illegal harvest **and consider modifications if necessary**

Weakfish

- Initiate stock assessment update to be completed in 2025

Winter Flounder

No new tasks

CROSS CUTTING ISSUES

- **Continue to monitor impacts of changes to Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES) design and data presentation standards relative to Commission FMPs and stock assessments**
- Continue to update existing management programs to address the concerns of the recreational community with regard to Commission-managed and jointly-managed species
- Continue to work with the states and NOAA Fisheries on changes to the Take Reduction Plan for North Atlantic right whale
- Monitor developments related to changing ocean conditions, ocean acidification, stock distributions, ecosystem services, ocean planning and potential fisheries reallocations
- Continue to explore allocation strategies for the Commission's quota-managed species to reflect current fishery conditions
- Explore the development of a guidance or policy-level document on allocation and use of mode splits

- **Consider strategies for increasing responsiveness in management to climate change**
- **Participate in the East Coast Climate Coordination Group to track progress of the Draft Potential Action Plan**
- **Provide support for the Climate Innovation Group to track information and changes relevant to East Coast fisheries, identify ideas that are worthy of consideration by the Coordination Group, and identify new possible actions to undertake in the Draft Action Plan**
- **Develop joint management agreement with MAFMC to clarify roles and increase efficiency on collaborative projects**

Goal 2 – Provide the scientific foundation for stock assessments to support informed management actions

Sustainable management of fisheries relies on accurate and timely scientific advice. The Commission strives to produce sound, actionable science through a technically rigorous, independently peer-reviewed stock assessment process. Assessments are developed using a broad suite of fishery-independent surveys and fishery-dependent monitoring, as well as research products developed by a coastwide network of fisheries scientists at state, federal, and academic institutions. The goal encompasses the development of new, innovative scientific research and methodology, and the enhancement of the states' stock assessment capabilities. It provides for the administration, coordination, and expansion of collaborative research and data collection programs. Achieving the goal will ensure sound science is available to serve as the foundation for the Commission's evaluation of stock status and adaptive management actions.

Several fisheries science activities occur on an annual or ongoing basis, including development of stock assessments and conducting peer reviews; stock assessment scheduling and evaluation of scientists' workloads; updating Commission research priorities and distributing to funding agencies; external research proposal reviews; development of ecological reference points models; supporting multispecies/diet data collection; fish ageing and tagging programs; gear technology research; and participation in Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) and Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) committees. While ongoing activities are not listed below, they continue to be conducted.

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

- **Seek Assessment Science Committee (ASC) guidance on best practices for use of MRIP FES data in stock assessments; work with MRIP statisticians to scope magnitude of potential effort and catch estimate changes by species; during stock assessments, conduct sensitivity analyses to evaluate the effects of potential MRIP changes on model results and stock status**
- Continue incorporating socioeconomic information in management documents and streamline processes for producing socioeconomic analyses through the Committee on Economics and Social Sciences
 - Participate in the development of Northeast Fisheries Science Center's (NEFSC) Ecosystem and Socioeconomic Profiles

- Develop an American lobster socioeconomic data inventory to enhance current stock and fishery indicators
- Update the ASMFC Research Priorities; work with scientific committees to write proposals and pursue funding to conduct priority research
- **Solicit ASC input to long-term stock assessment scheduling priorities, and assessment processes, in the Northeast (NRCC) and South Atlantic (SEDAR)**
- Incorporate risk and uncertainty lessons learned for the next iteration of the tool (e.g., **red drum**)
- Develop best practices to standardize and archive modeling code and data, during and after assessments, to increase consistency, efficiency, and assessment throughput
- **Support a Northeast Fish Passage Workshop to communicate and promote new innovations for improving passage efficiency**

DATA COLLECTION

- **Work with the three East Coast Regional Fishery Management Councils to characterize and address deficiencies in NOAA Fisheries' scientific support and associated impacts to fisheries; this effort could include exploration of industry-based platforms to conduct fishery research**
- Coordinate the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program-South Atlantic (SEAMAP-SA) component
 - Collaborate with the Southeast Coastal Ocean Observing Regional Association to host SEAMAP-SA survey data
 - Seek increased funding support via budget discussions with Congressional staff
- Coordinate the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP) and implement action items stemming from annual NEAMAP committee meetings
 - Develop common methodology protocols for NEAMAP surveys
 - Conduct Maturity Staging Workshop
 - Seek increased funding support via budget discussions with Congressional staff
 - Communicate with offshore wind energy developers on use of the NEAMAP brand with regard to pre- and post-construction surveys and monitoring
- Collect new data to address stock assessment needs
 - **Increase the resolution of catch and survey information, including bycatch and fishery-independent information, for future spatial modeling in stock assessments**
 - **Explore the use of video surveys as new fishery-independent indices for Jonah crab**
 - Collect fishery-dependent data using black sea bass research fleet
 - Increase bycatch monitoring of sturgeon, shad and river herring, and sciaenids in state waters, as resources allow
 - Support the states, SAFMC, and ACCSP with the citizen science project to collect new recreational live release data from volunteer anglers
 - Leverage partnerships to increase diet data collection for ecosystem-based assessments and management through new or existing programs (e.g., SEAMAP), as resources allow, notably diets of larger offshore fish, birds, and marine mammals

FISHERIES RESEARCH

- **Collaborate with US Geological Survey (USGS), New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and Delaware State University to develop new sturgeon spawning stock abundance estimates in the Hudson and Delaware estuaries**
- Conduct Atlantic menhaden and Atlantic sturgeon ageing exchanges and workshops
- Conduct a Fish Ageing Quality Assurance Workshop among Atlantic coast state and university laboratories to ensure consistency between new and historical age data
- Assess fixed gear and right whale interactions in the Gulf of Maine
- Collaborate with university researchers to advance stock assessment population dynamics models: **striped bass management strategy evaluation, ecological** reference points, striped bass multi-stock contributions, spot spatiotemporal model; and lobster thermal habitat and growth model
- Work with federal partners to identify shared research priorities and opportunities for enhanced scientific support to the Commission
- Continue to participate in and co-chair with Fisheries and Oceans Canada the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) American Eel Work Group

ECOSYSTEM-BASED MANAGEMENT & CHANGING OCEAN CONDITIONS

- **Promote consistencies in fishery independent survey data collection across East Coast geographic regions and jurisdictions (both state and federal); develop data collection protocols in order to readily combine and use data in coastwide modeling frameworks**
- Evaluate the effects of changing ocean conditions on stock productivity and distribution; develop criteria for adding/subtracting states from fishery management boards when stock distributions change
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- **Improve coordination and knowledge sharing among the Councils' Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSCs) and the Commission's scientific committees, particularly for species spanning multiple jurisdictions and jointly managed species**
- Collaborate with NOAA Fisheries Northeast and Southeast Fisheries Science Centers to include Commission interests in Ecosystem Status Reports
- Track development of emerging science and tools related to changing ocean conditions and impacts to fisheries (e.g., Climate Vulnerability Assessments)
- **Examine options to increase fishery management integration across FMPs in order to fully implement ecosystem-based modeling results**

COMPETING OCEAN USES

- Determine the Commission's role in wind energy intersections with fisheries; continue to participate in Responsible Offshore Science Alliance and provide forum for the states to discuss interactions between fisheries resources and offshore energy development
- **Support the Recreational Study Fleet Pilot Project, monitor progress, and respond if necessary**
- **Evaluate SEAMAP surveys' interactions with wind energy development in the Southeast**

Goal 3 - Produce dependable and timely marine fishery statistics for Atlantic coast fisheries

Effective management depends on quality fishery-dependent data to inform stock assessments and fisheries management decisions. **This goal focuses on providing timely, accurate catch, effort, biological and socioeconomic data on Atlantic coast recreational, for-hire, and commercial fisheries to support fisheries science and management.**

The Commission will accomplish this through the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP), a cooperative state-federal program that designs, implements, and conducts marine fisheries statistics data collection programs and integrates those data into data management systems to meet the needs of fishery managers, scientists, and harvesters. ACCSP partners include the 15 Atlantic coast state fishery agencies, the three Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, NOAA Fisheries, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

On a continuing basis, ACCSP does the following:

- Reviews and maintains coastwide standards for data collection and processing in cooperation with all program partners
- Provides funding to its Program Partners supporting data collection management and innovation through a competitive process and monitors funded projects
- Maintains commercial dealer reporting and commercial and for-hire **trip** catch reporting through the Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System (SAFIS) electronic applications
- Coordinates state conduct of the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) and the For-Hire Survey (FHS), including the Large Pelagics Telephone Survey (LPTS) add-on
- Consolidates and integrates partner data and provides user-friendly, on-line, public and confidential access to those data via the Data Warehouse
- Provides communication, outreach, and engagement resources to ACCSP Partners and system users in accordance with the ASMFC Communications Plan
- Maintains security protocols for ASMFC network and information systems to comply with Federal Information Security Management Act

PARTNERSHIPS

- Coordinate with Gulf and Pacific Commissions on data collection and data management initiatives
- **Coordinate Atlantic region recreational fisheries data needs, including prioritization of new and ongoing development activities**
- Participate in the Fisheries Information Systems (FIS) program and promote Atlantic data modernization projects
- Coordinate data initiatives with Councils (NEFMC, MAFMC, SAFMC, GMFMC), and relevant NOAA regional offices and Science Centers

FISHERIES-DEPENDENT DATA COLLECTION

SAFIS

- **Develop modernized dealer reporting application and data processing for implementation in January 2025**
- **Implement expanded at-entry quality control checks on SAFIS eTRIPS submissions for partner specific questions (attributes) based on 2023 data validation & processing workshop**
- Continue to provide data collection pathway for Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER) implementation
- Extend One Stop Reporting initiative (e.g., expanded functionality across federal permits, convene workshop on state requirements)
- Support implementation of spatial data management (e.g., American lobster trip locations)
- **Launch the SciFish mobile application and project builder under the SAFIS umbrella for standardized citizen science data collection**

Recreational Surveys

- **Continue to develop and seek certification of for-hire methodology for logbook estimates of catch and effort with dockside validation**
- **Scope a pilot project to expand collection of discard data from recreational anglers**

DATA STANDARDS, DISTRIBUTION AND USE

Standards

- **Publish updated and searchable Atlantic coast fisheries data standards to ACCSP website with database driven standard code references**

Data Distribution and Use

- Expand data warehouse content, with emphasis on presentation of recreational estimates
- Establish new biological data feeds and create Data Warehouse queries for biological data linked to collection program details and metadata
- Provide validated commercial landings data for Commission stock assessments (**American lobster, Atlantic croaker, Atlantic herring, Atlantic striped bass, ERP species, and red drum**) and SEDAR process (**red snapper, cobia, gag grouper, blueline tilefish, golden tilefish**)
- Respond to custom data requests, as necessary

Goal 4 – Promote compliance with fishery management plans to ensure sustainable use of Atlantic coast fisheries

Fisheries managers, law enforcement personnel, and stakeholders have a shared responsibility to promote compliance with fisheries management measures. Activities under the goal seek to increase and improve compliance with FMPs. This requires the successful coordination of both management and enforcement activities among state and federal agencies. Commission members recognize that adequate and consistent enforcement of fisheries rules is required to keep pace with increasingly complex management activity and emerging technologies. Achieving the goal will improve the effectiveness of the Commission's FMPs.

The Commission’s Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) carries out much of Goal 4. Most of these activities occur on an annual basis or as part of the FMP development process. Proposed changes in management are evaluated to determine enforceability and effectiveness. The LEC provides managers with feedback on the practicality of regulations to foster stakeholder buy-in and compliance.

COMPLIANCE

- Explore methods for improved enforcement of offshore lobster regulations; work with states to implement vessel tracking **requirements**, consistent with **American Lobster Addendum XXIX and Jonah Crab Addendum IV**
- Incorporate revisions to and reference the revised “Guidelines for Resource Managers” in reviews and evaluations of proposed changes to management programs
- Annually review and comment on (as needed) NOAA Fisheries enforcement priorities to ensure they support the enforceability and effectiveness of Commission management programs
- Evaluate interagency measures to enhance traceability of fishery products across jurisdictional boundaries

PARTNERSHIPS

- Engage and support NOAA Fisheries and USFWS Offices of Law Enforcement, U.S. Department of Justice, and U.S. Coast Guard to facilitate the enforceability of Commission FMPs
- Work to sustain financial support for Joint Enforcement Agreements (JEAs)

STAKEHOLDER AWARENESS

- Use emerging communication platforms and tools to deliver real time information regarding regulations and the outcomes of law enforcement investigations
 - Explore the use of electronic tools to communicate real-time commercial and recreational regulations

Goal 5 – Protect and enhance fish habitat and ecosystem health through partnerships and education

Goal 5 aims to conserve and improve coastal, marine, and riverine habitat to enhance the benefits of sustainable Atlantic coastal fisheries and resilient coastal communities in the face of changing ecosystems. Habitat loss and degradation have been identified as significant factors affecting the long-term sustainability and productivity of our nation’s fisheries. The Commission’s Habitat Program develops objectives, sets priorities, and produces tools to guide fisheries habitat conservation efforts directed towards ecosystem-based management.

The challenge for the Commission and its state members is maintaining fish habitat in the absence of specific regulatory authority for habitat protection or enhancement. Therefore, the Commission will work cooperatively with state, federal, and stakeholder partnerships to achieve this goal. Much of the work to address habitat is conducted through the Commission’s Habitat and Artificial Reef

Committees. In order to identify critical habitat for Commission managed species, each year the committee reviews existing reference documents for Commission-managed species to identify gaps or updates needed to describe important habitat types and review and revise species habitat factsheets. The Habitat Committee also publishes an annual issue of the *Habitat Hotline Atlantic*, highlighting topical issues that affect all the states.

The Commission and its Habitat Program endorses the National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP), and will continue to work cooperatively with the program to improve aquatic habitat along the Atlantic coast. Since 2008, the Commission has invested considerable resources, as both a partner and administrative home, to the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP), a coastwide collaborative effort to accelerate the conservation and restoration of habitat for native Atlantic coastal, estuarine-dependent, and diadromous fishes. As part of this goal, the Commission will continue to provide support for ACFHP, under the direction of the National Fish Habitat Partnership Board.

EDUCATE

- Educate Commissioners, stakeholders, and the general public about the importance of habitat to healthy fisheries and ecosystems
- Publish Habitat Management Series document on acoustics affecting fish habitat, and initiate next Habitat Management Series document
- Identify mechanisms to evaluate ecosystem health for consideration by Technical Committees and Boards

INTEGRATE

- Complete Fish Habitats of Concern descriptions to be considered for integration into Commission FMPs
- Increase communication on ecosystem-based management with Commission committees to find overlap with fish habitat related issues
- Explore opportunities to integrate habitat data into stock assessments, where possible

LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS

- Engage local, state, and regional governments in mutually beneficial habitat protection and enhancement programs through partnerships
- Foster partnerships with management agencies, researchers, and habitat stakeholders to leverage regulatory, political, and financial support
- Engage in state and federal agency efforts to ensure response strategies to changing ocean conditions are included in habitat conservation efforts
- Work with ACFHP to foster partnerships with like-minded organizations at local levels to further common habitat goals
- **Support ACFHP and its partners in pursuing habitat restoration funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act**
- Promote assessment and development of effective fish passage approaches and projects through state and federal collaboration

- Provide administrative home and support to the Atlantic Coast Fish Habitat Partnership, and identify partners to support restoration grant administration and project management
- Work with partners to develop standardized submerged aquatic vegetation monitoring protocols for the Atlantic coast
- Implement the ACFHP 2023-2027 Strategic Plan and annual action plan, including climate resilience and diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives
- Work with partners to protect, restore, or maintain resilient Regional Priority Habitats to optimize ecosystem functions and services to benefit fish and wildlife
- Restore habitats by funding fish habitat conservation projects

Goal 6 – Strengthen stakeholder and public support for the Commission

Stakeholder and public acceptance of Commission decisions are critical to our ultimate success. For the Commission to be effective, these groups must have a clear understanding of our mission, vision, and decision-making process, as well as the opportunities that stakeholders have to participate in our process through advisory panels and public comment. The goal seeks to do so through expanded outreach and education efforts about Commission programs, decision-making processes, and its management successes and challenges. It aims to engage stakeholders in the process of fisheries management, and promote the activities and accomplishments of the Commission. Achieving the goal will increase stakeholder participation, understanding, and acceptance of Commission activities.

On a continuing basis, the Commission conducts outreach and stakeholder engagement through a number of products and activities. These include publications (e.g., bi-monthly Fisheries Focus, Annual Report to Congress), press releases, meeting summaries, stock assessment overviews, website and social media platforms, industry tradeshow and state festivals, and stakeholder engagement through the advisory panel process. Building strong relationships with local, regional and national media contacts, and networking/collaborating with our management partners from the Councils, states and federal agencies are also critical components of our outreach program, which occur on an ongoing basis.

INCREASE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT OF ASMFC

- Continue to provide a streamlined Annual Report, highlighting major accomplishments in a concise format
- Update *Guide to Fisheries Science and Stock Assessments*
- Promote high profile species and stock assessment results through various outreach tools and platforms
- Provide focused outreach on: **Atlantic striped bass, Atlantic menhaden, horseshoe crabs, and continuing recreational reform initiatives with MAFMC**
- Develop overviews for stock assessments for **American lobster, Atlantic croaker, Atlantic herring, Atlantic striped bass, ERP species, and red drum**
- **Develop story map of striped bass migration, spawning patterns and the impact of environmental factors on recruitment to increase understanding of the complexity of the species' life history**

- **Promote best fishing practices for recreational fishing (FishSmart)**

MAXIMIZE USE OF CURRENT AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

- Update/upgrade ASMFC website, **based on staff input and recommendations from Outreach Survey**, to increase user friendliness; develop new content on climate change effects on managed species, recreational reform initiative, recreational data (MRIP), and best fishing practices; **seek offsite host**
- **Work with Fisheries Science Coordinator to re-design and migrate** NEAMAP and SEAMAP websites to offsite host
- Use webinars, videos and story maps to engage and inform public about current activities (management, science, habitat, and data collection and management)
- Use new technologies and communication platforms to more fully engage the broader public in the Commission's activities and actions
- Use story mapping and photo journaling to better communicate science and management activities
- Monitor the success of website and social media platforms in reaching broader constituency and effectively communicating ASMFC mission, programs and activities

FACILITATE STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

- Revise Advisory Panel (AP) Primer and other AP guidance documents
- **Explore options** to strengthen stakeholder input on pending management documents, stock assessments, and **data collection/management activities**
- Explore additional tools to gather public comment on proposed management actions (e.g., online surveys)

MEDIA RELATIONS AND NETWORKING

- Finalize ASMFC Communications Plan to clarify staff roles and details of outreach program as well as provide vision for future outreach efforts across all Commission Programs, social media; and trade show participation.
- Work with other Northeast Regional Coordinating Council (NRCC) communication members to coordinate outreach on shared stock assessments
- **Work with MRIP communications staff to develop messaging regarding the impacts of possible changes to FES survey methodology on ASMFC managed species**
- Continue to participate on the SAFMC Outreach Advisory Panel and continue to work closely with MAFMC on communication and outreach activities, possibly through participation its newly established Outreach Committee
- Strengthen national, regional, and local media relations to increase coverage of Commission actions; **continue to respond to factual inaccuracies in news articles**
- Consider using a media monitoring service to track media communications and coverage, including social media to analyze strengths and weaknesses and expand coverage
- Work with Atlantic Coast Fisheries Communication Group, comprised of Public Information Officers from the Councils, states and federal agencies, to share successful tools, identify key media contacts and work cooperatively on joint projects

Goal 7 – Advance Commission and member states’ priorities through a proactive legislative policy agenda

State input is critical for a coherent national fisheries policy. The Commission recognizes the need to work with Congress, the Administration and partner organizations in policy formulation, and will be vigilant in advocating state interests to Congress. The Commission will pursue federal resources for states to implement and comply with the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (Atlantic Coastal Act) and to improve or maintain fisheries data collection. The importance of habitat restoration, research on the impacts of changing ocean conditions, and the need for effective marine enforcement will also be communicated to Congress and our management partners.

DEVELOP AND STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS WITH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND STAFF

- Encourage Commissioners to communicate with members of Congress as needed and facilitate in person meetings when possible
 - **Facilitate Commissioners meeting with members of Congress and their staff in their districts**
- Provide opportunities for the Executive Director to communicate with Congressional staff on a regular basis
- Provide state-specific ‘ASMFC Meeting Previews’ to Congressional staff ahead of quarterly Meetings

ENGAGE CONGRESS AND THE ADMINISTRATION ON FISHERY-RELATED LEGISLATION AND ISSUES

- Utilize the Legislative Committee to increase the Commission’s effectiveness on Capitol Hill
 - Review pending legislation of interest to the Commission and make recommendations to the Executive Committee
 - Explore authorizing legislation for fishery-independent surveys supporting ASMFC-managed species (horseshoe crab, Atlantic menhaden, NEAMAP and SEAMAP-SA trawl surveys)
- Monitor federal legislation affecting the Commission, including policy and annual appropriations bills and develop Commission positions on pending federal legislation
 - Existing laws: Atlantic Coastal Act, Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, Anadromous Fish Conservation Act, Magnuson-Stevens Act, Federal Aid in Fish Restoration Act, and Endangered Species Act, and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act
 - Pending legislation/emerging issues: forage fish management, **shifting stocks and reallocations**, disaster declarations **and increasing declaration efficiency**, energy initiatives (offshore wind, hydropower; fishery compensation/mitigation), shark fin trade, whale rulemaking, living shorelines, **modernization of recreational data collection efforts, the NOAA Organic Act**, Reinvesting in Shoreline Economies and Ecosystems, and Recovering America’s Wildlife Act

PURSUE FEDERAL RESOURCES TO SUPPORT MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

- Communicate the Commission’s federal funding needs to Congress and advocate for sufficient appropriations in fiscal years 2024 **and 2025**
 - Priority line items under NOAA: Regional Councils and Fishery Commissions, Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, Fisheries Data Collections, Surveys and Assessments, SEAMAP, and Fisheries Information Networks
 - Priority projects, programs, and activities include: Atlantic Coastal/National Fish Habitat Partnership, Cooperative Enforcement Joint Enforcement Agreements, NEAMAP and SEAMAP-South Atlantic trawl surveys, GOM lobster research, Mid-Atlantic Horseshoe Crab Trawl Survey, Chesapeake Bay Atlantic menhaden abundance, retrofitting South Carolina DNR’s R/V Lady Lisa replacement
- Priority line items under the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS):
 - Priority projects, programs, and activities include: Eastern Ecological Science Center, **the Species Management Research Program and Ecosystem Mission Area**
 - Four Interstate Commissions/USGS science cooperative research funding, **building upon the report language included in the FY24 House and Senate reports**
 - **Build relationships through USGS facilitation with Cooperative Research Units**
 - Seek federal funding support for long-term monitoring surveys and species-specific initiatives
- Engage the Administration (Commerce and Interior Departments) on funding and policy issues, including Secretarial implementation of the Atlantic Coastal Act
- Communicate state and Commission funding needs to NOAA Fisheries, USFWS, and USGS

PARTNERSHIPS

- Coordinate with the Gulf, Pacific, and Great Lakes Commissions on policy items of mutual interest including federal funding for fisheries programs. Executive Directors should continue to provide unified positions on funding and legislative priorities to lawmakers and federal agencies, where appropriate
- Continue participation on Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee
- **Build on partnerships with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, USFWS, USGS, and Bureau of Ocean Energy Management**

Goal 8 – Ensure the fiscal stability and efficient administration of the Commission

Goal 8 will ensure that the business affairs of the Commission are managed effectively and efficiently, including workload balancing through the development of annual action plans to support the Commission’s management process. It also highlights the need for the Commission to efficiently manage its resources. The goal promotes the efficient use of legal advice to proactively review policies and react to litigation as necessary. It also promotes human resource policies that attract talented and committed individuals to conduct the work of the Commission. The goal highlights the need for the Commission as an organization to continually expand its skill set through training and educational opportunities. It calls for Commissioners and Commission staff to maintain and increase the

institutional knowledge of the Commission through periods of transition. Achieving this goal will build core strengths, enabling the Commission to respond to increasingly difficult and complex fisheries management issues.

On a continuing basis, the Commission staff conservatively manages fiscal resources to achieve the proper balance between allocating funds to coastwide priorities and ensuring fiscal stability. Tasks performed to accomplish this balance include monitoring expenditures on a monthly basis; managing the reserve fund; fine-tuning meeting and travel policies; and preparing and participating in the annual audit and indirect cost proposal.

Human resources management is an ongoing process of recruitment and selection of employees; thoroughly orienting and introducing new employees to the culture of the Commission; maintaining good working conditions for all employees; managing employee relations; and training to enhance and increase their current skills. Ongoing tasks to accomplish this are annual review and revision of position descriptions; facilitating staff participation at national and regional conferences; and providing professional training opportunities. Additionally, human resource support is provided to cooperative programs such as APAIS and ACFHP. All human resources documents are reviewed at least annually to ensure compliance with federal regulations and consistency with current practices.

Further, Commission staff keeps abreast of changes in technology and evaluates the need for updating the Commission's hardware and software. Ensuring consistency of resources and training across the Commission as well as documenting processes and verifying database information are ongoing tasks conducted by the staff.

The Commission process can be overwhelming to new Commissioners. The staff is committed to providing a thorough introduction and orientation to new Commissioners. Tasks conducted throughout the year include documenting institutional knowledge and updating on a regular basis the Commissioner Manual. Staff also provides this service to new members of Commission committees.

MANAGE OPERATIONS AND BUDGETS

- **Work with member states to effectively and efficiently administer Atlantic right whale/lobster Congressional funding**
- **Assist member states in distributing fishery disaster funds as requested**
- **Complete distribution of remaining CARES and Consolidated Appropriations Act funding and respond to audit requirements as necessary**
- Manage all ongoing Cooperative Agreements, ensuring deliverables are completed and budgets are responsibly managed
- Utilize and update as necessary the Commission compensation plan, including job classifications and salaries based on location
- Expand the capacity of contracts database to capture the complete life-cycle of all Commission funding sources
- Work with financial advisor to implement revised Commission investment policy

UTILIZE CURRENT INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

- Develop protocols for information retention; implement archive storage on the network
- Manage Commission inventory through accounting software, tracking acquisitions and disposals
- Develop and implement a Commission intranet to connect our hybrid workforce via seamless and transparent communication
- Provide updates to staff, reviewing technology that has changed, been implemented or could be better-utilized
- Continue digitization of historical documents
- Perform review of Commission technology, ensuring it is under support and is up-to-date with current technology needs

MANAGE HUMAN RESOURCES

- Continue to refine the telecommute policy, **if necessary**
- Promote Commission's mission and programs, and recruit new and diverse talent through outreach meetings with various marine policy and marine science graduate programs
- Provide training opportunities for ASMFC staff, including National Conservation Training Center
- Conduct annual meeting with financial advisor to review retirement program performance with staff

ENGAGE AND SUPPORT COMMISSIONERS

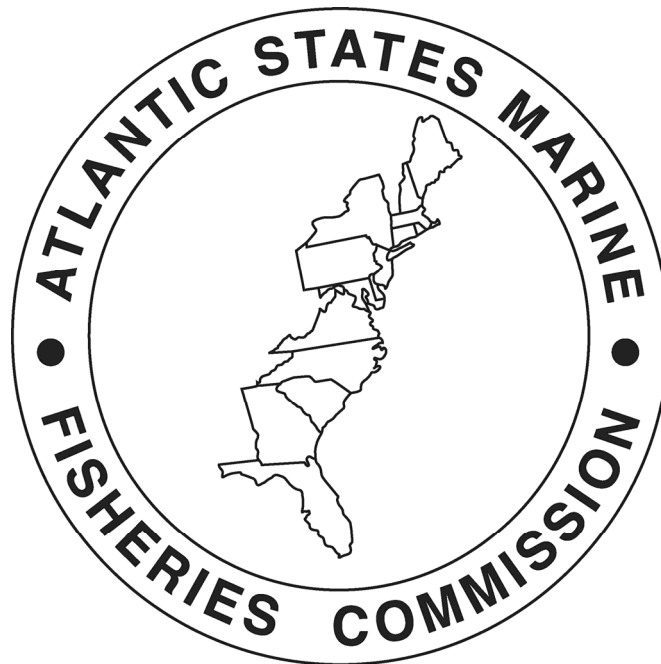
- Conduct a meetings facilitation training workshop for technical committee members
- Continue process to welcome and orient new Commissioners to allow for full engagement in the Commission process
- Facilitate the retention and transfer of institutional knowledge among Commissioners

ENSURE THE LEGAL COMPLIANCE OF COMMISSION ACTIONS

- Utilize legal advice on new management strategies and policies, and respond to litigation as necessary, whether it be regarding challenges to Commission FMPs, a human resource issue, or access to confidential data

ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

Five-Year Strategic Plan 2024- 2028



*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

Introduction

Each state has a fundamental responsibility to safeguard the public trust with respect to its natural resources. Fishery managers are faced with many challenges in carrying out that responsibility. Living marine resources inhabit ecosystems that cross state and federal jurisdictions. Thus, no state, by itself, can effectively protect the interests of its citizens. Each state must work with its sister states and the federal government to conserve and manage natural resources.

Beginning in the late 1930s, the 15 Atlantic coastal states from Maine to Florida took steps to develop cooperative mechanisms to define and achieve their mutual interests in coastal fisheries. The most notable of these was their commitment to form the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) in 1942, and to work together through the Commission to promote the conservation and management of shared marine fishery resources. Over the years, the Commission has remained an effective forum for fishery managers to pursue concerted management actions. Through the Commission, states cooperate in a broad range of programs including interstate fisheries management, fisheries science, [fishery-dependent data collection and management](#), habitat conservation, and law enforcement.

Congress has long recognized the critical role of the states and the need to support their mutual efforts. Most notably, it enacted the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (Atlantic Coastal Act) in 1993, which built on the success of the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act of 1984. Acknowledging that no single governmental entity has exclusive management authority for Atlantic coastal fishery resources, the Atlantic Coastal Act recognizes the states' responsibility for cooperative fisheries management through the Commission. The Atlantic Coastal Act charges all Atlantic states with implementing coastal fishery management plans that will safeguard the future of Atlantic coastal fisheries in the interest of both fishermen and the nation.

Accepting these challenges and maintaining their mutual commitment to success, the Atlantic coastal states have adopted this five-year Strategic Plan. The states recognize circumstances today make the work of the Commission more important than ever before. The Strategic Plan articulates the mission, vision, goals, and objectives needed to accomplish the Commission's mission. It serves as the basis for annual action planning, whereby Commissioners identify the highest priority issues and activities to be addressed in the upcoming year. With 27 species/[species complexes](#) currently managed by the Commission, finite staff time, Commissioner time and funding, as well as a myriad of other factors impacting marine resources (e.g., changing ocean conditions, protected species interactions, offshore energy, and aquaculture), Commissioners recognize the absolute need to prioritize activities, dedicating staff time and resources where they are needed most and addressing less pressing issues as resources allow. Efforts will be made to [balance the competing needs of stability/predictability in fisheries management and the necessity for adaptability to respond to changing fishery and environmental conditions.](#) ~~streamline management by using multi-~~

~~year specifications where possible and increase stability/predictability in fisheries management through less frequent regulatory changes.~~ A key to prioritizing issues and maximizing efficiencies will be working closely with the three East Coast Regional [Fishery](#) Management Councils and NOAA Fisheries.

Mission

The Commission's mission, as stated in its 1942 Compact, is:

To promote the better utilization of the fisheries, marine, shell and anadromous, of the Atlantic seaboard by the development of a joint program for the promotion and protection of such fisheries, and by the prevention of physical waste of the fisheries from any cause.

The mission grounds the Commission in history. It reminds every one of the Commission's sense of purpose that has been in place for over ~~8277~~ years. The constantly changing physical, political, social, and economic environments led the Commission to restate the mission in more modern terms:

To promote cooperative management of marine, shell and diadromous fisheries of the Atlantic coast of the United States by the protection and enhancement of such fisheries, and by the avoidance of physical waste of the fisheries from any cause.

The mission and nature of the Commission as a mutual interstate body incorporate several guiding principles. They include:

- States are sovereign entities, each having its own laws and responsibilities for managing fishery resources within its jurisdiction
- States serve the broad public interest and represent the common good
- Multi-state resource management is complex and dependent upon cooperative efforts by all states involved
- The Commission provides a critical sounding board on issues requiring cross-jurisdictional action, coordinating cooperation, and collaboration among the states and federal government, [including NOAA Fisheries, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and US Geological Survey.](#)

Vision

The long-term vision of the Commission is:

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

Values

The Commission and its member states have adopted the following values to guide its operations and activities. These values affirm the Commission's commitment to sustainable fisheries management for the benefit of recreational ~~and anglers, and~~ commercial ~~fishermen industries harvesters~~ and coastal communities. They also acknowledge the growing importance of managing fisheries in a more holistic and adaptive way, seeking solutions to cross cutting resource issues that lead to long-term ecological and socio-economic sustainability.

- Effective stewardship of marine resources through strong partnerships
- Decisions based on sound science
- Long-term ecological sustainability
- Transparency and accountability in all actions
- Timely response to new information through adaptive management
- Balancing resource conservation with the economic success of coastal communities
- Efficient use of time and fiscal resources
- Work cooperatively with honesty, integrity, and fairness

Driving Forces

The Commission and its actions are influenced by a multitude of factors. These factors are constantly evolving and will most likely change over the time period of this Strategic Plan. However, the most pressing factors affecting the Commission today are climate-induced changes to the ocean environment, fisheries, and coastal communities; changing ocean conditions, resource allocation, the quality and quantity of scientific information; competing ocean uses; a growing demand to address ecosystem functions; and interactions between fisheries and protected species. - The Strategic Plan, through its goals and broad objectives, will seek to address each of these issues over the next five years.

Climate-Induced Changes~~Changing Ocean Conditions~~

Changes in ocean temperature, currents, acidification, and sea level rise are occurring rapidly, affecting nearly every facet of fisheries resources and management at the state, interstate, and federal levels. Potential impacts to marine species include degraded water quality, altered prey and habitat availability, susceptibility to disease, changing migration patterns, and changes to reduced prey and habitat availability, water quality, susceptibility to disease, and spawning and reproductive potential, and declines in survival. It is often difficult for fisheries stock assessments and management to keep pace with changes in ~~The~~ distribution and productivity of fishery stocks ~~are often changing at a rate faster than fisheries stock assessments and management can keep pace with~~. Several Commission species, such as northern shrimp, ~~Southern New England~~American lobster, Atlantic cobia, Atlantic croaker, Atlantic striped bass, Spanish mackerel, black sea bass, and summer flounder are already responding to changes in the ocean. In the case of northern shrimp and Southern New England lobster, warming ocean waters have created inhospitable environments for ~~species~~ reproduction and survivability. For

cobia, black sea bass, and summer flounder, changing ocean conditions have contributed to ~~altered shifts in~~ species distributions, with some species expanding their ranges and others moving into deeper and/or more northern waters to stay within preferred temperature ranges. Where shifts are occurring, the Commission may need to reconsider state-by-state allocation schemes and make adjustments to our fishery management plans (FMPs). For other species depleted due to factors other than fishing mortality (e.g., habitat degradation and availability, predation), the states will need to explore steps ~~that can be taken~~ to aid in species recovery. And, if a stock's viability is compromised, Commission resources and efforts should be shifted to other species that can be ~~recovered-rebuilt~~ or sustainably maintained ~~as a rebuilt stock~~.

Since 2021, the Commission and other marine fishery management organizations along the U.S. East Coast have been exploring governance and management issues related to climate change and fishery stock distributions. This effort recognizes the need to plan for how fishery management organizations and coastal communities can best adapt to environmental changes in a thoughtful and deliberate way. Over the span of this Strategic Plan and beyond, the Commission and other East Coast marine fishery management organizations will be prioritizing actions around three overarching themes of cross-jurisdictional governance; managing under increased uncertainty; and data sources and partnerships to plan for possible future outcomes.

Allocation

~~As noted above, r~~Resource allocation among the states and between various user groups will continue to be an important issue over the next five years. Many of the Commission FMPs divvy up the available harvestable resource through various types of allocation schemes, such as by state, region, season, or gear type. The changing distribution of many species has further complicated the issue of resource allocation with traditional allocation schemes being challenged and a finite amount of fishery resources to be shared. Discussion may be difficult and divisive, with some states (and their stakeholders) wanting to maintain their historic (traditional) allocations, while others are seeking a greater share of the resource given increased abundance and availability in their waters. States will need to seek innovative ways to reallocate species so that collectively all states feel their needs are met. What will be required to successfully navigate these discussions and decisions is the commitment of the states to work through the issues with honesty, integrity, and fairness, seeking outcomes that balance the needs of the states and their stakeholders with the ~~ever-changing~~ever-changing realities of shifting resource abundance and availability.

Science as the Foundation

Accurate and timely scientific information form the basis of the Commission's fisheries management decision-making. Continued investments in the collection and management of fishery-dependent and -independent data remain a high priority for the Commission and its member states. The challenge will be to maintain and expand data collection efforts in the face of shrinking state and federal budgets. Past and current investments by state, regional and federal partners ~~have established of~~ the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) ~~have established the program~~ as the principal source of marine fishery statistics for the Atlantic

coast. State and regional fishery-independent data collection programs, in combination with fishery statistics, provide the scientific foundation for stock assessments. Many data collection programs will continue to be strained by budget restrictions, scientists' workload capacities, and competing priorities. The Commission remains committed to pursuing long-term support for research surveys and monitoring programs that are critical to informing management decisions and resource sustainability.

Ecosystem Functions

Nationally, there has been a growing demand for fisheries managers to address broader ecosystem functions such as predator-prey interactions and environmental factors during their fisheries management planning. Ecosystem science has improved in recent years, though the challenges of comprehensive data collection continue. While the A-majority of the Commission's species are managed and assessed on a single species basis, there have been significant advancements in the development and use of ecological reference points for Atlantic menhaden management. Horseshoe crabs of Delaware Bay origin are also managed in an ecosystem context to account for the forage needs of migratory shorebirds. When ecosystem information is available, the Commission has managed accordingly to provide ecosystem services. The Commission remains committed to seeking ecological sustainability over the long-term through continuing its work on multispecies assessment modeling and the development of ecosystem-based reference points in its fisheries management planning process.

Competing Ocean Uses

Marine spatial planning has become an increasingly popular method of balancing the growing demands on valuable ocean resources. More specifically, the competing interests of commercial and recreational fishing, offshore wind renewable energy development, aquaculture, marine transportation, offshore oil exploration and drilling, military needs, and habitat restoration are all components that must be integrated into successful ocean use policies. -The Commission has always emphasized cooperative management with our federal partners; however, the states' authorities in their marine jurisdictions must be preserved and respected. -The Commission will continue to prioritize the successful operation of its fisheries, but it will be imperative to work closely with federal, state, and local governments on emerging ocean use conflicts as they diversify into the future.

Protected Species

Like coastal fishery resources, protected species, such as marine mammals, sea turtles, and listed and candidate fish species, traverse both state and federal waters. The protections afforded these species under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and Endangered Species Act can play a significant role in the management and prosecution of Atlantic coastal fisheries. The Commission and the states have a long history of supporting our federal partners to minimize interactions with and bycatch of marine mammals and sea turtles. The listing of Atlantic sturgeon under the Endangered Species Act has added a whole new level of complexity in the ability of the Commission and its member states to carry out their stewardship responsibilities for these important diadromous species. The species spends the majority of its life in state

waters and depend on estuarine and riverine habitat for their survival. Listing has the potential to jeopardize the states' ability to effectively monitor and assess stock condition, as well as impact fisheries that may encounter listed species. It is incumbent upon the Commission and its federal partners to work jointly to assess stock health, identify threats, and implement effective rebuilding programs for listed and candidate species.

More recently, the depleted status of the Northern right whale population and the potential impacts to this population by entanglement in fishing gear, particularly lobster and crab gear, has heightened concern for both whales and the lobster industry.

Increased Cooperation and Collaboration among the States and between the States and Our Federal Partners

Demands for ecosystem-based fisheries management, competing and often conflicting ocean uses, and legislative mandates to protect marine mammals and other protected species, further complicate fisheries management and require quality scientific information to ~~help~~ guide management decisions. Federal agencies have a long track record of providing scientific support to the Commission and collaborations recently expanded in some areas. However there is a developing trend of reduced support for fundamental data collection and assessment support in recent years. There is a growing concern among fishery managers that some "control" over fisheries decisions and status has been diminished due to political intervention and our inability to effect climate changes ~~changing ocean conditions~~ and other environmental factors that impact marine resources. Fisheries management has never been more complex or politically charged. State members are pulled between what is best for their stakeholders versus what is best for the resource and the states as a whole.

While the issues may seem daunting, they are not insurmountable. In order for the Commission to be successful, the states must recommit to their collective vision of "Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries," recognizing that their strength lies in working together to address the fisheries issues that lie ahead. Given today's political and environmental realities, the need for cooperation among the states has never been more important. It is also critical the states and their federal partners seek to strengthen their cooperation and working relationships, providing for efficient and effective fisheries management across all agencies. No one state or federal agency has the resources, authority, or ability to do it alone.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The Commission will pursue the following eight goals and their related strategies during the five-year planning period, from 20~~24~~¹⁹ through 20~~23~~³⁸. It will pursue these goals through specific objectives, targets, and milestones outlined in an annual Action Plan, which is adopted each year at the Commission's Annual Meeting to guide the subsequent year's activities. Throughout the year, the Commission and its staff will monitor progress in meeting the Commission's goals, and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies. While committed to the

objectives included in this plan, the Commission is ready to adopt additional objectives to take advantage of new opportunities and address emerging issues as they arise.

Goal 1 - Rebuild, maintain, fairly allocate, and promote sustainable Atlantic coastal fisheries

Goal 1 focuses on the responsibility of the states to conserve and manage Atlantic coastal fishery resources for sustainable use. Commission members will advocate decisions to achieve the long-term benefits of conservation, while balancing the socio-economic interests and needs of coastal communities. Inherent in this is the recognition that healthy and vibrant resources benefit stakeholders. The states are committed to proactive management, with a focus on integrating ecosystem services, socio-economic impacts, habitat issues, bycatch and discard reduction measures, and protected species interactions into well-defined fishery management plans. Fishery management plans will also address fair allocation of fishery resources among the states. Understanding ~~changing ocean conditions~~ [climate change](#) and ~~its their~~ impact on fishery productivity and distribution is an elevated priority. Successful management under [climate change](#) ~~changing ocean conditions~~ will depend not only on adjusting management strategies [to be more adaptable and flexible](#), but also in reevaluating and revising, as necessary, the underlying conservation goals and objectives of fishery management plans. [Changing climate and ocean conditions can impact fish stocks, fish habitats, and interactions between species and fisheries. The Commission will strive to proactively consider ecosystem level impacts when making management decisions to take a more holistic consideration of issues.](#) Improving cooperation and coordination with federal partners and stakeholders can streamline efficiency, transparency, and, ultimately, success. In the next five years, the Commission is committed to ending overfishing and working to rebuild overfished Atlantic coast fish stocks, while promoting sustainable harvest of and access to rebuilt fisheries. Where possible, the Commission will seek to aid in the rebuilding of depleted stocks, whose recovery is hindered by factors other than fishing pressure.

Annual action planning will be guided by the following objectives:

- Manage interstate resources that provide for productive, sustainable fisheries using sound science
- [Strengthen state and federal partnerships to improve comprehensive management of shared fishery resources](#)
- [Create management frameworks that are nimble, adaptable, and robust to climate change.](#)
- ~~Adapt management to address emerging issues~~
- Practice efficient, transparent, and accountable management processes
- Evaluate progress towards rebuilding fisheries
- Promote sustainable harvest of and access to rebuilt fisheries
- Strengthen interactions and input among stakeholders, technical, advisory, and management groups

Goal 2 – Provide soundrobust, actionable science to supportinformed management decisionsactions

Sustainable management of fisheries relies on accurate and timely scientific advice. The Commission strives to produce soundrobust, actionable science through a technically rigorous, independently peer-reviewed stock assessment process. Assessments are developed using a broad suite of fishery-independent surveys and fishery-dependent monitoring, as well as research products developed in cooperation with the fishing industry, by a broad network of fisheries scientists at state, federal, and academic institutions along the coast. The goal encompasses the development of novel and new, innovative scientific research, and modern assessment methodology, and ~~the~~ enhancement of the states' stock assessment capabilities. It provides for the administration, coordination, and expansion of collaborative research and data collection programs. Achieving the goal will ensure soundrobust science is available ~~to serve~~ as the foundation for the Commission's evaluation of stock status and adaptive management actions.

Annual action planning will be guided by the following objectives:

- Proactively address research priorities through cooperative state and regional data collection programs; strengthen stakeholder involvement in ~~and~~ collaborative research projects, including stakeholder involvement
- Explore the use of new emerging technologies to improve fishery-independent surveys, monitoring, and the timeliness of scientific products
- Provide training to enhance the expertise and involvement participation of state and staff scientists in the development of conducting stock assessments
- Streamline assessment data assimilation within individual states, and among states and ASMFC
- Conduct stock assessments based on comprehensive data sources and rigorous technical analysis; deliver direct, concise scientific advice in order to achieve clear endpoints in the assessment process; generate indicators/rapid assessments for all stocks
- Balance requests from fisheries management with finite assessment workload capacity
- ~~Characterize the risk and uncertainty associated with the scientific advice provided to decision makers~~
- ~~Proactively address research priorities through cooperative state and regional data collection programs and collaborative research projects, including stakeholder involvement~~
- ~~Explore the use of new technologies to improve surveys, monitoring, and the timeliness of scientific products~~
- Utilize ecosystem and climate science products to inform fisheries management decisions, including projected shifts with quota allocation implications
(Action): Integrate estuarine/state waters and federal waters environmental data for use in stock assessments
-

- ~~Promote effective c~~ommunicat~~e~~ion with stakeholders to ensure scientific advice and on-the-water observations ~~and science~~ are consistent
Characterize the risk and uncertainty associated with the scientific advice provided to decision-makers

-

Goal 3 - Produce dependable and timely marine fishery statistics for Atlantic coast fisheries

Effective management depends on quality fishery-dependent data ~~and fishery-independent data~~ to inform stock assessments and fisheries management decisions. ~~While Goal 2 of this Action Plan focuses on providing sound, actionable science and fishery-independent data to support fisheries management,~~ Goal 3 focuses on providing timely, accurate catch, ~~and effort,~~ and biological data on Atlantic coast recreational, for-hire, and commercial fisheries to support fisheries management.

Goal 3 seeks to accomplish this through the activities of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP), a cooperative state-federal program that designs, implements, and conducts marine fisheries statistics data collection programs and integrates those data into data management systems that will meet the needs of fishery managers, scientists, and fishermen. ACCSP partners include the 15 Atlantic coast state fishery agencies, the three Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, NOAA Fisheries, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Annual action planning will be guided by the following objectives:

- Focus on activities that maximize benefits, are responsive and accountable to partner and end-user needs, and are based on available resources-
- ~~Cooperatively~~ develop, implement, and maintain coastwide data standards through cooperation with all program partners
- Provide electronic applications that improve efficiently align partner data collection
- Integrate and provide access to partner data via a coastwide repository
- Facilitate fisheries data access through an on-line, user-friendly, system while protecting confidentiality
- Support data systems modernization and integration technological innovation

Goal 4 – Protect and enhance fish habitat and ecosystem health through partnerships and education

Goal 4 aims to conserve and improve coastal, marine, and riverine habitat to enhance the benefits of sustainable Atlantic coastal fisheries and resilient coastal communities in the face of changing ecosystems. Habitat loss and degradation have been identified as significant factors affecting the long-term sustainability and productivity of our nation’s fisheries. The

Commission's Habitat Program develops objectives, sets priorities, and produces tools to guide fisheries habitat conservation efforts directed towards ecosystem-based management.

The challenge for the Commission and its state members is maintaining fish habitat under limited regulatory authority for habitat protection or enhancement. Therefore, the Commission will work cooperatively with state, federal, and stakeholder partnerships to achieve this goal. Much of the work to address habitat is conducted through the Commission's Habitat and Artificial Reef Committees. In order to identify fish habitats of concern for Commission managed species, each year the Habitat Committee reviews existing reference documents for Commission-managed species to identify gaps or updates needed to describe important habitat types and review and revise species habitat factsheets. The Habitat Committee also publishes an annual issue of the *Habitat Hotline Atlantic*, highlighting topical issues that affect all the states.

The Commission and its Habitat Program endorses the National Fish Habitat Partnership, and will continue to work cooperatively with the partnership to improve aquatic habitat along the Atlantic coast. Since 2008, the Commission has invested considerable resources, as both a partner and administrative home, to the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP), a coastwide collaborative effort to accelerate the conservation and restoration of habitat for native Atlantic coastal, estuarine-dependent, and diadromous fishes. As part of this goal, the Commission will continue to provide support for ACFHP, under the direction of the National Fish Habitat Partnership Board.

Annual action planning will be guided by the following objectives:

- Identify fish habitats of concerns through fisheries management programs and partnerships
- Educate Commissioners, stakeholders, and the general public about the importance of habitat to healthy fisheries and ecosystems
- Better integrate habitat information and data into fishery management plans and stock assessments
- Engage local state, and regional governments in mutually beneficial habitat protection and enhancement programs
- Foster partnerships with management agencies, researchers, and habitat stakeholders to leverage scientific, regulatory, political, and financial support
- Work with ACFHP to foster partnerships with like-minded organizations at local levels to further common habitat goals

Goal 5 – Promote compliance with fishery management plans to ensure sustainable use of Atlantic coast [resources fisheries](#)

Fisheries managers, law enforcement personnel, and stakeholders have a shared responsibility to promote compliance with fisheries management measures. Activities under the goal seek to increase and improve compliance with fishery management plans. This

requires the successful coordination of both management and enforcement activities among state and federal agencies. Commission members recognize that adequate and consistent enforcement of fisheries rules is required to keep pace with increasingly complex management activity and emerging technologies. Achieving the goal will improve the effectiveness of the Commission's fishery management plans.

Annual action planning will be guided by the following objectives:

- Develop practical compliance requirements that foster stakeholder buy-in
- Evaluate the enforceability of management measures and the effectiveness of law enforcement programs
- Promote coordination and expand existing partnerships with state and federal natural resource law enforcement agencies
- Enhance stakeholder awareness of management measures through education and outreach
- Use emerging communication platforms to deliver real time information regarding regulations and the outcomes of law enforcement investigations

Goal 6 – Strengthen stakeholder and public support for the Commission

Stakeholder and public acceptance of Commission decisions are critical to our ultimate success. For the Commission to be effective, these groups must have a clear understanding of our mission, vision, and decision-making processes. The goal seeks to do so through expanded outreach and education efforts about Commission programs, decision-making processes, and its management successes and challenges. It aims to engage stakeholders in the process of fisheries management, and promote the activities and accomplishments of the Commission. Achieving the goal will increase stakeholder participation, understanding, and acceptance of Commission activities.

Annual action planning will be guided by the following objectives:

- Increase public understanding and support of activities through expanded outreach at the local, state, and federal levels
- Clearly define Commission processes to facilitate stakeholder participation, as well as transparency and accountability
- Strengthen national, regional, and local media relations to increase coverage of Commission actions
- Use new technologies and communication platforms to more fully engage the broader public in the Commission's activities and actions

Goal 7 – Advance Commission and member states' priorities through a proactive legislative policy agenda

Although states are positioned to achieve many of the national goals for marine fisheries through cooperative efforts, state fisheries interests are often underrepresented at the

national level. This is due, in part, to the fact that policy formulation is often disconnected from the processes that provide the support, organization, and resources necessary to implement the policies. The capabilities and input of the states are an important aspect of developing national fisheries policy, and the goal seeks to increase the states' role in national policy formulation. Additionally, the goal emphasizes the importance of achieving management goals consistent with productive commercial and recreational fisheries and healthy ecosystems.

The Commission recognizes the need to work with Congress in all phases of policy formulation. Several important fishery-related laws ~~may~~ will be reauthorized over the next couple of years (i.e., Atlantic Coastal Act, Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act, Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act, and Anadromous Fish Conservation Act). The Commission needs to proactively engage with reauthorization efforts, this includes advocating for increased funding from sources such as Wallop-Breaux Trust Fund, Sportfish Restoration Trust Fund and the Atlantic Coastal Act. The Commission will be vigilant in advancing the states' interests to Congress as these laws are reauthorized and other fishery-related pieces of legislation are considered.

Annual action planning will be guided by the following objectives:

- Increase the Commission's profile and support in the U.S. Congress by developing relationships between Members and their staff and Commissioners, the Executive Director, and Commission staff
- Maintain or increase long-term funding for Commission programs through the federal appropriations process and other available sources, this includes for non-federal surveys and to support our partnerships with outside organizations such as USGS.
- Engage Congress on fishery-related legislation affecting the Atlantic coast
- Promote member states' collective interests at the regional and national levels
- Promote economic benefits of the Commission's actions (return on investment)

Goal 8 – Ensure the fiscal stability & efficient administration of the Commission
(Should this goal be removed since fiscal administration is an ongoing obligation that has little room for interpretation, or should it should stay in and not be reflected in annual action planning, or stay as is?)

Goal 8 will ensure that the business affairs of the Commission are managed effectively and efficiently, including workload balancing through the development of annual action plans to support the Commission's management process. It also highlights the need for the Commission to efficiently manage its resources. The goal promotes the efficient use of legal advice to proactively review policies and react to litigation as necessary. It also promotes human resource policies that attract talented and committed individuals to conduct the work of the Commission. The goal highlights the need for the Commission as an organization to continually expand its skill set through training and educational opportunities. It calls for Commissioners

and Commission staff to maintain and increase the institutional knowledge of the Commission through periods of transition. Achieving this goal will build core strengths, enabling the Commission to respond to increasingly difficult and complex fisheries management issues.

Annual action planning will be guided by the following objectives:

- Conservatively manage the Commission's operations and budgets to ensure fiscal stability
- Utilize new information technology to improve meeting and workload efficiencies, and enhance communications
- Refine strategies to recruit professional staff, and enhance growth and learning opportunities for Commission and state personnel
- Fully engage new Commissioners in the Commission process and document institutional knowledge.
- Utilize legal advice on new management strategies and policies, and respond to litigation as necessary.