

October 2026 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met October 6-8, 2026, in Duck, NC. This document summarizes key actions taken and issues considered during the meeting. Presentations, briefing materials, motions, and webinar recordings are available on the Council's [October 2026 meeting page](#).

HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- Agreed to initiate a joint amendment with the New England Council to consider revisions to vessel baseline restrictions, contingent on similar action by the New England Council in December.
- Initiated a framework action to consider modifications to the scup gear restricted areas and/or alternative measures to reduce scup discards.
- Maintained the previously adopted 2027 Illex squid specifications, including a commercial quota of 38,631 MT.
- Considered potential approaches for increasing the U.S. Illex quota and agreed to revisit the issue in December.
- Maintained the previously adopted 2027 Atlantic mackerel specifications, which include an increase in the commercial quota to 13,210 MT, subject to a potential payback adjustment.
- Reviewed a new longfin squid stock assessment that represents a significant scientific advancement and will inform catch limits for 2027-2029.
- Maintained the previously adopted 2027 spiny dogfish specifications, including a commercial quota of 9.2 million pounds.
- Reviewed recommendations for further developing an approach to apportioning blueline tilefish catch between the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Councils.
- Received updates on NOAA Fisheries' habitat consultation activities and major coastal and offshore projects in the Mid-Atlantic.
- Reviewed a draft regional framework for administering fisheries compensation funds associated with future offshore wind projects.
- Received an update on scoping for potential measures to reduce whale entanglement risks in commercial fixed-gear fisheries.
- Reviewed proposed actions and deliverables for 2027, with a draft Implementation Plan scheduled for Council consideration in December.

Evaluation of Vessel Baseline Restrictions

The Council reviewed an evaluation of vessel baseline restrictions conducted jointly with the New England Council. These restrictions limit potential increases in vessel length and horsepower for many limited access commercial fisheries managed by both Councils. The evaluation was intended to help determine whether to prioritize a joint management action to consider revisions to these restrictions.

The Council acknowledged the complexity of the issue, noting that potential challenges and benefits vary by fishery, gear type, and vessel size. Members also discussed how vessel baseline restrictions intersect with other regulations, including the prohibition on permit splitting.

The Council agreed to initiate an omnibus amendment to consider potential revisions, contingent on the New England Council taking similar action at its December 2026 meeting. If both Councils agree to move forward, public scoping hearings and initial development of management alternatives would be expected to take place in 2027.

Scup Gear Restricted Areas

The Council reviewed background information on the commercial scup gear restricted areas (GRAs), findings from the Council-funded [scup GRA project](#), and input from the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). The GRAs were implemented in 2000 to reduce juvenile scup discards in small mesh trawl fisheries, including longfin squid, black sea bass, and silver hake. The project evaluated potential modifications to the GRAs by examining spatial patterns in scup and longfin squid abundance and assessing socioeconomic impacts on the fishing industry. The results suggest that fixed time-area closures may not be an effective approach for mitigating scup discards in the small mesh squid fishery. The SSC concluded that the project's findings are scientifically supported by the available data and analytical approach. Based on this information, the Council agreed to initiate a framework action to consider modifications to the GRAs and/or alternative measures to reduce scup discards.

2027 *Illex* Squid Specifications

After considering the recommendations of the SSC, Advisory Panel, and the Monitoring Committee, the Council agreed to maintain the previously adopted 2027 specifications for *Illex* squid. These specifications were adopted in 2025 as part of the 2026–2028 multiyear specifications and would remain unchanged for 2026 and 2027. After accounting for expected discards, the commercial quota would again be 38,631 metric tons (MT).

Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) *Illex* Quota Issues

The Council reviewed the possibility of increasing the U.S. *Illex* quota in years when U.S. landings are high and catches in the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) area are low. The SSC concluded that these conditions have not been shown to reliably indicate when a higher U.S. quota would be consistent with the Council's risk policy. Based on the SSC's findings and staff recommendations, the Council decided not to pursue further action at this time. However, members discussed other approaches to evaluating whether higher catch limits may be warranted, including whether relatively large squid sizes could support an increase. The Council will revisit this topic in December 2026 as it finalizes the 2027 Implementation Plan.

2027 Atlantic Mackerel Specifications

After considering recommendations from the SSC, Advisory Panel, and the Monitoring Committee, the Council agreed to maintain the previously adopted 2027 specifications for Atlantic mackerel. These specifications were adopted in 2025 and would provide for a slight increase from 2026 to 2027, consistent with the rebuilding projections.

After accounting for Canadian landings, recreational catch, and commercial discards, the 2027 commercial quota would increase from 11,237 MT to 13,210 MT. However, a payback from a 2025 overage may reduce the 2027 quota by about 1,100 MT. This adjustment would be made automatically by NOAA Fisheries under existing Atlantic mackerel regulations.

Longfin Squid Research Track Assessment

Kristan Blackhart of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center presented results from a new Research Track stock assessment for longfin squid. The assessment represents a significant scientific advancement, producing two analytical stock assessment models for a stock that previously lacked such models. Both models passed peer review, and results suggest that fishing mortality has been relatively low compared with proposed reference points. The assessment also provided additional information on longfin squid biology and the influence of environmental conditions on the stock. The [SSC will review the assessment in November 2026](#) and develop recommendations for 2027-2029 catch limits, which the Council will consider at its December 2026 meeting.

2027 Spiny Dogfish Specifications

After considering recommendations from the SSC, Advisory Panel, and Monitoring Committee, the Council agreed to maintain the previously adopted 2027 specifications for spiny dogfish. These specifications were adopted in 2025 and would remain unchanged for 2026 and 2027. After accounting for minor Canadian landings, minor recreational landings, and substantial expected discards, the commercial quota would again be 9.2 million pounds.

Joint MAFMC and SAFMC Blueline Tilefish Subcommittee

The Council reviewed recommendations from the Joint MAFMC and SAFMC Blueline Tilefish Subcommittee. The subcommittee was established to develop a framework for apportioning the blueline tilefish acceptable biological catch (ABC) north of Cape Hatteras between the two Councils' jurisdictions. The subcommittee recommended further development of a weighted rubric incorporating fishery-independent survey information, commercial and recreational fishery information, and the current 70% MAFMC/30% SAFMC proportional split, along with supporting analyses to inform each category. The Council expressed general support for the subcommittee's recommendations and continued collaboration between the two Councils on blueline tilefish.

Habitat Activities Update

Karen Greene of the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) Habitat and Ecosystem Services Division (HESD) provided updates on coastal resilience, marine mineral mining, dredging, and large infrastructure projects in the Mid-Atlantic. To date in 2026, there have been 569 requests for habitat consultation in our region. Given this workload and a staff of 11 responsible for Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) consultations, Ms. Greene highlighted efforts to improve efficiency through greater use of general concurrences and programmatic consultations with agencies such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Federal Emergency Management Agency. Council Chair Joe Cimino emphasized the importance of EFH consultations and noted the value of HESD's engagement on these projects to state agency partners.

Regional Offshore Wind Fisheries Compensatory Mitigation Fund

The Council received a presentation on a draft Regional Offshore Wind Fisheries Compensation Framework, developed collaboratively by 11 East Coast states, federal agencies, commercial and for-hire fisheries representatives, and offshore wind energy project developers. The framework proposes a regional approach for administering fisheries compensatory mitigation funds associated with future offshore wind projects. The initiative is not responsible for determining the amount of compensation funding provided by individual projects. Instead, it focuses on how funds could be administered and distributed to eligible fishermen. A public comment period on the draft is open through November 3, 2026. Additional information is available [here](#).

Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP) Scoping

Corie Grewal and Jennifer Goebel of GARFO presented an update on scoping for potential future ALWTRP modifications. The scoping process, which included a public comment period ending October 16, 2026, was intended to solicit public input on strategies to reduce entanglement risks to North Atlantic right, humpback, and fin whales in commercial fixed-gear fisheries along the U.S. East Coast. No specific changes have been proposed at this stage. The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team is tentatively scheduled to meet in December 2026 to begin developing recommended risk-reduction measures for NOAA Fisheries' consideration. Additional information is available [here](#).

2027 Implementation Plan

The Executive Committee reviewed progress on the 2026 Implementation Plan and a draft list of actions and deliverables for 2027. The Council develops annual Implementation Plans to guide its work and ensure progress toward the goals and objectives of its five-year strategic plan. The Committee recommended several modifications to the proposed 2027 actions and deliverables. The full Council will review a draft 2027 Implementation Plan at its December meeting.

Next Council Meeting

The Council will meet jointly with the ASMFC Policy Board on [Thursday, November 12, 2026](#), to receive a report from the Recreational Sector Separation Workshop. The next full Council meeting will be held [December 15-17, 2026](#), in Annapolis, MD. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.