

ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

2021 Action Plan



Approved by the Business Session

October 23, 2020

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 2020 and into 2021 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 2021

American Eel

- Continue development of a benchmark stock assessment for peer review in 2022, including coordination with U.S. Geological Survey and Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Monitor international action on the Convention of International Trade of Endangered Species through communications with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

American Lobster

- Consider management response to the 2020 benchmark stock assessment and peer review, if necessary
- Develop a management strategy for the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank (GOM/GBK) stock that acknowledges the effects of climate change and addresses the resilience of the stock (Addendum XXVII)
 - Monitor and respond if necessary to GOM research on impacts of changing ocean conditions
- Implement Addendum XXVI data elements to improve data collection and characterization of the fishery. Continue to work with ACCSP and all partners to ensure required data elements are incorporated into SAFIS.

- 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 (e.g., trap cap in Area 3, trap banking, data collection)

Atlantic Herring

- Finalize and implement Addendum III
- Monitor federal activities to publish final rule for Amendment 8 and respond if necessary
- Monitor New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) activities as Framework 7 (spawning protections for Georges Bank and Nantucket Shoals) and Framework 8 (specifications and incidental catch limits) are developed
- Continue to improve coordination and collaboration with NEFMC
- Conduct meetings as necessary to establish state effort control (days-out) programs for Area 1A

Atlantic Menhaden

- Review Amendment 3 quota allocations and initiate management action if necessary
- Initiate the stock assessment update to be completed in 2022

Atlantic Striped Bass

- Develop Draft Amendment 7 to ensure stock rebuilding and address current fishery management issues
- Complete the 2021 stock assessment update and address findings in Amendment 7 if necessary
- Develop long-term strategy to continue winter striped bass tagging efforts offshore of NC and VA, including funding, administration, and at-sea support

Black Sea Bass

- Finalize, in coordination with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC), addendum/amendment on commercial/recreational allocation taking into account calibrated recreational estimates
- Develop, in coordination with the MAFMC, a management action to address recreational reform
- Implement Addendum XXXIII (state commercial allocations)
- Contribute data for 2021 management track assessment and 2022 research track assessment

Bluefish

- Finalize, in coordination with MAFMC, amendment addressing issues including: commercial/recreational allocation taking into account calibrated recreational estimates, commercial allocation, goals and objectives, quota transfers, and a rebuilding program

- Develop an management action, in collaboration with the MAFMC, to address recreational reform
- Review the effectiveness current fishery-independent data requirements and evaluate the optimal range and sample size for age data
- Contribute data for 2021 management track assessment and 2022 research track assessment

Horseshoe Crab

- Complete the revision and peer review of the Adaptive Resource Management (ARM) Framework to use modelling approaches from the benchmark stock assessment
- Secure long-term funding for the Horseshoe Crab Benthic Trawl Survey for use in the ARM Framework

Scup

- Finalize, in coordination with MAFMC, amendment addressing commercial/recreational allocations taking into account recalibrated recreational estimates
- Develop, in collaboration with MAFMC, a management action to address recreational reform

Summer Flounder

- Finalize, in coordination with MAFMC, amendment addressing commercial/recreational allocations taking into account recalibrated recreational
- Participate in MAFMC Management Strategy Evaluation regarding the benefits of minimizing discards and converting discards into landings in the recreational sector
- Develop, in coordination with the MAFMC, a management action to address recreational reform

Tautog

- October: Board review 2021 stock assessment update. Consider management response if necessary

MEDIUM-LOW PRIORITY SPECIES

Atlantic Croaker

- Implement measures triggered from the 2020 traffic light analysis (TLA) as outlined in Addendum III

Atlantic Sturgeon

- Monitor state and federal activities in response to an Endangered Species Act listing of Atlantic sturgeon, including 5-year status review and recovery plan

Black Drum

No new tasks

Coastal Sharks

- February: Board review of the 2021 SEDAR Blacktip Shark Stock Assessment and Peer Review. Consider management response if necessary.
- 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)

Cobia

- Implement Addendum I (allocation and *de minimis* measures)
- Continue to monitor and respond as necessary to NOAA rulemaking

Jonah Crab

- Implement Addendum XXVI data elements to improve data collection and characterization of the fishery. Continue to work with ACCSP and all partners to ensure required data elements are incorporated into SAFIS.
- Identify data availability, limitations, and uncertainty, and recommended stock assessment approaches

Northern Shrimp

- Conduct stock assessment update and set specifications (current moratorium sunsets in 2021)
- Continue to explore long-term management options given environmental changes in the Gulf of Maine and depleted stock status

Red Drum

- Continue to work on assessment simulation models for use in future stock assessments

Shad and River Herring

- Consider management response to the 2020 American Shad Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review
- Identify improvements to the FMP with regard to recreational management in systems with low harvest/abundance, sustainable fishery management plan (SFMP)/alternative management plan requirements and content, and incorporation of assessment information in SFMPs
- Complete updates to the shad habitat plans
- Monitor management activities of NEFMC and MAFMC including, but not limited to, shad and river herring catch caps and bycatch avoidance programs

Spanish Mackerel

- Work through SEDAR to prepare Benchmark Stock Assessment for Peer Review in 2022

Spiny Dogfish

- Contribute data and participate in 2022 research track stock assessment

Spot

- Implement measures triggered from the 2020 TLA as outlined in Addendum III

Spotted Seatrout

No new tasks

Weakfish

No new tasks

Winter Flounder

- In collaboration with NEFMC, consider management response to the management track assessment, if necessary

CROSS CUTTING ISSUES

- Raise awareness of COVID-19 related impacts to the Marine Recreational Information Program's (MRIP) ability to produce catch estimates
- Raise awareness to MRIP data standards and impacts to Commission FMPs and stock assessments
- Seek ways within existing management structures to address the concerns of the recreational community with regard to Commission-managed and jointly-managed species
- Participate in and provide administrative support for scenario planning activities to address changes in stocks and fisheries due to climate and fisheries governance
- Evaluate COVID-19 impacts on 2020 fishery-dependent and fishery-independent data collection; develop strategies to mitigate impacts to stock assessments and management
- Work with the states and NOAA Fisheries on changes to the Take Reduction Plan for North Atlantic Right Whale
- Participate in a workshop with MAFMC's Research Steering Committee to examine reestablishing the Research Set Aside program
- Monitor developments related to changing ocean conditions, ocean acidification, stock distributions, ecosystem services, ocean planning and potential fisheries reallocations

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) catch estimation calibrations and Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) committees. While ongoing activities are not listed below, they continue to be conducted.

SCIENCE COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

- Evaluate and pursue expansion of coastwide stock assessment analytical capacity
- Continue incorporating socioeconomic information in management documents and streamline processes for producing socioeconomic analyses through the Committee on Economics and Social Sciences
- Develop proposals and pursue support for outstanding fisheries research priorities through the Management and Science Committee (MSC)
- Finalize a Commission policy regarding risk and uncertainty for consideration and approval by the ISFMP Policy Board

DATA COLLECTION

- Coordinate the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP) South Atlantic component
 - Collaborate with the Southeast Coastal Ocean Observing Regional Association (SECOORA) to host SEAMAP South Atlantic survey data
- Coordinate the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP); implement action items stemming from the 2020 NEAMAP Summit
 - Develop common methodology protocols for NEAMAP surveys
 - Conduct Maturity Staging Workshop
 - Conduct Trawl Survey Calibration Workshop
- Collect new data to address data deficiencies
 - Collect new fishery-dependent data using black sea bass research fleet
 - Assess fixed gear and right whale interactions in the Gulf of Maine
 - Increase bycatch monitoring of sturgeon, shad and river herring, and sciaenids in state waters, as resources allow
 - Establish, in coordination with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and state agencies, American shad and river herring genetics repository for stock identification purposes
 - Increase diet data collection to support ecosystem-based assessments and management, through new or existing programs (e.g., SEAMAP), as resources allow
- Promote the collection of acoustic tagging information and work with the Atlantic Coastal Telemetry network to integrate tagging studies along the coast; secure telemetry tagging data for use in stock assessments

FISHERIES RESEARCH

- Conduct an Atlantic Menhaden Ageing Workshop
- Conduct a Fish Ageing Quality Assurance Workshop among Atlantic coast state and university laboratories to ensure consistency between new and historical age data
- Collaborate with university researchers to develop next iteration of lobster length-structured assessment model, with incorporation of time-varying thermal habitat effects and growth
- Seek opportunities to collaborate with academic institutions to advance population dynamic models for use in stock assessments
- Partner with USGS to identify shared research priorities and opportunities for enhanced scientific support to the Commission

ECOSYSTEM-BASED MANAGEMENT & CHANGING OCEAN CONDITIONS

- Standardize timeline of Commission assessments to support timely updates to ERP assessments for Atlantic menhaden
- 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
- Collaborate with NOAA Fisheries Northeast and Southeast Fisheries Science Centers to include Commission interests in Ecosystem Status Reports
- Track the development of state and federal activities related to changing ocean conditions and impacts to fisheries

COMPETING OCEAN USES

- Participate in Responsible Offshore Science Alliance and provide forum for the states to discuss interactions between fisheries resources and offshore energy development
- Explore opportunities to characterize the geographic extent of fisheries using trackers as a tool
- Continue the Commission's role in aquaculture activities, including policy development and interstate shellfish seed tracking through the Aquaculture Committee

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 data on Atlantic coast recreational, for-hire, and commercial fisheries.

Goal 3 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 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 (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
- Maintains commercial dealer reporting and commercial and for-hire fishermen 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)
- Consolidates and integrates partner data and provides user-friendly, on-line public and confidential access to those data via the Data Warehouse
- Maintains security protocols for ASMFC network and information systems to comply with Federal Information Security Management Act

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

- Monitor ACCSP funded projects, and select FY2022 Partner projects
- Implement method for distribution and revision of Atlantic coast data standards which will improve accessibility and be more responsive to partner needs
- Implement communication strategies in accordance with the ASMFC Communications Plan
- Update Atlantic Recreational Implementation Plan

FISHERIES-DEPENDENT DATA COLLECTION

SAFIS

- Support partner agency implementation of electronic trip reporting, including a single submission to meet the reporting requirements of multiple partner agencies
- Extend major redesign of the SAFIS database and applications for dealer landings (SAFIS eDR) that includes an integrated reporting solution to streamline reporting, and reduce duplication. This will be accomplished by;
 - Integrating the SAFIS Management System (SMS) Switchboard into the eDR applications providing greater flexibility for partners and end users
 - Restructuring data processing to use a single pathway for online, mobile, and uploaded data entry
- Implement updated participant and permit database design to provide better resolution of individual and corporation fishing records
- Coordinate implementation of trip management system with universal trip ID

DATA STANDARDS, DISTRIBUTION AND USE

Data Warehouse

- Update Data Warehouse structures and queries to incorporate new data elements collected by partner systems

- Continue to expand data warehouse content, with specific emphasis on biological data and recreational estimates
- Implement additional processes and partner communication designed to improve data integrity

Recreational Fisheries

- Evaluate utility of, and standards for, private angler voluntary mobile application data
 - Define appropriate uses of the data to guide stakeholder expectations
 - Develop core fields for collection and availability of data to promote compatibility across source applications
- Develop methodology to more fully incorporate for-hire logbooks into catch statistics

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**
- Incorporate 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
- Aquaculture: Review and provide input on enforcement issues associated with American eel or other aquaculture proposals, including offshore aquaculture proposals
- 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, 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 a Habitat Management Series document on acoustics affecting fish habitat for ISFMP Policy Board review and acceptance
- Identify mechanisms to evaluate ecosystem health for consideration by Technical Committees and Boards

INTERGRATE

- 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
- Promote 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, including the following activities
 - Collect information on the long-term successes of ACFHP on-the-ground conservation projects
 - Develop fundraising strategy to solicit donations from the private sector (foundations, corporations) for targeted on-the-ground projects
 - 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 passage and non-fish passage projects (SAV, oyster reefs, salt marshes)

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 tradeshows 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

- Build upon Fisheries Management 101 webpage content to create Fisheries Management 101 Primer (to include interplay with Council on shared resources) or use by Commissioners/state agencies
- Explore methods for highlighting current status for all stocks
- Update *Guide to Fisheries Science and Stock Assessments*
- Identify 3-4 high profile issues and seek to proactively address stakeholder criticisms and concerns through various outreach tools
 - Focal areas for 2021: striped bass amendment development; implementation of mandatory circle hooks for striped bass recreational fishery; and ERPs
- Promote high profile species and stock assessment results through various outreach tools and platforms
 - 2021: Horseshoe Crab ARM Benchmark Assessment and management track assessments for Atlantic striped bass, bluefish, black sea bass and summer flounder

MAXIMIZE USE OF CURRENT AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

- Update/upgrade website: modify to be https compliant; increase user friendliness; develop new content for ERPs and climate change effects on managed species
- 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

- Continue to evaluate effectiveness of current advisory panel process and consider possible changes to enhance engagement and provide management boards with useful stakeholder input
- Explore additional tools to gather public comment on proposed management actions (e.g., online surveys)
- Clearly define Commission processes to facilitate stakeholder participation, as well as transparency and accountability
 - Develop outreach materials that highlight opportunities for public engagement in the Commission's fisheries management and stock assessment processes

MEDIA RELATIONS AND NETWORKING

- Increase interdepartmental coordination on outreach activities through the implementation of Communications Plan
 - Conduct a survey of ASMFC outreach products/tools to assess effectiveness/success of products/tools and identify new platforms and opportunities for outreach moving forward
- Strengthen national, regional, and local media relations to increase coverage of Commission actions
- Track media communications and coverage through ASMFC-related news clippings and media tracking sheet
- Work with other Northeast Regional Coordinating Council communication members to coordinate outreach on shared stock assessments
- 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
 - Conduct meeting in 2021

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
- Provide state-specific ‘ASMFC Meeting Previews’ to congressional staff ahead of quarterly Meetings
- Provide opportunities for the Executive Director to communicate with congressional staff on a regular basis

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

- Engage with the Administration and Congressional representatives following the November 2020 election on fisheries priorities and emerging 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 ISFMP Policy Board
- Explore reauthorization of the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act and Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act
- Explore a Commission line-item for annual federal appropriations
- Explore authorizing legislation to fund the Horseshoe Crab Trawl Survey
- 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
 - Pending Legislation/Emerging Issues: forage fish management, user group and state-by-state allocations, disaster declarations energy initiatives (offshore wind, hydropower, oil and gas exploration), shark fin trade, right whales, and living shorelines

PURSUE FEDERAL RESOURCES TO SUPPORT MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

- Communicate the Commission’s federal funding needs to Congress and advocate for sufficient appropriations
 - Priority line items include 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, GOM lobster research, Mid-Atlantic Horseshoe Crab Trawl Survey, National Sea Grant College Program, Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Program, and National Estuarine Research Reserves
 - Increase Wallop-Breaux funding for the Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commissions via Wallop-Breaux Reauthorization legislation
 - 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 and U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

PARTNERSHIPS

- Continue to explore opportunities to collaborate with the U.S. Geological Survey in providing scientific support to the Commission
- 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, the Marine Fisheries Initiative and Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

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

- Develop revised statement of work for the ACCSP Cooperative Agreement to respond to the new federal grant reporting requirements

- Manage the CARES Act, and all ongoing Cooperative Agreements, insuring deliverables are completed and budgets are responsibly managed
- Provide financial support to the states to implement the Atlantic Coastal Act, as COVID-19 cost savings allow
- Utilize and update as necessary Commission compensation plan, including job classifications and salaries based on location

UTILIZE CURRENT INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

- Develop a site map of the Commission’s electronic filing system for internal use, including protocols for document deletion and archiving
- Develop a secure system for scanning all documents for the Finance and Administration Department
- Create a template to facilitate electronic approval of documents that have been locked with a secure, authenticated signature
- Manage Commission inventory through accounting software, tracking acquisitions and disposals
- Ensure adequate resources to support telecommuting and online meetings
- Enhance contracts database to add features that assist Program Managers in awareness of payment details, balances and deliverables of Commission contracts
- Develop SOPPs for conducting web-based meetings
- Provide an annual update to staff, reviewing technology that has changed or could be better-utilized

MANAGE HUMAN RESOURCES

- Develop a welcome/introduction document for new employees, similar to an FAQ document.
- Continue to refine the telecommute policy
- Pursue hiring a Finance and Administration Deputy Director
- Research options for staff performance review and feedback
- Promote Commission’s mission and programs, and recruit new talent through outreach meetings with various marine policy and marine science graduate programs
- Provide training opportunities for ASMFC staff
- Conduct annual meeting with financial advisor to review retirement program performance with staff and provide opportunities for staff to meet individually with financial advisor to match financial goals with investment choices for retirement

ENGAGE AND SUPPORT COMMISSIONERS

- Conduct a meetings facilitation training workshop for technical committee members
- Conduct a workshop on parliamentary procedures and meeting management
- 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