

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

5-Year Strategic Plan

2014-2018

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	1
Introduction	2
The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council.....	2
Rationale for a Strategic Plan.....	2
Strategic Planning Process	3
Strategic Plan Overview	4
Vision.....	4
Mission	4
Core Values	4
Strategic Goals	4
Communication.....	5
Goal: Engage, inform, and educate stakeholders to promote public awareness and encourage constructive participation in the Council process.....	5
Governance.....	7
Goal: Ensure that the Council's governance structures and practices fairly represent stakeholder interests, are coordinated with the Council' management partners, and include a clear and well-defined decision-making process.	7
Science	8
Goal: Ensure that the Council's management decisions are based on timely and accurate scientific data that are analyzed and modeled in a manner that improves management performance and build stakeholder confidence.	8
Management.....	10
Goal: Develop fishery management strategies that provide for productive, sustainable fisheries.	10
Conclusion.....	12

Introduction

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (also referred to as the Council, Mid-Atlantic Council, or MAFMC) is responsible for the conservation and management of 13 species of fish and shellfish found primarily off the coast of the Mid-Atlantic region (North Carolina through New York). The Council manages fisheries for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, Atlantic mackerel, short-finned squid, long-finned squid, butterfish, surfclams, ocean quahogs, tilefish, spiny dogfish and monkfish. Spiny dogfish and monkfish are managed under joint fishery management plans developed in coordination with the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC). The Council also coordinates the management of summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, and spiny dogfish with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC).

Mid-Atlantic fisheries are important sources of food, income, employment, and recreation in the Mid-Atlantic region. In 2011, the commercial fishing industry in the Mid-Atlantic harvested 858 million pounds of fish and shellfish valued at \$605 million, and more than 5 million recreational fishermen took nearly 21 million fishing trips. The commercial and recreational fishing industries also provide about 80 thousand full- and part-time jobs.

The Mid-Atlantic Council is one of eight regional councils that were established by the 1976 Fishery Conservation and Management Act (later renamed the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, or MSA). The law created a 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), eliminated foreign fishing effort within the EEZ, and charged the regional councils with management of fishery resources in the newly expanded federal waters. All of the Council's fishery management recommendations must be consistent with the ten national standards as defined by the MSA.

The Mid-Atlantic Council has 25 members and is the largest of the eight councils. The Council typically meets 6 times each year to develop recommendations for fishery management measures. Decisions made by the Council are not final until they are approved or partially approved by the Secretary of Commerce through NMFS. The Council has a full time staff which assists with planning and facilitating meetings, developing fishery management plans, coordinating with other management agencies, and performing other tasks as needed by the Council. The Council also has a number of advisory bodies, including a Scientific and Statistical Committee and industry advisory panels for each fishery.

Rationale for a Strategic Plan

Over the last 36 years the Council has made remarkable progress toward its goals of establishing effective management programs for Mid-Atlantic fisheries and rebuilding stocks that were once overfished. Despite the successes of rebuilding fish stocks, the Council still faces social, economic, and ecological challenges that threaten the stability and sustainability of Mid-Atlantic fisheries. The strategic planning process is critical for defining the future for the Council and has become increasingly important in the face of these many challenges. Developing a strategic plan will enable the Council to respond proactively and strategically.

The strategic plan was designed to guide the Council's efforts to:

- Maintain sustainable fisheries, ecosystems, and habitats in the Mid-Atlantic;
- Address specific issues identified by the Council and its constituents during the Visioning Project;
- Improve communication with constituents and other organizations;
- Improve the Council's ability to collect and use input from constituents and management partners;
- Increase efficiency in the management process;
- Promote stability in Mid-Atlantic fisheries
- Establish a more proactive process for addressing management challenges

Strategic Planning Process

The Council developed this plan in coordination with, and with substantial input from, its stakeholders and management partners. To ensure that the plan accurately reflected the diverse interests affected by management of Mid-Atlantic fisheries, the Council engaged in a large-scale stakeholder outreach effort prior to the actual strategic planning process. The purpose of this outreach initiative, entitled the “Visioning Project,” was for the Council to gain a better understanding of stakeholders’ challenges and concerns as well as their visions for Mid-Atlantic fisheries.

This task was accomplished by collecting input from stakeholders through surveys, port meetings, and position letters. From September 2011 through February 2012 more than 1,500 stakeholders participated in the Visioning Project, offering a broad range of ideas and recommendations for improving management of Mid-Atlantic fisheries. This input was summarized in the *Stakeholder Input Report* which was presented to the Council and distributed to the public in June 2012.

In July 2012, the Council established a working group to spearhead the strategic planning process. The working group was made up of Council members, leaders of management partner organizations, and stakeholders representing commercial, recreational, environmental, and regional planning interests. From August through December 2012 the group met five times to develop the components of a draft strategic plan. During the first meeting, the working group reviewed the *Stakeholder Input Report* and agreed to a framework of 7 themes based on the top issues and concerns expressed by stakeholders. These themes—science, governance, regulatory process, communication, social and economic considerations, ecosystems, and management strategies—were used throughout the planning process to guide the development of goals, objectives, and strategies for the plan. These seven themes were eventually reduced to four strategic goals: (1) Communication, (2) Governance, (3) Science, and (4) Management.

The Visioning phase of the project was completed with assistance from S.R.I. International, and the strategic planning phase of the project was facilitated by RESOLVE Consulting.

Strategic Plan Overview

Vision

Healthy and productive marine ecosystems supporting thriving, sustainable marine fisheries that provide the greatest overall benefit to stakeholders.

Mission

The Council manages marine fisheries in federal waters of the Mid-Atlantic region for their long-term sustainability and productivity consistent with the National Standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Council is committed to the effective stewardship of these fisheries and associated habitats by incorporating scientific information and informed public input in transparent processes that produce fishery management plans and programs.

Core Values

Core values are the traits or qualities that represent an individual's or organization's highest priorities, deeply held beliefs, and core, fundamental driving forces. These core values are embedded in the vision, mission, goals and objective of the strategic plan. Core values are shared among the members and stakeholders of an organization, drive an organization's culture and priorities, and provide a framework upon which decisions are made. The Council's core values include:

- Stewardship
- Integrity
- Effectiveness
- Fairness
- Competence
- Clear Communication

Strategic Goals

1. **Communication:** Engage, inform, and educate stakeholders to promote public awareness and encourage constructive participation in the Council process
2. **Governance:** Ensure that the Council's governance structures and practices fairly represent stakeholder interests, are coordinated with the Council's management partners, and include a clear and well-defined decision-making process. (Option 2: Improve the efficiency, consistency, and transparency of the Council process.)
3. **Science:** Ensure that the Council's management decisions are based on timely and accurate scientific data that are analyzed and modeled in a manner that improves management performance and build stakeholder confidence. (Option 2: Strengthen the scientific foundation of management decisions.)
4. **Management:** Develop fishery management strategies that provide for productive, sustainable fisheries.

Communication

Goal: Engage, inform, and educate stakeholders to promote public awareness and encourage constructive participation in the Council process

Objective 1. Develop and implement a strategic communications plan to provide clear and accurate information to a broad range of stakeholders.

- Strategy 1.1. Employ a variety of written, visual, and oral communication methods appropriate for a diverse audience of stakeholders.
- Strategy 1.2. Expand the use of technology to streamline the communication process.
- Strategy 1.3. Use the Council’s website to provide stakeholders with easy access to accurate and up-to-date information.
- Strategy 1.4. Provide stakeholders with timely news and updates via email distribution list and website.
- Strategy 1.5. Ensure that all communication products meet the federal plain language guidelines.
- Strategy 1.6. Develop communication templates and communication guidelines for staff and Council members.

Objective 2. Engage a diverse audience of stakeholders.

- Strategy 2.1. Conduct a stakeholder analysis to identify target audiences for Council communications.
- Strategy 2.2. Develop and maintain a database of stakeholder contact information, including a list of key industry leaders.
- Strategy 2.3. Coordinate communication efforts with management partners and other organizations to reduce redundancy and expand the distribution of messages to a broader audience.
- Strategy 2.4. Use targeted communication to increase the number of stakeholders in the Council’s contact database.

Objective 3. Increase stakeholder trust and facilitate greater stakeholder engagement by making the Council process accessible and transparent.

- Strategy 3.1. Provide conference lines or Webinar access to Council and advisory body meetings whenever it is feasible.
- Strategy 3.2. Maintain an online calendar of meetings and events with links to meeting materials and supplemental information.
- Strategy 3.3. Establish a consistent process for collecting and analyzing public input and incorporating it into the decision-making process.
- Strategy 3.4. Summarize public comments received on specific actions and explain how public input was used in management decisions.
- Strategy 3.5. Ensure that briefing books, presentations, and other meeting documents provide sufficient background information to be understood by the general public.

Objective 4. Increase stakeholder involvement in the development of fishery management actions.

- Strategy 4.1. Hold workshops to facilitate collaborative development of innovative management approaches among fishermen, managers, and scientists.
- Strategy 4.2. Identify and implement additional opportunities for stakeholders to ask questions and make general comments.
- Strategy 4.3. Ensure that meetings are advertised and conducted in such a way that encourages and enables stakeholder attendance and participation.
- Strategy 4.4. Provide stakeholders with sufficient background information to provide constructive input
- Strategy 4.5. Educate stakeholders about the Council process.
- Strategy 4.6. Utilize an informal, small group meeting format to gather input from “hard to reach” interests via Listening Sessions or Q&A sessions.

- Strategy 4.7. Ensure that scoping and public hearings are held in locations with high concentrations of interested stakeholders.
- Strategy 4.8. Use targeted communication methods to solicit public input on management actions.

Objective 5. Increase awareness and understanding of fishery science and management.

- Strategy 5.1. Partner with academic institutions and non-governmental organizations to develop workshops and other interactive educational opportunities for stakeholders.
- Strategy 5.2. Collaborate with academic and research institutions to develop outreach materials that explain fisheries science and data collection.
- Strategy 5.3. Develop plain-language outreach materials to educate the public about the Council's legislative mandates and the fisheries management process.
- Strategy 5.4. Use the results of the Visioning Project to promote general public understanding of fisheries science and management.

Governance

Goal: Ensure that the Council's governance structures and practices fairly represent stakeholder interests, are coordinated with the Council' management partners, and include a clear and well-defined decision-making process.

(Option 2: Improve the efficiency, consistency, and transparency of the Council process.)

Objective 6. Establish a formal decision-making process for the development and evaluation of management actions.

- Strategy 6.1. Evaluate the Council's existing decision-making process and identify areas of ambiguity, inefficiency, and inconsistency.
- Strategy 6.2. Increase consistency in the process for developing amendments, frameworks, and specification documents.
- Strategy 6.3. Enhance the process for incorporating scientific data into the evaluation of management alternatives.
- Strategy 6.4. Establish a consistent process for evaluating and incorporating stakeholder input in the decision-making process.

Objective 7. Develop and strengthen partnerships to promote greater efficiency and enhance coordination among management partners and other relevant organizations.

- Strategy 7.1. Establish new and strengthen existing relationships with organizations involved with water quality, wind energy, waste management, marine transportation, and other marine related issues in the Mid-Atlantic region.
- Strategy 7.2. Initiate the development of a comprehensive project in cooperation with the other East coast management agencies to address the management implications associated with shifts in species distribution resulting from climate change.
- Strategy 7.3. Develop operating agreements with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to strengthen coordination and clarify roles and responsibilities.
- Strategy 7.4. Participate in regional planning initiatives associated with the National Ocean Council, Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean, and the Northeast Regional Ocean Council.
- Strategy 7.5. Coordinate with BOEM to ensure that fisheries impacts and concerns are effectively addressed in the offshore energy development process.

Objective 8. Ensure that stakeholder interests are accurately understood and meaningfully considered in the Council process.

- Strategy 8.1. Regularly evaluate the composition of committees and advisory bodies to ensure a balanced representation of interests.
- Strategy 8.2. Use advisory bodies and stakeholder input to inform the decision-making process and actively monitor changing conditions in the fisheries and ecosystem.

Science

Goal: Ensure that the Council’s management decisions are based on timely and accurate scientific data that are analyzed and modeled in a manner that improves management performance and build stakeholder confidence.

(Option 2: Strengthen the scientific foundation of management decisions.)

Objective 9. Promote the collection and analysis of accurate and timely scientific data to support the Council's management plans and programs.

- Strategy 9.1. Evaluate current data collection, monitoring, and reporting programs for the Council's managed fisheries and associated data needs.
- Strategy 9.2. Develop a comprehensive research plan that prioritizes the Council's data and research needs.
- Strategy 9.3. Coordinate with the NEFSC to develop research plans that include specific timelines and goals (i.e. roadmap) that produce acceptable benchmark assessments for all of the Council's managed species.
- Strategy 9.4. Enhance the Council's Research Set-Aside Program to support the Council's research needs.
- Strategy 9.5. Evaluate the use of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program data and protocols for their potential utility in Council management decisions.
- Strategy 9.6. Encourage the science center to conduct a risk assessment to identify the potential threats of climate change on our marine ecosystem.

Objective 10. Improve our understanding of the social and economic dimensions of Mid-Atlantic fishing communities.

- Strategy 10.1. Perform a gap analysis to identify areas where additional or improved social and economic data collection and analysis are necessary.
- Strategy 10.2. Support the collection of relevant economic and social data to produce analyses that meets current and future Council needs.
- Strategy 10.3. Develop partnerships with research institutions (e.g., Sea Grant) with the expertise to collect social and economic data to support the Council's management objectives.
- Strategy 10.4. Develop terms of reference for the SSC to develop social and economic metrics for analysis of management alternatives.

Objective 11. Promote the collection and analysis of data needed to support the Council's transition to an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM).

- Strategy 11.1. Encourage the collection of habitat data that will support methodologies and subsequent management measures that link habitat protection more directly to increased fish production.
- Strategy 11.2. Support the collection of oceanographic data that support the development of an ecosystem approach to fisheries management and support management decisions related to climate change and ocean acidification.
- Strategy 11.3. Coordinate with the NEFSC to conduct a regional evaluation of species interactions within the marine ecosystem.
- Strategy 11.4. Fully consider species interactions in the assessment process and in the determination of catch limits.

Objective 12. Encourage effective stakeholder participation in data collection and analysis.

- Strategy 12.1. Seek funding for expansion of study fleet and other similar types of programs.
- Strategy 12.2. Promote and expand opportunities for cooperative and collaborative research in the Mid-Atlantic region.
- Strategy 12.3. Encourage the collection and use of real-time commercial data to support stock assessment and management decisions.

Strategy 12.4. Explore the potential use of volunteer angler data in recreational management decisions.

Objective 13. Promote efficient and accurate methods of monitoring and reporting.

Strategy 13.1. Support increased at-sea observer coverage in Mid-Atlantic fisheries.

Strategy 13.2. Support the development of innovative technologies (e.g., electronic monitoring, smart phones, etc.) to improve the accuracy and/or efficiency of data collection.

Strategy 13.3. Support the development and implementation of electronic VTRs / log books in the commercial and for-hire sectors.

Strategy 13.4. Effectively communicate stakeholders' concerns or recommendations regarding monitoring/observing to the NEFSC.

Management

Goal: Develop fishery management strategies that provide for productive, sustainable fisheries.

Objective 14. Evaluate the Council's fishery management plans.

- Strategy 14.1. Establish a timeline for FMP review.
- Strategy 14.2. Review and update FMP objectives as appropriate to ensure that they specific, relevant, and measurable.
- Strategy 14.3. Develop a list of performance variables that can be used to track FMP performance.
- Strategy 14.4. Develop a performance management system that tracks the progress of management decisions and their impacts.

Objective 15. Incorporate economic and social analysis of management alternatives into the decision-making process.

- Strategy 15.1. Include Terms of Reference that will allow a Fishery Management Action Team to identify and consider relevant economic and socio-cultural issues in the development and analysis of management alternatives.
- Strategy 15.2. Develop a process to formally compare economic and social impacts of management alternatives prior to Council decisions.
- Strategy 15.3. Support the development of bioeconomic models to evaluate allocation strategies and management measures.
- Strategy 15.4. Evaluate the cumulative social and economic impacts of proposed and existing management alternatives.

Objective 16. Develop management strategies that enable efficient operation of commercial and recreational fishing businesses.

- Strategy 16.1. Consider the development of multi-year management approaches for all managed species.
- Strategy 16.2. Support the development of a Magnuson-Stevens Act certification program and label for U.S. harvested fish.
- Strategy 16.3. Consider energy efficiency in the development of management measures.
- Strategy 16.4. Support the development of innovative gear designs for commercial fisheries to increase efficiency, reduce discards, and reduce costs.

Objective 17. Develop innovative management strategies for recreational and commercial fisheries.

- Strategy 17.1. Develop management approaches that account for uncertainty in recreational catch estimates.
- Strategy 17.2. Support the development of models and analyses that evaluate alternative bag, size, and seasonal limits.
- Strategy 17.3. Review and revise current approaches to management of recreational fisheries that consider governance issues, data limitations, and differences among fishing modes.
- Strategy 17.4. Develop management measures to reduce regulatory discards.
- Strategy 17.5. Develop management strategies that ensure fair access to recreational fisheries throughout their range.

Objective 18. Advance ecosystem approaches to fisheries management in the Mid-Atlantic.

- Strategy 18.1. Complete and implement the "Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management Guidance Document."
- Strategy 18.2. Incorporate consideration of species interactions into fishery management plans and coordinate these considerations across appropriate management plans.

- Strategy 18.3. Determine and incorporate the relationship between essential fish habitat and productivity of marine resources into management decisions.
- Strategy 18.4. Develop regional workshops that consider the various aspects of ecosystem approaches to management.
- Strategy 18.5. Develop management approaches that minimize adverse ecosystem impacts.

Conclusion

Achieving a balance between biophysical, ecological, and socioeconomic objectives will continue to be a challenging aspect of fisheries management as the Council works to attain a vision of a healthy, responsive, and sustainable future for Mid-Atlantic fisheries. The greatest opportunity for progress can be found in the evaluation of our past successes and mistakes, seeking insight into the challenges of our present, assessing and understanding evolving dynamics within the marine ecosystem, and identifying opportunities for addressing these challenges in the years to come. The visioning and strategic planning efforts over the last two years have given the Council an opportunity to do just that—identify successes and failures of the past and translate that knowledge into a better future for our managed fisheries.

Looking forward, the Council’s managed fisheries face uncharted impacts and consequences associated with climate change and large scale offshore wind energy development. In order to deal effectively with these future challenges, the Council will have to leverage all of its relationships with its management partners and stakeholders, relying on each for their respective expertise and information for possible solutions. Assessing and managing these risks will not happen automatically; rather, it will require diligent planning and close internal and external working relationships at the Council level.

Based on the strategic plan, it is anticipated that the Council will actively seek greater stakeholder engagement and involvement in the Council process, set more specific social and economic management objectives, establish more effective review processes for management plans, and improve the transparency of Council operations. Building public confidence in the management process will ultimately require a sustained commitment to excellence and continuous improvements from the first point of data collection to final decision-making.