**MFC Executive Committee**

**April 23, 2024**

**Meeting Summary**

The Executive Committee met to review advisor applications and continue discussions of spotted seatrout regulations and expanding the at-sea fillet permit.

At the January 2024 Executive Committee meeting, the Committee postponed reviewing a number of advisor applications in order to gather more information to make informed decisions. In addition, staff recently sent letters to all advisors whose terms were expiring before the end of 2024, and many of them submitted applications for renewal. Staff provided the committee with summary information on all applicants. Council reviewed the applications with respect to enforcement history, sector affiliation, geographic location, and past attendance, and made recommendations for approval as shown in the summary table.

Staff recounted that the committee had previously requested information on ASMFC requirements for spotted seatrout and whether they school with weakfish. An online literature search found no indication that the two species form mixed schools. ASMFC compliance criteria for seatrout require only a 12” minimum size with comparable mesh size requirements. There are no season or possession limitations. New Jersey’s current regulations include a 13” minimum size with one fish (recreational) or 100 lbs (commercial) possession limit. At the January committee meeting, the committee recommended maintaining the current regulations; however, with the additional information and a review of other state regulations, the committee recommends a recreational 12” minimum size and no possession limit, consistent with Delaware’s regulations. Staff has reached out to ASMFC to determine if a proposal is required to liberalize regulations since the proposed regulations are still consistent with the FMP. It was also noted that NJ may lose its *de minimis* status if harvest increases significantly under the new regulations, but the implications of this are minimal.

Also at the January meeting, the committee requested staff conduct a survey of NJ charter boat operators to gauge interest in expanding the fillet permit to charter boats. Staff requested additional guidance in developing the survey. The committee is interested in establishing not only how many vessels would be interested in participating, but also evaluating eligibility. In particular, committee members expressed concerns that some vessels register as charter operators but aren’t Coast Guard certified or don’t carry paying passengers, so should not be allowed to participate. They suggested including questions relative to these issues, as well as whether a vessel is part time or full time. Finally, they recommended asking law enforcement if they had additional questions. Staff will develop a survey for committee review before distribution.

The committee makes the following recommendations for Council consideration:

* Implement a recreational 12” minimum size limit with no possession limit and no closed season for spotted seatrout;
* Approve appointments to advisory committees as shown in the summary table.

