

NEW ENGLAND FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Habitat Committee

I. STATUS

- A. Meetings: The Advisory Panel met on May 29, the Committee met on June 12, and the PDT will meet on June 17. All meetings included or will include discussion of the Dedicated Habitat Research Area sunset review, Great South Channel Habitat Management Area surfclam exemption program evaluation, and the 2026 Essential Fish Habitat Designation Framework.
- B. Essential Fish Habitat Designation Framework (2026): The PDT has developed draft updated EFH designations for most of the species in the framework. These designations were presented to the Habitat AP and Committee at their recent meetings. Analyses and designation development for offshore hake, wolffish, and sea scallops are ongoing. Outreach to experts including groundfish, whiting, and scallop PDT members is underway or planned for this summer. Final action is planned for September.
- C. Essential Fish Habitat Designation Framework (2025): The framework document and appendices were transmitted to GARFO for review on April 10, and comments were received in mid-May. The revised framework will be resubmitted prior to the Council meeting.
- D. Dedicated Habitat Research Area (DHRA) Sunset Review: The PDT, Committee, and Advisory Panel reviewed a report on research activities in the two DHRAs and each group developed recommendations for Council consideration.
- E. Evaluation of Great South Channel Habitat Management Area Surfclam Exemption Areas: Staff are preparing a report that will (1) assess the effectiveness of surfclam exemption areas from habitat conservation and fishery perspectives, considering recent data and information, and (2) generally discuss tradeoffs related to the exemption program. Staff presented a report outline and description of information sources to be considered during the recent AP and Committee meetings. Both groups offered feedback on information to consider when preparing the report, which is anticipated in September.
- F. Ocean Planning: Staff continue to coordinate with partners on offshore wind issues of regional interest including regional monitoring standards, fisheries compensation, and the status of various offshore wind projects given the dynamic landscape. Staff are also following other issues including marine carbon dioxide removal, offshore aquaculture projects, offshore oil/gas leasing, and potential for offshore mineral mining in the Mid-Atlantic region. Staff also continue to engage with ROSA, NROC, and the national marine sanctuaries (Stellwagen and Hudson Canyon).
- G. Atlantic Salmon Aquaculture Framework: Proposed rule publication is pending NOAA review.

II. COUNCIL ACTION

1. Develop a recommendation to the NOAA Regional Administrator regarding continuation or removal of the Stellwagen DHRA and Georges Bank DHRA.

2. Review the scope, objectives, and information to be considered in the Great South Channel HMA clam exemption program evaluation and offer feedback.
3. Receive a status update on the 2026 EFH Designation Framework, ask questions about the work, and suggest opportunities for reviewing the draft designations with knowledgeable industry members, scientists, or other stakeholders over the summer.

III. INFORMATION

1. Staff presentation
 2. Meeting summaries
 - a. Habitat Advisory Panel, May 29, 2026
 - b. Habitat Committee, June 12, 2026 (DRAFT)
 - c. Habitat PDT, June 17, 2026 (DRAFT)
 3. Memo, Habitat Committee to Council re DHRAs
 4. Great South Channel HMA clam exemption program evaluation report (outline only)
 5. Draft EFH designations for 2026 species (EFH Primers)
 6. Correspondence
- Habitat, Ocean Planning, and other correspondence is archived [here](#).
 - The 2025 EFH Designation Framework is available [here](#).