

NEW ENGLAND FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Habitat Committee

I. STATUS

- A. Meetings: Since the June Council meeting, the PDT met on August 4th and 13th and the Habitat Advisory Panel and Committee met jointly on August 20th. All meetings included a discussion of the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area surfclam exemption program evaluation, the 2026 Essential Fish Habitat Designation Framework, and brief updates on offshore ocean planning activities.
- B. Essential Fish Habitat Designation Framework (2026): This action considers updated EFH designations for sixteen species in the Northeast Multispecies and Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plans. The Habitat PDT worked with Mid-Atlantic Council staff and a modeling contractor to develop a range of alternatives for the framework. The PDT consulted on the draft designations with the Groundfish, Whiting, and Scallop PDTs and Advisory Panels along with stock assessment leads not on the PDTs
- 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 incorporating GARFO feedback was resubmitted on July 7th.
- D. Evaluation of Great South Channel Habitat Management Area Surfclam Exemption Areas: Working with the PDT, staff prepared a report that (1) assesses the effectiveness of surfclam exemption areas from habitat conservation and fishery perspectives, considering recent data and information, and (2) generally discusses tradeoffs related to the exemption program.
- E. 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. The Council will receive a presentation from the Regional Fund Administrator regarding the 11-State Regional Fund Administration draft fisheries compensation program design and public comment opportunities.
- F. Atlantic Salmon Aquaculture Framework: Proposed rule publication is pending NOAA review.

II. COUNCIL ACTION

- 1. Final action on EFH Designation Framework
- 2. Discuss Great South Channel HMA Surfclam Exemption Program Evaluation Report.

III. INFORMATION

- 1. Staff presentation
- 2. Meeting summaries
 - a. [Habitat PDT, August 4, 2026](#)
 - b. Habitat PDT, August 13, 2026
 - c. Joint Advisory Panel and Committee, August 20, 2026

3. 2026 Essential Fish Habitat Designation Framework
 - a. Decision document
 - b. Framework document
 - c. Appendix D – Species Distribution Model Outputs
 - d. Appendix E – Detailed EFH Methods
 4. Great South Channel Surfclam Exemption Program Evaluation
 - a. Great South Channel Surfclam Exemption Program Review Report
 - b. Exempted Fishing Permit 27073 Final Report, Coonamessett Farm Foundation
 5. Correspondence
- Habitat, Ocean Planning, and other correspondence is archived [here](#).
 - The 2025 EFH Designation Framework is available [here](#).