



New England Fishery Management Council

50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492

Daniel Salerno, *Chair* | Cate O'Keefe, PhD, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 20, 2026
TO: Climate and Ecosystem Steering Committee (CESC)
FROM: John Pappalardo, CESC Chair
SUBJECT: Charge for CESC meeting on July 27, 2026

The purpose of this memo is to help prepare the Climate and Ecosystem Steering Committee for its webinar meeting on July 27, 2026, from 9:00 – 12:30.

MEETING PURPOSE. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss: 1) outcomes of a recent Council workshop on dynamic reference points; 2) methods and planned outputs of NOAA's Northeast Fish and Shellfish Climate Vulnerability Analysis 2.0; and 3) mapping on-ramps for climate and ecosystem information into management, including national and NEFMC-specific efforts. The CESC will also receive other project updates and discuss other business, as necessary.

MEETING MATERIALS. To make the most of our meeting time, please familiarize yourself with the documents beforehand and come ready to make any recommendations. As documents become available, they will be posted on the Council webpage: <https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/jul-27-2026-climate-and-ecosystem-steering-committee-webinar>. Documents are also listed at the end of this memo.

WEBINAR REGISTRATION. <https://nefmc-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/aifwMzpWTKi9Vz4fsK8Glg>. To be able to view the webinar, listen, and talk during it, you must: 1) register for the webinar in advance and 2) join the webinar on the day of the meeting (you can then select phone or computer for your audio connection). For the best audio and visual experience, your Zoom desktop application must be updated prior to the meeting. Please join the webinar ten minutes prior to test audio and help the meeting start on time.

QUESTIONS/TECHNICAL SUPPORT. If you have any questions about the meeting documents, agenda, or how to participate, please contact Michelle Bachman (mbachman@nefmc.org; 978-465-0492 x 120). Staff would be happy to set up a practice webinar for you ahead of the meeting if that would be helpful.

Dynamic Reference Points Workshop

The New England Fishery Management Council's (NEFMC) Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) convened a two-day workshop in Boston, MA on June 1–2, 2026 to develop practical guidance for evaluating and implementing Dynamic Biological Reference Points (DRPs) for New England fisheries. Building on recommendations from recent workshops and NOAA Fisheries guidance, participants explored approaches for applying DRPs within existing assessment, management, and legal frameworks to better account for persistent changes in stock productivity resulting from changing ocean conditions.

The need for DRPs is at its core a climate and ecosystem issue. Traditionally, BRPs have been estimated with the assumption of relatively stable stock productivity through time. However, growing evidence

suggests that changing environmental conditions and ecosystem dynamics are altering stock productivity, potentially reducing the relevance and effectiveness of these static BRPs.

Dr. Willy Goldsmith, Pelagic Strategies, one of three workshop facilitators and lead author of the workshop summary report, will provide an overview of workshop outcomes and next steps for the SSC, including discussion of potential indicators at their August 2026 meeting. The exact role of the CESC in implementing DRPs in New England has not been determined but could include tasks such as reviewing indicators or analyses to screen for suitability of DRP development for specific stocks, or communication about the expected benefits of DRPs to fishery management in New England. Meeting materials include a slide presentation (Document 4), but a copy of the draft workshop report is available on request. The final report will be shared in early August.

Climate Vulnerability Assessment 2.0

Approximately a decade ago, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center working with other NOAA Fisheries colleagues prepared the first of [a series of climate vulnerability assessments](#) (CVAs) focused on fish and shellfish species in the northeast U.S. ([Hare et al. 2016](#)). CVAs are tools that estimate the vulnerability of fish and shellfish species or their habitats to climate change, based on a combination of exposure and sensitivity. The scores from these assessments can be used to focus management interventions on climate-vulnerable stocks or to determine appropriate levels of risk to assume when making management decisions. Understanding pathways of climate exposure and underlying traits that contribute to sensitivity can guide conservation decisions. In New England, the results of the 2016 fish and shellfish CVA have provided context for Council management decisions for nearly a decade and climate vulnerability is a factor in the Council's recently revised Risk Policy, contributing to the calculated Z score for each stock.

NOAA Fisheries is currently updating the fish and shellfish CVA for the Northeast Region (CVA 2.0). This updated assessment will be spatially explicit, relying on species distribution models to estimate each stock's climate exposure across its geographic range, and benefits from recent development of a high-resolution ocean model, Modular Ocean Model 6 (MOM6). Recall that Dr. Andrew Ross presented MOM6 forecasts to the CESC last September.

Dr. Katherine Gallagher, NEFSC, will provide an overview of CVA 2.0 methods, touching on the overall assessment structure, the underlying species distribution models, the expert sensitivity scoring conducted earlier this year, and what the results of the assessment will look like. Results are not yet available but are anticipated later in 2026 for use starting in 2027. The purpose of this presentation is to begin to familiarize CESC members and other Council process participants with the CVA 2.0 approach as we anticipate ongoing use of the CVA in management. Updated estimates of stock-level climate vulnerability from CVA 2.0 will continue to be integrated into the Council's Risk Policy, but there are likely other applications. Meeting materials include a slide presentation (Document 5). The draft [Climate Vulnerability Assessment 2.0 GitHub Manual](#) provides some additional details about the work.

Mapping On-Ramps for Climate and Ecosystem Information

The CESC has been working towards identifying and mapping on-ramps for climate and ecosystem information through the Process Mapping Subcommittee. At the March meeting, the CESC encouraged the subcommittee to collaborate with a national on-ramps mapping effort, identify case studies to illustrate previously used pathways, and recommend 2-3 on-ramps for future development.

Matt Seeley, Environmental Defense Fund, will provide a presentation on their project, which is aimed at facilitating the integration of climate and ecosystem information into fishery management processes across all eight US councils (Document 6). The project uses flowcharts to map where in the Councils' action development processes these opportunities occur. Underpinning the flowcharts is a detailed database of tools and approaches. The database includes examples of specific projects at various Councils

and has been informed by focus group interviews and ongoing collaborations with Council staff and other Council process participants. On behalf of the subcommittee, Michelle Bachman will share two case studies and three recommendations for further work. The subcommittee is seeking CESC feedback on whether these are useful case study examples and on the suitability of the three focus areas for further development. As directed by the CESC, the subcommittee can continue to work with the national project team to further develop these case studies and opportunities.

Other Updates

The June Council meeting included updates on the Risk Policy, the Holistic Strategic Plan, and the Ecosystem Component Species Analysis; see here for more information: <https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/june-2026-council-meeting>. All IRA projects are summarized in the IRA briefs, provided as Document 7.

Risk Policy Approval and Implementation

The Council approved revisions to its Risk Policy, establishing qualitative categories of low, medium, and high risk tolerance to support management decisions beginning in 2026. The Risk Policy's bi-directional approach is designed to emphasize caution when stock conditions are poor, recruitment is low, and environmental conditions are unfavorable, and conversely allow fishery managers to increase catch limits for healthy stocks deemed eligible to tolerate more risk.

The Risk Policy combines the Council's input about the importance of risk factors with technical scores related to managed resources. The policy preference was determined at the June meeting, when Council members assigned universal weights to five factors on a scale of 0-4, ranging from "least" to "critically" important. The five factors include: (1) Biomass/Stock Status, (2) Recruitment, (3) Climate Vulnerability, (4) Recreational Fishery Characterization, and (5) Commercial Fishery Characterization.

The weights will be combined with scores completed by each Plan Development Team and unique to each Fishery Management Plan (FMP) in the coming months. Combined weights and scores generate a qualitative Risk Tolerance level. In July and August, the Plan Development Teams (PDTs) for herring, scallop, groundfish and small-mesh multispecies will conduct scoring for each stock to update catch specifications. A public-facing, online tool is expected to launch in Fall 2026, which will visualize levels of risk tolerance for each FMP. Risk Policy communication support from the CESC would be most useful this winter, as the policy is applied to Acceptable Biological Catch Control Rule development in the groundfish FMP.

Holistic Strategic Plan Update (IRA Initiative 5)

The Council reviewed a draft Implementation Charter to support the Council's Holistic Strategic Plan. The Executive Committee will meet with Council staff over the summer to advance the Strategic Plan, and approval of the plan is scheduled for the September Council meeting. No specific CESC input is requested at this time.

Ecosystem Component Species (IRA Initiative 3.3)

This project aims to establish management strategies for ecosystem components in the New England region, specifically by developing a screening process that considers the eligibility of managed and/or unmanaged species and stocks for designation as ecosystem components. The screening process addresses 12 factors as questions evaluating the need for conservation and management, as described in the Magnuson-Stevens Act and in National Standard 1 Guidelines, based on existing and emerging climate,

ecosystem, fisheries, and socioeconomic information. The June Council discussion focused on the elements of the screening process, using yellowtail flounder and sand lance as examples.

To date, the contractor (Maris Collaborative) has worked with the project oversight team and collaborators to analyze the 12 factors, identify information sources, and develop a draft screening process and accompanying guidance document. Notably, there has been much interest and engagement from external stakeholders, which have led to productive discussions about recent data and management challenges and how they intersect with ecosystem components consideration. Based on feedback received so far, the contractor will be exploring additional information sources and carrying out the pilot screening during summer 2026, with a report expected for consideration by the CESC and Council this fall to support priorities discussions for 2027.

Portfolio Analysis (IRA Initiative 4.4)

The project team at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth is continuing to develop the portfolio model including a dynamic factor analysis (see March meeting memo for more information about DFA). The contractor is also working to integrate ecological dynamics into the model, using species distribution model outputs to understand relationships between harvested species. The team is currently planning for an SSC sub-panel review in mid fall, and outreach to the fishing industry during the winter.

Process Mapping / Unified Technical Report Preparation

The March meeting memo describes planned work to streamline and unify technical information to support decision making. Limited additional development occurred this spring as staff and contractors focused on other priorities, but this work will continue in the coming months as time permits.

State of the Ecosystem Report

Following our March meeting, Dr. Caracappa presented the 2026 State of the Ecosystem Report (SOE) to the SSC and Council. Following the April Council meeting, staff compiled Council feedback on the 2026 report for Dr. Caracappa (Document 8). The annual SOE research prioritization meeting with representatives from the New England and Mid-Atlantic SSCs and Council staff is planned for late July, and the 2027 SOE kickoff meeting will occur in August.

Quarterly CEFI Forecast

The July 2026 CEFI forecast products are available here: [Experimental Regional Ocean Forecasts – Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory](#). The forecast summary is that “the experimental seasonal outlook for the Northwest Atlantic Ocean continues to predict widespread warm surface conditions this summer and fall, with even stronger warming in winter and spring in the tropical North Atlantic and Gulf of St. Lawrence driven by the Pacific El Niño. Along the Northeast U.S. continental shelf, cooler than normal bottom temperatures will continue to persist in the deep Western Gulf of Maine.” Dr. Andrew Ross and Dr. Vince Saba will be available during the meeting to answer any questions about this product.

Meeting Documents

Meeting Notice

Meeting Agenda

1. Memo from CESC Chair, July 20, 2026 (this document)

2. Council staff presentation
3. CESC Meeting Summary, March 27, 2026 ([link](#))
4. Dynamic Reference Points Workshop Summary presentation, Dr. Willy Goldsmith, Pelagic Strategies
5. Northeast Fish and Shellfish Climate Vulnerability Assessment 2.0 presentation, Dr. Katherine Gallagher, Northeast Fisheries Science Center
6. Climate and Ecosystem On-Ramps presentation, Matt Seeley, Environmental Defense Fund
7. Inflation Reduction Act briefs, updated July 2026
8. Memo from NEFMC staff to NEFSC staff re SOE, June 2026
9. Correspondence (if any)