



Vessel Baseline Restrictions Evaluation

September 2026 NEFMC meeting
October 2026 MAFMC meeting

<https://www.nefmc.org/library/vessel-baselines-restrictions-evaluation>
<https://www.mafmc.org/actions/vessel-baseline-restrictions>

Objective

- Review white paper
- Discuss next steps

Vessel baseline restrictions

- Restrict increases in vessel length & engine horsepower
- Apply to many NEFMC/MAFMC limited access fisheries
- Originally implemented when effort controls were primary tools to limit catch (prior to ACLs)
- Initial intent:
 - Limit potential increases in catch
 - Maintain vessel size diversity of fleets



Why are baseline restrictions being evaluated?

- NEFMC and MAFMC priority for 2026
- Response to EO 14276: Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness
- Consider:
 - Challenges in replacing vessels/engines under current restrictions
 - Providing flexibility to upgrade/replace vessels/engines (e.g., for efficiency, safety) without compromising the ability to manage overall fleet capacity
- **Inform whether to prioritize a joint management action to consider revisions**

Timeline

2026

- Jan - May: Workgroup formed, began analysis
- May 21-29: AP meetings, comment period
- June: Updates at Council meetings
- June - August: Workgroup finalizes evaluation
- Sept and Oct: NEFMC (Sept 15-17) and MAFMC (Oct 6-8) receive final report, consider next steps
- Dec: NEFMC (Dec 8-10) and MAFMC (Dec 14-17) finalize 2027 priorities

2027 (and beyond)

- Develop management action, if prioritized by Councils



Current regulations

- **Vessel/engines cannot exceed the permit's baseline by more than 10% in length, 20% in horsepower.**
- Year defining the baseline varies by permit type.
- Current regulations in place since 2015.

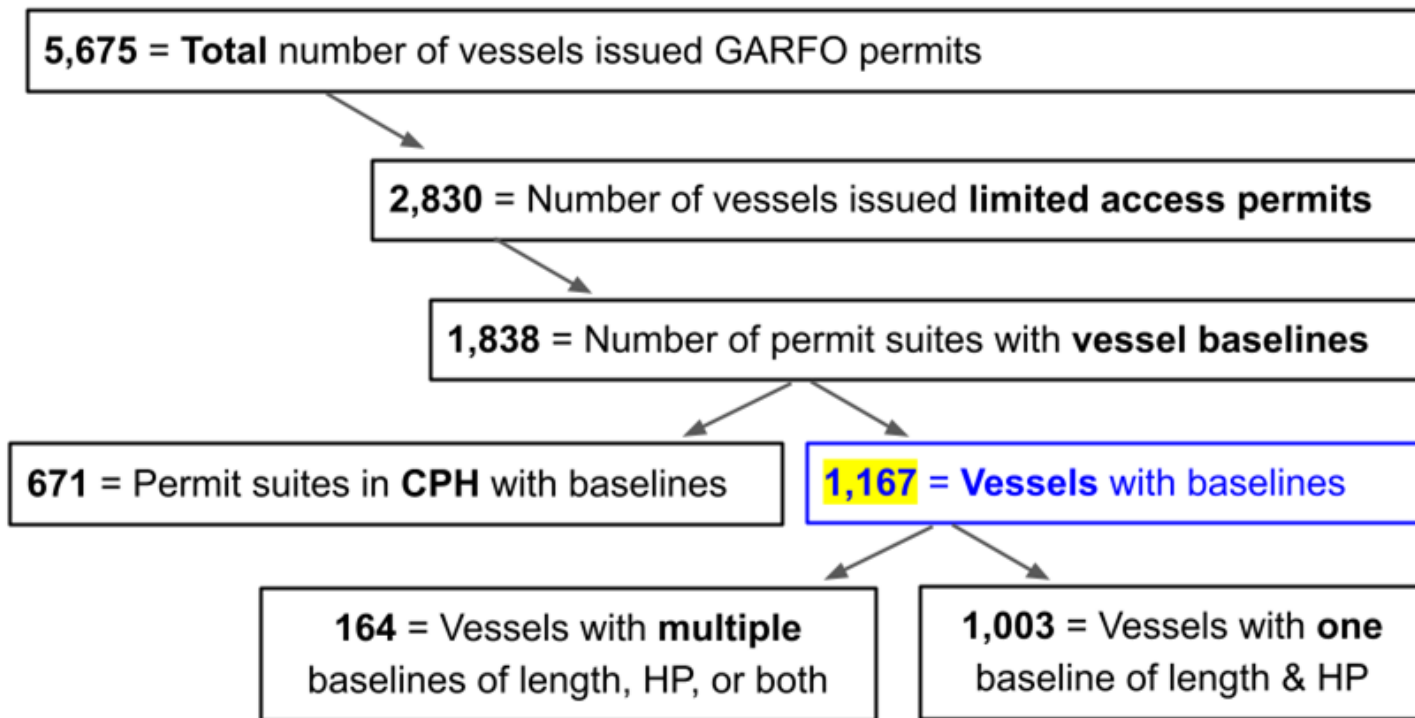
Baseline Year	
Northeast multispecies (except Handgear A permit)	1994
Atlantic sea scallop	
Red crab	1999
Summer flounder	
Scup	
Black sea bass	
Longfin squid (except Tier 3)	
Illex squid	
Butterfish	2000
Maine mahogany quahogs	
Monkfish	
Atlantic herring	
Atlantic mackerel	2011

Permits grouped in suites

- When vessels have more than one limited access/moratorium permit, those permits are bundled together as a "permit suite."
- If permits in a suite have different baselines (previously associated with different vessels), the **most restrictive baseline applies to the entire permit suite.**
- Only way to eliminate a more restrictive baseline is to permanently relinquish the relevant permit(s); permit suites cannot be split.



Subset of permits subject to baselines (2025)



Administration of vessel baselines

- GARFO Permits Office.
- Required documentation:
 - Length
 - USCG Certificate of Documentation - required for all vessels ≥ 5 net tons.
 - If not USCG documented, then state registration, third-party marine survey, or mechanic certification needed.
 - Horsepower
 - Not included in USCG Certificate of Documentation.
 - Documented through marine survey, mechanic certification, or engine manufacturer specs with proof engine installed on vessel.

Vessel/engine replacement process

- Vessel Replacement Application required for replacing a vessel/engine or modifying length/horsepower.
- Pre-screening to help ensure compliance with baselines.
 - Complicated if multiple baselines in permit suite or with permit transfers.
- Permit Office fields ~175 requests/yr for baseline specifications.
- Application denials are rare (12 in 10 years) due to pre-screening process.



Other administrative notes

- 3-8% of permits/fishery exceed baseline maximums:
 - Tracking baselines of all permits in suite has had some processing errors.
 - Subsequent information demonstrates max was exceeded.
- GARFO accepts requests for correcting potential errors; can take extended staff time.
- Since 2021, 84 permits from 26 suites have been relinquished during a vessel replacement because new vessel exceeded maximum allowed.
- Example simplification: GARFO no longer documents length and horsepower for vessels under 17 feet, e.g., if permits transfer to a skiff to sell a vessel.

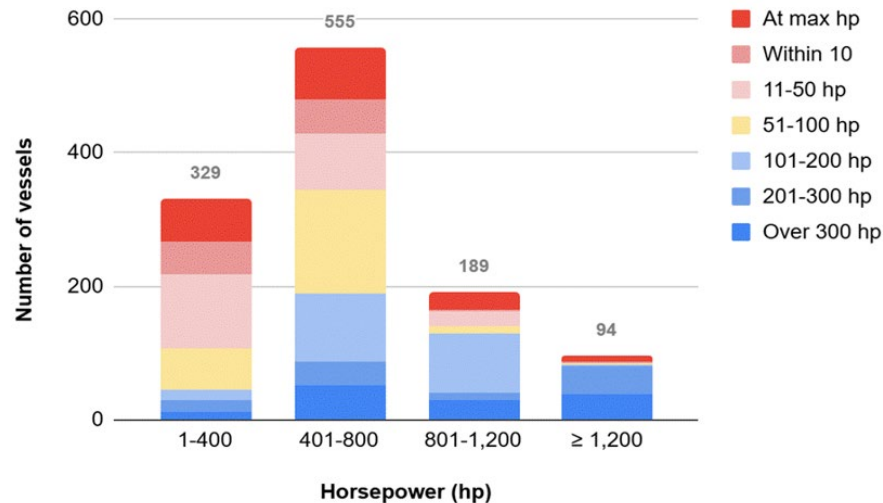
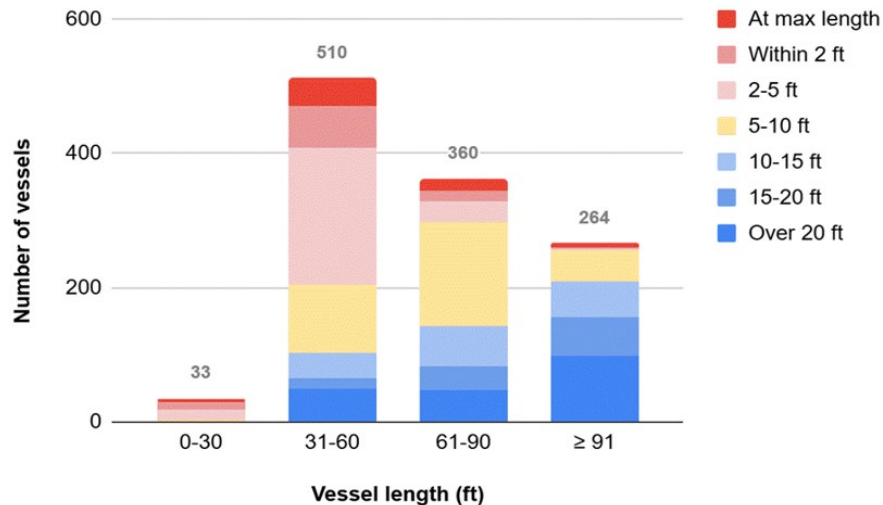
Increases possible, more so for length than horsepower

Permit Type	# of vessels	% of vessels under baseline	% of vessels at baseline	% of vessels above baseline	% of vessels at maximum	% of vessels above maximum
Vessel Length - 2025 data						
Red Crab	5	20%	60%	20%	0%	0%
Maine Mahogany Quahog	13	31%	31%	38%	0%	0%
<i>Illex</i> Squid	67	69%	7%	19%	2%	3%
Atlantic Herring	74	51%	24%	18%	4%	3%
Atlantic Mackerel	114	39%	42%	13%	6%	0%
Butterfish	270	65%	16%	16%	2%	1%
Longfin Squid	270	65%	16%	16%	2%	1%
Sea Scallop	345	70%	10%	18%	1%	1%
Monkfish	486	67%	14%	16%	2%	1%
Scup	525	58%	19%	17%	4%	2%
Black Sea Bass	581	56%	22%	17%	3%	2%
NE Multispecies	627	56%	22%	18%	3%	1%
Summer Flounder	655	66%	15%	16%	2%	1%

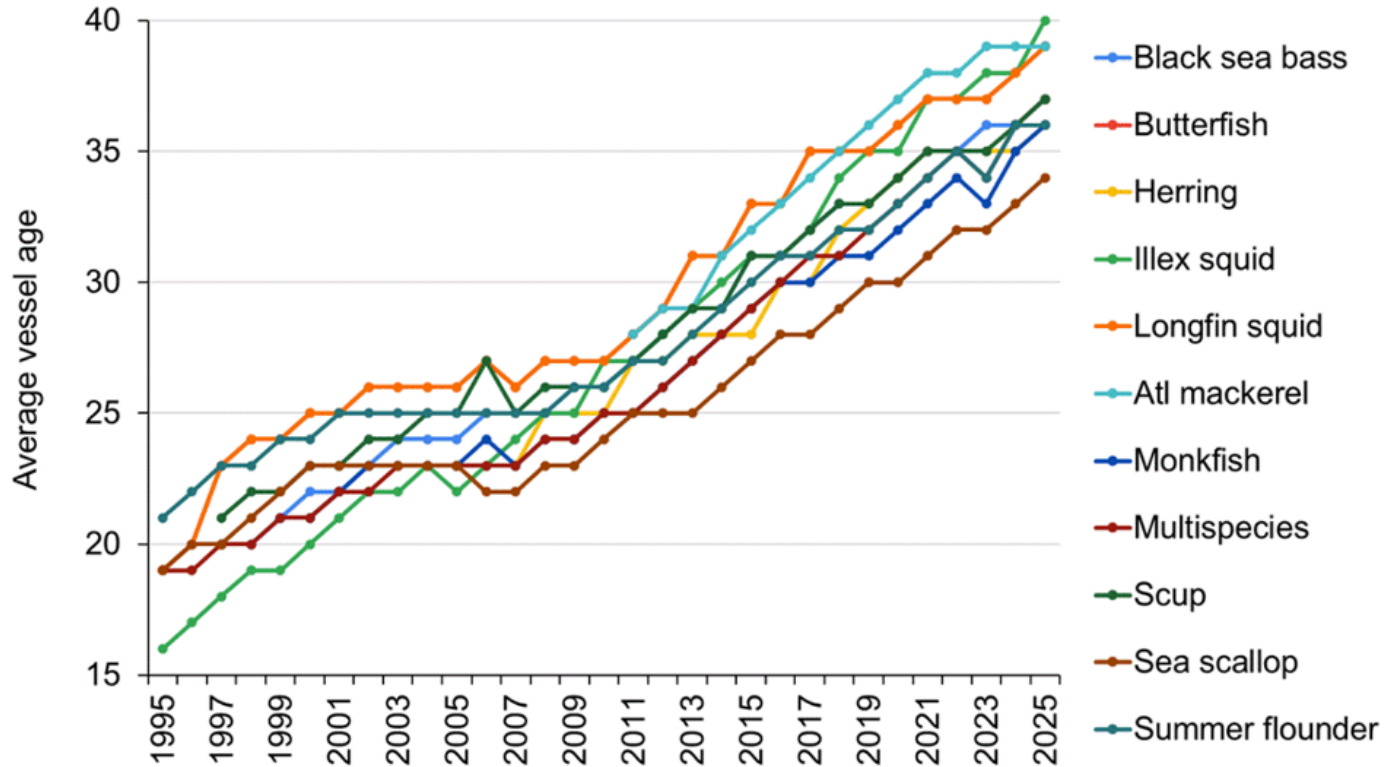
Increases possible, more so for length than horsepower

Permit Type	# of vessels	% of vessels under baseline	% of vessels at baseline	% of vessels above baseline	% of vessels at maximum	% of vessels above maximum
Vessel Horsepower - 2025 data						
Red Crab	5	20%	60%	20%	0%	0%
Maine Mahogany Quahog	13	46%	15%	31%	0%	8%
<i>Illex</i> Squid	67	33%	36%	22%	6%	3%
Atlantic Herring	74	34%	38%	20%	4%	4%
Atlantic Mackerel	114	26%	50%	16%	4%	4%
Butterfish	270	29%	30%	30%	7%	4%
Longfin Squid	270	28%	30%	31%	7%	4%
Sea Scallop	345	21%	30%	34%	11%	4%
Monkfish	486	30%	31%	27%	7%	5%
Scup	525	30%	28%	30%	7%	5%
Black Sea Bass	581	30%	28%	30%	6%	6%
NE Multispecies	627	33%	29%	26%	6%	6%
Summer Flounder	655	27%	29%	31%	8%	5%

Shorter, lower HP vessels tend to be closer to their max



An aging fleet



2015-2025 changes in active vessels with baselines

Fishery	Average length	Average horsepower	Average age	# of active permits
Black Sea Bass	55 → 53 (-4%)	430 → 427 (-1%)	30 → 38 (+27%)	342 → 273 (-20%)
Scup	57 → 59 (+4%)	449 → 459 (+2%)	32 → 40 (+25%)	285 → 226 (-21%)
Summer Flounder	58 → 59 (+2%)	433 → 437 (+1%)	33 → 41 (+24%)	340 → 242 (-29%)
<i>Illex</i> Squid	114 → 102 (-11%)	1,443 → 1,286 (-11%)	27 → 36 (+33%)	15 → 34 (+127%)
Atlantic Herring	91 → 68 (-25%)	1,125 → 672 (-40%)	25 → 41 (+64%)	38 → 20 (-47%)
Butterfish	63 → 62 (-2%)	524 → 487 (-7%)	33 → 42 (+27%)	150 → 129 (-14%)
Monkfish	57 → 63 (+11%)	481 → 526 (+9%)	28 → 38 (+36%)	428 → 240 (-44%)
Northeast Multispecies	66 → 69 (+5%)	569 → 573 (+1%)	30 → 40 (+33%)	296 → 172 (-42%)
Red Crab	88 → 90 (+2%)	553 → 567 (+3%)	33 → 44 (+33%)	3 → 3 (0%)
Longfin Squid	63 → 64 (+2%)	531 → 538 (+1%)	33 → 41 (+24%)	181 → 150 (-17%)
Sea Scallop	78 → 79 (+1%)	742 → 754 (+2%)	27 → 34 (+26%)	331 → 330 (-0.3%)
Atlantic Mackerel	81 → 61 (-25%)	846 → 513 (-39%)	30 → 37 (+23%)	72 → 55 (-24%)



In 2025, 20% of baseline permits still on qualifying vessel

Fishery	Permits on the qualifying vessel	Permits on a replacement vessel	Permits in CPH	Total
Red Crab	20%	80%	0%	5
Mahogany Quahog	12%	46%	42%	26
<i>Illex</i> Squid	33%	55%	12%	76
Atlantic Herring	34%	42%	24%	97
Atlantic Mackerel	53%	25%	22%	146
Butterfish	22%	51%	27%	371
Longfin Squid	22%	51%	27%	371
Sea Scallop	26%	74%	1%	347
Monkfish	20%	47%	33%	724
Scup	19%	51%	30%	745
Black Sea Bass	22%	54%	24%	767
NE Multispecies	17%	38%	45%	1,149
Summer Flounder	21%	52%	27%	900
Total	20%	48%	29%	5,724



May 2026 AP/public comments, key points

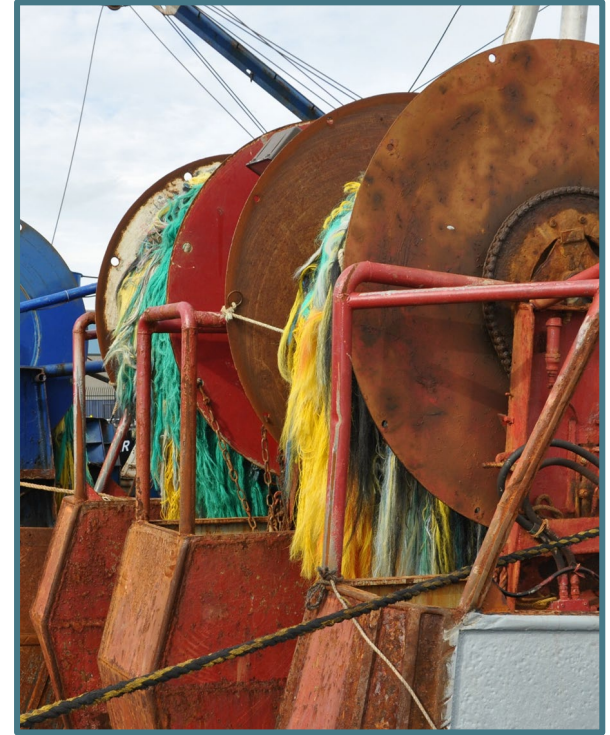
- **Considerations vary** greatly by fishery, vessel size, and gear type
 - No one size fits all solution
 - Safety at sea especially of concern for smaller vessels, lower HP engines
- Can be **challenging and costly** to modify/replace vessels and engines
 - Limited suitable replacements
 - Relinquishing permits is sometimes necessary
 - Logistics of getting proper documentation
- Baselines impact the **value of permits**
- Baseline restrictions continue to play a role in **conservation and prevention of overcapitalization** in some fisheries



Considerations for changing restrictions

One of many tools

- Are the original goals still relevant? If so, are other tools in place sufficient to achieve them?
 - Catch now constrained by ACLs and AMs
 - Other measures maintain vessel size and HP diversity (e.g., possession limits, spatial/seasonal mgmt, gear restrictions, allocations)



Considerations for changing restrictions

- **Should not increase administrative complications**
 - Past actions to harmonize regs have reduced administrative burden.
 - Consider intent of EO 14276 (reducing burden, increasing flexibility).
- **Omnibus approach needed**
 - In 2025, 66% of vessels with baselines had permits for fisheries managed by both Councils.
 - Complex topic - may warrant a joint FMP omnibus amendment, depending on alternatives considered.



Photo credit: Sonny Gwin



Recommendation and next steps

- Staff recommendation: **prioritize a joint management action to consider potential revisions to vessel baseline restrictions.**
 - Administrative and logistical challenges vary across fisheries.
 - Suggestions for modifications can be more fully considered through the deliberative, public process of a Council mgmt action.
 - Consider a variety of alternatives, including no change.
 - Additional evaluation and analysis of impacts.
 - Additional expertise brought in through an FMAT (e.g., social science/economics, Coast Guard).

Questions/Discussion



Photo credit: Bonnie Brady

Backup Slides

GARFO permits not subject to baselines

All open access permits

- Recreational permits (for hire, private)
- Commercial IFQ/ITQ fisheries
 - Surfclams, ocean quahogs, golden tilefish
- Other commercial open access permits
 - MAMFC: bluefish, blueline tilefish, spiny dogfish, and incidental permits for golden tilefish, Atlantic mackerel, longfin squid, *Illex* squid, and butterfish
 - NEFMC: skate, herring category D

Some limited access permits

- Limited Access General Category scallop
- Northeast multispecies handgear A
- Longfin squid tier 3
- Lobster

Regulations - Origins

- 1977 - vessel length restricted in surfclam/ocean quahog fishery (later rescinded under ITQs).
- 1994 - first baselines for groundfish and scallop fisheries with creation of limited access programs.
- Other fisheries followed, but restrictions varied by fishery.
- Original goals:
 - One of many effort controls to limit catch, prior to annual catch limits.
 - Control potential increases in fishing capacity.

Help preserve the size diversity of the fleets.

Regulations - Simplification

Omnibus Amendments in 1999 and 2015

- Standardized vessel baselines restrictions across all limited access fisheries managed by the two Councils.
- New limited access access programs subject to same baselines to achieve consistency across FMPs.
- Eliminated tonnage restriction, removed limits on the number of upgrades allowed per vessel.
- Other simplifications to documentation and administration.

Vessels relative to maximum horsepower

Number of permit suites (not in CPH) with baselines relative to their maximum potential HORSEPOWER

Horsepower	1-400	401-800	801-1,200	1,200-greater	Total	Percent
At max HP	60	74	21	5	160	14%
within 10	49	50	2	1	102	9%
11-50	111	84	23	1	219	19%
51-100	62	155	12	2	231	20%
101-200	15	103	89	3	210	18%
201-300	18	34	10	41	103	9%
over 300	14	55	32	41	142	12%
Totals	329	555	189	94	1,167	100%



Vessels relative to maximum length

Number of permit suites (not in CPH) with baselines relative to their maximum potential LENGTH

Length (ft)	0-30 ft	31-60 ft	61-90 ft	91-greater	Total	Percent
At max length	0	38	13	2	53	5%
within 2'	13	61	16	2	92	8%
2-5'	14	204	30	3	251	22%
5-10'	2	103	155	45	305	26%
10-15	2	36	61	54	153	13%
15-20	2	15	35	58	110	9%
over 20	0	53	50	100	203	17%
Totals	33	510	360	264	1,167	100%



Additional data on vessel characteristics in 2025

Permit Type	Average length		Average horsepower		Average age		# of permits	
	All	Active	All	Active	All	Active	All	Active
All vessels with baselines								
Black Sea Bass	55	53	475	427	37	38	606	273
Scup	57	59	480	459	37	40	552	226
Summer Flounder	65	59	571	437	36	41	681	242
<i>Illex</i> squid	84	102	867	1286	40	36	67	34
Atlantic Herring	77	68	836	672	36	41	77	20
Butterfish	68	62	589	487	39	42	280	129
Monkfish	63	63	599	526	36	38	503	240
NE Multispecies	49	69	411	573	37	40	663	172
Red Crab	88	90	632	567	46	44	5	3
Longfin Squid	68	64	589	538	39	41	280	150
Sea Scallop	80	79	765	754	34	34	347	330
Atlantic Mackerel	75	61	733	513	39	37	121	55



Additional data on vessel characteristics in 2025

Permit Type	Average length		Average horsepower		Average age		# of permits	
	All	Active	All	Active	All	Active	All	Active
Subset of vessels with more than one permit with baselines								
Black Sea Bass	57	54	490	428	37	38	545	243
Scup	57	59	478	460	37	40	548	225
Summer Flounder	65	59	576	438	36	41	664	239
<i>Illex</i> squid	84	102	867	1,286	40	36	67	34
Atlantic Herring	78	68	851	680	36	41	73	18
Butterfish	68	62	589	487	39	42	280	129
Monkfish	64	63	606	527	36	38	485	233
NE Multispecies	53	71	445	601	37	40	495	146
Red Crab	87	87	525	525	42	42	1	1
Longfin Squid	68	64	589	538	39	41	280	150
Sea Scallop	80	80	773	765	34	35	324	310
Atlantic Mackerel	75	61	733	513	39	37	121	55



2015-2025 changes in all vessels with baselines

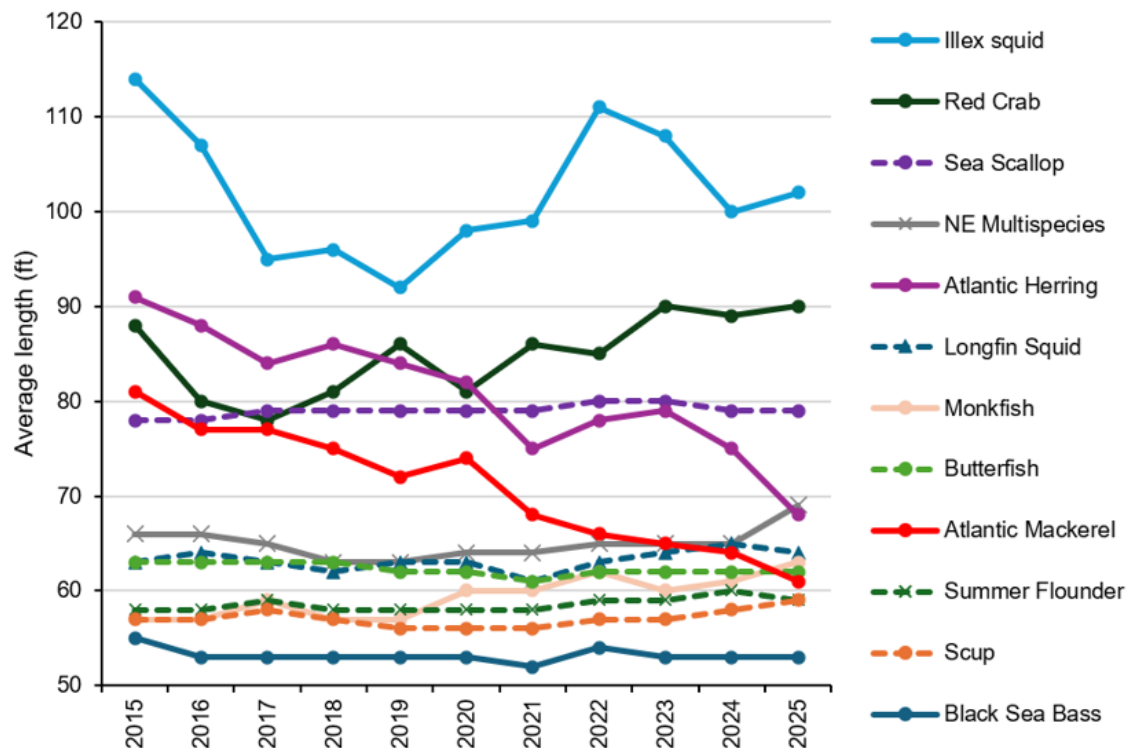
Fishery	Average length	Average horsepower	Average age	# of active permits
Black Sea Bass	53 → 55 (+4%)	451 → 475 (+5%)	31 → 37 (+19%)	693 → 606 (-13%)
Scup	54 → 57 (+6%)	449 → 480 (+7%)	31 → 37 (+19%)	646 → 552 (-15%)
Summer Flounder	62 → 65 (+5%)	534 → 571 (+7%)	30 → 36 (+20%)	779 → 681 (-13%)
Illlex Squid	82 → 84 (+2%)	823 → 867 (+5%)	31 → 40 (+29%)	67 → 67 (0%)
Atlantic Herring	79 → 77 (-3%)	876 → 836 (-5%)	28 → 36 (+29%)	88 → 77 (-13%)
Butterfish	67 → 68 (+2%)	559 → 589 (+5%)	33 → 39 (+18%)	296 → 280 (-5%)
Monkfish	60 → 63 (+5%)	544 → 599 (+10%)	29 → 36 (+24%)	593 → 503 (-15%)
Northeast Multispecies	45 → 49 (+9%)	372 → 411 (+11%)	29 → 37 (+28%)	876 → 663 (-24%)
Red Crab	72 → 88 (+22%)	506 → 632 (+25%)	36 → 46 (+28%)	5 → 5 (0%)
Longfin Squid	67 → 68 (+2%)	559 → 589 (+5%)	33 → 39 (+18%)	296 → 280 (-5%)
Sea Scallop	79 → 80 (+1%)	753 → 765 (+2%)	27 → 34 (+26%)	337 → 347 (+3%)
Atlantic Mackerel	75 → 75 (0%)	749 → 733 (-2%)	32 → 39 (+22%)	142 → 121 (-15%)



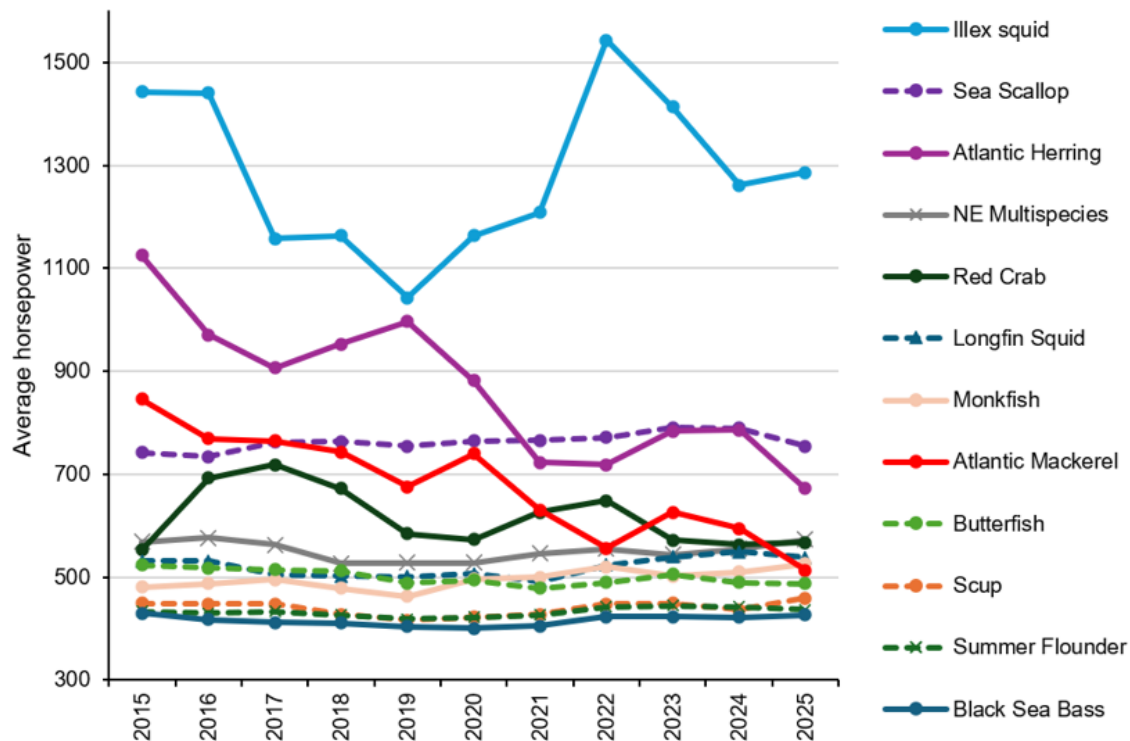
2015-2025 changes in active vessels with more than one permit with baselines

Fishery	Average length	Average horsepower	Average age	# of active permits
Black Sea Bass	57 → 54 (-5%)	440 → 428 (-3%)	31 → 38 (+23%)	308 → 243 (-21%)
Scup	57 → 59 (+4%)	451 → 460 (+2%)	32 → 40 (+25%)	283 → 225 (-21%)
Summer Flounder	58 → 59 (+2%)	435 → 438 (+1%)	33 → 41 (+24%)	331 → 239 (-28%)
<i>Illex</i> Squid	114 → 102 (-11%)	1443 → 1286 (-11%)	27 → 36 (+33%)	15 → 34 (+127%)
Atlantic Herring	97 → 68 (-30%)	1274 → 680 (-47%)	25 → 41 (+64%)	35 → 18 (-49%)
Butterfish	63 → 62 (-2%)	524 → 487 (-7%)	33 → 42 (+27%)	150 → 129 (-14%)
Monkfish	58 → 63 (+9%)	485 → 527 (+9%)	28 → 38 (+36%)	409 → 233 (-43%)
NE Multispecies	68 → 71 (+4%)	593 → 601 (+1%)	31 → 40 (+29%)	264 → 146 (-45%)
Red Crab	93 → 87 (-7%)	610 → 525 (-14%)	36 → 42 (+17%)	1 → 1 (0%)
Longfin Squid	63 → 64 (+2%)	531 → 538 (+1%)	33 → 41 (+24%)	181 → 150 (-17%)
Sea Scallop	79 → 80 (+1%)	747 → 765 (+2%)	27 → 35 (+30%)	310 → 310 (0%)
Atlantic Mackerel	81 → 61 (-25%)	846 → 513 (-39%)	30 → 37 (+23%)	72 → 55 (-24%)

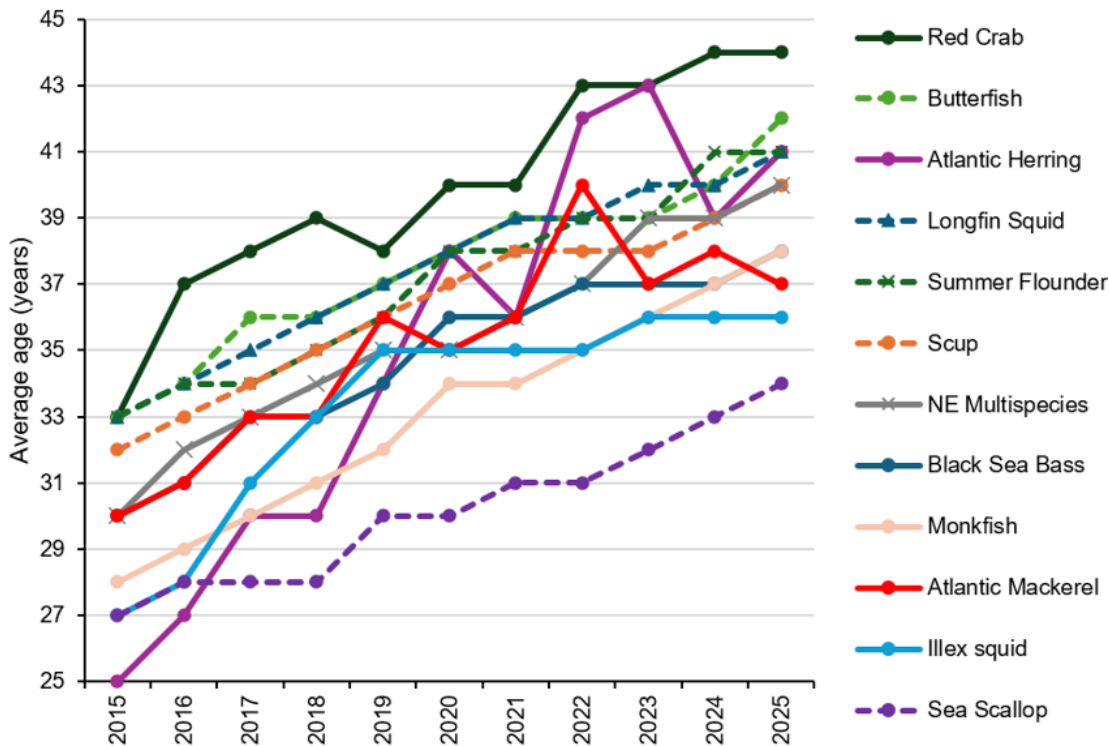
Avg. length of active vessels with baselines



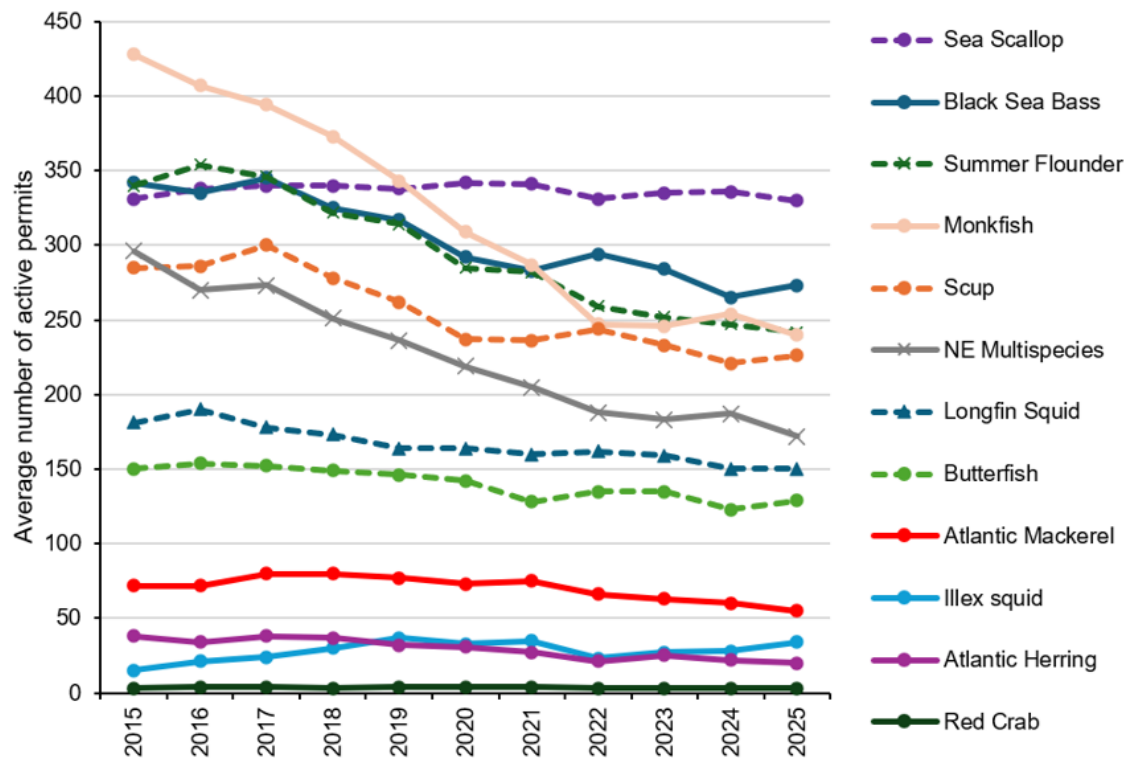
Avg. HP of active vessels with baselines



Avg. age of active vessels with baselines



Number of active permits



Illex Squid and Atlantic Mackerel

- **Additional volumetric fish hold baselines**
 - Volumetric hold cannot exceed 10% of the baseline.
 - Established through Amendment 11 (2011) for mackerel and Framework 16 (2024) for *Illex*.
 - In both cases, requested by fishing industry due to concerns that the length/HP restrictions would not sufficiently constrain capacity.
 - Concerns about both active and latent effort.