



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

July 2, 2026

Cate O'Keefe, Ph.D.
Executive Director
New England Fishery Management Council
cokeefe@nefmc.org

Dear Dr. O'Keefe:

Thank you for the New England Fishery Management Council's (NEFMC) work regarding Executive Order 14276, Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness, including your detailed action plan outlining priorities, and your extensive stakeholder engagement. I deeply appreciate the Council's partnership and the thorough analysis provided by the Council members, your expert staff and industry advisors. The volume of input from fishery participants and coastal communities received in public comments highlights the urgency of our shared mission. In particular, I want to acknowledge and commend the Council for already integrating several of these priority actions directly into your current action plans. To fulfill the EO's mandate to reduce burdens on domestic fishing, increase production, stabilize markets, improve access, and enhance economic profitability, I request the Council maintain momentum on these key issues and focus on the following priorities during upcoming prioritization and action planning processes:

- **Implement Rotational Access for the Northern Edge Scallop Fishery:** High-yield scallop beds remain closed, limiting domestic production. Please advance a Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Amendment to consider establishing a controlled, rotational limited-access scallop fishery within the Northern Edge Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC). This will drastically improve access to traditional fishing grounds, increase domestic production, and stabilize seafood markets while maintaining protective measures for vital nursery habitats. I also support your efforts to develop a strategic plan for the scallop fishery.
- **Implement Scallop Permit Stacking:** The Council has not expressed interest in taking any immediate action on scallop permit stacking, this has the potential for important benefits to the industry. However, I note there are risks also associated – foreign ownership, job reductions, and erosion of our critical working waterfronts – if the action is not carefully developed. Therefore, I ask the Council to reconsider taking on this action and working with stakeholders to ensure proper guardrails. If the Council is unable to take this up, I will consider developing a Secretarial amendment.
- **Rescind Industry Funded Monitoring (IFM) Requirements:** The current at-sea monitoring costs are actively eroding fleet profitability. As I recently requested in a letter dated May 1, 2026, pertaining to the Herring IFM, I request that the Council initiate an action to consider rescinding IFM requirements from the Herring FMP. In addition to herring, we want to work with you to minimize costs and look at alternatives that may relieve the industry of the burden of monitoring in the groundfish fishery. Relieving this financial burden is paramount to preserving the economic viability of the New England fleet.
- **Deprioritize Advancing Requirements for Ropeless Gear:** I request the Council consider deprioritizing the advancement of complex gear marking for ropeless gear. NMFS will continue to promote the innovation and adoption of gear technologies and will ensure to coordinate with the Council when ready for management consideration. Trap fishers face high operational costs from these technologies, and halting or making their implementation optional will remove requirements to mitigate potential adverse operational costs.



- **Evaluate Vessel Baseline Restrictions:** Existing horsepower and length restrictions inhibit fishermen from upgrading to safer, more efficient, and modern vessels. I understand both the NEFMC and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) have already initiated evaluations of these vessel baseline restrictions. I recommend a joint framework action with the MAFMC to consider permanently removing or adjusting the 10 percent length and 20 percent horsepower baseline upgrade restrictions currently tied to limited access permits as I believe modernizing fleet capacity could help improve global competitiveness.
- **Consider Reopening the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area (HMA) to Surfclams:** Blanket closures based on cod spawning data have displaced the clam dredge fleet, causing economic losses and potential localized depletion in surrounding state waters. I request that the Council consider drafting a framework amendment creating adaptive, data-driven exemptions allowing surfclam dredging in the Great South Channel HMA based on updated cod spawning data. This action could restore access to highly productive, sustainable clam harvest areas.

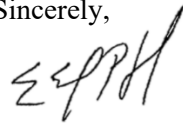
Strategic EO 14276 Mandates for Council Consideration:

To further optimize regional management, I urge the Council to systematically assess current FMPs and consider removing species that no longer require conservation and management. Where species are not in need of conservation and management, but including them in the FMP would help achieve ecosystem management objectives, I encourage the Council to consider redesignating them as Ecosystem Component (EC) species. Finally, as stated in the Seafood EO, I strongly encourage the Council to collaborate with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on the expanded and continued use of Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs) as agile management tools to test gear innovations, enhance value-added quality, and safely increase domestic production.

In some instances, the priorities identified above may implicate other statutory requirements. Where that applies, NMFS will work with the Council to determine how best to advance an action. Complementing your efforts, NMFS is concurrently evaluating internal actions to support these initiatives and your priorities. These include preparing Secretarial action regarding herring IFM relief should Council processes face administrative delays, prioritizing data modernization, and aligning our agency resources with the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to better support domestic seafood promotion.

Thank you for your ongoing dedication to New England's fishing communities. I look forward to advancing these vital reforms together.

Sincerely,



Eugenio Piñeiro Soler
Assistant Administrator
for Fisheries