



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 21, 2025
TO: Council
FROM: Executive Committee
SUBJECT: 2026 Council Priorities – Executive Committee Recommendations

The Executive Committee met on November 13, 2025, to develop its recommendations for 2026 Council Priorities. The Committee reviewed information and recommendations provided by the Executive Director, including brief comments about required tasks, staff resources, and rationale for each recommended 2026 task as detailed in the [November 7, 2025, Memorandum](#) “2026 Council Priorities – Executive Director Recommendations.”

Executive Committee Recommendations

The Executive Committee recommendations are based on a range of criteria including staff resources, regulatory requirements, ongoing IRA-funded initiatives, Executive Order 14276 (EO 14276) responses, Executive Director input, and available information to support development of management actions. Results are listed in Attachment 1 “2026 New England Council Priorities – Executive Committee Recommendations.”

The Committee recognized that the Council would face challenges matching work priorities to the available staff time in 2026 but did not come to full agreement on how to reduce the number of proposed work items. For some tasks, it may be possible to augment available resources with contract assistance; this will reduce, but not eliminate, the staff capacity shortfall.

General Comments

The Committee noted overarching sources of uncertainty to accomplish 2026 work items, including the recent government shutdown and potential for future shutdowns, lack of guidance about completion of Executive Order 14276 tasks, and reduced capacity from NOAA partners. The Executive Committee reached consensus on most recommendations for 2026 priorities in agreement with the Executive Director’s recommendations. Items that did not have a consensus recommendation are detailed below. The list below details the Executive Committee’s recommendations for each proposed priority; red text indicates consensus items for 2026 work priorities.

Groundfish

The Committee recommended 2026 priorities to include G1 – G7, while pausing G8 (Atlantic cod transition plan) due to uncertainty surrounding Amendment 25 and Framework 69. They also emphasized the need to clearly define the scope of the reviews of the Redfish Sector Exemption Program (G5) and Amendment 23 Monitoring Program (G6).

- **G1 – G4: Required tasks** with additional details for specific items:
 - G2: Specifications
 - May be developed as a FW with additional measures
 - G4: US/CA transboundary management for FY2027
 - US assessment for GB cod will not be updated in 2026
- **G5: Review of redfish sector exemption program**
 - Paused in 2025 to address resubmission of A25
 - Required completion per FMP
 - Results may lead to changes to be included in 2026 or 2027
- **G6: A23 monitoring system review**
 - Paused in 2025 to address resubmission of A25
 - Required completion per FMP
 - Results may lead to changes to be considered in 2027
- **G7: Revise groundfish ABC control rules**
 - Paused in 2025 to address resubmission of A25
 - Coordinated with IRA projects and Risk Policy work items
 - External contract to be completed in spring 2026; revisions of control rules to be included in Groundfish FW development in 2026
- **G8: Cod transition plan**
 - Paused in 2025 to address resubmission of A25
 - A25/FW69 implementation timing is unknown
 - Consider management units, allocations, and measures for spawning protection
 - Cod assessment updates tentatively scheduled for 2027
 - Consideration of expanding beyond cod to more holistic groundfish revisions

Scallops

The Committee recommended 2026 priorities to include SC1 – SC6 and add SC8 – SC9 to SC3. They noted that the specifications action (SC3) could be developed as a FW to include NGOM sub-area management (SC8) and Limited Access DAS regional allocation and carryover provisions (SC9). One member felt that SC8 could be addressed within existing management measures. The Executive Committee emphasized the need to develop projection methods (SC4), which could be supported by a contractor, and maintain Scallop RSA management (SC6). They recommended continuing discussions about the Menu Items in the Scallop Strategic Plan (SC5) to provide guidance on longer-term priorities. Council staff noted that modifying the in-shell possession limits in NGOM (SC7) may be directly addressed by GARFO and the Regional Administrator. The Committee did not recommend SC10 – 11 based on limited Council resources, lack of new information, and potential for Secretarial Action. They recognized the high level of interest from stakeholders to consider consolidation (SC11) and noted that the Council should coordinate discussions on this topic with NOAA Fisheries.

- **SC1 – SC3: Required tasks** with additional details for specific items:
 - SC3: Specifications
 - May be developed as a FW with additional measures
- **SC4: Develop projection methods**
 - Results from the 2025 Research Track Assessment did not fully satisfy TORs for management advice; need to develop projection methods in coordination with NEFSC or contracted work
- **SC5: Scallop Strategic Plan menu items**
 - Continue to consider the menu items to develop a 3–5-year prioritization
- **SC6: RSA Management**
 - 2026 RSA NOFO has not published; Council should continue to collaborate with NOAA to support research set-aside funding
- SC7: Modification to the in-shell possession limits in NGOM
 - Possible regulatory change facilitated by GARFO
- **SC8: Develop sub-management areas in NGOM (lack of consensus)**
 - Combine with SC3 FW action in 2026
- **SC9: Limited Access regional DAS and carryover measures**
 - Combine with SC3 FW action in 2026
- SC10 - 11: Northern Edge and Consolidation
 - SC10: Northern Edge
 - Not anticipating new research products to inform a Council action
 - SC11: Consolidation
 - Engage in discussions with NOAA Fisheries on strategies and timelines

Herring

The Committee recommended 2026 priorities to include HE1, HE2, and HE4 with the possibility of combining HE3, in total or identified components, with HE1. They did not reach consensus about the scope of Amendment 10 (HE3) that should be advanced in 2026 and discussed whether the river herring/shad (RHS) management measures could be addressed in a specifications action developed as a FW (HE1) or if specifications could be addressed within the full scope of A10 (HE3). Discussion focused on resources and timelines with recognition that final action for specifications is needed in September for the January 1st start of the fishing year. Some Committee members noted that the RHS issue dominated scoping feedback, while others noted that the user conflict issue is still relevant. They suggested that components of A10 could be “front loaded” in 2026 to make progress in advance of the management track assessment in June, and that components could be dropped if there is not enough time to meet the September deadline for specifications.

- **HE1: Required task**
 - Specifications for FY2027-2031 including updated reference points
 - Could consider adding specifications to A10 (HE3)
- **HE2: Required tasks**
 - First management track application to update reference points and projections
- **HE3: Amendment 10 (lack of consensus)**
 - Paused in 2025 to address Management Flexibility Omnibus

- Scoping completed: majority of input focused on river herring/shad measures
- Could consider adding RHS measures to 2026 Framework action (HE1)
- Council needs to consider scope of A10 for 2026 priority tasks
- **HE4: Coordination with ASMFC**
 - Ongoing required

Monkfish/Skate (Joint Plan Coordination/Monkfish joint with MAFMC)

The Committee recommended 2026 priorities to include M/SK1, M/SK2, and M/SK4. They expressed support for reviewing the monkfish CPUE RSA project (M/SK1) and noted that this may inform future stock assessments and management approaches. They noted that the Council identified “Monkfish management modifications” in the EO 14276 response (EO3) and suggested review and possible revisions to the skate possession limit (M/SK2) and seasonal management measures (M/SK4) could be coordinated through joint Monkfish/Skate activities in 2026. The Committee noted that development of a new RSA program (M/SK3) should be paused until additional review of the existing Monkfish RSA program is completed. They noted the lack of new information related to latent effort (M/SK5), DAS leasing (M/SK8), and IFQ management approaches (M/SK9) for monkfish and skate and did not recommend these as 2026 priorities. They suggested that creation of skate DAS and revisions to the skate bait exemption area (M/SK6) could be considered in a broader context, including revisions to the spiny dogfish gillnet exemption area (EO6) under future groundfish priorities.

- **M/SK1: Peer review of monkfish CPUE RSA with TORs to evaluate utility**
 - SSC sub-panel review; project is complete and ready for peer review
- **M/SK2, M/SK4: Skate possession limit and seasonal management adjustments**
 - Framework items that could be considered in coordination with EO3
- M/SK3: Skate RSA Program
 - Developing and implementing Research Set-Aside programs is a multiyear endeavor and should be guided by the Council’s RSA Program Review and recent performance of RSA program performance; Skate wing TALs are not constraining, which may lead to negative outcomes for RSA program incentives
- M/SK5, M/SK8, M/SK9: Latent effort, DAS leasing, IFQ management
 - Focused on latent effort, potential overcapacity, and catch share management in the monkfish and skate fisheries; multiyear items that have been partially considered without advancement and limited new information
- M/SK6 – M/SK7: Revise Trawl Exemption Areas and DAS classifications
 - Requires coordination with groundfish FMP, including staff, AP, and Committee; multiyear proposals that may be coordinated with area management strategies and overarching FMP revisions holistically

Whiting

The Committee recommended 2026 priorities to include W1, specifications for FY20267-2031.

- **WH1: Required task for updated specifications**

Habitat

The Committee recommended 2026 priorities to include HA1 – HA6. They recognized that the EFH designation action (HA1) continues efforts to revise EFH for all Council managed species. They supported required and ongoing activities to review habitat impacts of management actions (HA2) and engage with partners on a range of habitat-related issues (HA3 – HA5). They recommended adding a priority for “Evaluation of the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area surfclam exemption areas” (HA6). They noted high stakeholder interest in this topic and referenced completion in March 2026 of multi-year research conducted under an EFP. Council staff have been actively following the research and have identified potential analysis to evaluate the existing management measures. The Committee emphasized that the 2026 priority would focus on an evaluation of existing and emerging information, while maintaining the EFH designation action as a top priority for completion in 2026.

- **HA1 – HA2: Required tasks** with additional details for specific items:
 - HA1: Revised EFH designations
 - Develop EFH designation updates groundfish, small mesh, and scallops
- **HA3 – HA5: Ongoing tasks for habitat management and collaboration**
- **HA6 – Evaluation of the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area surfclam exemption areas**
 - Review existing and emerging information related to the surfclam exemption areas within the broader context of the GSC HMA; Council staff technical report

On-Demand Gear

The Committee recommended 2026 priorities to include OD1, specifically to maintain Council staff involvement with the PDT/FMAT to support development of the Alternative Gear Marking Framework. The timeline for advancement of the FW is unclear due to the recent government shutdown and future plans of the Take Reduction Team; the Committee recommended inclusion of this topic as a placeholder for 2026. The On-Demand Gear Conflict Working Group completed their Terms of Reference and delivered a final report in September 2025; the Committee recommended discontinuation of the ODWG.

- **OD1: Alternative Gear Marking Framework**
 - Postponed in September 2025 with anticipated future action based on information solicited through a NOAA Request for Information

Risk Policy Working Group

The Committee recommended 2026 priorities to include RP1 – RP3.

- **RP1 – RP3: Required tasks** with additional details for specific items:
 - RP1: Communication strategies
 - Coordinated with IRA projects, Climate and Ecosystem Steering Committee communication sub-panel, and ongoing staff activities
 - RP2/RP3: Simulation testing and implementation of Risk Policy and control rules
 - Coordinated with IRA projects and Groundfish work items
 - Contract for simulation testing of risk policy-integrated control rule
 - Consideration of new Risk Policy in all specifications actions in 2026

SSC

The Committee recommended 2026 priorities to include SSC1 – SSC2.

- **SSC1: Required task for OFL/ABC recommendations**
- **SSC2: Social Science Subpanel support**
 - Social Science Sub-Panel of the SSC was created in 2025; anticipated continuing work in 2026

Enforcement

The Committee recommended 2026 priorities to include EN1 – EN2. The Committee made recommendations about reengaging the Enforcement Committee, which will be completed in early 2026 with plans to hold a meeting in spring 2026 to discuss on-demand gear and other issues.

- **EN1: Required task to reengage Committee**
 - Implement Executive Committee recommendations for membership and tasks
- **EN2: Issues related to ropeless/on-demand gear**
 - Coordinate with NOAA Request for Information and continuation of Alternative Gear Marking Framework

NTAP

The Committee recommended 2026 priorities to include NT1.

- **NT1: Continue support of NTAP efforts for RIBTS and trawl efficiency**

Climate and Ecosystem

The Committee recommended 2026 priorities to include CE1.

- **CE1: Committee support**
 - The Climate and Ecosystem Steering Committee was created in 2025 to provide guidance for IRA initiatives, climate-resilient fisheries management, and ecosystem approaches

Inter-Agency

The Committee recommended 2026 priorities to include IA1 – IA7.

- **IA1 – IA7: Required tasks for coordination and collaboration with partners**

IRA

The Committee recommended 2026 priorities to include IRA1 – IRA6. The Committee recognized that the funding deadline is March 31, 2027 and that work will ramp up in 2026. They noted that results from several initiatives will inform future priorities for Council actions.

- **IRA1 – IRA6: Required tasks**
 - Increased workload for 2026 to be completed by funding deadline in March 2027

EO14276

The Committee recommended 2026 priorities to include EO1, EO3, and EO5 as time allows. They noted that there has not been guidance from NOAA Fisheries about the Council's response to EO 14276 that was submitted on September 30, 2025, but they supported initiation of some topics in 2026. The Committee supported initiating discussions with the MAFMC and GARFO about modifications to vessel baseline restrictions (EO1) as a high priority aligned with the objectives of the EO, but they suggested that 2026 might focus on review of existing measures with action delayed until 2027. They referred to potential coordination of EO3 with M/SK2 and M/SK4. The Committee requested additional explanation on the approach to address EO5 to determine if there are adequate resources to accomplish this task in 2026. It may be possible to remove outdated/redundant regulations through actions scheduled for each FMP, or it may be more efficient to remove regulations across FMPs in an overarching action focused on reducing regulatory burden. Depending on the most efficient approach, the Committee recommended some work on this topic in 2026. They did not recommend consideration of herring slippage measures (EO2) or revisions to the dogfish exemption areas (EO6) in 2026 due to the previously identified workload for herring and groundfish. They also did not recommend activity in 2026 to revise Accountability Measures (EO4) due to staff capacity, but they emphasized the importance of this topic for a near-term priority.

- **EO1: Vessel baseline restriction modifications**
 - Coordinated approach with GARFO and MAFMC to review existing vessel baseline restriction regulations
- EO2 Herring slippage measures
 - Evaluation of existing regulations to consider revisions to be implemented through a future FW or Amendment, not a standalone action in 2026
- **EO3: Monkfish management modifications**
 - Review of the monkfish FMP in coordination with the MAFMC and considering provisions in the groundfish, skate, scallop, and dogfish FMPs to reduce regulatory burdens, modernize management measures, and improve management efficiency; coordinate with M/SK2/4 and IRA4
- EO4: Revisions to Accountability Measures
 - Holistic review of FMP AMs to identify areas for consistency, efficiency, and regulatory burdens; revisions could be implemented by FMP in planned future actions or through an omnibus approach
- **EO5: Fishery Management Plan revisions**
 - Several regulations across FMPs have been identified as outdated, duplicative, or no longer applied; Council could consider removing or updating regulations in planned 2026 actions or through an omnibus approach
- EO6: Revisions to the Southern New England Dogfish Gillnet Exemption Area
 - Requires coordination with groundfish FMP, including staff, AP, and Committee; multiyear proposal that may be coordinated with area management strategies and overarching FMP revisions holistically