

On-Demand Fishing Gear Conflict Working Group

New England Fishery Management Council

September 25, 2025

Gloucester, MA and Webinar



New England
Fishery Management Council

ODWG Priorities

2025 Priority	Jan – Mar	Apr – Jun	July – Sept	Oct – Dec
Joint action with MAFMC and GARFO to revise gear marking regulations across FMPs	PDT/FMAT Forms	NEFMC/MAFMC initiate FW (April); PDT/FMAT meets; updates to Councils	PDT/FMAT meets; Public engagement session held; Anticipated final action: September (NEFMC), October (MAFMC)	
WG report on gear conflict solutions for lobster/Jonah crab, gillnet, and other trap/pot fisheries	ODWG develops 2025 work plan	ODWG continues work on TOR 3B report; update presented to Council	ODWG meets; Final TOR 3B report presented to Council	
Continue work addressing TORs and refine TORs as needed	ODWG works to address TORs			

Recent ODWG Meetings

- **July 23 (Webinar)**
 - Updates on joint alternative gear-marking framework, ALWTRT timeline
 - Follow-up topics from April 29 meeting; reviewed outline of TOR 3B report, developed recommendations
- **August 26 (Wakefield, MA and Webinar)**
 - Received presentation, provided feedback on the Joint Alternative Gear-Marking Framework
 - Finalized TOR 3B recommendations to the Council

TOR 3B Report

TOR 3B Report Outline

- Background
 - ODWG composition, terms of reference
 - On-demand fishing gear overview, gear testing programs
- Terms of Reference Progress Updates
- ODWG Recommendations for reducing gear interactions between on-demand gear used in the Northeast lobster/Jonah crab fishery and other types of fishing gear

TOR Progress

Term of Reference	Status
1) Identify the implications of on-demand fishing gear use for Council-managed fisheries.	- Identified potential impacts of on-demand gear use to fixed, mobile, recreational fisheries - Council initiated Alternative Gear-Marking FW in April 2025; ODWG receives updates
2) Engage with fishermen, industry members, members of the public, and other relevant stakeholders to identify potential interactions between on-demand and mobile, fixed, and recreational fishing gear use.	- Identified potential interactions between on-demand gear and other gears/fleets - ODWG discussion/ identifying possible interactions; looked at MITRE report, DST vertical line estimates
3a) Provide advice on reducing gear interactions that may result from risk reduction measures under consideration for gillnets and other trap/pot (OTP) fisheries in the form of a final report by spring 2024.	- Report completed Fall 2024 - Consensus Statement updates: Council tasked Enforcement Committee to provide input to ODWG; Council initiated joint gear marking FW; continuing to work with MAFMC/ASMFC through ODWG and FW
3b) Develop recommendations on reducing gear interactions between on-demand gear used in the Northeast lobster and Jonah crab fisheries and other types of fishing gear (including the fixed gear, mobile gear, and recreational/charter fleets) in the form of a final report by fall 2025.	Completed Fall 2025

TOR Progress

Term of Reference	Status
4) Explore gear impacts/loss issues related to gear interactions.	• Received an update from NEFSC on February 2025 gear conflict in MRA • Continue to discuss at ODWG meetings
5) Coordinate with the Enforcement Committee to identify recommendations to improve the enforceability of on-demand fishing.	• Enforcement Committee met in November 2024 to review ODWG questions/discussion related to gear marking regulations strawman; provided feedback to Council in December 2024, ODWG in January 2025 • Will continue to engage Committee as needed
6) Suggest what modifications would be required to replace a buoy, technologies that would mark where gear is on the bottom, and to enable vessels to visualize that gear.	• ODWG discussed functional equivalence at July/September 2024 meetings • Functional equivalence included in joint alternative gear-marking framework

TOR 3B

“Develop recommendations on reducing gear interactions between on-demand gear used in the Northeast lobster and Jonah crab fisheries and other types of fishing gear (including the fixed gear, mobile gear, and recreational/charter fleets) in the form of a final report by fall 2025.”

- ODWG discussed recommendations at 4/29, 7/23, and 8/26 meetings
- Acknowledged timing challenges
- Discussions on some other potential options/topics; summarized in document for reference
 - Pre-trip notification; gentlemen’s agreements

Consensus Statement 1

“The ODWG recommends that all approved alternative gear visualization systems show alternatively marked gear locations in real time. Likewise, approved gear marking systems should also operate in real time.

The working group recognizes the need for further discussion on these systems before implementation, and recommends soliciting industry input regarding possible specifics of these systems, including the definition of “real time”. The working group also recommends identifying legal questions related to implementing a gear marking and detection system (specific to fishing location data and data sharing).”

Consensus Statement 1: Discussion

- ODWG has discussed various aspects of a gear marking and visualization system at recent meetings; interested in seeking industry input
 - Definition and necessity of “real-time” on-demand fishing gear location data
 - Availability to various user groups
 - Viewing distance
 - Data sharing options
- Data/location sharing & confidentiality → requirements for location sharing?
- Lengthy discussion about “real-time” data – what is considered real-time?

Consensus Statement 2

“The ODWG recommends that vessels operating in areas with alternatively marked gear have the technology to visualize that gear.

The working group recognizes the potential for economic effects to the mobile gear fleets and recommends that an economic evaluation be conducted to better understand the effects. The ODWG recommends discussing potential cost mitigation strategies/benefits of digital marking and visualization. The working group also recommends further discussion regarding the nature of gear conflicts with recreational fisheries, the potential economic effects, and best practices for avoiding such conflicts.”

Consensus Statement 2: Discussion

- Recognizing potential economic impacts to mobile fleet; equity concerns regarding costs/burdens on different fleets
- Fixed gear fishermen would be able to fish in vertical line closure areas with on-demand gear → appropriate to ensure that mobile vessels can detect gear
- Cost-prohibitive gear visualization requirement could create de-facto closure for mobile fleet
- Economic evaluation to understand costs of tech to view real-time on-demand gear locations, costs of potential lost/damaged gear
 - ODWG has discussed satellite connectivity costs/possibility of using cellular data at prior meetings, summarized in report



Questions & Council Discussion

Joint Alternative Gear-Marking Framework: ODWG/ AP/ Public Feedback

ODWG Discussion (8/26)

- General Feedback/Alternative Set 1:
 - Action seems vague, outlined approval process is not public facing
 - Lobster industry feedback → unable to comment because it is unclear how the process would work; concerns that process would be left to RA without defined public process; not enough industry input on specific components
 - Interest in opening up fishing opportunities, but need more clarity on approval process; further develop standards for gear
 - Unsure whether there is an immediate need to implement action since gillnets can access lobster/JC vertical line restricted areas
 - If more work needs to be done → identify key groups, including industry

ODWG Discussion Continued

- Alternative Set 2:
 - Need more information on implications of Alternative Set 2 (Letters of Authorization) on state fisheries
 - Cost of gear motivates effective use
 - Would want to hear from industry on the educational requirement
 - Some training/educational component would be beneficial, could be industry-based

Alternative Gear-Marking Framework Public Engagement Session (8/26)

- Held in Wakefield, MA and via Webinar following the ODWG Meeting
- 6 commenters: lobster industry, NGO, state agency, no affiliation
- Comments in support of Alternative 1B/2B (2):
 - Creates opportunity to access vertical line closure areas; could allow for dynamic management (might reduce need for additional management); offers most benefit for protected resources
 - Supported additional outreach to lobster fishery, noted opportunities to engage
 - Could allow access to other areas such as shipping lanes/ferry routes
 - Alternative 2B: fishermen participating in gear marking research have benefitted from training; manufacturers should be encouraged to provide training

Alternative Gear-Marking Framework Public Engagement Session (8/26)

- Comments in support of delay and/or Alternative 1C (2):
 - Recommendation to delay implementation to allow for more outreach to mobile/ fixed gear fisheries; coordinate with ASMFC/States for outreach
 - Alternative 1C: support providing fishermen with fishing opportunities if it is economically viable but limit to closed areas
 - Encouraged mandatory use of virtual gear marking tech for fixed/mobile gear vessels; NOAA should develop minimum standards for implementation to minimize gear conflicts
 - Supported training for fishermen, may not need to be mandatory
 - Alt. 1C would open areas without encouraging industrialization
- Comments not in support/ no clear position on framework indicated (2):
 - Concerns about inequities due to costs; may not be economically feasible for fishermen
 - Gear conflicts; accountability for gear damage
 - Premature to take action before visualization technology/ enforcement considerations had been clarified
 - Could enable fishermen to fish undetected in other zones/states
 - Missed opportunity to engage fishermen in regulatory process

Joint Groundfish & Recreational AP Discussion (9/3/25)

- Impacts to mobile and fixed gear users → mobile vessels need to see the gear, real time data needed; not aware of possible ramifications, i.e., requiring visualization tech on mobile vessels
- Approval process should be public; Need more engagement overall from public/fisheries, other APs
- Concerns about lost gear, costs, safety; few mobile vessels inshore have internet connectivity; need to equip and educate fixed & mobile fleets
 - Responsibility/costs of incidentally damaging gear
- Recreational Fishery: not everyone has satellite internet; some activity in closure areas; concerns with anchoring/drift; can see gear now and drift accordingly; costs of accessing data

Scallop AP Discussion (9/12/25)

- Highlighted challenge of wide-spread Starlink connectivity
 - Many LAGC IFQ vessels don't have internet connection >10 nm from shore, and greater data usage from Starlink is expensive
- On-demand gear needs to be viewable from >5 nm away
 - Scallopers make decisions about where to fish before on-demand gear would be viewable and want to be able to avoid concentrations of fixed-gear
- Concerned with liability for damaged gear
- Concerned that on-demand gear implementation is happening too quickly

Joint Monkfish & Skate AP Discussion (9/16/25)

- Cost considerations/concerns
 - Satellite connectivity costs, data usage; mobile fleet costs
 - On-demand gear itself is expensive
- Lost gear, ghost gear, gear conflicts
 - Concerns about not being able to recover gillnet strings if gear moves/ issue with on-demand gear retrieval
- Obligations for mobile fleet – burden on mobile vessels to stay away from fixed gear?
- Could make it easier for TRT to implement closures



Questions?