

Monkfish and Skate Staff Report

**April 14, 2026 NEFMC
meeting (Portland, ME)**



New England
Fishery Management Council

For Today

- **Part A: Summary of 2025 coordinated monkfish and skate activities**
 - Receive white paper; no Council action needed
 - *Notes about report:*
 - *IS a compilation of feedback received to date on 2025 efforts*
 - *NOT an action to combine the Monkfish and Skate FMPs*
- **Part B: Potential IFQ program for monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries**
 - Scheduled to review and approve scoping document and schedule
 - Consider Joint Monkfish and Skate Committee motion (3/19) and MAFMC motion (4/8)
 - *Note: Depending on outcome from consideration of Committee motion, evaluate staff idea to pivot scoping meetings*

Draft Summary of Feedback on 2025 Coordinated Monkfish and Skate Efforts



New England
Fishery Management Council

2025 Joint Efforts Across Monkfish and Skate

- Coordinated Committee, Advisory Panel, and Plan Development Team activities & began reviewing effectiveness of joint planning.
- **Why?**
 - Prior Monkfish and Skate AP and Committee meetings emphasized overlap and interdependencies between monkfish and skate wing fisheries.
 - Targeting monkfish but incidentally catching large amounts of skate wings → hit skate trip limits before monkfish limit.
 - Both monkfish and skate had specifications actions in 2025.
- **End goals?**
 - Near-term: support both specifications actions; joint meetings was a stepping-stone to consider whether joint management should continue.
 - Longer-term: to inform cross-jurisdictional governance discussions and whether joint management should be more formalized.

Interviews for feedback on joint processes

- Held individual / small group interviews Dec 2025 – Jan 2026.
- Asked questions related to how 2025 joint process went, effectiveness of joint meetings, ways to improve, etc.
- Some feedback applies generally to meeting and work processes vs. monkfish-skate coordination.

Council Group	Total Interviews	Monkfish only	Skate only	Monkfish & Skate
Monkfish and Skate PDTs	11	4	3	4
Monkfish and Skate APs	10	2	3	5
Monkfish and Skate Committee	4	0	0	4
Council leaders	2	n/a	n/a	n/a

Note: Staff sought input from the APs and Committees during the March 19th meeting

What's worked well with the joint arrangement?

- **Joint meeting structure:**

- *Improved efficiency:* overlap in fishery participation; improved context and broader perspectives provided; more thoroughly considered recommendations for management changes; easier to plan one set of meetings.
- *Improved engagement, attendance.*

- **Joint data analysis:**

- FMP-specific PDT mtgs were helpful; delegation of tasks went smoothly; one NOAA person pulled all data; joint analyses helped answer questions related to interactions between fisheries.

What were governance/coordination challenges?

- **Joint meeting structure**

- *Not inclusive / representative*: some participants disregarded info not pertinent to their fishery; some discussions not relevant to all stakeholders (skate bait fishery); lack of representation from all fishery sectors; confusion on voting protocols.
- *Mismatch of expectations & Not focused*: lengthy discussions that were at times unrelated to overall mtg goals; confusion around goals & potential outcomes of joint process.
- *Unclear on utility, expectations*: changing understanding of the problem that adjusting effort limits would resolve led to analyses not formulated in the best way; final Council work priorities for 2026 not aligned with joint group recommendations (i.e., scoping for IFQ program) → discouraging that joint discussions built strong consensus on certain issues that did not have traction during Dec Council meeting.

What were governance/coordination challenges?

- **Joint data analysis**

- *General approach*: wide scope of PDT tasking (& focus on one species), varying interests, shifting timelines; some work did not address questions being asked → inefficient time/effort.
- *Unclear on utility*: analyses did not consistently match monkfish & skate industry perception (varies based on external factors); perception of overabundance of skates limiting monkfish could incorrectly lead to increased effort; very specific/off-topic analyses that were not helpful for joint evaluation; shifting interests over time → last minute analyses.

Suggestions for improvement

- **Meeting prep / materials:**

- Clearly outline purpose, goals, process, expectations of any joint endeavors to avoid confusion on multiple simultaneous projects.
- Clarify roles/responsibilities of PDT, AP, Cte and where/when/how input will be solicited and incorporated into the process.
- More background information given staff turnover; continue sharing email updates.

- **Meeting structure:**

- Closed meetings of a PDT subgroup to have more focused discussions before receiving input from wider audience.
- Could be helpful to have joint PDT and AP meetings.
- Joint management discussions separate from regulatory topics.
- Suggestions to allow participants to engage on only their topics of interest (quorum issues).

Suggestions for improvement

- **General approach:**

More focused PDT tasking by Cte to answer specific questions:

- Council staff working more closely with Cte Chairs on meeting direction.
- Improved Cte Chair mtg facilitation → unproductive/unfocused discussions.
- Set clear goals/expectations/timeline before PDT tasking, esp. for joint efforts.
- PDT learn from AP/Cte 1st for context before data pulls/analyses.
- Analyses that account for different fishing behavior between segments.

More approachable informational materials to explain science/data/assessment (presentation recordings, workshop with mock data, frequent 'open' meetings to ask questions/provide input, etc.).

Suggestions for improvement

- **Data**

Focus on simpler data analyses/trends in fishery performance (as informed by subset of joint PDT) → basic biological & socioeconomic analyses across both fisheries.

- *Note: not consistent with other feedback received suggesting Cte tasking first.*
- Would help determine what's feasible/sensible to reduce unnecessary analyses not used in decision-making.
- Would reduce shifting AP/Cte priorities tasking (early in 2025, focus was on economic analyses then this was sidelined later).
- Create one base dataset for all PDT members to use for analyses; provide code to improve reproducibility in future.

Overarching lessons learned to inform any future joint management

- Improved efficiency BUT mixed opinions on success, outcomes, & if joint approach was beneficial
- Focused on southern monkfish and skate wing fisheries (i.e., minimal focus on GOM monkfish, skate bait, etc.)
- Created hierarchy of species (winter skate and southern monkfish stock)
- Will need a large AP with diverse sectors with only one AP and one Committee Chair
- Data did not show consistent patterns in interaction between southern monkfish & skate wing fisheries due to unpredictability of external factors → this was the primary impetus for trialing joint process in 2025

Other considerations:

- Joint management of monkfish with MAFMC creates additional challenge given skates is not
- More proactive management aligning regulations across both FMPs would be helpful

*NOTE: some comments specifically applicable to any future joint monkfish/skate management, **though**, some are more applicable to Council process overall*

Monkfish/Skate Joint AP & Committee Meeting (3/19)

- Input on summary report:
 - *Both groups:* confusion on the purpose of the report (to initiate a joint FMP vs feedback on 2025 process)
 - *AP:* mixed opinion on separate vs joint processes; Suggested a consensus statement to approve summary report but several advisors not comfortable doing so
 - *Cte:* concern about lack of info on all monkfish & skate fishery segments, declining representation on APs; relationship with IRA joint governance workshops and desire to wait to make any changes to monkfish & skate management until IRA work is complete
- Input on fishery performance:
 - *Council-related work:* ongoing challenges with Council's sturgeon action re lighter twine size (effectiveness of gear, ability to acquire gear)
 - *Other factors:* shifting stocks; offshore wind; overabundance of skates inhibiting monkfish harvest; increasing shipping/transport costs with declining fish prices; other/unknown.

For Today

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Draft Scoping Document for a Potential IFQ Program for Monkfish and/or Skate Wing Fisheries



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Fishery Management Council

How did the idea for IFQ scoping originate?

September 19 Committee consensus on 2026 priorities

Green = recommended by NEFMC Executive Committee
Underline = recommended by Advisory Panels

- Highest Priority (in priority order)
 1. Have the monkfish CPUE research peer-reviewed.
 2. Explore options for moving from skate possession limits that are per trip to limits based on the number of DAS that a trip is charged. This could allow more trip efficiency and improve access to the skate and monkfish fisheries.
 3. Create a skate wing RSA program to provide research opportunities for relevant fisheries. This would help forward research such as on discard mortality rates.
 4. Develop a 3-season approach for managing the skate wing fishery.
- Lower Priority (not in order)
 5. Explore options for ways to reduce latent effort in the monkfish fishery.
 6. Explore if the boundary of the Southern New England Skate Bait Trawl Exemption Area could be moved to the south (increasing the area).
 7. Create skate wing DAS to replace Northeast multispecies DAS for fishing on skate wings.
 8. Create a DAS leasing program for monkfish and skate wings to allow flexibility (once skate DAS are created).
 9. Create an Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ)/sector management program for the monkfish and wing skate fisheries.

How did the idea for IFQ scoping originate?

Reminder: NEFMC December 2025 Council meeting motion (carried 14/1/1)

- Motion to replace work on skate possession limits and seasons and monkfish latency with: “Scope an IFQ program for monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries; consider EOI4276 response related to monkfish management modifications”
- Rationale:
 - IFQ program has been supported by southern New England fishermen; historically opposed by Mid-Atlantic fishermen, but that has changed in recent years, and they have been advocating for an IFQ system.
 - Offers a more comprehensive solution for monkfish and/or skate fisheries; less resource-intensive than pursuing various proposed monkfish and skate priorities in a piecemeal approach.
 - Fisheries not efficient or profitable; need relief [*unclear if this applied to monkfish and/or skates*].
 - IFQs may not be a perfect solution, but it would improve management.
 - Would reduce skate discards.
 - Understanding that creating an IFQ program(s) is a long process, but improving monkfish and skate management needs more focus by the Council.

Related Prior Actions: Monkfish Amendment 6

Existing Management System

- Limited access permits
- DAS
- Trip Limits
- Size & gear regulations

**2016 Amendment 6
withdrawn:**
catch shares not best
approach

**2010 – 2011
Scoping**

Over 2011 - 2014

Goal: maximize yield & profitability while minimizing changes in relative fleet distribution & composition, preserving monkfish bycatch allowance for other fisheries, minimizing impacts on protected species

Objectives:

- Modifications to DAS allocations/landing limits (latent effort)
- DAS leasing option
- Change RSA approach/measures
- Integrate monkfish into groundfish sectors
- Create monkfish ITQ program

Related Prior Actions: Skate Amendment 5

Existing Management System

- Trip limits
- Total allowable landings
- Seasonal quotas

2016 - Interest in:

- Limited access
- Concerns about shifting effort from other fisheries into skate fishery

2017 First Scoping

2020

Problem statement, goals, types of measures developed

Overarching goal: limited access skate permit for skate wing and/or bait fisheries

Overall problem: an increase in effort could achieve quota sooner, triggering reduced skate trip limits and other negative economic impacts

2021 Amendment 5

withdrawn: limited access not necessary

2021 Second Scoping:

- Limited access
- Additional measures (intermediate triggers & landing limits, monitoring/reporting requirements, restricting switching between state/federal, year-round permit, gear mods, etc.)

Overview of Scoping Document

Timeline

- Scoping document review & approval
 - April 8 by MAFMC (NYC)
 - April 14 by NEFMC (Portland)
- Scoping period begins April 20
 - Mon, April 27: Portland, ME
 - Wed, April 29: New Bedford, MA
 - Thurs, April 30: Riverhead, NY
 - Tues, May 5: Manahawkin, NJ
 - Mon, May 11: Webinar only
- Scoping period ends May 18

Written comments accepted
April 20-May 18
via postal mail or
to comments@nefmc.org

Overview of Scoping Document

Your comments are invited

Council is scoping to consider catch share management, specifically an Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program, for the monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries.

The Council seeks comments on:

1. the need for an IFQ program,
2. what elements the program should include, and
3. how could an IFQ program be reasonably calculated to promote conservation.

Overview of Scoping Document

Why is the Council conducting scoping?

- Document notes theoretical benefits of catch shares (e.g., increase in flexibility, reduces discards, promotes safety).
- Scoping discussed briefly by Council; Joint Committee did not develop any additional rationale

Why should I comment?

One of the best opportunities to share your input for Council decisions on whether to develop an action.



Overview of Scoping Document

What should my comments address?

In your opinion...

- What are the current problems in managing the monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries?
- Can a catch share program, and specifically an IFQ program, address those problems? Why or why not? If not, what other approaches should be considered?
- Should an IFQ program be developed for the monkfish and skate wing fisheries or just one of these fisheries?
- What would be the benefits and/or drawbacks of managing either/both fisheries with an IFQ program?

Overview of Scoping Document

What should my comments address?

If a fishing quota program were developed...

- What should the goals and objectives of the program be?
- What should be the basis or criteria of allocating quota (e.g., fishing history, active permits versus lease-only permits, etc.)?
- How should the program be designed to avoid excessive shares of quota?
- Should leasing and/or transfer of quota be allowed?
- Should the IFQ program apply across the full range of the monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries, or should it be limited to specific components (e.g., by area or gear type)?
- How should an IFQ program intersect with other fisheries that vessels participate in?

Overview of Scoping Document

What is the process?

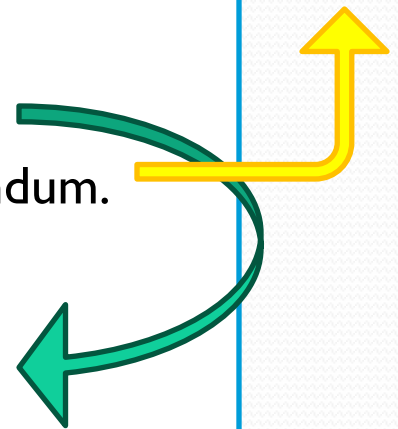
- *Step 1:* Public input gathered through scoping.
- *Step 2:* Input summarized. Councils decide whether to initiate an action (June for NEFMC, August for MAFMC) with input from plan teams, advisory panels, committees.
- *Step 3:* If initiated, Councils would develop and analyze alternatives in a multiyear action.
- *Step 4:* Draft NEPA document published, Councils hold comment period and select final preferred alternatives.
 - NEFMC and MAFMC must agree on proposed action for the Monkfish FMP.
 - Proposed action must include eligibility criteria for fishery participants to vote to approve the IFQ program via a referendum.

Overview of Scoping Document

What is the process?

- **Step 5:** Secretary of Commerce initiates a referendum if the Council-recommended voter eligibility criteria is determined to be fair.
 - Proposed and final rulemaking on the referendum process.
 - Voting occurs. Program needs approval by over 2/3 of eligible voters.
 - If approved, then Councils would submit the action to the Secretary for approval.
 - If disapproved, then the Councils can revise the program and ask for another referendum.
- **Step 6:** Councils submit the action to the Secretary for rulemaking and implementation.

Back to
Step 3.



Overview of Scoping Document

Will
detail in
scoping
slides

Background Information

- Assessment and management approaches for monkfish and skates.
- Recent fishery performance.
- Related prior actions:
 - Monkfish Amendment 6: considered ITQs from 2010-2016, stopped work – catch shares not best approach.
 - Skate Amendment 5: considered limited access from 2016-2021, withdrew amendment – concerns about effort and triggering incidental limits could be addressed through other approaches.

Monkfish/Skate Joint AP & Committee Meeting (3/19)

- Joint AP: **strongly opposed moving forward with scoping**
 - Questions/concerns about IFQ program details (control date, qualification criteria, new entrants into fishery from scallops/groundfish)
 - Desire for alternative management approaches to address problems in both fisheries (address latent effort, Skate day-at-sea program, 3-season skate wing, etc. – *priorities developed by AP in Sept. 2025*)
 - Economic considerations (limited domestic market and processing capacity; international markets impacted by price/tariffs/exchange rates; product substitutions)
 - Concern about creation of a choke species;
 - Questions related to impact on skate bait and why this segment wasn't included in priority
→ urged Council members to consider all segments of fishery

Monkfish/Skate Joint AP & Committee Meeting (3/19)

- Joint Committee: recommended Councils not approve scoping document
 - Groundfish sectors have been challenging since implementation;
 - Unlikely to pass 2/3 referendum vote;
 - Joint AP did not select IFQ as a priority during their fall meeting;
 - Secorder of Dec. motion did not support moving forward with IFQ program;
 - NOAA reps. emphasized that a strong commitment is needed before initiating IFQ action
 - Discussion on whether discontinuing scoping would be a change in Council priorities and how to proceed process-wise (*need NOAA General Counsel's input*)

In support: Maker of Dec. motion felt IFQ could be holistic solution and AP input is only from a subset of fisheries and not representative

Perfected Joint Committee Motion

The Committee recommends that the Council not approve the IFQ scoping document and discontinue the scoping process.

Rationale: This is a solution in search of a problem, and the problems with the monkfish and skate fisheries require different solutions. The AP members and public in attendance today did not show support for moving ahead with scoping.

The motion carried unanimously with two abstentions

NOTE: *There were questions on when/how Council priorities may change and opportunities to pivot to other monkfish/skate work → staff input: need robust discussion on possible management measures first*

Updates since 3/19 Monkfish/Skate AP & Committee Meeting

NEFMC Staff input: pivot IFQ scoping meetings to seek comments on ideas for fishery improvements in the monkfish and skate fisheries; this would be a change in Council priorities requiring 2/3 vote

Goal: identify challenges in both fisheries and identify possible management measures for the Council to address those challenges in the future

Input from NOAA General Counsel:

- ❖ A revised FR notice is allowed to pivot purpose of scoping meetings
- ❖ No additional NEPA requirements associated with listening sessions

Input from Executive Committee (3/25):

- ❖ Agreed with Joint Committee to no longer scope for a possible IFQ program
- ❖ Discussed but did not provide consensus recommendation on pivoting previously scheduled IFQ scoping meetings to a series of structured listening sessions

→ *Noted: Repurposing meetings could help improve management in both fisheries*

ExCom Rationale for Potential Pivot

- Lack of stakeholder support: Near unanimous AP support to discontinue IFQ process
- Absence of immediate priority: Industry input doesn't denote IFQ as a 2026 high-priority need
- Resource efficiency: May not be efficient use of limited staff resources without industry or Committee support

Proposed Format of Listening Sessions

- Utilize Existing Information: Present prior Monkfish/Skate priority ideas, recent [CPUE review](#) info, [white paper](#) on governance
- Target specific dynamics: Seek feedback on gear-type dynamics, skate fishery components, differences between northern and southern monkfish components
- Inform 2027 Priorities: Collect broad stakeholder concerns/ideas to help Council articulate & prioritize management objectives in 2027+

MAFMC Outcomes (4/8 NYC mtg)

Motion: On behalf of the Committee, I move that the Council not approve the IFQ scoping document and discontinue the scoping process. (Ruhle for Committee).

- Passes without objection.

Regarding NEFMC staff idea, deferred to NEFMC on how to proceed in pivoting scoping meetings to focus on monkfish and skate fishery improvement ideas; no clear opposition to this idea, some support provided.

For Today

- **Part B: Potential IFQ program for monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries**
 - Review and approve scoping document and schedule
 - Consider Joint Monkfish and Skate Committee motion (3/19) and MAFMC motion (4/8)
 - *Note: Depending on outcome from consideration of Committee motion, evaluate staff idea to pivot scoping meetings to listening sessions*

Backup slides

Overview of Monkfish Fishery Management Plan

Monkfish Fishery

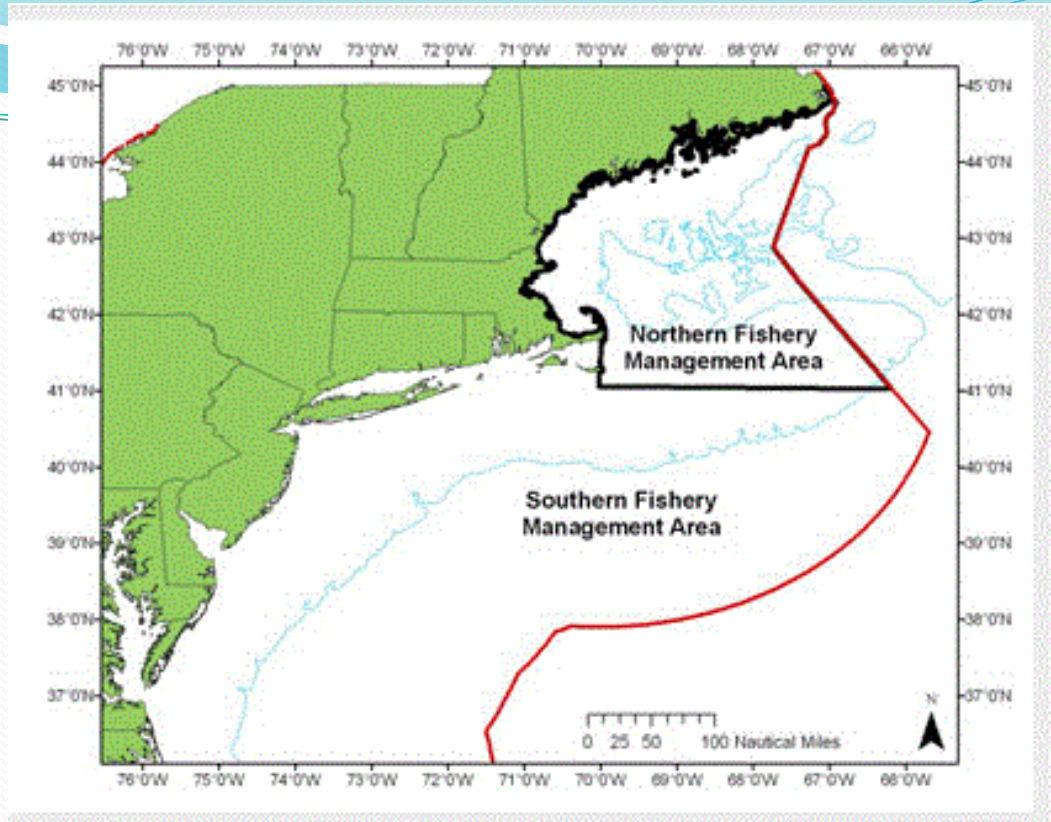


Northern Stock:

Gulf of Maine +
Northern
Georges Bank

Southern Stock:

Southern
Georges Bank +
Mid-Atlantic



- ❖ *Each area has a separate Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), Total Allowable Landings (TAL), Days-at-Sea (DAS), allocation, daily possession limits*
- ❖ *Six Limited Access Permits + One Open Access Permit*

Table 11. Monkfish permits issued by GARFO for FY 2024.

Monkfish Permit Type	Category	Number of Permits
Limited Access	A	13
	B	30
	C	235
	D	187
	F	15
	H	7
Total Limited Access	A, B, C, D, F, H	487
Total Open Access	E	1,390
Total Monkfish Permits		1,877

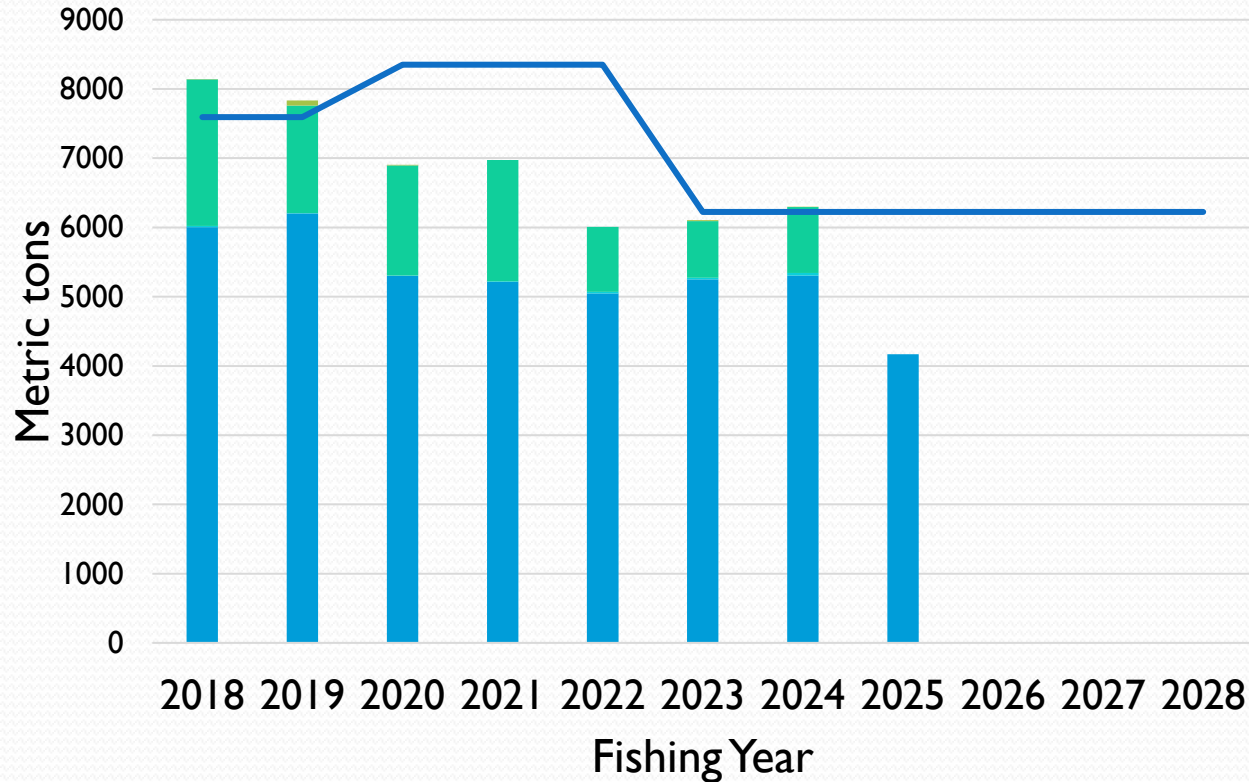
Source: Greater Atlantic Region Vessel, Dealer, Operator, and Tuna Permit Data [website](#), accessed October 16, 2025.

Monkfish Catch Relative to ACL, FY 2018-2025

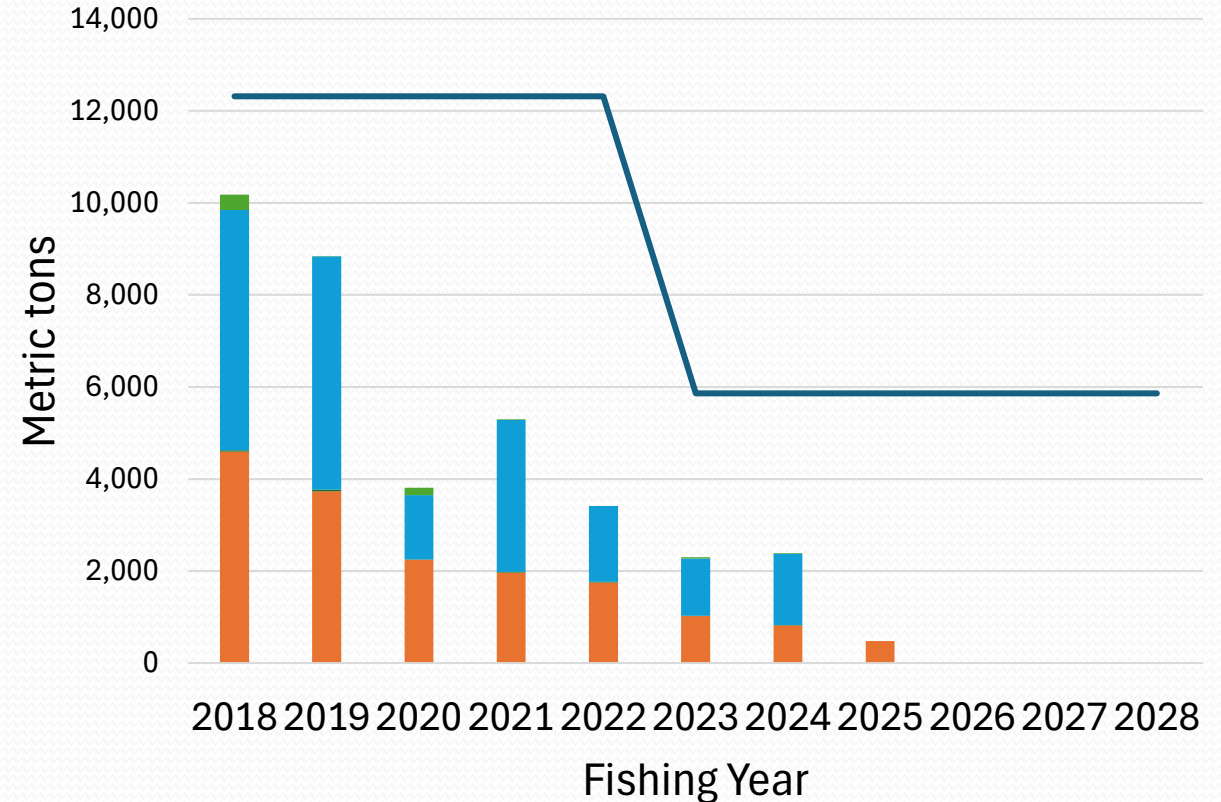
FY 2026-2028 are Council ABC recommendations

FY 25 data through 3/11/2026
 Source: GARFO Quota Monitoring

Northern Area



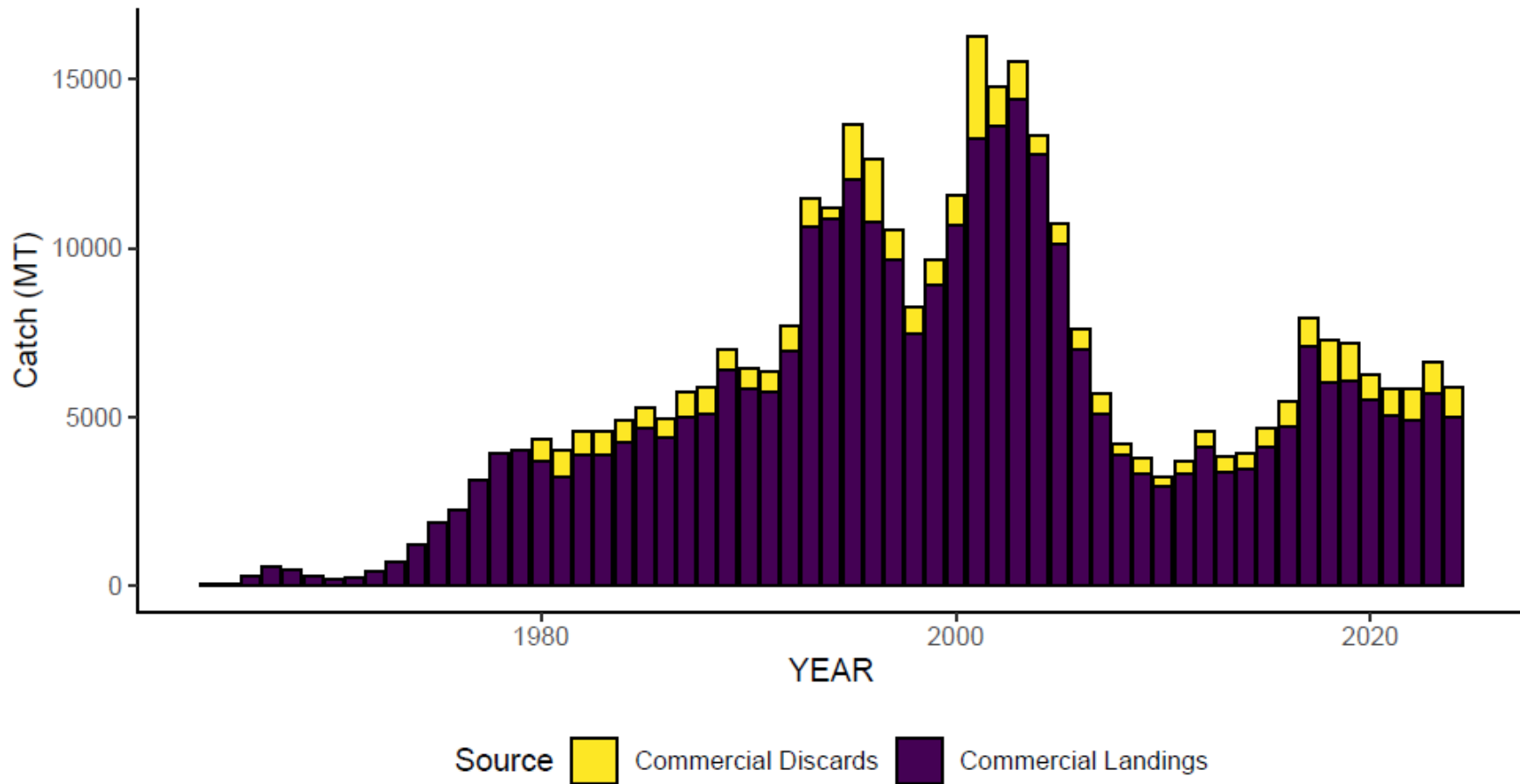
Southern Area



- Recreational catch (MRIP landings & discards)
- Estimated discards
- State commercial landings
- Federal commercial landings
- ABC = ACL

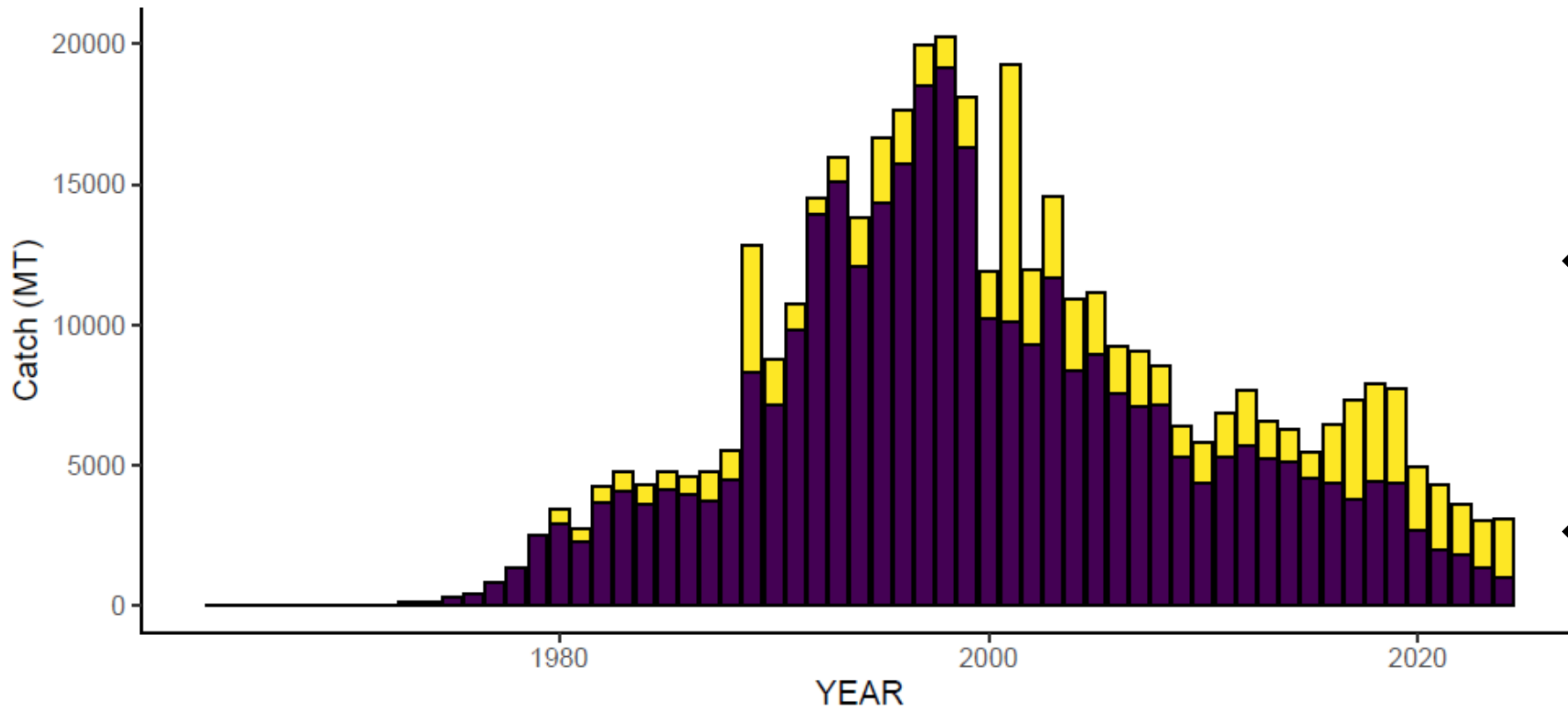
- Recreational catch (MRIP landings & discards)
- Estimated discards
- State commercial landings
- Federal commercial landings
- ABC=ACL



Monkfish landings (mt) and discards (mt) in the Northern Fishery Management Area from calendar year 1964 through 2024



- ❖ *Proportion of landings and discards generally similar in recent calendar years*
- ❖ *Majority of monkfish landings from Multispecies sector declared trips*

Monkfish landings (mt) and discards (mt) in the **Southern Fishery Management Area** from calendar year 1964 through 2024.



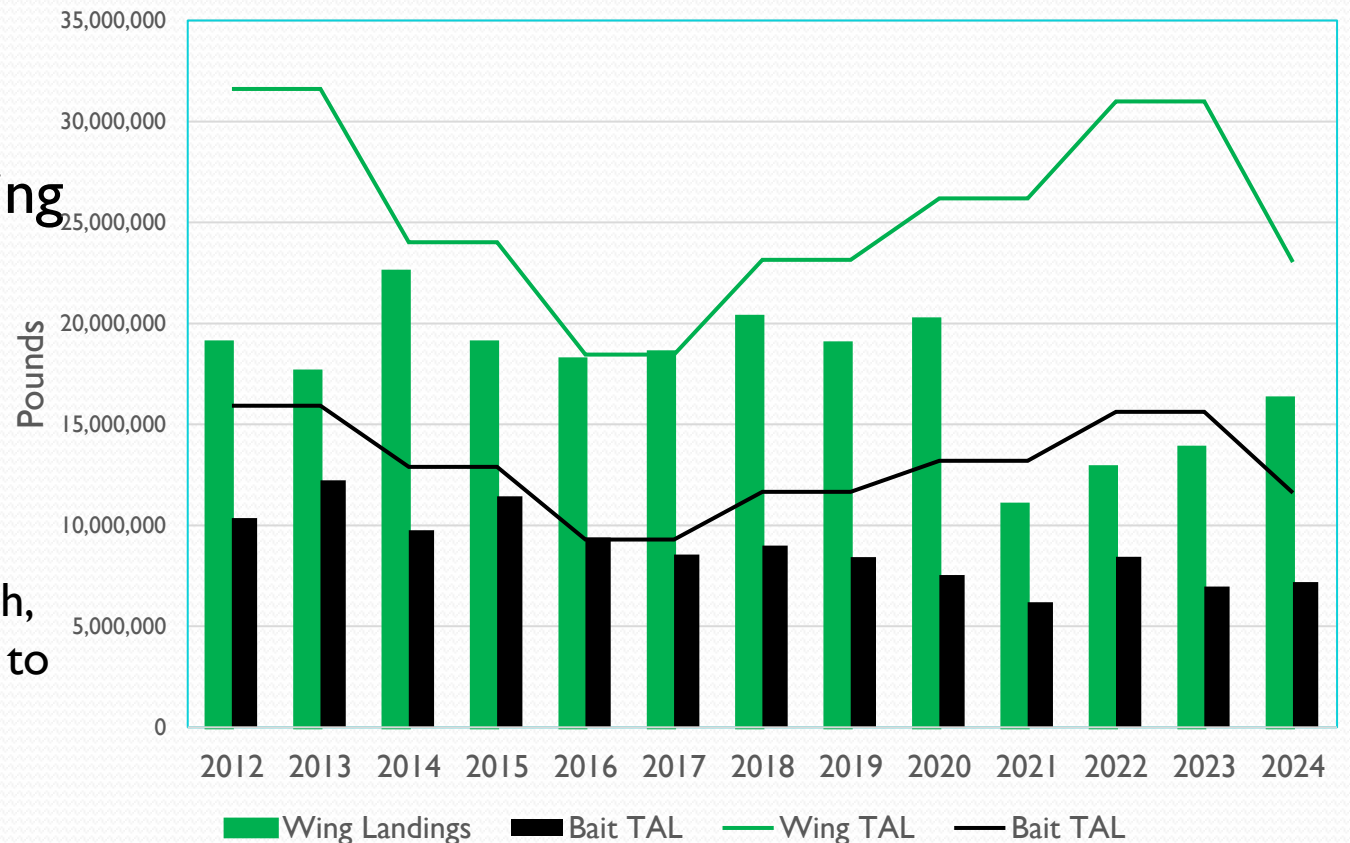
Source  Commercial Discards  Commercial Landings

- ❖ *Proportion of landings has declined, and discards increased in recent calendar years*
- ❖ *Majority of monkfish landings from Southern Monkfish only trips*
- ❖ *Majority of monkfish discards from scallop dredge*

Overview of the Skate Fishery

- Seven skate species managed as a complex; only thorny skate is overfished, overfishing is not occurring for any species
- Open access permit, ~243 vessels landing skate in FY 2024
- 2 fishery components:
 - Skate wing (66.5% of TAL)
 - Primarily targets winter skates
 - Vessels need to have a limited access groundfish, monkfish, or scallop permit and declare a DAS to land more than incidental limits
 - Skate bait (33.5% of TAL)
 - Vessels fish under a skate bait Letter of Authorization (LOA)

FY 2020-2024 in-season monitoring of federal Northeast skate wing and bait landings



Data Source: CAMS Database; see [2026-2028 Skate Specifications Final Submission, Table 9](#)

Link to IRA project?

- IRA 4.1 and 4.2 focus on improving cross-jurisdictional governance to:
 - Evaluate advisory body structure, use, and decision-making; consider representativeness of membership given shifting species distributions.
 - Evaluate joint management approaches and consider the need to more clearly document and revise them.
 - Evaluate opportunities to combine fishery management plans within or across Councils and consider the benefits and costs.
 - Collaborate with partner organizations to develop regionally consistent approaches where possible.
- Monkfish/Skate feedback contributed to East Coast staff-to-staff governance workshop (Feb 2026).
- Early 2027 East Coast regional workshop, planning exercise, potential revisions to management operations, plan structures, etc.