Groundfish Committee Report

Council Meeting

Portland, ME and by Webinar

April 16, 2026

New England
Fishery Management Council

Groundfish Outlook by Quarter in 2026, updated March 26, 2026, NEFMC Staff

Council Priority*	Jan – Mar	Apr - Jun	July - Sept	Oct - Dec
Amendment 25	Final Submission	GARFO implementation		
Recreational Measures	Develop recommendations for cod & haddock	GARFO implementation		
Framework Adjustment 72	Preliminary & Final Submissions	GARFO implementation		
Amendment 23 Review	Conduct review analyses	Complete review		Consider recommendations for follow-up actions
Redfish Sector Exemption Review	Conduct review analyses	Complete review		Consider recommendations for follow-up actions
ABC Control Rules Framework (68)	Contract work conducted to evaluate integration of revised Risk Policy with revised ABC CRs	Develop revised ABC CRs from simulation testing , conduct analysis	Final action	Implementation of revised ABC CRs for specifications
Framework Adjustment 74		Develop scope / Initiate action	Develop specifications & measures, conduct analysis	Final action
Atlantic Cod Management			Continue to develop transition plan; paused pending Amendment 25 decision	
White Hake Rebuilding			Conduct rebuilding plan analyses & review biological reference points	
Stock Assessments		MT- GB haddock (Jun.)	Domestic updates for transboundary mgmt. (cod, haddock, yellowtail flounder) (Jul.)	MT- GOM haddock, plaice Data updates- pollock, witch flounder, halibut (Sept.)

*Additional: Participate in TMGC, coordinate on EFH designation updates, and make recommendations for 2027 Council priorities

Redfish Sector Exemption Review

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For Today

- Redfish Sector Exemption Review
  - Receive an overview of the PDT's report on the review
  - Discussion

<u>Next Steps:</u>

- Consider potential future actions to modify the redfish sector exemption program (*to be discussed during 2027 Council priorities recommendations later this year*)

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Redfish Sector Exemption Review

Scope: Conduct a review of the redfish sector exemption, which was established as a universal sector exemption in Framework 61.

Objectives: Review the redfish sector exemption including (but not limited to) the following:

- Evaluation of the monthly and annual thresholds performance
- Vessel-level performance
- Bycatch of other groundfish stocks
- Any observed changes in selectivity
- Purpose, goals, and objectives of the program

Tier 1 and Tier 2 review metrics categorized under:

- Fishery Performance
- Catch Composition
- Program Goals and Objectives

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Review Timeline

Spring 2025	Develop review metrics
June 2025	Review paused – change in 2025 Council groundfish priorities
December 2025	Council includes review for 2026 priorities
Winter/Spring 2026	PDT conducts review, including sector manager feedback
Spring 2026	Review complete, report out to Committee/Council, including initial discussion on potential future actions
Fall 2026	Potential to add management actions to 2027 Council Priorities in response to the review

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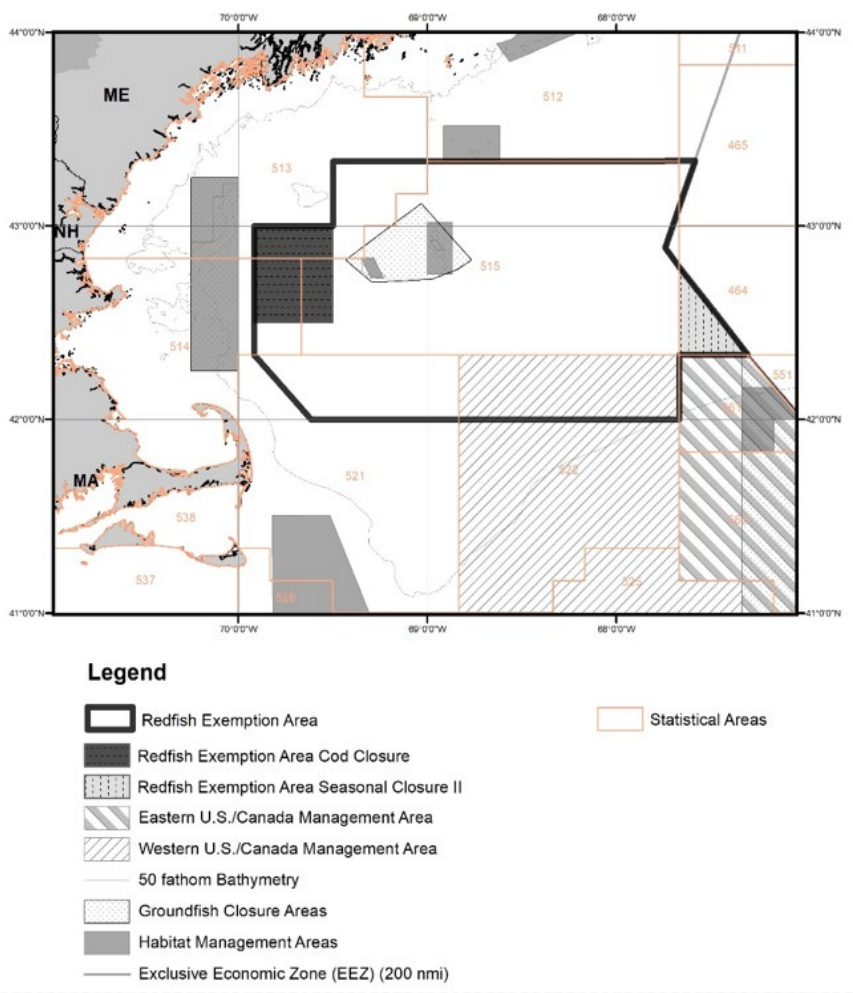
Redfish Sector Exemption Program

- Framework 61 added a universal sector exemption that allows commercial trawl vessels enrolled in sectors to fish for redfish using a 5.5-inch (or larger) mesh codend within the defined Redfish Exemption Area
  - Implemented in FY2021
- Redfish Exemption Area seasonal closures:
  - February and March due to potential catch of GOM cod.
  - September through December to reduce bycatch of other groundfish stocks (mainly pollock).



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Redfish Sector Exemption Goals and Objectives

Purpose: To increase stability and certainty for current and potential participants and improve Council control and oversight of the fishery.

Goal: To achieve optimum yield of the redfish resource.

Objectives:

- Allow use of an efficient mesh size codend to facilitate harvest of redfish.
- Increase the harvest of redfish while reducing to the extent practicable bycatch of other groundfish stocks.
- Restore flexibility lost with 2020 contraction of the redfish exemption area.
- Remove areas from the exemption which provide little opportunity to effectively target redfish, or little ability to achieve exemption performance thresholds.

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Catch Thresholds and Performance Standards

- Monthly redfish landings and groundfish discards
  - at least 50% of a sector's monthly cumulative allocated groundfish kept on Part 2 of those trips using the exemption must be redfish
  - A sector's monthly total groundfish discards (including redfish) may not exceed 5% of all kept catch during Part 2 of redfish exemption trips
- Annual redfish landings
  - a sector's total annual landed pounds of groundfish landed on Part 2 of redfish exemption trips must be comprised of at least 55% redfish

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Reporting Requirements

- Vessels must submit a **Multispecies Trip Start Hail** declaring the redfish exemption trip.
- Before using the smaller mesh, the vessel must be inside the Redfish Exemption Area and send a **Multispecies Catch Report** via the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS).
- Once a vessel has sent a redfish exemption fishing notification, vessel operators are allowed (but not required) to switch to 5.5-inch (or larger) codends within the Redfish Exemption Area.
- Fishing outside of the Redfish Exemption Area first is optional, but once a vessel has sent a redfish exemption fishing notification, the vessel cannot fish outside the Redfish Exemption Area.

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Challenges with Monitoring for Compliance

- **Temporal Uncertainty:** Unless the trip is observed, *there is no timestamp or chronological order for subtrip*. This makes it impossible to chronologically link catch reports to specific fishing activity on an unobserved trip.
- **TSH Limitations:** A Trip Start Hail (TSH) indicates intent only; it does not confirm that redfish fishing actually occurred during that trip.

- **Redfish Trip Criteria:** Redfish subtrips are identified using a combination of *Stat Area, Gear + Mesh Size, Trip Start Hails (TSH), and Catch Reports.*
  - These criteria are described in the PDT report.
- Identification on observed trips is more precise than unobserved because of the timestamp associated with the haul.

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Discard Monitoring

- Compliance for discard threshold is monitored via **observed discards** only, not calculated discards.
- Using the described Redfish Trip Criteria to identify redfish exemption trips
- Discard estimates are calculated in CAMS from the current discard strata for redfish exemption trips which is based on the **Trip Start Hail (TSH).**
- There are a substantially greater number of trips with a TSH that did not use the exemption compared to “true” redfish exemption trips.

Fishing Year	Trips	No TSH	TSH not redfish
2021	70	11	399
2022	92	7	332
2023	90	13	355
2024	114	20	321
2025	62	13	258

Note: Data from fishing year 2021 begin July 28, 2021
Fishing year 2025 data queried March 2026

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Data for the Review

- Review metrics and analyses use the above described Redfish Trip Criteria to identify redfish exemption trips, unless where noted otherwise.
- Reported data are for fishing years (FY) 2021-2025 (the years under the universal sector exemption).
  - Note that FY2021 and FY2025 are partial years.

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Sector Compliance with Catch Thresholds

- Sector compliance with catch thresholds (monthly and annual redfish landings and monthly groundfish discards) has been high. Sectors have generally been achieving the threshold requirements year-to-year.
- To date, there has only been one instance of a sector being put on probation and no sector has been prevented from participating in the program in any year.
- The process for notifying sectors of their performance with the catch thresholds has evolved over time. Since December 2024, NMFS has been sending monthly performance reports to sector managers with vessels participating in the redfish exemption program. Prior to that, documentation and notification of performance was less consistent.
- Some sectors have taken corrective action to improve vessel performance in the redfish exemption program or to ensure that the sector does not reach the thresholds for probationary status.

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Updated since 3/31 GAP/CTE meeting

Fleet Participation

Participation has been generally stable over time in terms of relative effort, though there have been some fluctuations

- Decline in number of participating sectors from FY2023 to FY2024-FY2025
- Similar decline in number of permits
- Number of redfish trips increased to a high in FY2024 before declining in FY2025
- Trips taken in FY2025 are notably longer (as Days Fished)

Fishing Year	Sectors	Permits	Trips	Days Fished	Days Absent	DF Per Trip	DA Per Trip
2021	4	11	70	80	198	1.1	2.8
2022	5	18	92	125	433	1.4	4.7
2023	6	19	90	129	321	1.4	3.6
2024	3	17	114	176	435	1.5	3.8
2025	3	14	62	157	297	2.5	4.8

Note: Days fished is the total number of days gear is fished during a trip, in days. Does not include steam time.
Data from fishing year 2021 begin July 28, 2021
Fishing year 2025 data queried March 2026

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Fleet Participation

- Majority of vessels participating in the exemption are >75 ft.
- Fewer than three vessels <50 ft. in length participating in the exemption each FY

Number of active vessels by vessel length class.

Fishing Year	SubTrip Type	50-75 ft.	>75 ft.
2021	Redfish Exemption	4	7
2021	All Sector Groundfish	41	30
2022	Redfish Exemption	6	12
2022	All Sector Groundfish	39	31
2023	Redfish Exemption	3	15
2023	All Sector Groundfish	32	32
2024	Redfish Exemption	4	13
2024	All Sector Groundfish	37	33
2025	Redfish Exemption	C*	11
2025	All Sector Groundfish	40	27

Note: Fishing Year 2021 includes activity following the implementation of the universal redfish exemption on July 28, 2021.
Fishing Year 2025 in-season data queried during March 2026.
Among vessels less than 50 ft. in length, there were fewer than three vessels taking a redfish exemption trip in each fishing year.
C* indicates data not presented to protect confidentiality.

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Fleet Participation

- "Pure redfish" trip = all subtrips fished under the exemption
- "Split trip" = subtrips outside the exemption and subtrips fishing under the exemption
- Majority of exemption trips are "split trips" utilizing the flexibility to fish Part 1 of a trip outside the exemption before switching to the exemption on Part 2

Fishing Year	Trip Category	Trip Count
2021	Pure Redfish	15
2021	Split Trip	86
2022	Pure Redfish	31
2022	Split Trip	60
2023	Pure Redfish	14
2023	Split Trip	76
2024	Pure Redfish	13
2024	Split Trip	101
2025	Pure Redfish	16
2025	Split Trip	43
Total	Pure Redfish	89
Total	Split Trip	368

Note: Data from fishing year 2021 begin July 28, 2021
Fishing year 2025 data queried March 2026

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Fleet Participation

- Vessels taking “pure” exemption trips (all subtrips considered to be fishing under the exemption) are almost exclusively >75 ft. in length
- Among vessels less than 75 ft. in length, there were fewer than three vessels taking a “pure” redfish exemption trip in each FY

Number of active vessels by vessel length class and subtrip type taken.

Fishing Year	SubTrip Type	>75 ft.
2021	Pure Exemption Trips	4
2021	Split Exemption Trips	7
2022	Pure Exemption Trips	6
2022	Split Exemption Trips	12
2023	Pure Exemption Trips	3
2023	Split Exemption Trips	15
2024	Pure Exemption Trips	5
2024	Split Exemption Trips	13
2025	Pure Exemption Trips	5
2025	Split Exemption Trips	11

Note: Fishing Year 2021 includes activity following the implementation of the universal redfish exemption on July 28, 2021.
Fishing Year 2025 in-season data queried during March 2026.

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Catch Composition – Landings by Trimester

- Proportion of redfish landings to total groundfish landings:
  - Max: 84.8% in Trimester 3 (January – April) of FY2021
  - Min: 39.0% in Trimester 2 (September – December) of FY2025
- Redfish landings proportions are consistently lowest for Trimester 2 (September – December) while still generally meeting the 50% threshold.

Landings Values in metric tons (mt)

fishing_year	trimester	non_ground	other_ground	redfish	percent_redfish
2021	Trimester1	69.3	101.4	270.8	72.8
2021	Trimester2	135.0	305.8	347.8	53.2
2021	Trimester3	37.9	19.6	109.0	84.8
2022	Trimester1	321.4	368.5	1206.2	76.6
2022	Trimester2	55.5	150.2	168.5	52.9
2022	Trimester3	54.5	206.5	467.9	69.4
2023	Trimester1	59.8	104.8	286.7	73.2
2023	Trimester2	102.7	282.8	318.0	52.9
2023	Trimester3	180.0	275.1	588.0	68.1
2024	Trimester1	270.0	348.4	1216.3	77.7
2024	Trimester2	80.4	204.0	407.8	66.7
2024	Trimester3	84.0	114.3	230.1	66.8
2025	Trimester1	243.3	306.3	441.2	59.0
2025	Trimester2	75.0	196.9	126.0	39.0

Data from fishing year 2021 begin July 28, 2021
Fishing year 2025 data queried March 2026
Fishing year 2025 trimester 3 data removed for confidentiality

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Catch Composition – Discards by Trimester

- Across most years and trimesters, the proportion of groundfish discards is low and well below the 5% bycatch threshold.
  - Except for Trimester 3 in FY2021 at 4.3% and Trimester 2 in FY2024 at 5.6%

Discards

Values in metric tons (mt)

Fishing Year	Trimester	Non GF	Other GF	Redfish	% GF
2021	Trimester1	6.3	0.0	0.1	0.2
2021	Trimester2	6.8	0.7	0.1	1.2
2021	Trimester3	0.5	0.2	0.0	4.3
2022	Trimester1	42.7	1.7	0.0	0.7
2022	Trimester2	10.2	0.3	0.0	0.4
2022	Trimester3	13.3	3.4	0.0	1.1
2023	Trimester1	30.1	1.1	0.0	0.9
2023	Trimester2	24.3	1.5	0.1	0.9
2023	Trimester3	31.9	3.3	0.2	1.4
2024	Trimester1	66.2	2.1	8.0	2.8
2024	Trimester2	18.9	11.7	0.3	5.6
2024	Trimester3	8.5	0.3	0.1	0.5
2025	Trimester1	111.5	3.1	0.8	1.3
2025	Trimester2	19.4	1.9	0.1	2.6

Data from fishing year 2021 begin July 28, 2021
Fishing year 2025 data queried March 2026
Fishing year 2025 trimester 3 data removed for confidentiality

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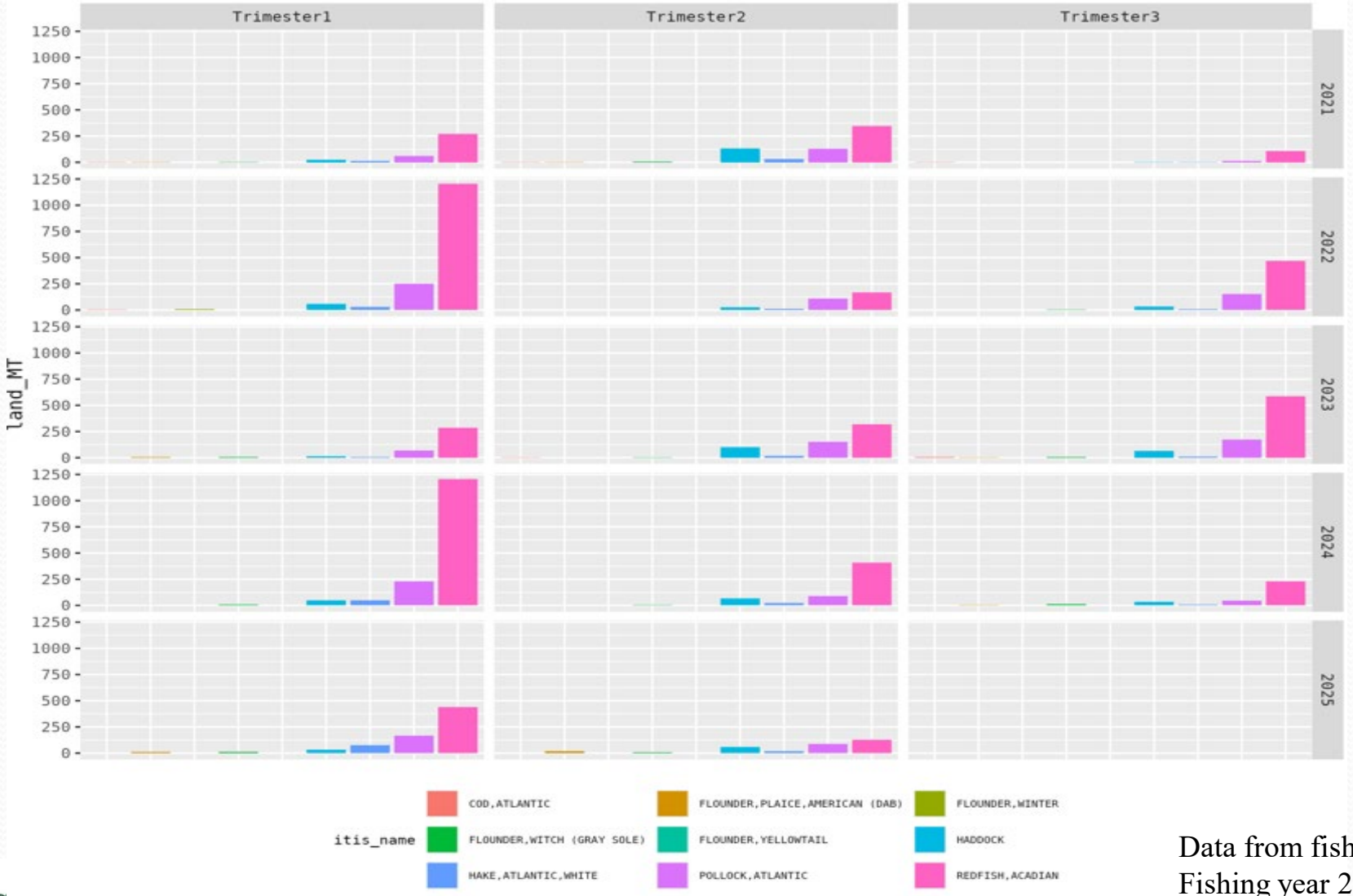
Updated since 3/31 GAP/CTE meeting

Redfish exemption trip landings by species by trimester, FY2021 - 2025



- Redfish are the highest landed groundfish species across all years. Followed by pollock, and haddock
- Redfish landings were notably higher in FY2022 and FY2024 compared to other years.
- Other groundfish species landings are minimal.

Data from fishing year 2021 begin July 28, 2021
Fishing year 2025 data queried March 2026

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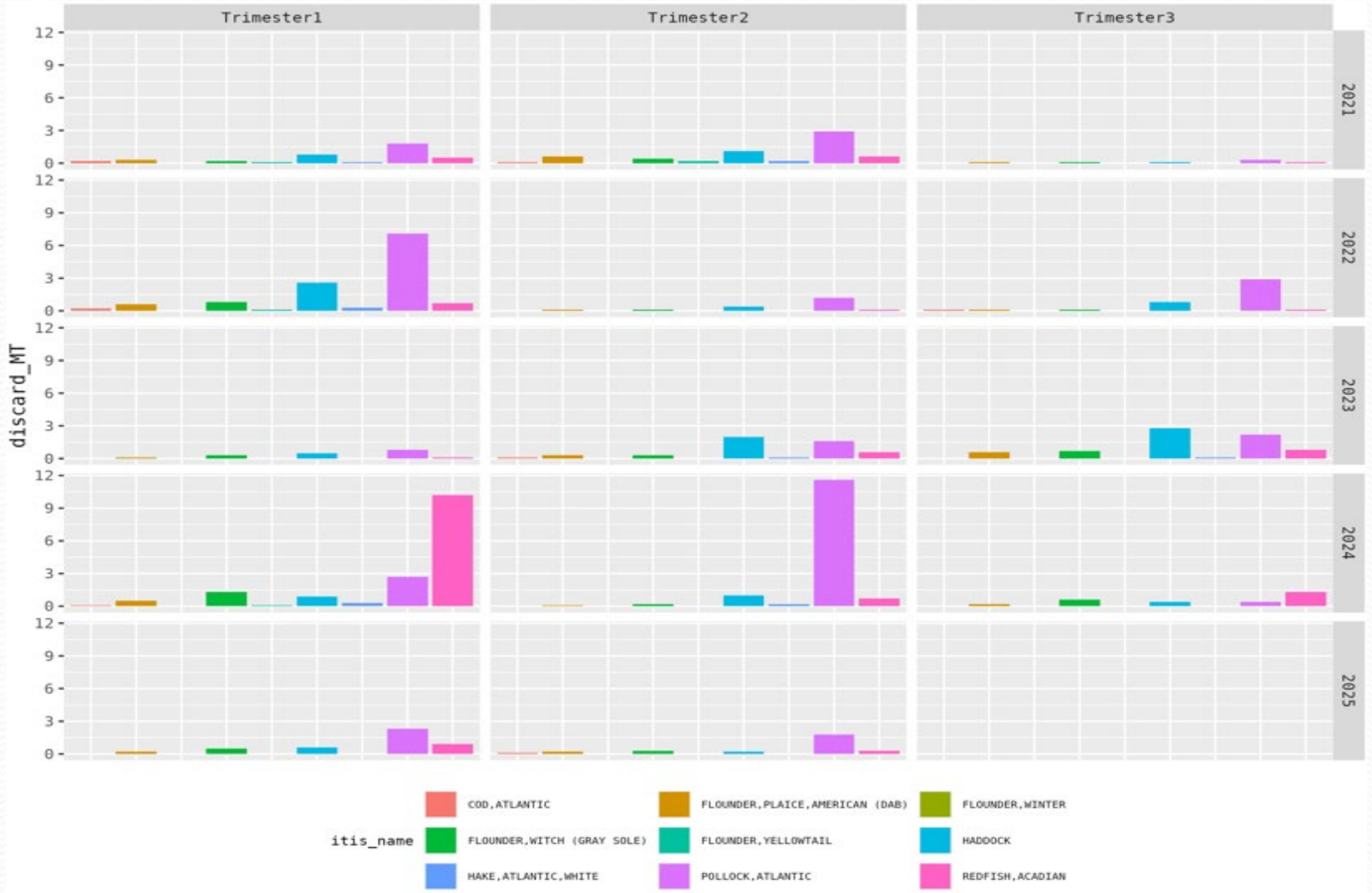
Redfish exemption trip discards by species by trimester, FY2021 - 2025



Data from fishing year 2021 begin July 28, 2021
Fishing year 2025 data queried March 2026

- Pollock comprise most of the discards, followed by redfish, across all years.
  - In FY2022 and FY2023, haddock discards were higher than redfish.
- Both pollock and redfish discards were notably higher in FY2024.
- Other groundfish species discards are minimal.
- The proportion of discards to landings is low for redfish, pollock, and other groundfish species.

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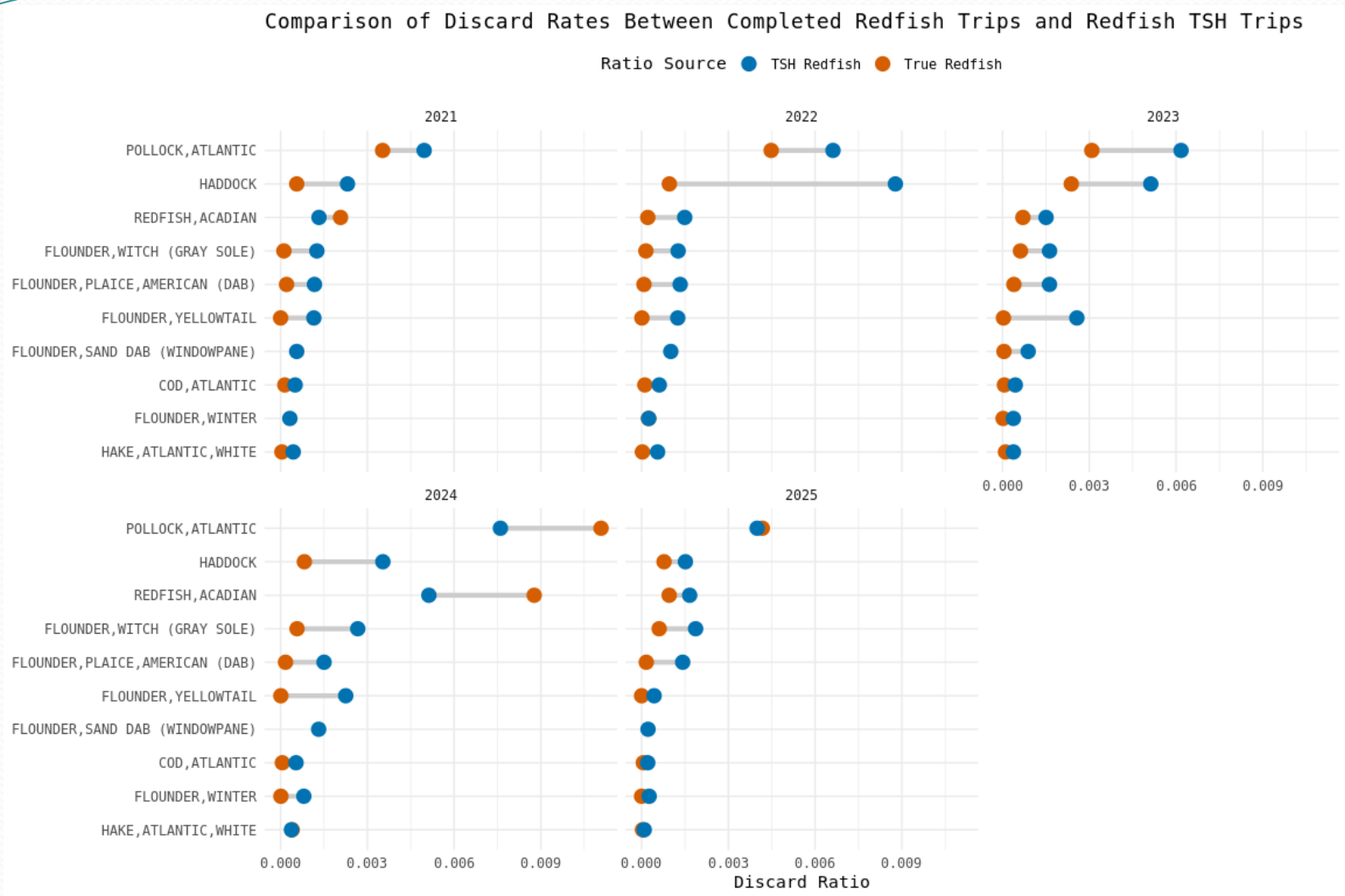


- Pollock has the highest d:k ratio of all species
- d:k ratios for pollock and redfish are highest in 2024 for both “true redfish” and non-redfish “TSH” trips
- d:k ratios are consistently different and are lower for “true redfish” compared to non-redfish “TSH” trips across years and species

Data from fishing year 2021 begin July 28, 2021
Fishing year 2025 data queried March 2026

Updated since 3/31 GAP/CTE meeting

Observer Length Frequency Analysis

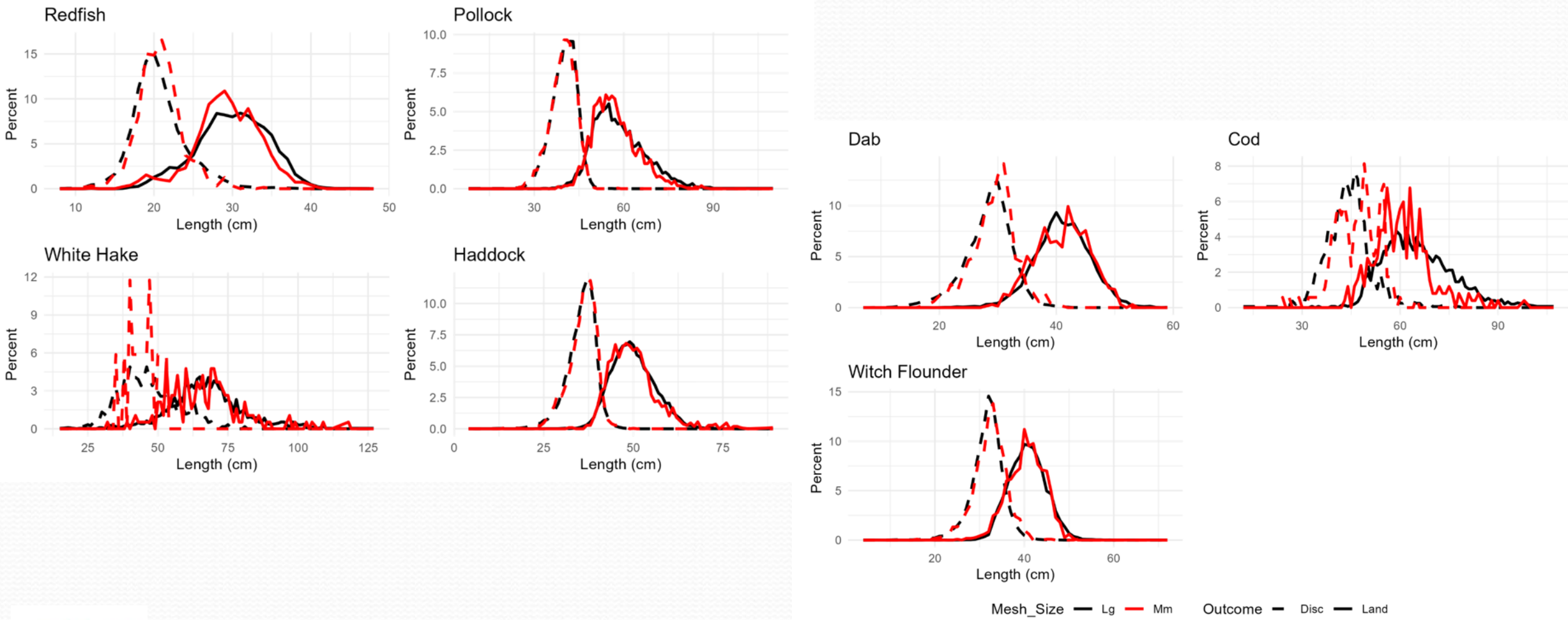
- Objective: determine whether differences in length frequency distribution and cumulative probability exist between medium and large mesh, and between discarded and landed fish
- Medium mesh defined as 5-5.8 inch and large mesh defined as 5.9-7 inch, to account for error
- Data: Calendar Year 2021-2025 observer (ASM + NEFOP) data

  All length samples included (not limited to redfish exemption trips)

  Limited to tows in GOM and GB (SNE excluded)
- These analyses evaluated whether there was evidence of a possible shift in gear selectivity to smaller fish with medium mesh, given the potential for greater retention of sublegal groundfish.
- Not intended or designed as an analysis of catchability/selectivity of medium mesh for redfish targeting – that was conducted as part of a comprehensive research effort (REDNET study)

Updated since 3/31 GAP/CTE meeting

Comparison of observer length frequency proportions between medium (5-5.8”) and large (5.9”) mesh trips for CY 2021-2025 combined



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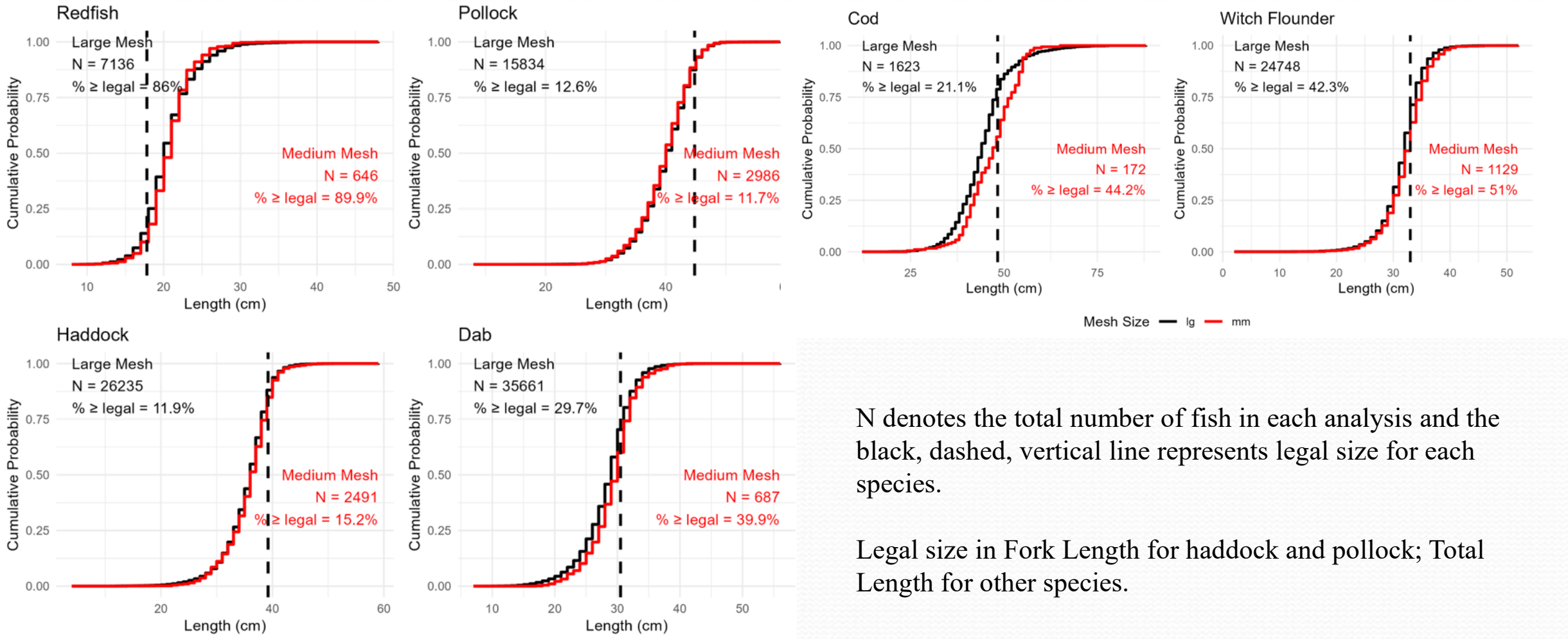
Updated since 3/31 GAP/CTE meeting

Cumulative Probability of discards at length for medium (mm; black line; 5-5.8”) and large (lg; red line; 5.9-7”)



N denotes the total number of fish in each analysis and the black, dashed, vertical line represents legal size for each species.

Legal size in Fork Length for haddock and pollock; Total Length for other species.

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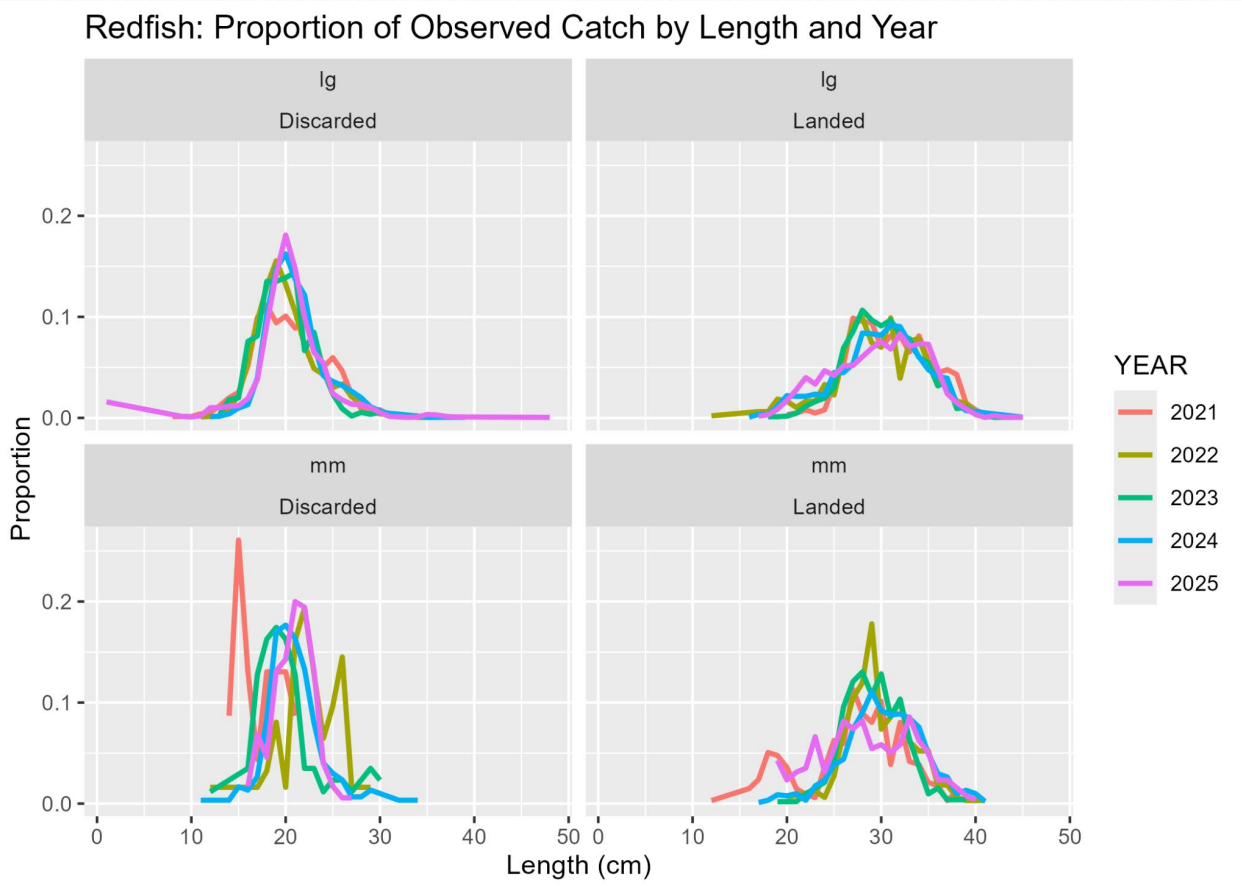
Updated since 3/31 GAP/CTE meeting

Redfish length proportions in medium (mm; 5-5.8”) and large (lg; 5.9-7”) mesh by year

- Redfish lengths by mesh size were mostly similar year to year, although there may be a slight narrowing of the range of sizes of discarded fish with increased proportions at 8 inches (20.3 cm).



2021 not directly comparable to other years since exemption was implemented mid-year

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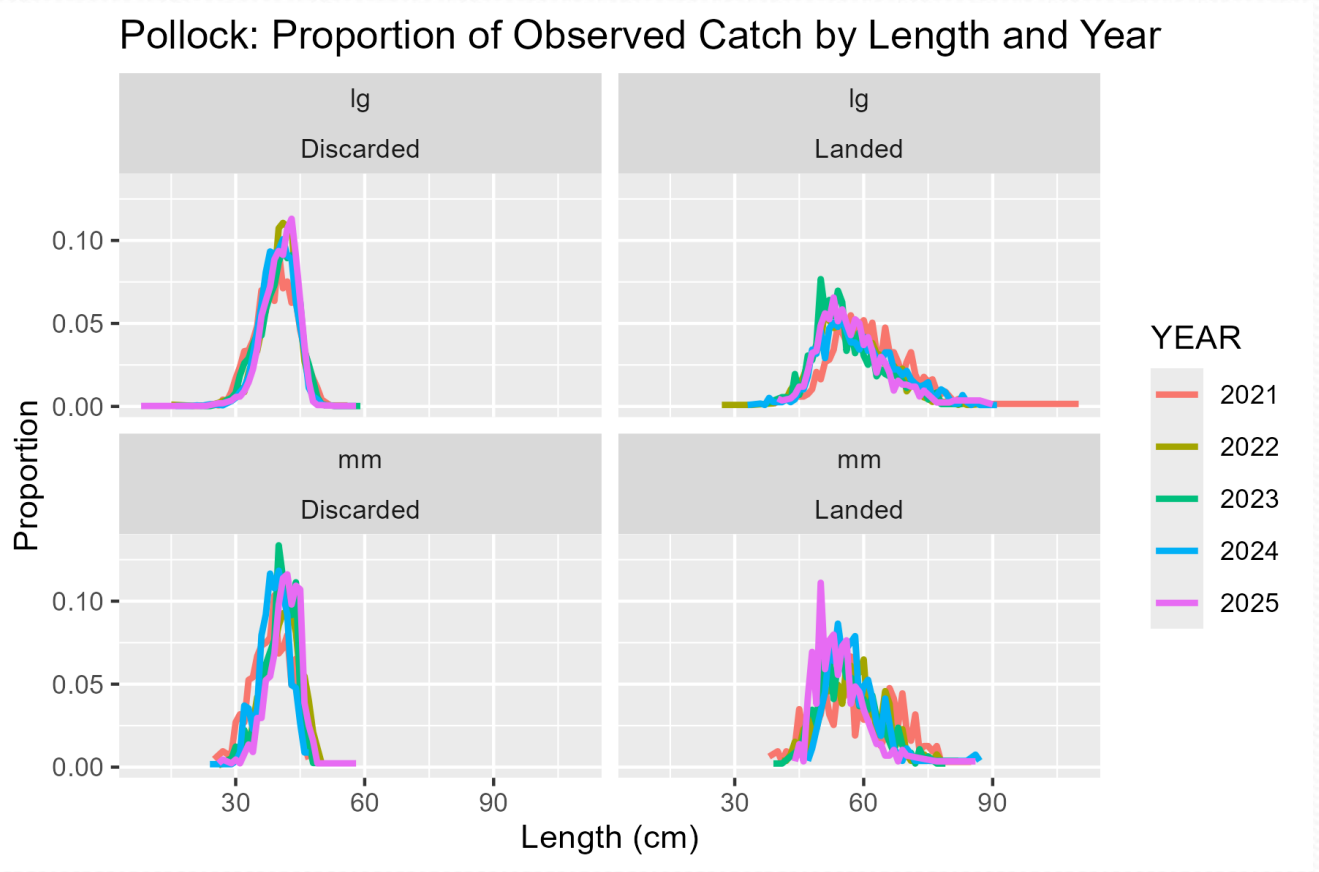
Updated since 3/31 GAP/CTE meeting

Pollock length proportions in medium (mm; 5-5.8”) and large (lg; 5.9-7”) mesh by year

- Pollock landings appear to show a pattern of decreased proportions of landed fish >25 inch (63.5 cm) from year to year, with 2025 having the lowest proportions, especially in medium mesh.



2021 not directly comparable to other years since exemption was implemented mid-year

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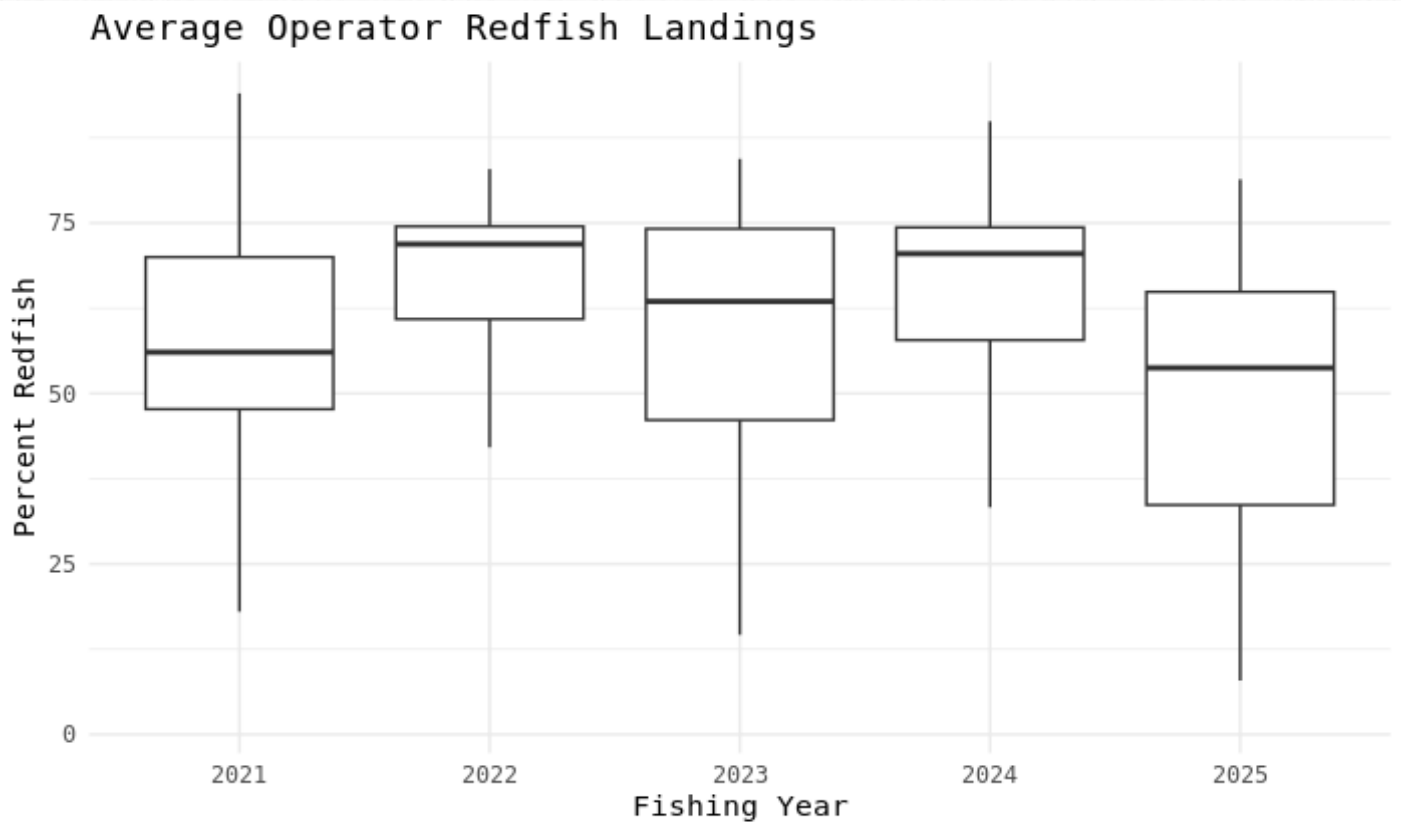
Size Composition (Observer Length Frequencies)

- For all groundfish species examined, there are **no significant differences in observer length frequencies or cumulative probabilities** between the medium mesh and large mesh for both discarded and kept catch, indicating there is **no evidence of any shift in selectivity with the smaller mesh size** allowed under the exemption program. Lack of shift to smaller fish indicates low biological impacts of medium mesh.
  - Low sample sizes for cod and white hake make drawing conclusions difficult, but length frequencies appear to be over the same general ranges for each mesh size.
- These findings are the same as what was seen in previous PDT analysis conducted during development of the universal exemption through FW61, which also did not see any signs of a shift in selectivity with the medium mesh.
  - Identified the same peak lengths in length frequency analysis and similar % discards >= legal size.
  - Previous analysis had shown differences for American plaice and witch flounder with a greater proportion of larger fish discarded with the medium mesh – but those differences seem to have shrunk or disappeared with additional years of data.
- There does appear to be some variability in length composition over time for redfish and pollock, but more years of data are needed to determine whether the identified patterns persist.

Operator Level Performance



Note: Outlier values removed for confidentiality.
Data from fishing year 2021 begin July 28, 2021
Fishing year 2025 data queried March 2026

- Median percent redfish landings by operator are above the 55% annual threshold for all years.
- For the three full years under the program: median percent redfish landings are ~70% in FY2022 and FY2024, and ~65% in FY2023.
- There is variability in percent redfish landings by operator across years
  - Greater variability in FY2023 compared to FY2022 and FY2024

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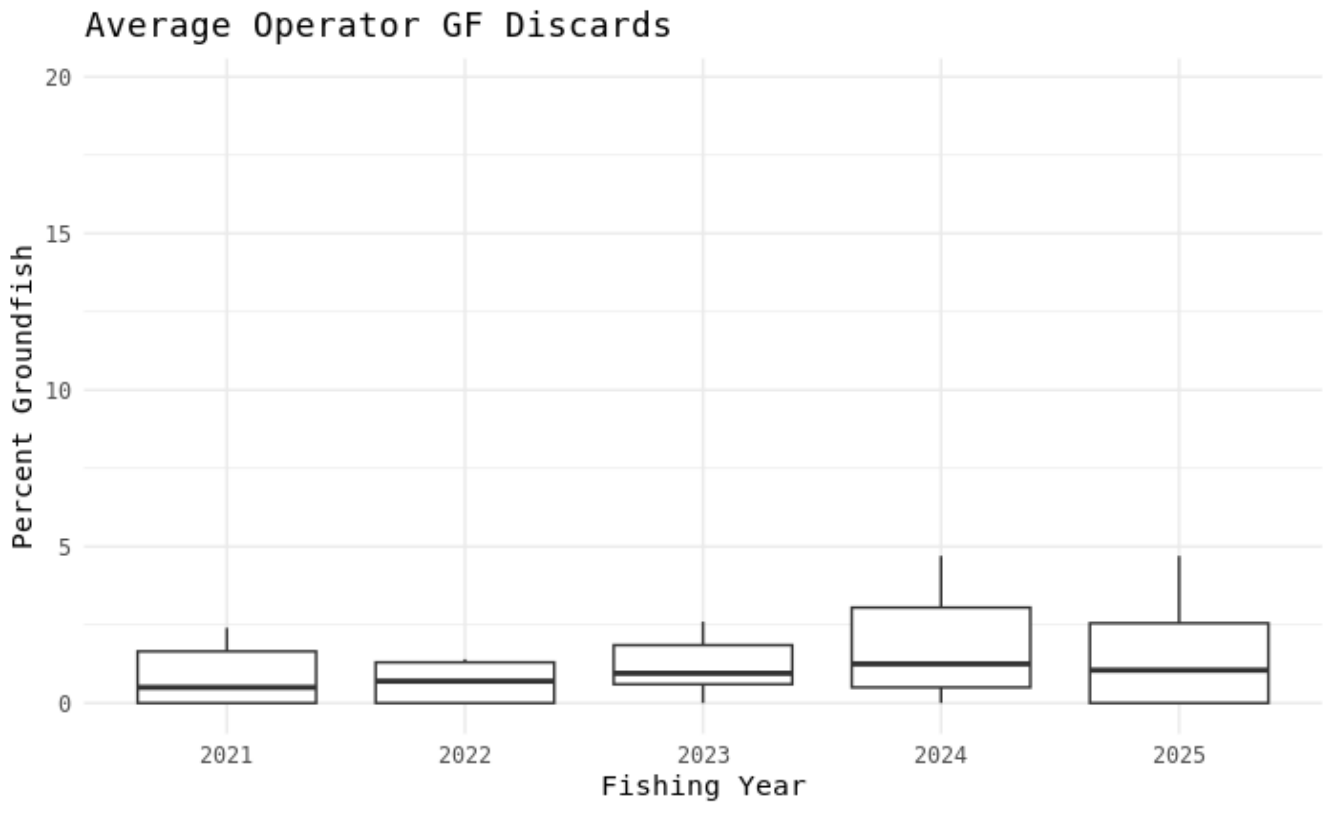
Operator Level Performance



- Median percent groundfish discards by operator are well below the 5% threshold for all years, at 1-2%.
- Variability in percent groundfish discards by operator is greatest in FY2024.

Note: Outlier values removed for confidentiality.
Data from fishing year 2021 begin July 28, 2021
Fishing year 2025 data queried March 2026

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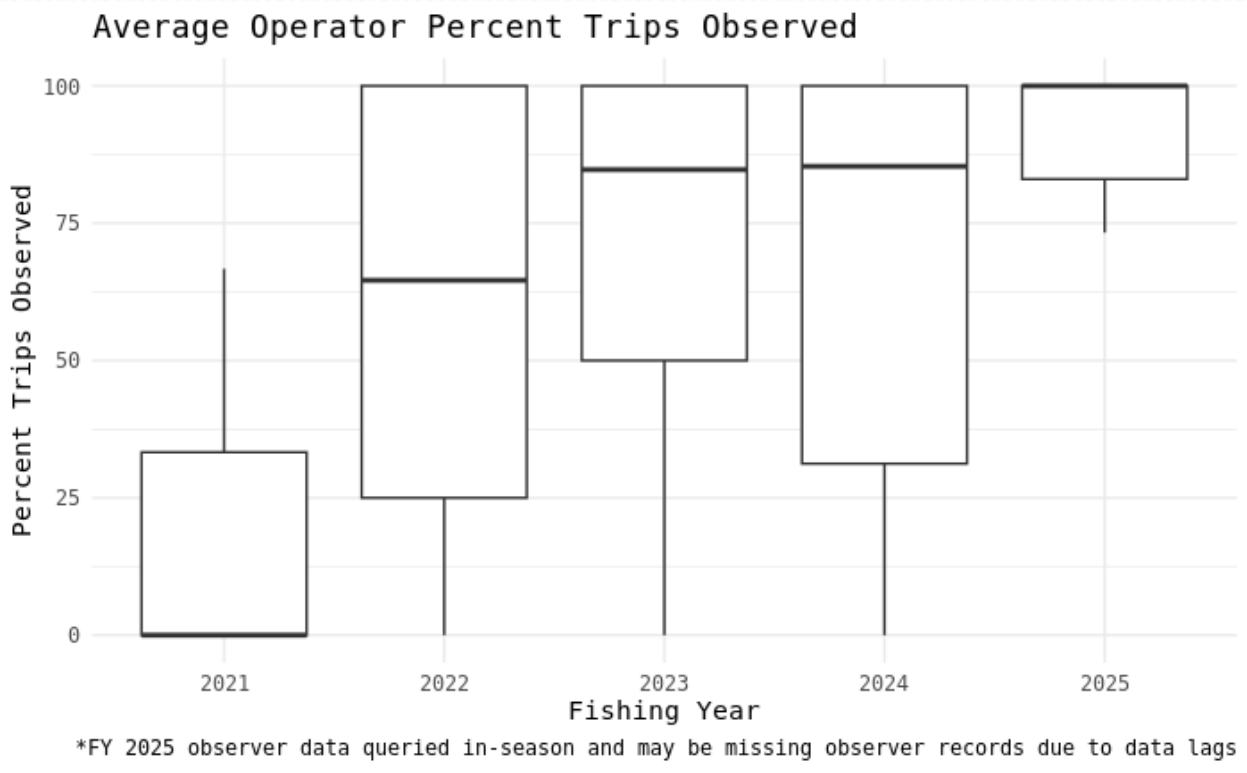
Operator Level Performance



- Median percent of observed exemption trips by operator in more recent years is relatively high, at over 80%.
- There is notable variability in the percent of observed exemption trips by operator across years.

Note: Outlier values removed for confidentiality.
Data from fishing year 2021 begin July 28, 2021
Fishing year 2025 data queried March 2026

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Monitoring Coverage

Percent redfish trips observed

fishing_year	observed	unobserved	total_trips	percent_observed
2021	17	53	70	24.3
2022	48	44	92	52.2
2023	74	16	90	82.2
2024	75	39	114	65.8
2025	53	9	62	85.5

- Monitoring coverage levels for redfish exemption trips reflect overall monitoring coverage levels for the groundfish fishery.
- FY2024 had the greatest difference.

Groundfish sector fishery monitoring coverage levels

Fishing Year	Target Coverage Level	Realized Coverage Level
FY 2021	40 %	32 %
FY 2022	80 %	60 %
FY 2023	100 %	81 %
FY 2024	100 %	85 %
FY 2025	100 %	82 %*

*In-season estimate as of March 15, 2026

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Redfish Landings and Revenue

Fishing Year	SubTrip Type	Redfish Landed lbs. (millions)	Redfish Revenue (millions 2024$)
2021	Redfish Exemption	1.45	0.95
2021	All Sector Groundfish	5.38	3.78
2022	Redfish Exemption	4.06	3.08
2022	All Sector Groundfish	8.36	6.20
2023	Redfish Exemption	2.60	1.89
2023	All Sector Groundfish	8.33	5.80
2024	Redfish Exemption	4.05	2.41
2024	All Sector Groundfish	11.60	6.70
2025	Redfish Exemption	1.30	0.64
2025	All Sector Groundfish	6.84	3.68

- 34% of redfish revenue has been generated from exemption sub-trips
- Min: 17% (FY2025)
  Max: 50% (FY2022)
- Redfish comprises 71% of groundfish landings and 52% of groundfish revenue from exemption sub-trips

Note: Fishing Year 2021 includes activity following the implementation of the universal redfish exemption on July 28, 2021.
Fishing Year 2025 in-season data queried during March 2026

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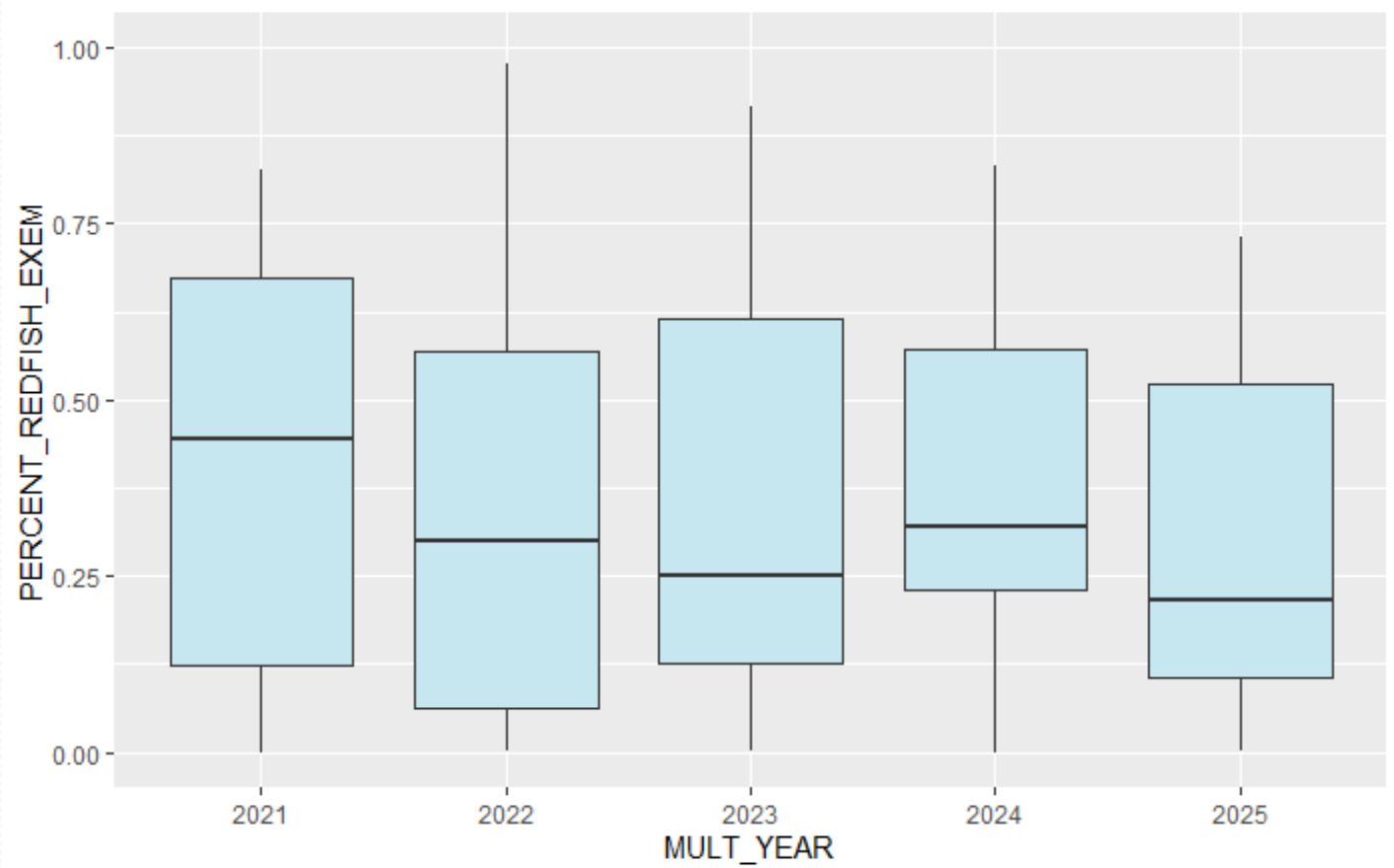
Redfish Landings and Revenue

Percentage of redfish revenue generated from exemption trips, vessel-level, FY2021 - 2025



- Considerable variability at the vessel level in terms of reliance on exemption sub-trips as a source of redfish revenue

Note: Only vessel/FY combinations with redfish revenue from exemption trips included
Fishing Year 2021 includes activity following the implementation of the universal redfish exemption on July 28, 2021.
Fishing Year 2025 in-season data queried during March 2026

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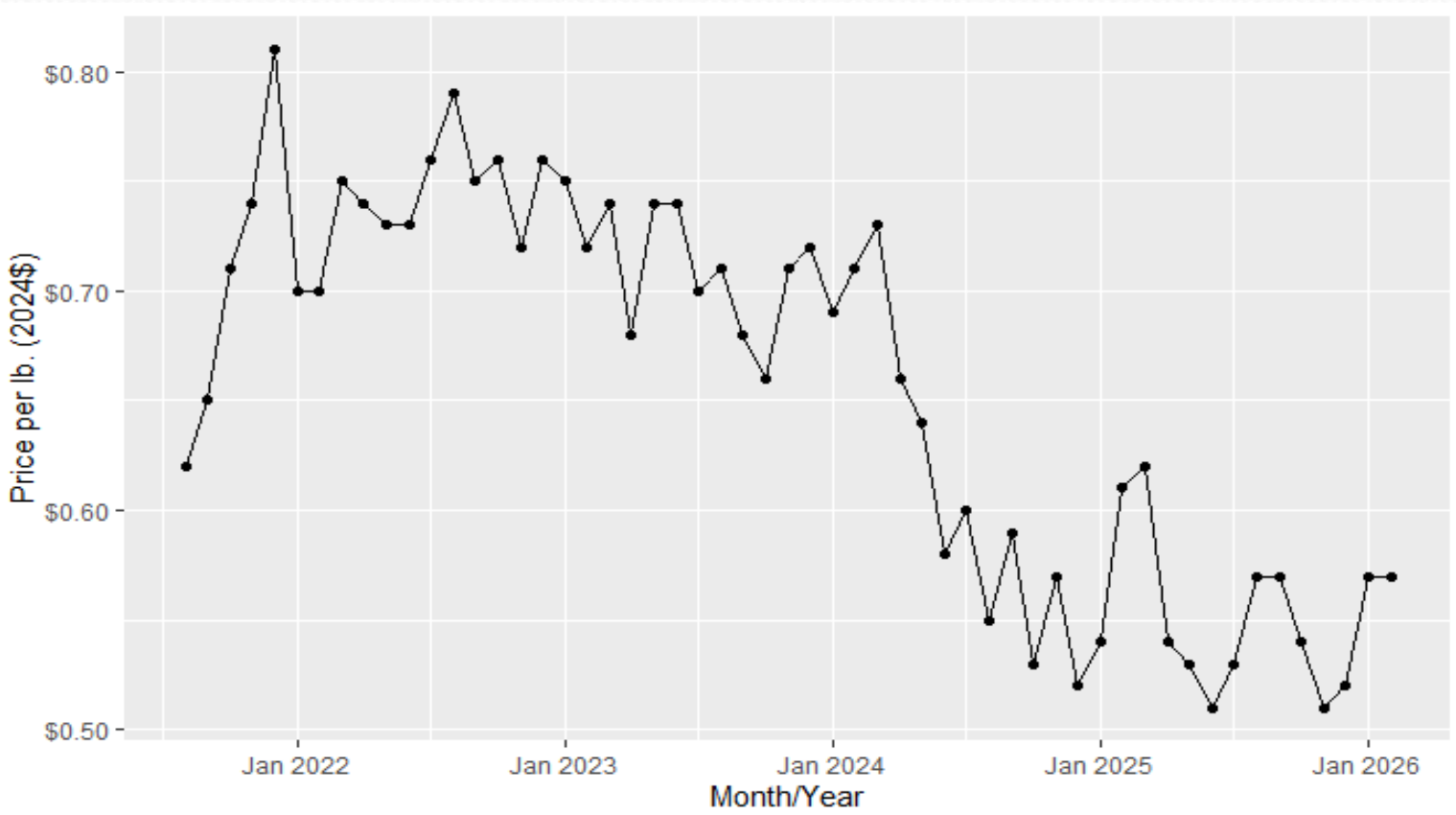
New since 3/31 GAP/CTE meeting

Monthly Redfish Prices



- Redfish per pound ex-vessel prices have generally been in the $0.50 - $0.80 range since the start of the universal exemption.
- Harvest of redfish has been bolstered by USDA purchases that have occurred throughout the exemption program.
  - In total, these purchases have amounted to 1,600 mt of redfish.

Price represents the total value divided by the total landed pounds in a given month.

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New since 3/31 GAP/CTE meeting

Pollock Landings and Revenue

Fishing Year	SubTrip Type	Pollock Landed lbs. (millions)	Pollock Revenue (millions 2024$)
2021	Redfish Exemption	0.36	0.61
2021	All Sector Groundfish	4.43	7.33
2022	Redfish Exemption	1.01	1.28
2022	All Sector Groundfish	6.77	8.78
2023	Redfish Exemption	0.76	1.12
2023	All Sector Groundfish	6.41	9.03
2024	Redfish Exemption	0.72	0.66
2024	All Sector Groundfish	4.24	4.18
2025	Redfish Exemption	0.51	0.60
2025	All Sector Groundfish	4.84	6.50

- Pollock is the second most caught groundfish species on redfish exemption sub-trips
- 12% of pollock revenue is generated from exemption sub-trips
- Pollock comprises 18% of groundfish landings and 25% of groundfish revenue from exemption sub-trips

Note: Fishing Year 2021 includes activity following the implementation of the universal redfish exemption on July 28, 2021.
Fishing Year 2025 in-season data queried during March 2026

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Groundfish Landings and Revenue

Fishing Year	SubTrip Type	Groundfish Landed lbs. (millions)	Groundfish Revenue (millions 2024$)
2021	Redfish Exemption	2.19	2.18
2021	All Sector Groundfish	26.00	42.14
2022	Redfish Exemption	5.43	5.09
2022	All Sector Groundfish	33.10	46.93
2023	Redfish Exemption	3.84	3.69
2023	All Sector Groundfish	32.47	42.48
2024	Redfish Exemption	5.29	4.02
2024	All Sector Groundfish	32.97	40.76
2025	Redfish Exemption	2.28	2.22
2025	All Sector Groundfish	23.50	34.78

- 8% of groundfish FMP revenue has been generated from exemption sub-trips
- Min: 5% (FY2025)
  Max: 11% (FY2023)
- Vast majority (~90%) of exemption sub-trip revenue generated from groundfish FMP stocks

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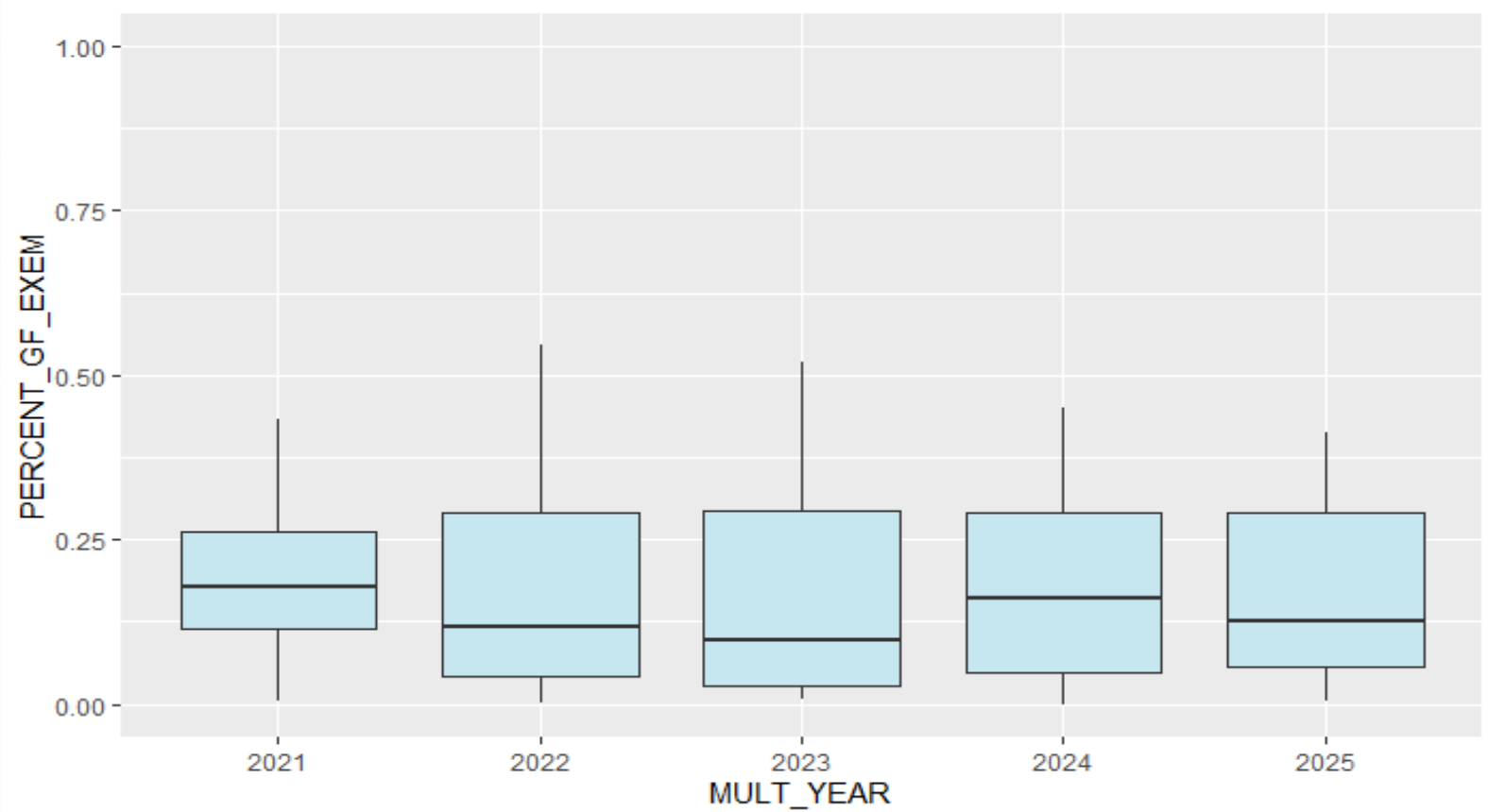
Note: Fishing Year 2021 includes activity following the implementation of the universal redfish exemption on July 28, 2021.
Fishing Year 2025 in-season data queried during March 2026

Groundfish Landings and Revenue

Percentage of groundfish revenue generated from exemption trips, vessel-level, FY2021 - 2025



- Vast majority of vessels generating <30% of their groundfish FMP revenue from exemption sub-trips

Note: Only vessel/FY combinations with groundfish FMP revenue from exemption trips included
Fishing Year 2021 includes activity following the implementation of the universal redfish exemption on July 28, 2021.
Fishing Year 2025 in-season data queried during March 2026

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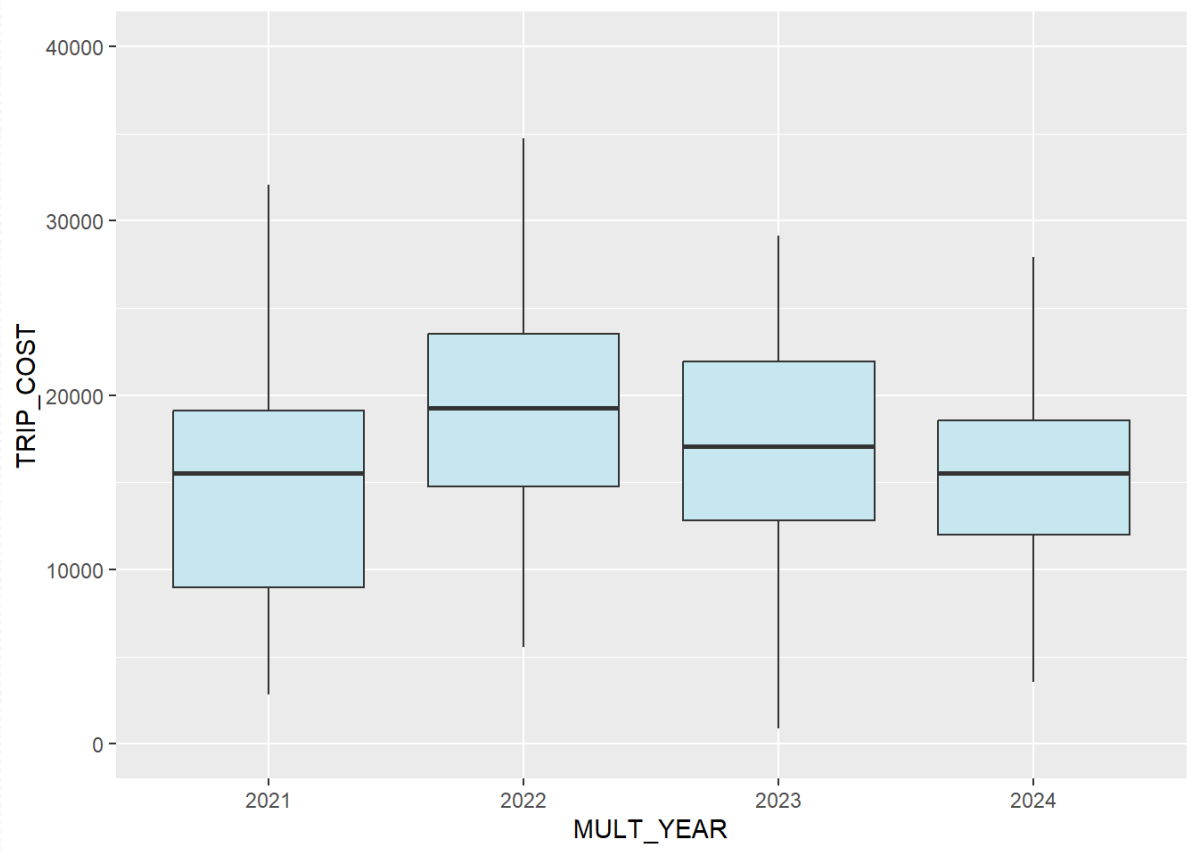
Operating Costs

Distribution of operating costs incurred on trips that had at least one exemption sub-trip, vessel-level, FY2021 – 2024



- Median operating costs on trips that had at least one redfish exemption sub-trip have generally been in the 15-20k range on an annual basis

Note: Costs are for the entire duration of the trip (all sub-trips).
Fishing Year 2021 includes activity following the implementation of the universal redfish exemption on July 28, 2021.
Fishing Year 2024 data covers May - December 2024, January 2025 - April 2025 not included.

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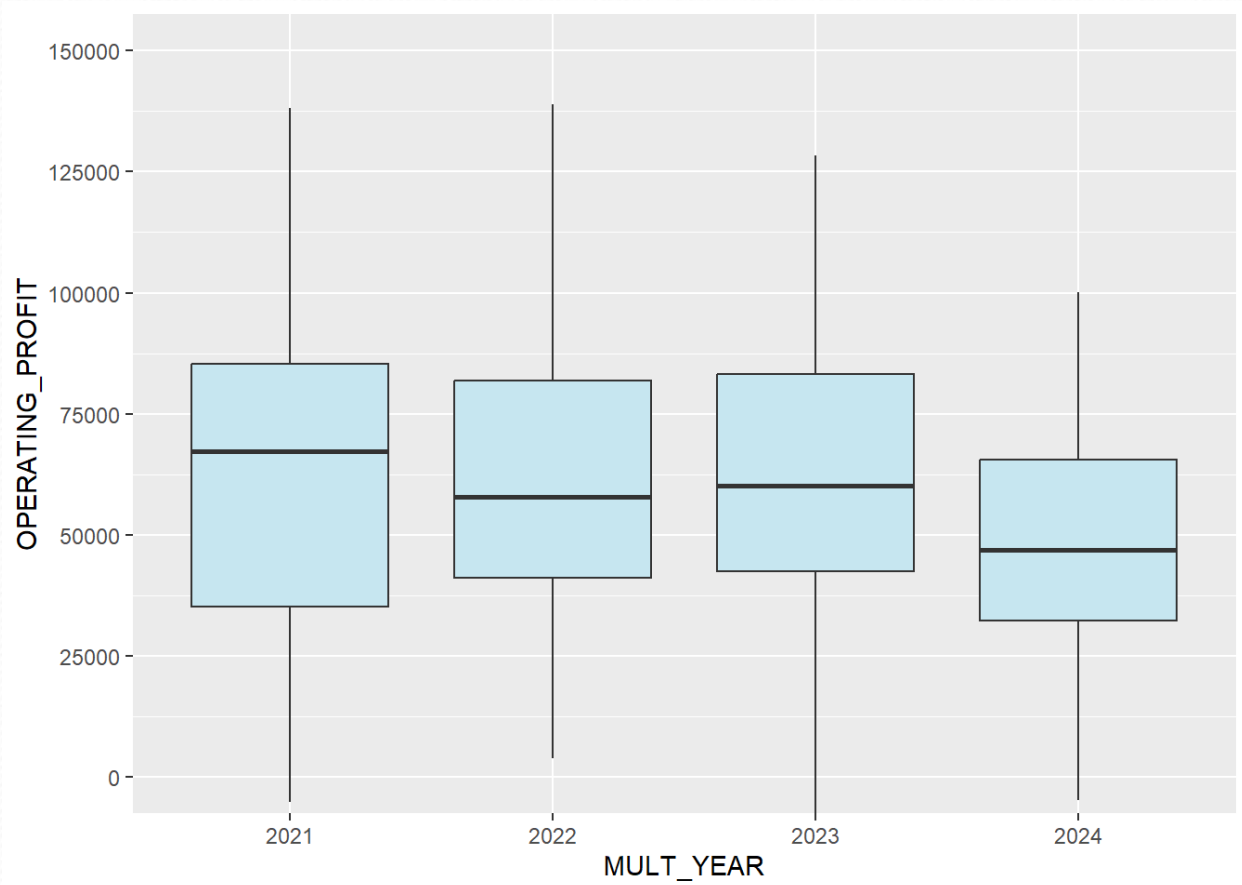
Operating Profits

Distribution of operating profit generated on trips that had at least one exemption sub-trip, vessel-level, FY2021 - 2024



- Median trip operating profit have generally been in the 60-70k range on an annual basis from FY2021 - 2023, with a drop-off in FY2024

Note: Revenues and costs are for the entire duration of the trip (all sub-trips).
Fishing Year 2021 includes activity following the implementation of the universal redfish exemption on July 28, 2021.
Fishing Year 2024 data covers May - December 2024, January 2025 - April 2025 not included.

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Enforcement Information

NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) and U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) representatives provided a summary of general enforcement information regarding the Redfish Sector Exemption Program:

- To date, there have been no enforcement actions taken specific to the Redfish Exemption Program.
- Offshore enforcement within the Redfish Exemption Area is primarily conducted through monitoring VMS data and conducting at-sea boardings to check for compliance with regulations.
- At-sea boarding is one of the only ways to confirm that a vessel is not actively fishing with the smaller mesh in an area not permitted.
  - Primary purpose of a Coast Guard targeted operation conducted in late 2021 (Dec. 13, 2021 – Jan. 8, 2022) for Redfish Exemption Program compliance.
- Mesh size regulations are enforceable, but enforcement is challenging.

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Conclusions: Across all Analyses

The current exemption program structure and reporting requirements make **monitoring the program for compliance challenging as identification of redfish exemption sub-trips is non-intuitive and requires additional steps/criteria**. This is due to the interaction of the regulatory language and the constraints of reporting.

- Regulations require that a vessel submits a trip start hail in order to participate in the program during the trip. However, a vessel is not compelled to participate if it submits the trip start hail.
- Vessels may use trawl gear with a minimum of 5.5 inch mesh, but they are not required to, when fishing under the Redfish Exemption Program.
- Regulations explicitly state that the redfish exemption fishing notification and catch report submitted is what indicates the vessel is fishing under the provisions of the Redfish Exemption Program. While this notification is associated with a timestamp, VTR subtrips are not, and the timing of the catch report cannot be matched with the correct subtrip unless the hauls are also observed.
- Observer data does include timestamps that can be used to match. Thus, these challenges become greater under lower monitoring coverage levels.

Conclusions: Across all Analyses

The program structure and reporting requirements also have **implications for estimation of discard rates**. The current discard strata for redfish exemption trips are based on the Trip Start Hail, and not all trips with a Trip Start Hail end up using the redfish exemption.

- Under high monitoring coverage levels this is less of an issue with discards coming directly from observer data on the majority of trips. But under lower monitoring coverage, this could introduce additional error and uncertainty in discard estimates as these may not be representative of actual redfish exemption fishing activity.

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Overall PDT Conclusions Based on Analyses

- Sectors are consistently meeting the catch thresholds requirements (monthly and annual redfish landings thresholds, and monthly groundfish discards).
- Redfish are the highest landed groundfish species on redfish exemption sub-trips by a large margin. Discards of groundfish (redfish and other stocks) are low.
- There are no differences in the size of fish discarded and landed between medium mesh and large mesh, suggesting no evidence of any shift in selectivity to smaller fish with use of the smaller mesh size.

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Overall PDT Conclusions Based on Analyses

- Fleet participation in the exemption has been generally stable over time in terms of relative effort, though there have been some fluctuations in the number of participating sectors, permits, and number of trips.
  - The majority of vessels participating in the exemption are >75 ft.
  - Most redfish exemption trips are “split trips” which utilize the provision to fish Part 1 of a trip outside the exemption and Part 2 under the exemption.
- While participation in the exemption program is relatively low on an annual basis, the vessels that participate generate a substantial portion of their redfish, and more broadly groundfish, revenue from redfish exemption sub-trips.

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Overall PDT Conclusions Based on Analyses

- Performance metrics appear to indicate the program is meeting its goal and objectives of: balance of allowing use of an efficient mesh size codend to facilitate harvest of redfish while reducing to the extent practicable bycatch of other groundfish stocks, and increasing stability and certainty for participants.
- The minimal landings and discards of other groundfish stocks on redfish exemption trips from FY2021 through in-season FY2025, suggest the current Exemption Area and seasonal closure areas have been effective at reducing bycatch of other groundfish stocks, especially white hake.
  - Bycatch of other groundfish (white hake, pollock, GOM haddock, GB haddock, and GB cod) was the primary driver in the reduction of the Redfish Exemption Area in FY2020 under the previous annual sector exemption process, and led to the development of an additional seasonal closure area under the current Exemption Area.

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Overall PDT Conclusions Based on Analyses

- The Trip Start Hail is not a reliable indicator of actual redfish exemption trip activity given the relatively large number of trips that use the Trip Start Hail but ultimately do not use the exemption, and so this requirement appears to not be meeting its intended goal. This has implications for monitoring compliance of the program and for discard estimation. It also does not generally enhance enforcement capabilities.

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GAP & Committee Discussion – March 31st

- Lot of engagement from advisors, committee members, and public – including active redfish exemption participants
- Suggestions to improve clarity of information in report
- Suggestions for modifications to existing analyses
- Interest in additional analyses
- Initial ideas shared for possible modifications to exemption program in a future action

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GAP & Committee Discussion – March 31st

Public comments on concerns about enforcement of mesh size requirements.

- Enforcement Committee meeting May 14th to discuss the topic of groundfish mesh regulations.

- Groundfish Advisory Panel Discussion Statement – June 10, 2025:

  The Groundfish Advisors in the meeting expressed interest for the Groundfish Committee to request the Enforcement Committee hold a meeting to discuss enforcement of mesh size regulations.

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GAP & Committee Discussion – March 31st

Suggestions for additional analyses:

- Operator-level performance – examine by operator tenure/experience
  - Could inform potential changes to catch thresholds
- Catch composition – examine by tow length and day vs. night
  - Could inform potential changes for additional flexibility of exemption fishing (i.e., beyond Part 1 and Part 2)

Analyses that could be conducted in a future action, should the Council consider taking action to modify the exemption in a future year

New England Fishery Management Council

For Today

- Redfish Sector Exemption Review
  - Receive an overview of the PDT's report on the review
  - Discussion

<u>Next Steps:</u>

- Consider potential future actions to modify the redfish sector exemption program (*to be discussed during 2027 Council priorities recommendations later this year*)

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Other Business

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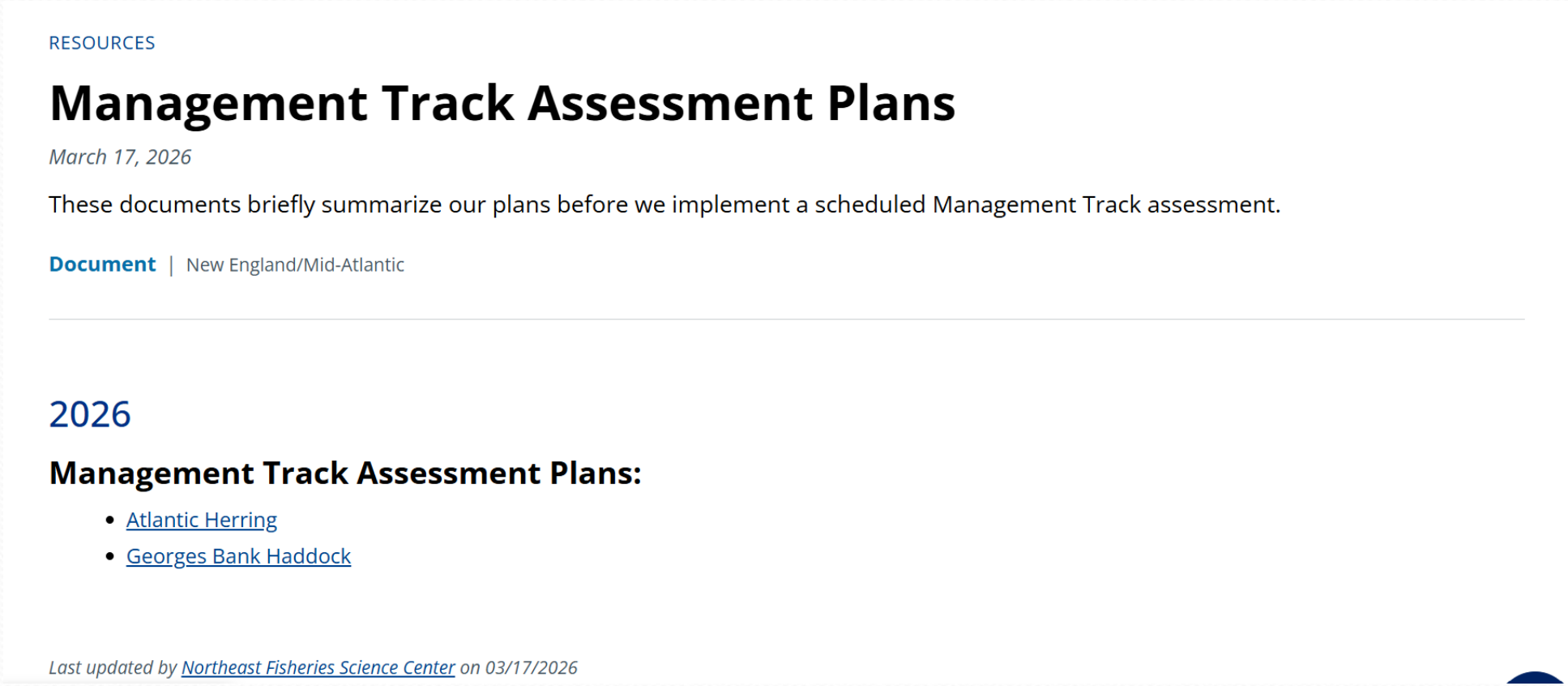
Plans for June 2026 Management Track Assessments

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center shared one-page documents summarizing plans for June 2026 Management Track Assessments, including for Georges Bank haddock.



RESOURCES

Management Track Assessment Plans

March 17, 2026

These documents briefly summarize our plans before we implement a scheduled Management Track assessment.

Document | New England/Mid-Atlantic

2026

Management Track Assessment Plans:

- Atlantic Herring
- Georges Bank Haddock

Last updated by Northeast Fisheries Science Center on 03/17/2026

NEFSC's request for community input for 2027 stock assessments

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center is seeking input from the commercial and recreational fishing industries, state agency scientists, academic researchers, and interested members of the public to help inform the 2027 Management Track Stocks Assessments for multiple Mid-Atlantic stocks as well as four stocks of **Atlantic cod**:

- Georges Bank
- Eastern Gulf of Maine
- Western Gulf of Maine
- Southern New England

Assessment scientists are interested in on-the-water observations and other information that can help improve assessments. A full list of stock specific questions is available here.

Submit your comments using the community input form. This form is open through April 30, 2026.

Virtual meeting held on March 18, 2026

Groundfish Committee – March 31st

The Groundfish Committee requests an update from the Science Center to the Council on Portside Biological Sampling. It was noted during the virtual meeting for the Atlantic cod community outreach meeting on March 18th that there continues to be no age-based samples for US Georges Bank cod. With up to 100% monitoring in the commercial groundfish sector fishery for multiple years and a pilot program initiated between the fishing industry and MA DMF, there should be an action plan for acquiring samples from vessels fishing in multiple broad stock areas. The Georges Bank cod assessment approach, which assumes a single, combined commercial fleet (US and Canada) and relies on Canadian catch-at-age information is inherently mis-specified. This approach ignores selectivity parameter issues from established regulation differences between the US and Canada (e.g., mesh-size regulations, seasonality of fishing effort, and spatial transferability of quota allocation).

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Extra Slides

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Redfish Sector Exemption Review

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New since 3/31 GAP/CTE meeting

Landings by Trimester - Pollock

- Proportion of pollock landings to total groundfish landings

Values in metric tons (mt)

Fishing Year	Trimester	Non GF	Other GF	Pollock	% Pollock
2021	Trimester1	6.4	308.5	59.7	16.2
2021	Trimester2	20.6	518.4	129.2	20.0
2021	Trimester3	1.4	113.9	14.1	11.0
2022	Trimester1	36.1	1310.1	252.3	16.1
2022	Trimester2	8.4	208.1	108.7	34.3
2022	Trimester3	22.3	516.4	154.0	23.0
2023	Trimester1	16.2	322.2	67.5	17.3
2023	Trimester2	15.6	442.6	153.4	25.7
2023	Trimester3	41.5	681.4	174.4	20.4
2024	Trimester1	56.5	1316.4	232.0	15.0
2024	Trimester2	24.9	508.9	89.1	14.9
2024	Trimester3	41.4	296.0	45.5	13.3
2025	Trimester1	121.3	574.8	168.1	22.6
2025	Trimester2	41.3	232.3	87.5	27.4

Data from fishing year 2021 begin July 28, 2021
Fishing year 2025 data queried March 2026
Fishing year 2025 trimester 3 data removed for confidentiality

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New since 3/31 GAP/CTE meeting

Discards by Trimester - Pollock

- Proportion of groundfish discards that are pollock

Values in metric tons (mt)

Fishing Year	Trimester	Non GF	Other GF	Pollock	% Pollock Discards
2021	Trimester1	6.3	0.1	0.0	0.0
2021	Trimester2	6.8	0.1	0.6	8.0
2021	Trimester3	0.5	0.0	0.2	28.6
2022	Trimester1	42.7	0.2	1.3	2.9
2022	Trimester2	10.2	0.3	0.2	1.9
2022	Trimester3	13.3	0.6	2.7	16.3
2023	Trimester1	30.1	0.4	0.4	1.3
2023	Trimester2	24.3	0.7	0.9	3.5
2023	Trimester3	31.6	2.2	1.1	3.2
2024	Trimester1	66.2	8.9	1.0	1.3
2024	Trimester2	18.9	0.8	10.9	35.6
2024	Trimester3	8.5	0.4	0.1	1.1
2025	Trimester1	111.5	1.8	1.9	1.6
2025	Trimester2	19.4	0.3	1.6	7.5

Data from fishing year 2021 begin July 28, 2021
Fishing year 2025 data queried March 2026
Fishing year 2025 trimester 3 data removed for confidentiality

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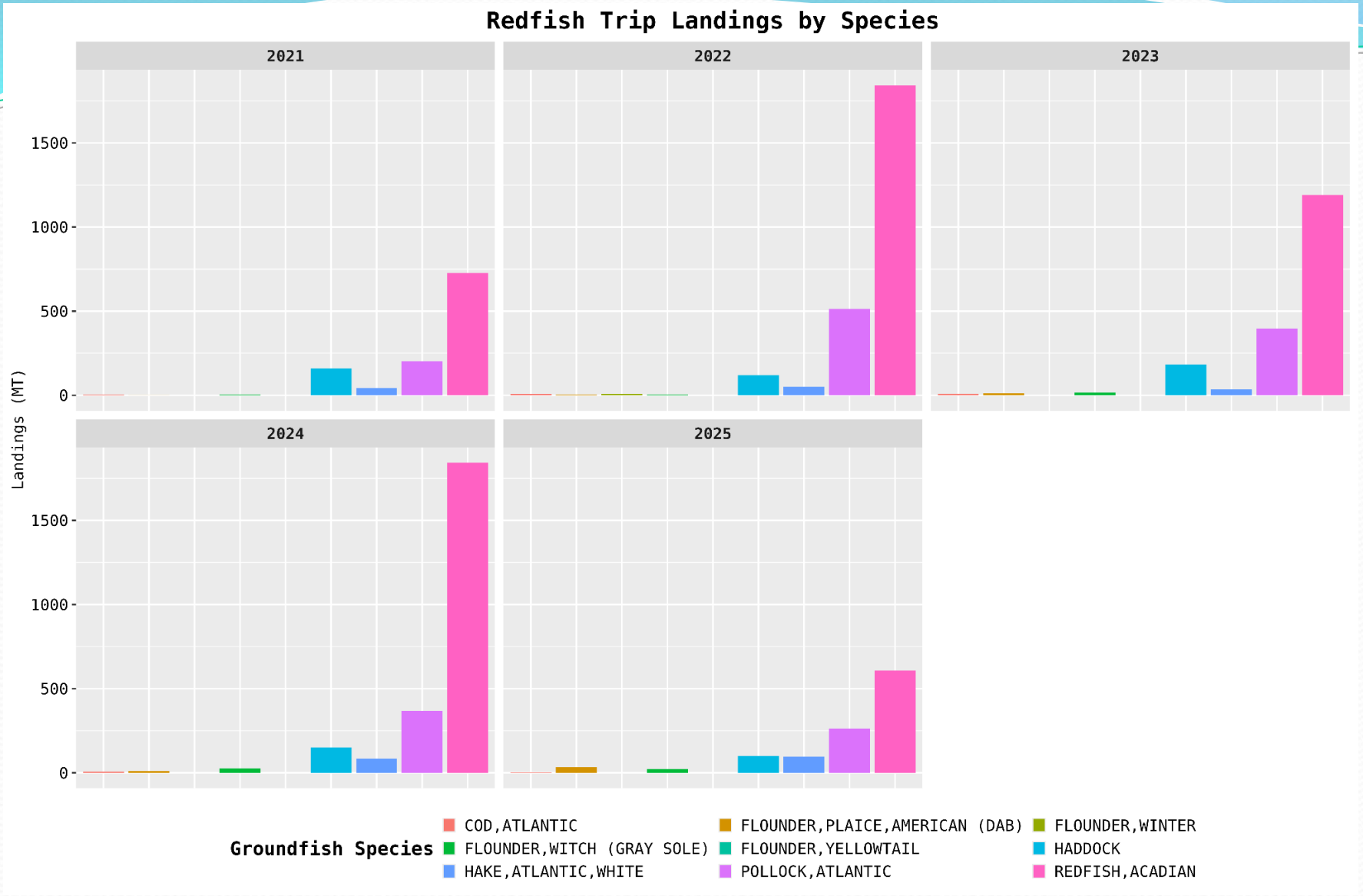

- Redfish are the highest landed groundfish species across all years. Followed by pollock, and haddock
- Redfish landings were notably higher in FY2022 and FY2024 compared to other years.
- Other groundfish species landings are minimal.

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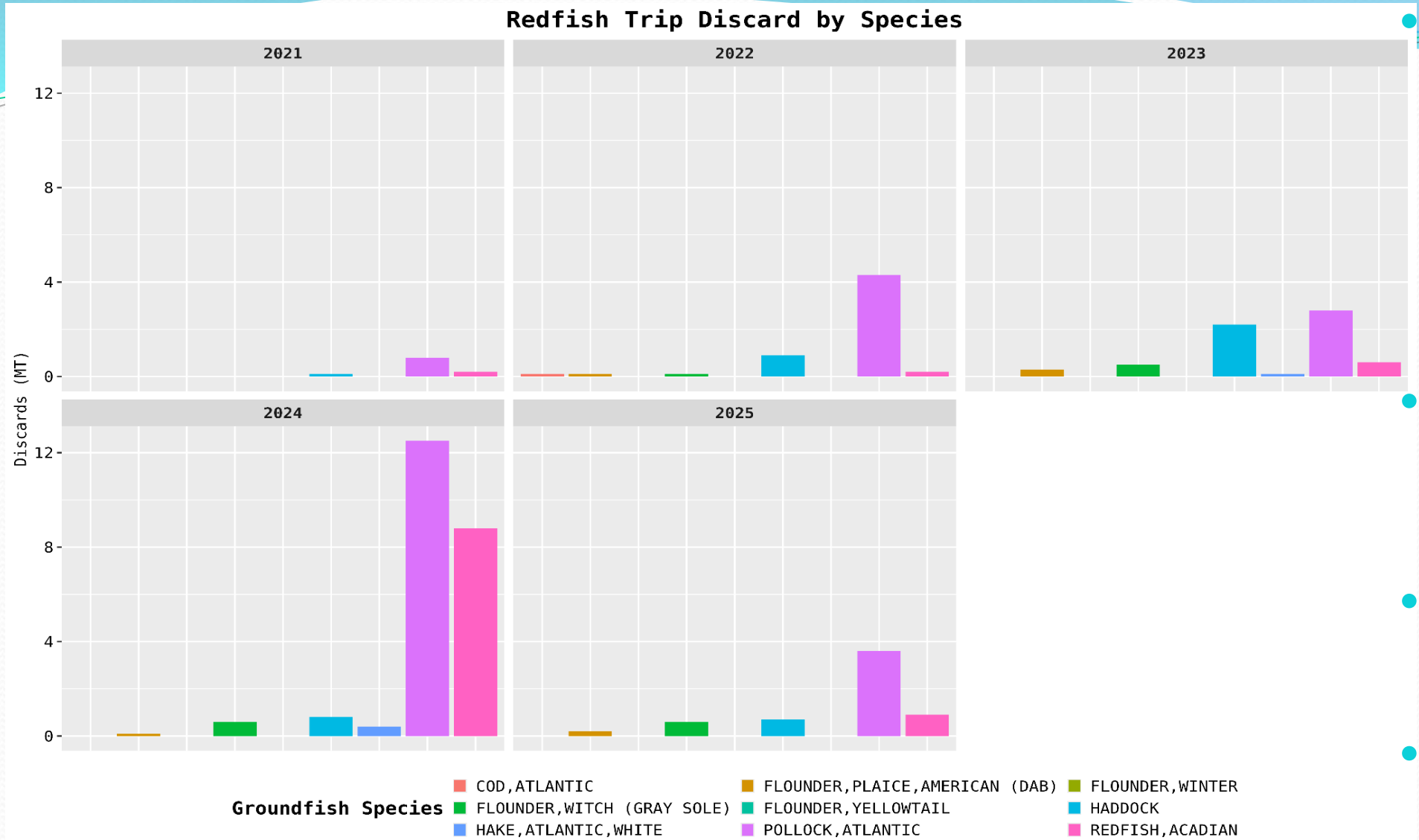
Data from fishing year 2021 begin July 28, 2021
Fishing year 2025 data queried March 2026



- Pollock comprise most of the discards, followed by redfish, across all years.
  - In FY2022 and FY2023, haddock discards were higher than redfish.
- Both pollock and redfish discards were notably higher in FY2024.
- Other groundfish species discards are minimal.
- The proportion of discards to landings is low for redfish, pollock, and other groundfish species.

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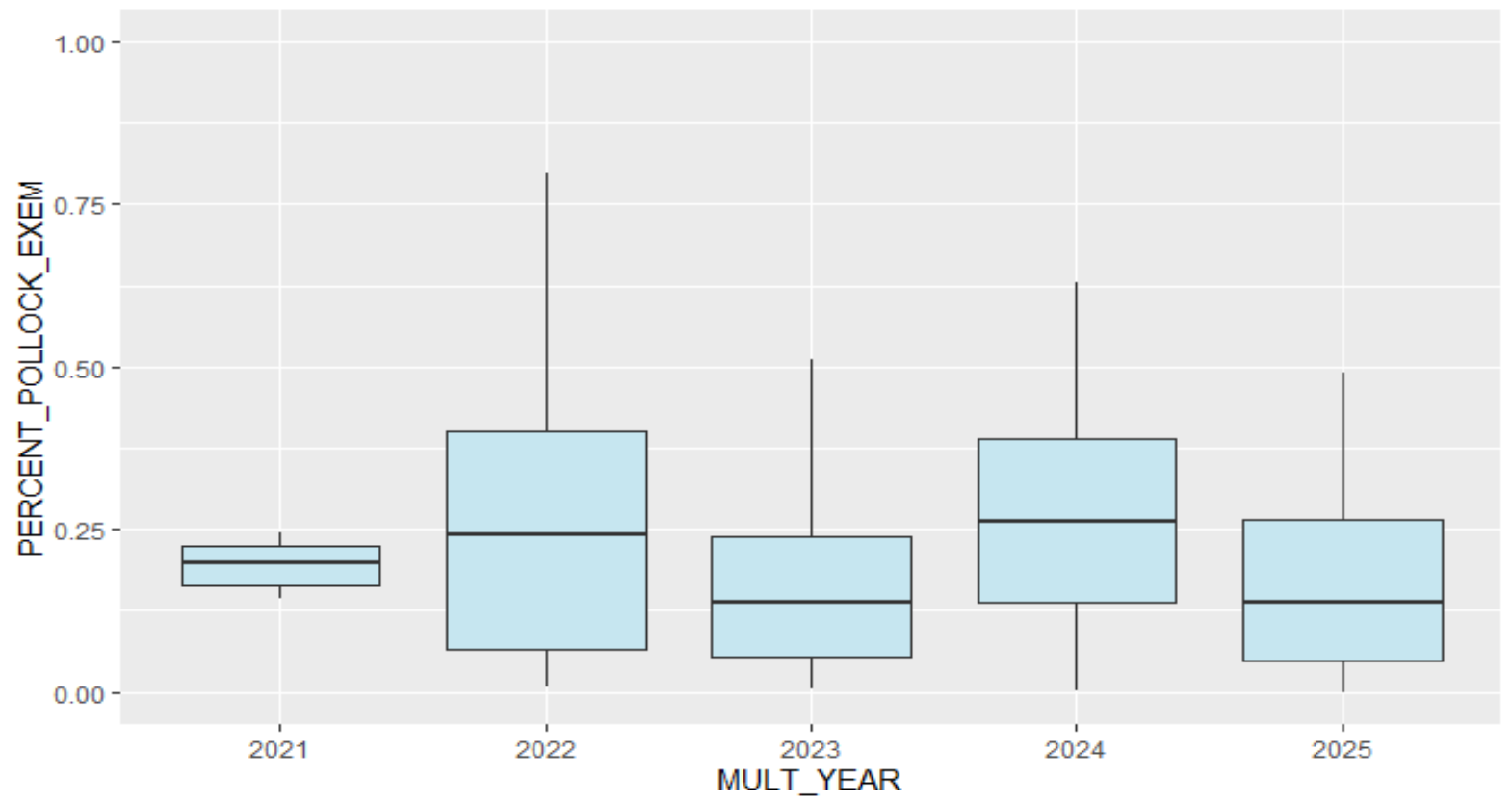
Data from fishing year 2021 begin July 28, 2021
Fishing year 2025 data queried March 2026

New since 3/31 GAP/CTE meeting

Pollock Landings and Revenue

Percentage of pollock revenue generated from exemption trips, vessel-level, FY2021 - 2025



- Considerable variability at the vessel level in terms of reliance on exemption sub-trips as a source of pollock revenue

Note: Only vessel/FY combinations with pollock revenue from exemption trips included
Fishing Year 2021 includes activity following the implementation of the universal redfish exemption on July 28, 2021.
Fishing Year 2025 in-season data queried during March 2026

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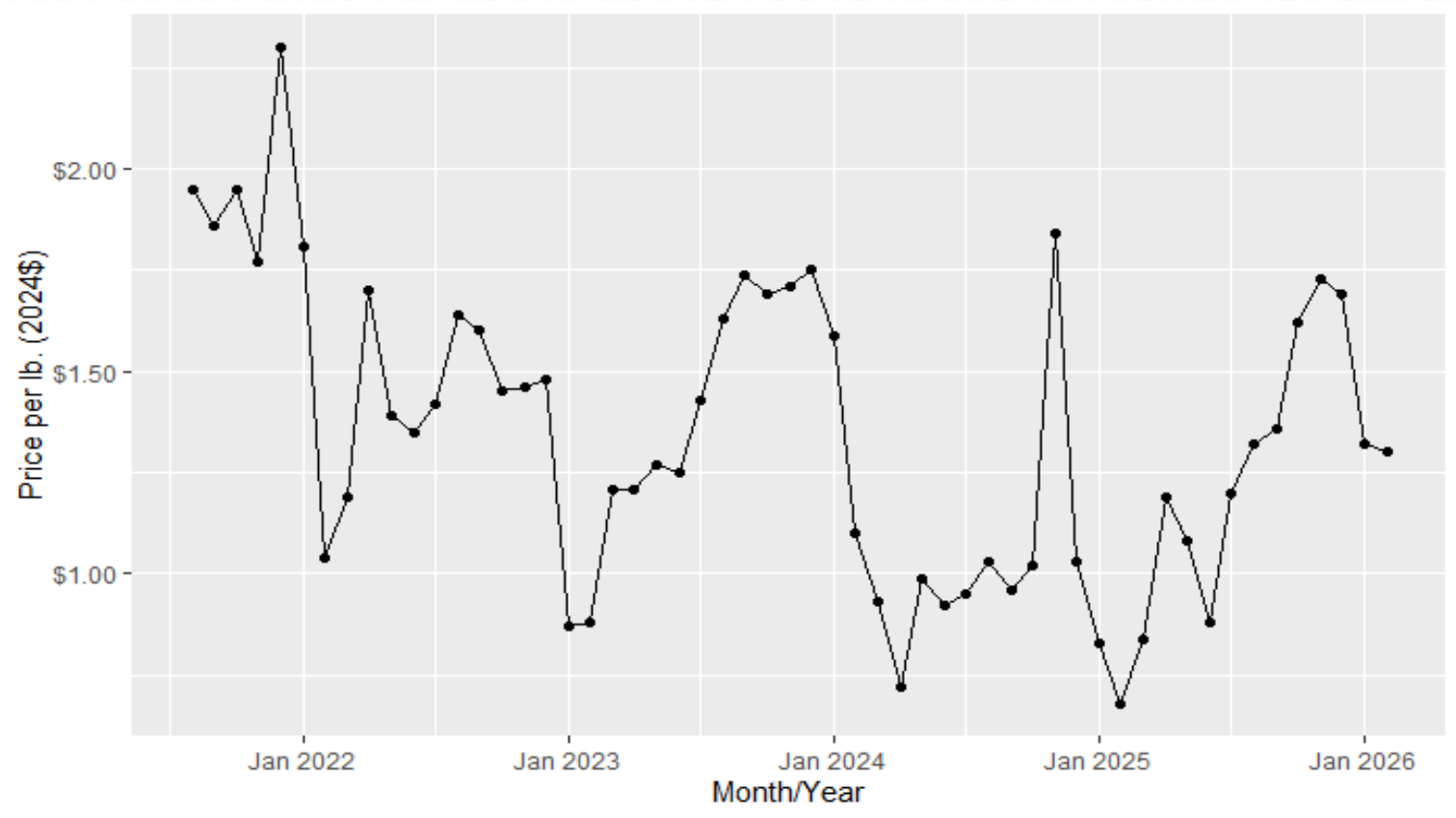
New since 3/31 GAP/CTE meeting

Monthly Pollock Prices



- Pollock per pound ex-vessel prices have experienced considerable variability since the start of the universal exemption.

Price represents the total value divided by the total landed pounds in a given month.

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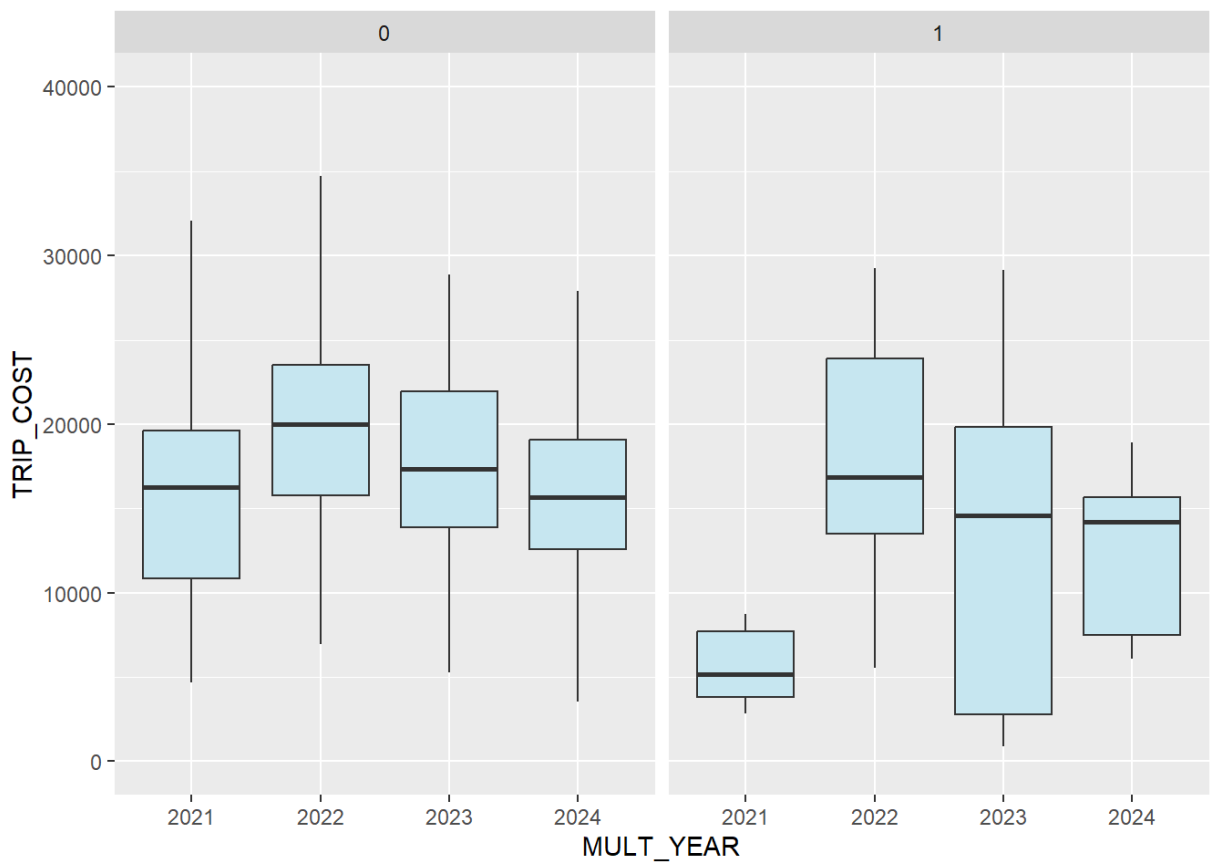
Operating Costs

Distribution of operating costs incurred on trips that were split between exemption and non-exemption sub-trips (0) vs. trips that were comprised of entirely exemption sub-trips (1), vessel-level, FY2021 – 2024



- Trips comprised entirely of redfish exemption sub-trips have generally had lower operating costs than split trips (trips with an exemption and non-exemption component)

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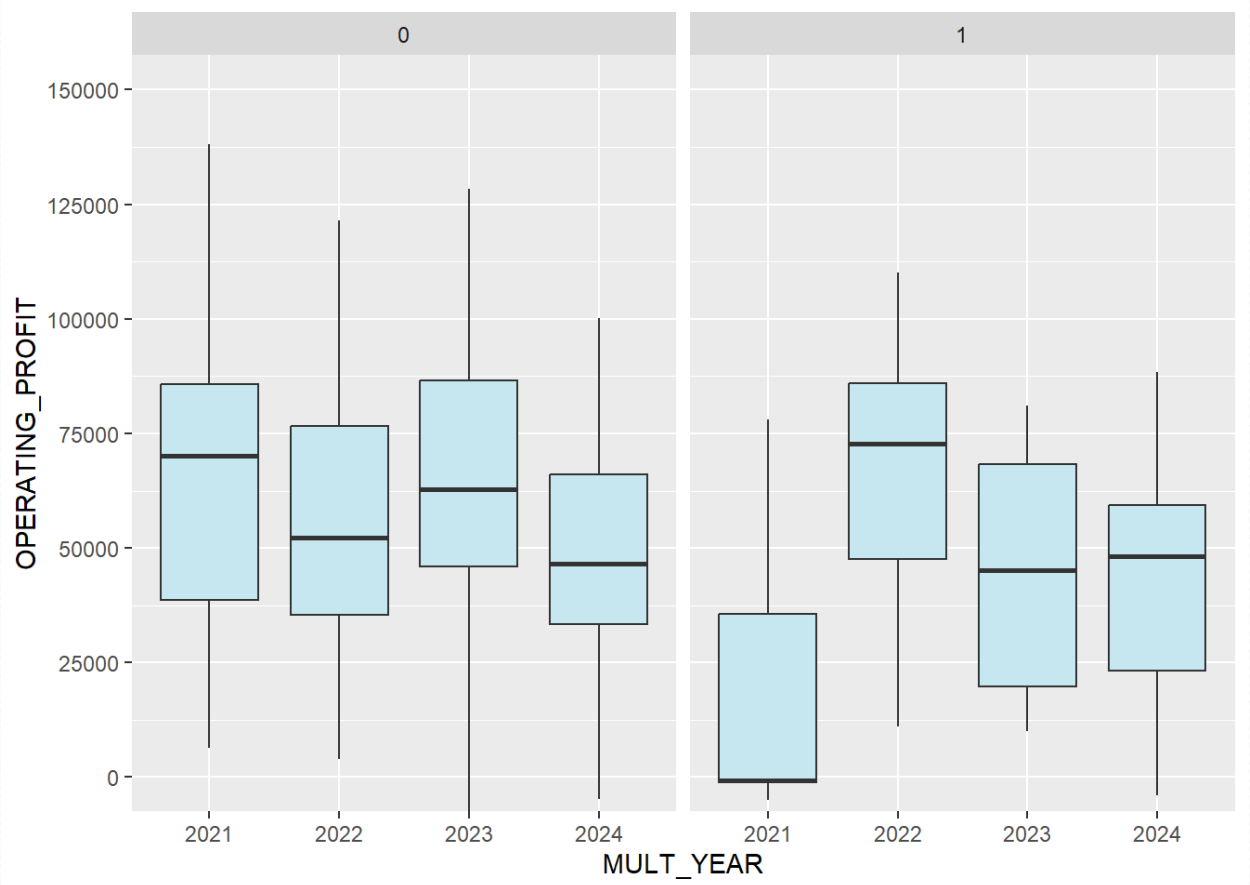
Note: Costs are for the entire duration of the trip (all sub-trips).
Fishing Year 2021 includes activity following the implementation of the universal redfish exemption on July 28, 2021.
Fishing Year 2024 data covers May - December 2024, January 2025 - April 2025 not included.

Operating Profits

Distribution of operating profit generated on trips that were split between exemption and non-exemption sub-trips (0) vs. trips that were comprised of entirely exemption sub-trips (1), vessel-level, FY2021 - 2024



- When separating out "split" vs "pure" exemption trips, the distribution of operating profits is different each year

Note: Revenues and costs are for the entire duration of the trip (all sub-trips).
Fishing Year 2021 includes activity following the implementation of the universal redfish exemption on July 28, 2021.
Fishing Year 2024 data covers May - December 2024, January 2025 - April 2025 not included.

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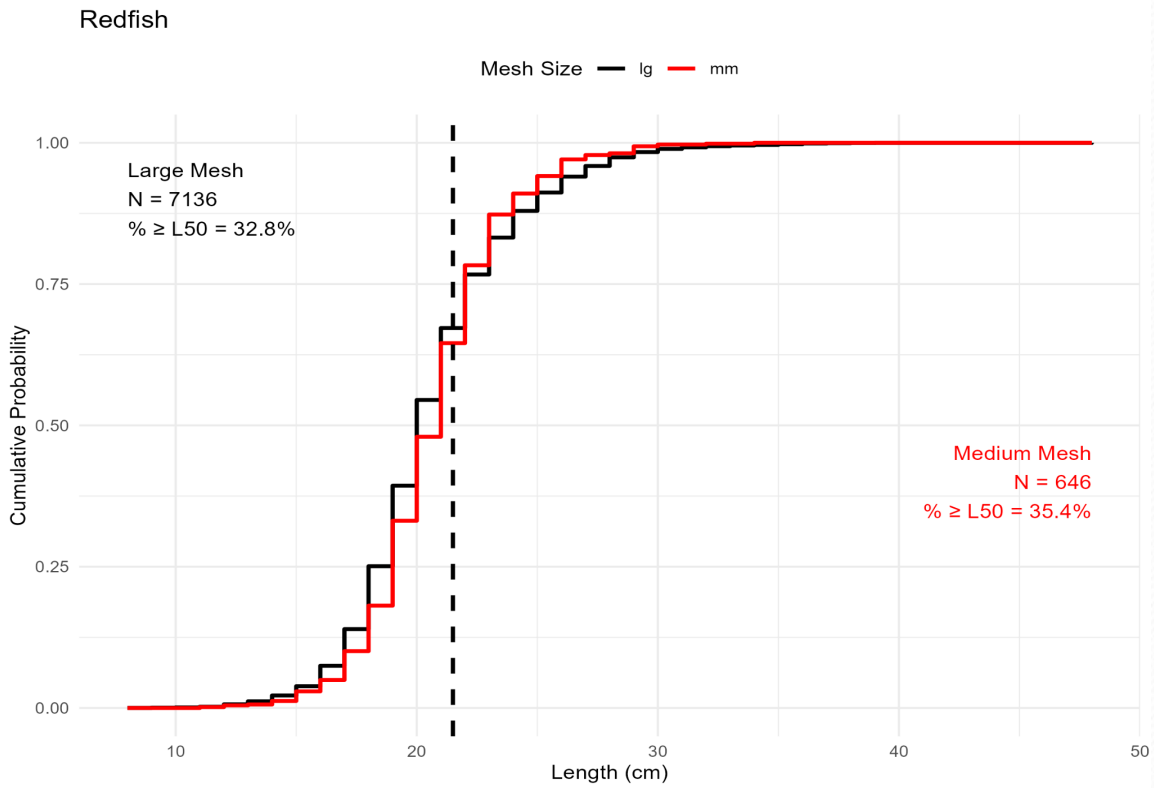
New since 3/31 GAP/CTE meeting

Cumulative Probability of discards at length for medium (mm; black line; 5-5.8”) and large (lg; red line; 5.9-7”) for Redfish



N denotes the total number of fish in each analysis and the black, dashed, vertical line represents the L50 for redfish (21.5 cm FL).

The A50 for redfish is 5.7 years.

L50 and A50 values are from the 2025 Management Track Assessment.

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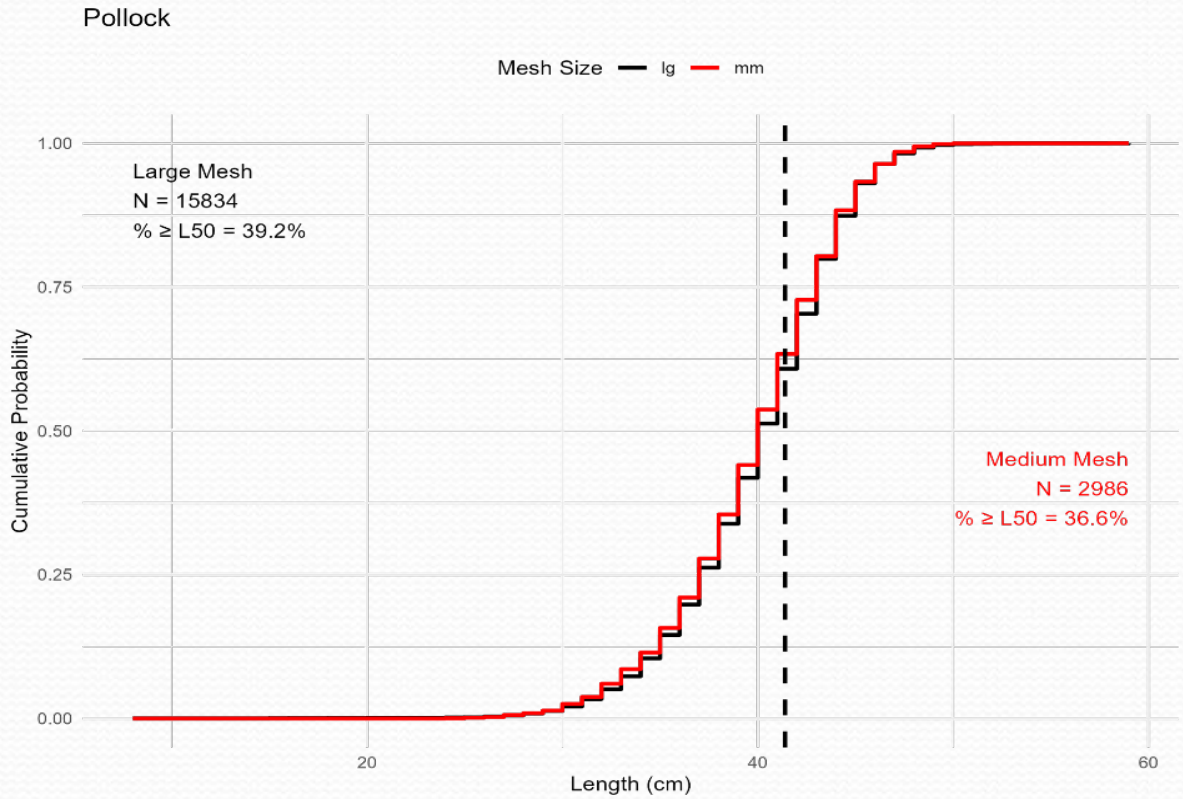
New since 3/31 GAP/CTE meeting

Cumulative Probability of discards at length for medium (mm; black line; 5-5.8”) and large (lg; red line; 5.9-7”) for Pollock



N denotes the total number of fish in each analysis and the black, dashed, vertical line represents the L50 for pollock (41.4 cm FL).

The A50 for pollock is 2.6 years.

L50 and A50 values are from the 2024 Management Track Assessment.

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Other Business

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FY2024 Overages for Southern Windowpane Flounder and Ocean Pout

Table 1: Fishing year 2024 catch and catch limits

Stock	ABC (mt)	Total ACL (mt)	Fishing Year 2024 Catch (mt and percent of ACL or sub-ACL)					
			Total		Commercial Groundfish Fishery	Scallop Fishery	State Waters	Other sub-component
Southern windowpane flounder	213	205	425.4	207.5%	117.7%	5.5%	357.8%	370.0%
Ocean pout	87	83	97.9	118.0%	89.4%	-	625.0%	151.8%

Accountability measures will be implemented May 1, 2026, for 2026 groundfish fishing year

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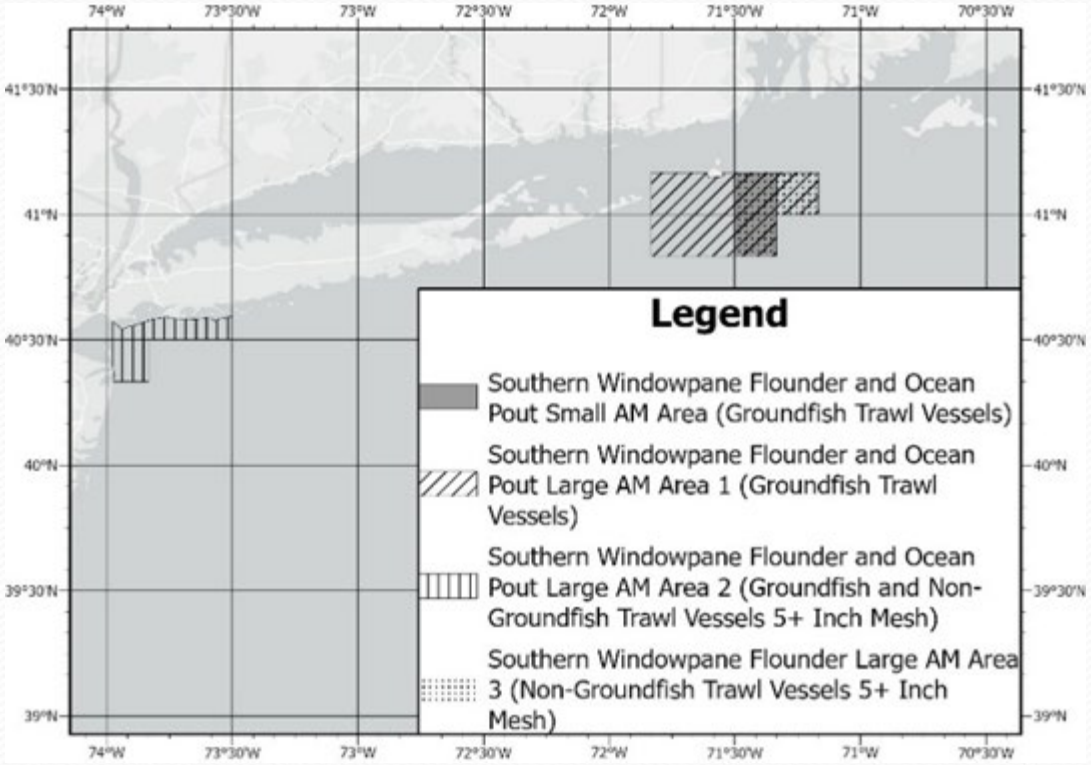
Southern Windowpane Flounder Accountability Measures



<u>Groundfish fishery:</u>

- Applies to groundfish trawl vessels (sectors and common pool) fishing on a sector or DAS trip
- Large AM area triggered
  - Provision to reduce to Small AM – biomass criteria not met
- Gear-restricted areas – vessels may only use a haddock separator trawl, a Ruhle trawl, or a rope separator trawl
- Provision to reduce duration of AM – on or after September 1, 2026, if FY2025 ACL is not exceeded

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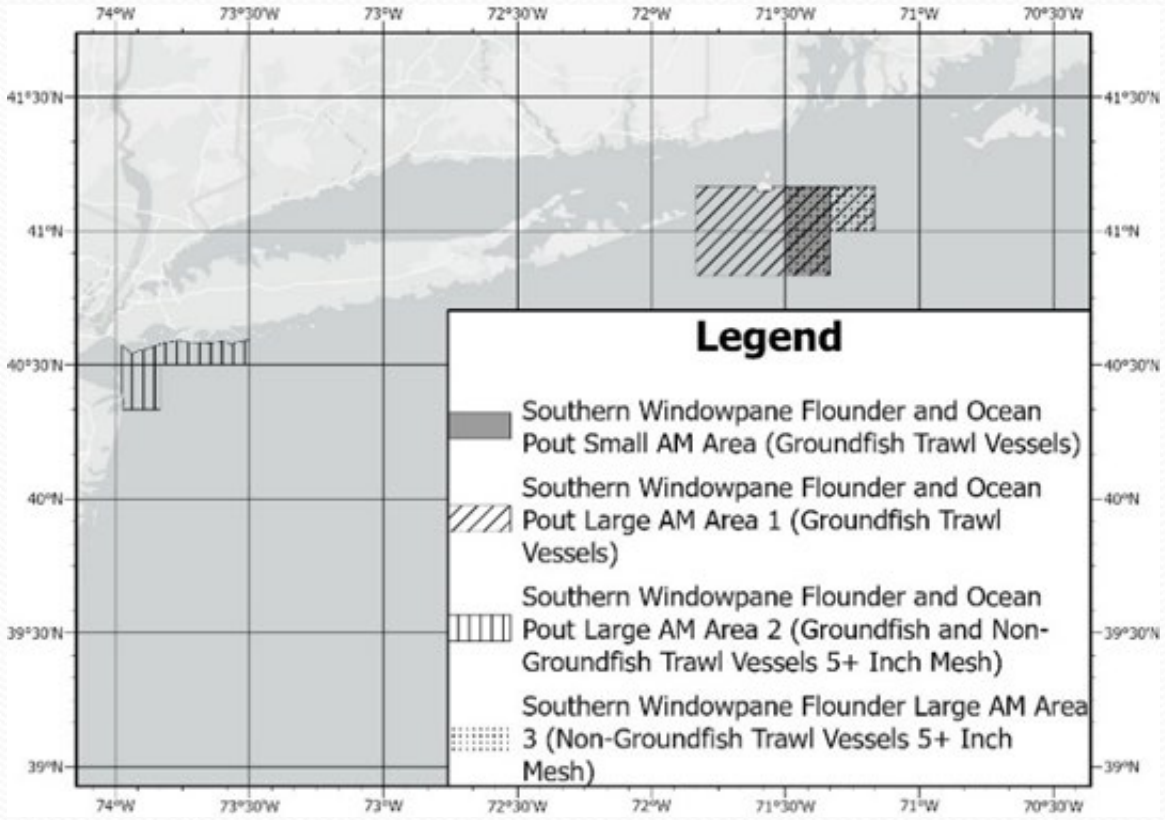
Southern Windowpane Flounder Accountability Measures



<u>Other large-mesh non-groundfish fisheries sub-component:</u>

- Applies to non-groundfish trawl vessels fishing with codends 5” mesh or greater
- Large AM area triggered
  - Provision to reduce to Small AM – biomass criteria not met
- Gear-restricted areas – vessels may only use a haddock separator trawl, a Ruhle trawl, or a rope separator trawl
- Provision to reduce duration of AM – on or after September 1, 2026, if FY2025 ACL is not exceeded

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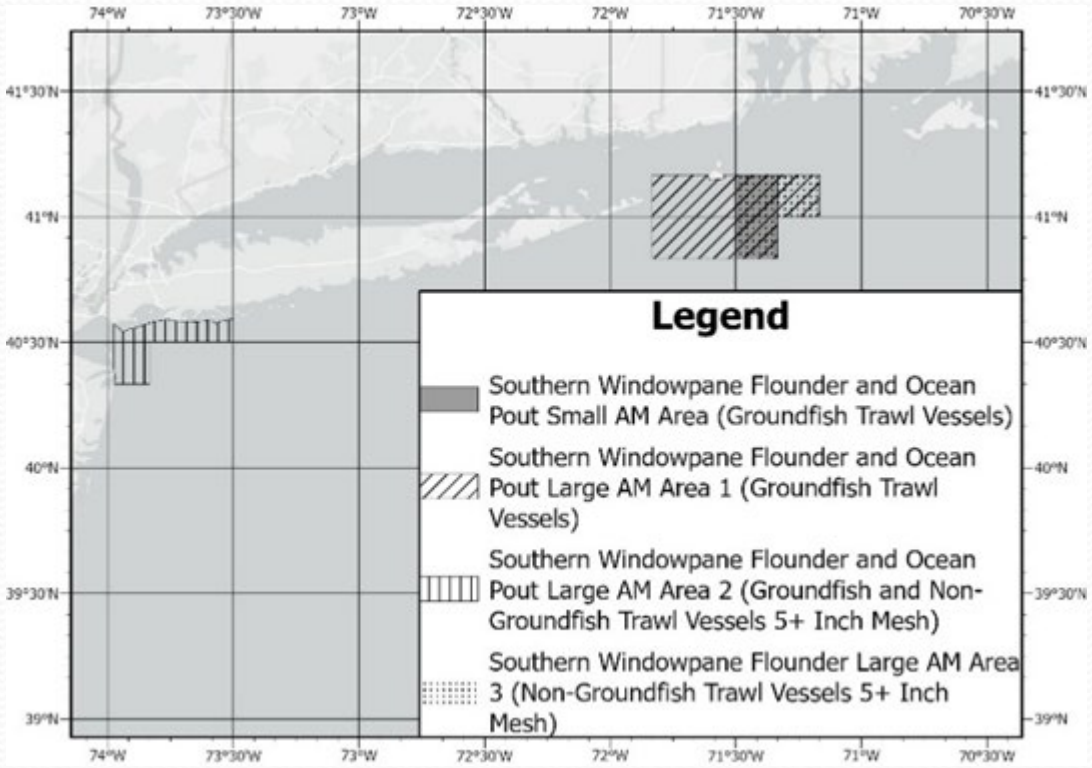
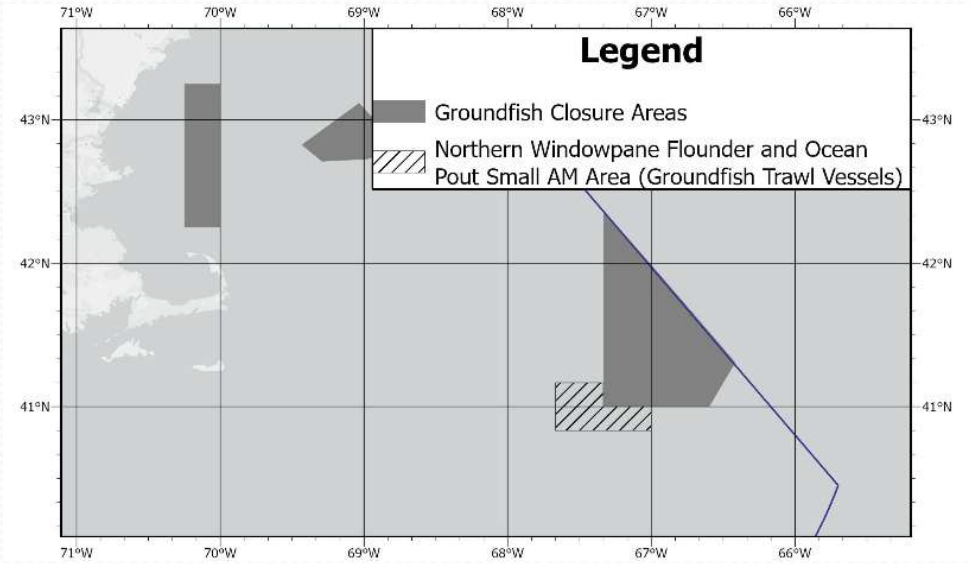
Ocean Pout Accountability Measures



Groundfish fishery:

- Applies to groundfish trawl vessels (sector and common pool)
- Small AM area triggered
- Gear-restricted areas – vessels may only use a haddock separator trawl, a Ruhle trawl, or a rope separator trawl
- No provision to reduce duration of AM



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