

Monkfish and Skate Staff Report

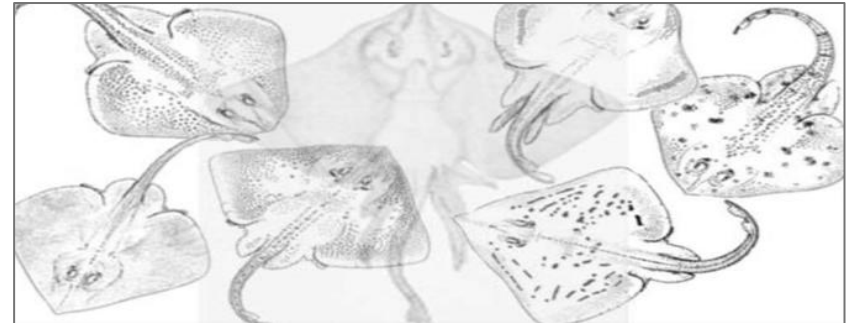
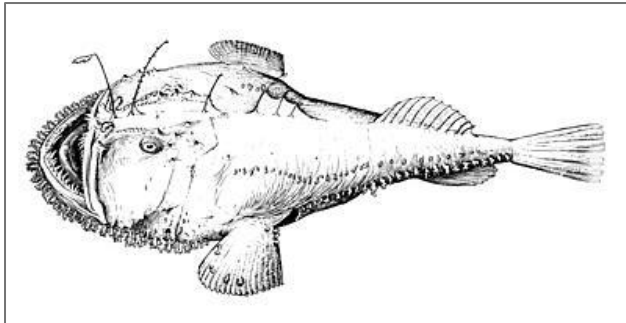
June 2026

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NEW ENGLAND FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

JUNE 23, 2026

MYSTIC, CT AND VIA WEBINAR



New England Fishery
Management Council

TODAY'S OBJECTIVE

- Receive a summary of the April/May Listening Information Sessions and comment period to inform any 2027 monkfish and skate priorities
- No action is required today



AT THE APRIL 2026 MEETING, THE COUNCIL MOVED TO:

1. **Disapprove the IFQ Scoping** Document and discontinue the 2026 Council Priority to “Scope for an IFQ Program for monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries.”
2. **Approve the schedule of 5 public meetings** and refocus them as listening sessions for both monkfish and skate fisheries to inform future priorities in 2027 and beyond



5 LISTENING SESSIONS WITH A TOTAL OF 65 PARTICIPANTS, 38 FISHING INDUSTRY

Location / Date	Participants	Description of Participants (Not including Council staff or meeting officer)
Portland, ME April 27, 2026	8	3 Council members; 1 GARFO staff; 2 fishing industry; 1 NGO; 1 ME DMR
New Bedford, MA April 29, 2026	7	3 Council members; 1 GARFO staff; 2 fishing reps; 1 SMAST
Riverhead, NY April 30, 2026	10	1 Council member; 2 academia; 6 fishing industry; 1 NYS DEC
Manahawkin, NJ May 5, 2026	14	1 Council member; ~12 fishing industry; 1 NJ Marine Fisheries
Webinar May 11, 2026	26	5 Council members; 5 GARFO staff; 16 fishing industry/reps
Other comments received (via comment letters & call)	3	2 fishing industry/rep; 1 NGO

CONSISTENT THEMES RAISED ACROSS ALL FIVE SESSIONS

- Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ)
- Area-specific management
- Changes in effort controls
 - Monkfish DAS
 - Trip limits
- Poor market conditions, processing capacity
- Latent fishing effort
- Interaction between monkfish & skate fishing
- Protected resource regulations:
 - Atlantic sturgeon & harbor porpoise
- Offshore wind = fish disappearing
- Other topics: governance; new monkfish research showing one stock; Exempted Fishing Permits; Research Set-Aside program; skate limited access



PROTECTED RESOURCE MEASURES → POTENTIAL COUNCIL AND/OR NMFS RESPONSES

- **Modifications to Sturgeon Measures:** appear rebuilt, reduced gillnet effort → Remove new gear requirements off NJ, dynamic management with rolling closures
 - Sturgeon gear research now outdated
 - Environment nor sturgeon population are the same so findings not overly relevant
- **Remove sturgeon from endangered species list**
- **Modifications to Harbor Porpoise Measures:** overabundant, zero observed caught → Reconsider Feb & April Mid-Atl. closures for one year, require pingers or observers



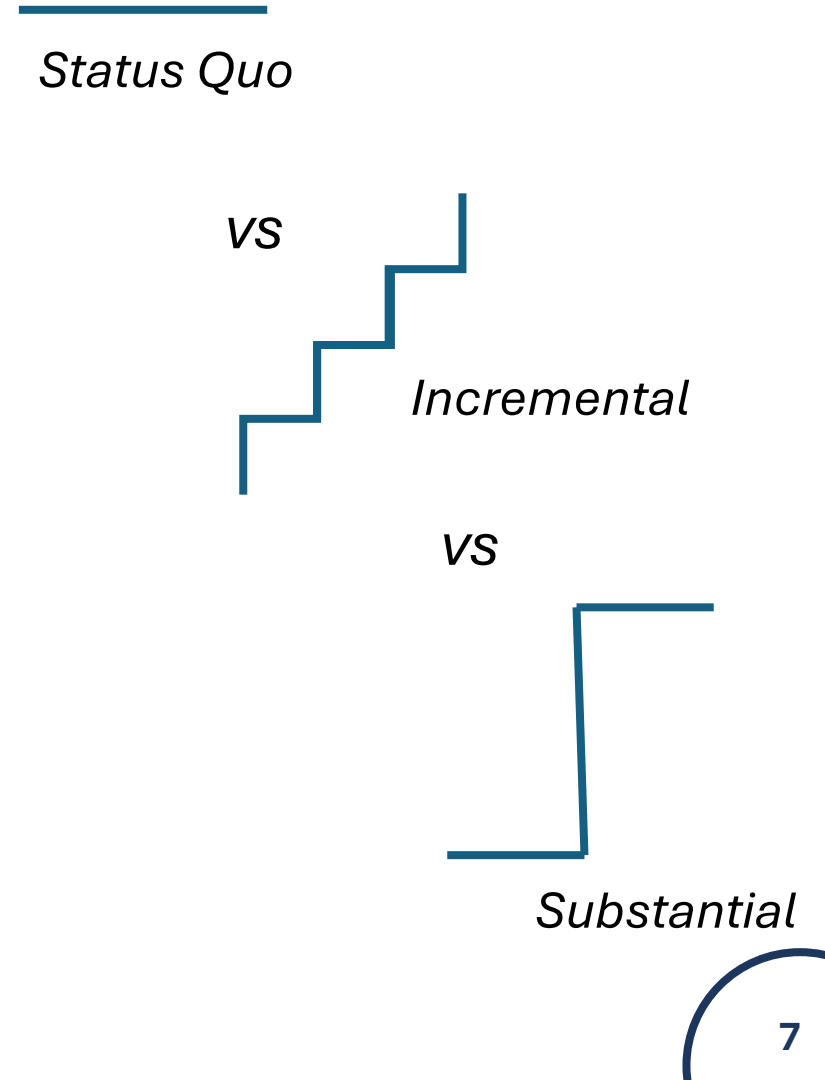
EFFORT CONTROL MEASURES → POTENTIAL COUNCIL / NMFS RESPONSES

Mixed opinion for if/how any effort controls should be adjusted

- Marketing & protected species = bigger concerns
- Concerns related to changing effort controls: market impacts, processor capacity, willingness of crew to cut skates



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IS THERE A ROLE FOR COUNCILS TO ADDRESS THESE EFFORT AND MARKETING ISSUES?

Declining fishery effort/participation over time

- Fishing shifted from monkfish to skates (“trash fishery”)

Poor market conditions

- Declining prices,
- Low demand (domestic, international → loss of Korean market),
- Inconsistent supply,
- “Price fixing” due to no competition with buyers/dealers

Could this be a Role for the new USDA Office of Seafood?



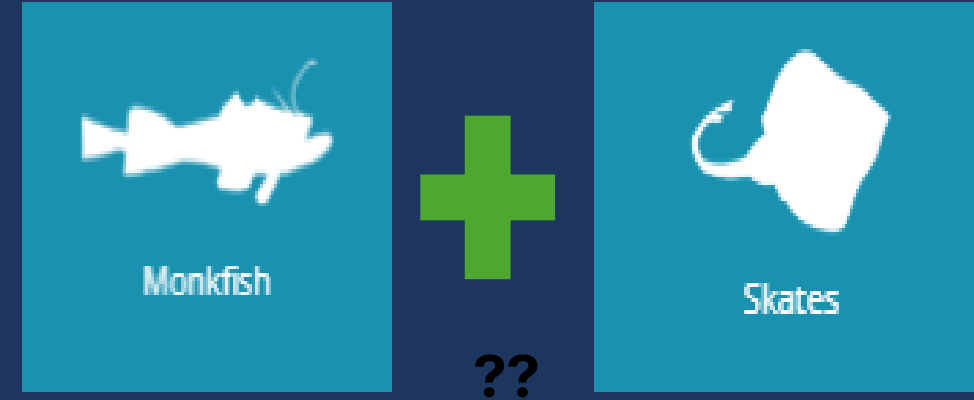
IS THERE A ROLE FOR COUNCILS & NMFS TO RETHINK MONKFISH AND SKATE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLANS?

Holistic changes in management? *Mixed opinion*

- Manage southern monkfish with skates and manage northern monkfish separately (seems to be doing well)

OR

- Manage monkfish & skates as one FMP



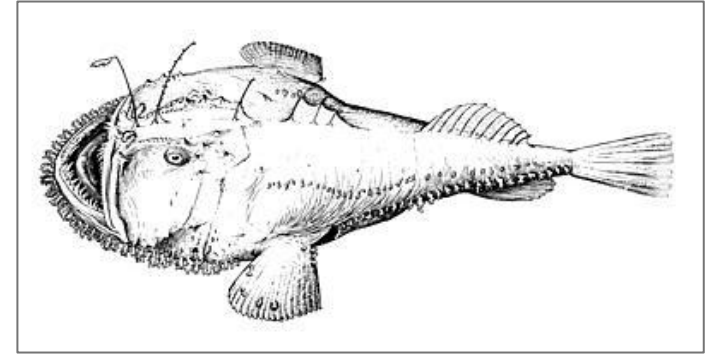
Removing latent fishing effort? *Mixed opinion*

- Could address concerns related to influx or reactivation of effort from other fisheries
- Concerns related to consolidation, future opportunity



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MONKFISH CHALLENGES AND SOME CONSIDERATIONS WHEN EVALUATING POTENTIAL CHANGES



- Monkfish fishery should be defined as catching monkfish (vs mixed fishery)
- Fishing previously started around Halloween, now Thanksgiving (if not later)
- Not worth catching monkfish because of overabundance of skates and consistently low prices



MONKFISH - SOME POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Retain joint management with MAFMC

Limited support for IFQ program

- Why a change in priorities before seeking broad public input?
- Sectors for monkfish?
- How to avoid excluding anyone, keeping costs low, etc.?



Monkfish DAS

- Charged based on total landings
- Allocate based on landings history (vs same for each permit)
- Re-allocate periodically based on recent effort / fishery performance
- Allow DAS leasing
- Allow switching from Groundfish to Monkfish DAS (or RSA DAS) while at sea
- Greater flexibility when fishing for groundfish & monkfish (add A-DAS, charge DAS consecutively)

SKATE CHALLENGES



- Lack of flexibility in fishing operations
- Overrun with skates in Southern New England → constraining trip limits
- Fewer skates in north → minimal changes needed
- Difficulty finding crew who are willing to cut skates



SKATE – POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- Dynamic trip limits or weekly aggregate skate limit (similar to RI) → *some opposition because of protected species and a few ‘bad actors’*
- Charge skate possession limit per DAS used (vs trip limits)
- Ability to declare an overage while at sea:
 - Similar to monkfish (double limit for 24 hr 1 min) → *some concerns*
- *Or*
 - 1.5 trip limits for 24 hr 1 min trip → *some preferred*
- Skate limited access
- Expand skate exemption areas to offset restrictions in Southern New England (offshore wind, windowpane exemption areas)

ADDITIONAL CONCERNS → POTENTIAL RESPONSES

- **Derby fishery** → Incrementally remove effort controls in both fisheries to see if DAS and/or trip limits are constraining
- **Sturgeon gear research now outdated** → environment nor sturgeon population are the same so findings not overly relevant
- **Simplifying the Monkfish and Skate FMPs** → Decoupling from Groundfish & Scallop FMPs
- **Lack of New Bedford participation** → due to good weather window for fishing, not lack of interest
- **Analyses should account for fishery changes over time** → Skates previously discarded but now targeted

MAFMC CONSIDERATION

MAFMC Outcomes from 6/18/2026: The Council collaborate with the New England Fishery Management Council to develop a letter to NMFS-GARFO requesting additional information on the effectiveness of current Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan measures and whether modifications could reduce negative socioeconomic impacts on relevant fisheries, consistent with concerns raised during the spring 2026 monkfish and skate listening sessions.

August 10-13: *MAFMC Monkfish Report (same as today)*



Questions?

