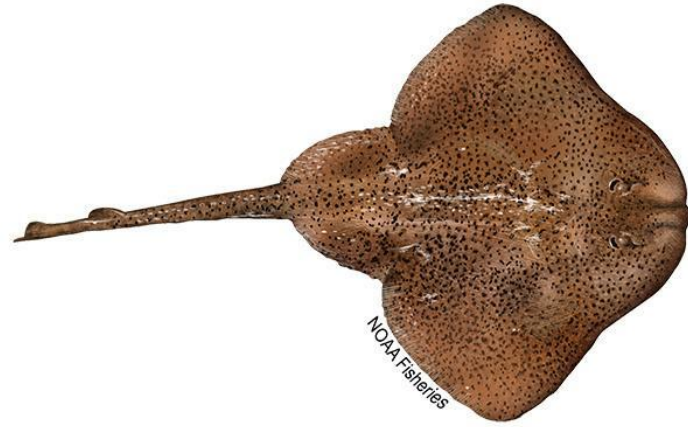


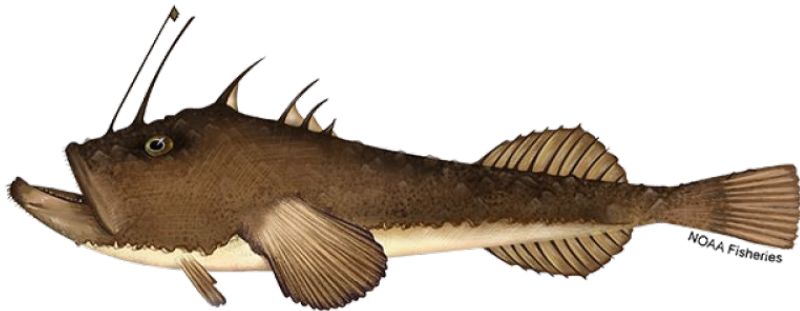


SSC Reports to NEFMC

SSC Chair, Conor McManus

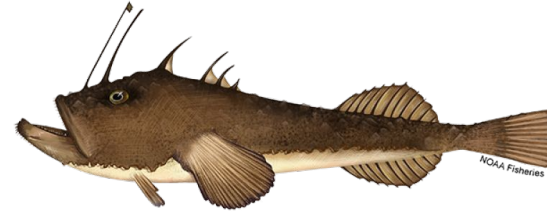
NEFMC Council Meeting

September 23, 2025





Monkfish ToRs



The SSC met in person and via webinar on August 18, 2025, to address Terms of Reference (TORs) for northern and southern monkfish.

- A. Consider the results of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's (NEFSC) 2025 Data Update for Northern and Southern monkfish and information provided by the Council's Monkfish Plan Development Team (PDT).
- B. Recommend OFLs and ABCs for monkfish in both the Northern and Southern management areas for FY 2026 – 2030 that will prevent overfishing, meet the objectives of the fishery management plan, and consider the Council's Risk Policy Statement and Concept.



Monkfish

- Data Update:
 - Commercial catch, biomass indices, stratified mean indices at length.
- Assessment Method: Index-based (but not applied).
- No analytical reference points for the units.
- Stock Status: unknown.
- SSC recommends the following OFLs and ABCs:

Fishing Year	Management Area	OFL (mt)	ABC (mt)
2026-2028	Northern	Unknown	6,224
2026-2028	Southern	Unknown	5,861
2029-2030	Northern	Unknown	6,224
2029-2030	Southern	Unknown	3,766



Monkfish

RATIONALE

- No procedure or guidance for setting catch advice using data updates.
- There do not appear to be any substantial changes for these stocks, but the Southern unit may be in a stable, depleted state (last 3 years are lowest in time series).
- No substantial changes to the catch and survey indices in the 2025 data update that suggest status quo specifications are inappropriate in the short-term.
- However, despite recent decreases in Southern monkfish catch, the survey indices have not responded, signaling that precautionary advice may be warranted.
- This state and uncertainty in the approaches used to assess and set catch advice, the SSC recommended more precautionary advice for the Southern unit for FY 2029-2030: at the level that the SSC recommended in fall 2022 (Ismooth applied to catch per the last assessment).



Monkfish

SIGNIFICANT SOURCES OF UNCERTAINTY

- SSC is concerned about the increasingly dated nature of the status quo ABCs (based on Ismooth approach from the 2023 assessment and the ABCs from a previously rejected analytical stock assessment in 2016).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- For data updates, the SSC recommends developing decision-making criteria for catch advice.
 - Reframe information provided in data updates to be more informative in a decision making context, or consider other data to include.
 - Develop a more holistic approach for recommending catch advice based on data updates (e.g. multi-indicator approach).
- Recommend revisiting FY 2029-2030 advice on monkfish stocks in two years.



Monkfish

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

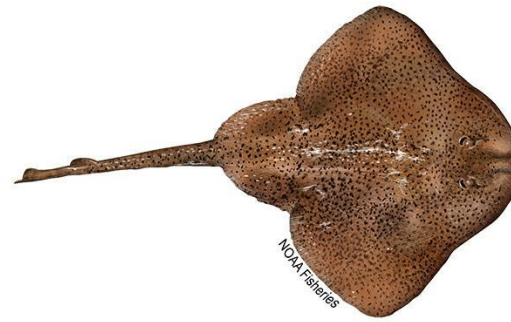
- The SSC recommends synthesis of research on stock structure of monkfish to evaluate the one stock vs. two stocks hypothesis.
- The SSC continues to recommend pursuing alternative assessment methods (e.g., delay-difference models, stochastic surplus production models, or length-based assessments).
- The SSC recommends considering additional survey indices in future assessment and data updates (e.g., scallop survey indices, NEAMAP survey indices, fishery dependent indices,). Swept-area biomass estimates for monkfish from the NEFSC bottom trawl would be another useful addition and could support estimation of exploitation rate.



Monkfish

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- OFL be unknown for both management areas for FY 2026-2030.
- Status quo ABC of 6,224 mt for the Northern management area be held constant for FY 2026-2030. Status quo ABC of 5,861 mt for the Southern management area to be held constant for FY 2026-2028 with the advice for FY 2029-2030 held constant at 3,766 mt.
- Revisiting the FY 2029-2030 advice with a data update to inform ABC setting in these years.
- Development of criteria for decision making using information contained in NEFSC data updates.
- Synthesis of research on stock structure and alternative assessment methods for monkfish be investigated.
- Considering additional survey indices and analyses, and swept-area biomass estimates derived from survey indices be analyzed.



Skate ToRs

The SSC met in person and via webinar on August 19, 2025, to address Terms of Reference (TORs) for the Northeast skate complex.

- A. Consider the results of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's (NEFSC) 2025 Data Update for the Northeast skate complex and information provided by the Council's Skate Plan Development Team (PDT).
- B. Recommend an OFL and ABC for the Northeast skate complex for FY 2026 – 2030 that will prevent overfishing, meet the management objective to rebuild thorny skate, are consistent with the Council's skate ABC control rule and thorny skate rebuilding plan, and consider the Council's Risk Policy Statement and Concept.



Skate Complex

- Data Update, with data used by PDT to calculate ABC recommendations.
- Assessment Method: Index-based.
- No analytical reference points; use biomass indices and reference periods for status determination.
- Stock Status: No overfishing on any skate species, thorny skate overfished (under rebuilding plan).
- SSC recommends the following OFLs and ABCs:

Fishing Year	OFL (mt)	ABC (mt)
2026-2027	Unknown	41,282
2028-2030	Unknown	37,154



Skate Complex

RATIONALE

- The SSC used the ABC control rule established in Amendment 3 of the Northeast skate complex fishery management plan to make FY 2026-2027 recommendations.
 - Second highest in the time series, a 28% increase from the ABC recommended by the SSC for FY 2024-2025.
- Data update appears to show improvements in the skate complex indices (e.g., improvement in some species, no overfishing on species, two species above B_{target}).
- The recommended ABC for FY 2026-2027 is not anticipated to be met based on current fishery capacity.



Skate Complex

RATIONALE

- FY 2028-2030 ABCs were calculated as 10% less than that of FY 2026-2027.
- This more conservative future catch recommendation was based on index, fishery, and environmental uncertainty, as well as socioeconomic concerns related to higher-variance in catch advice and principles of risk management.
- The 37,154 mt recommended for FY 2028-2030 represents an ABC within the recent range (since 2012) of skate complex ABCs recommended (31,081 to 37,236 mt) and is still at the upper end of the contemporary range.
- The SSC discussed socioeconomic concerns with more variable catch advice, and believed that the slightly lower recommendation for FY 2028-2030 was more likely to avoid catch advice changing abruptly in the future.



Skate Complex

SIGNIFICANT SOURCES OF UNCERTAINTY

- The comparatively higher control rule-based recommendations for FY 2026-2027 were driven primarily by recent increases in the winter skate index (particularly in 2023).
 - Setting FY 2028-2030 ABCs at the proposed FY 2026-2027 levels would implicitly assume the recent increases in winter skate will persist.
- The SSC also discussed uncertainty related to
 - Discard mortality rate used to estimate dead discards,
 - Ecosystem changes that may occur over the next three to five years,
 - Accuracy of speciation in the commercial fishery data.



Skate Complex

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- Strongly recommend revisiting ABC advice within two years.
- Discuss the risk associated with making recommendations over longer periods than traditionally done (standardize guidance across stocks).
- Review other Council's approaches to data/assessment-limited scenarios.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

- Reevaluate the reference points and the utility of analytical assessment approaches for skate complex species.
- Additional survey data be considered in the skate species indices.
- Research focused on how to propagate uncertainty of observations and other sources into estimated ABCs.



Skate Complex

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- OFL for the Northeast skate complex is unknown for FY 2026-2030.
- ABCs of 41,282 mt for FY 2026-2027 and 37,154 mt for FY 2028-2030 for skates.
- Revisiting the FY 2028-2030 advice with a data update to inform ABC setting in these years.
- Revisiting overfished and overfishing definitions for the Northeast skate complex, in conjunction with development of an analytical, model-based approach that can estimate reference points directly.
- Further evaluate how best to handle uncertainty associated with setting ABCs over longer periods.



Atlantic Sea Scallops ToRs



The SSC met in person and via webinar on August 18, 2025, to address Terms of Reference (TORs) for Atlantic Sea Scallops.

- A. Consider the results of the 2025 research track assessment for Atlantic sea scallops and information provided by the Council's Scallop Plan Development Team (PDT) on developing specifications considering biological reference points.
- B. Provide recommendations related to fishing mortality reference points and targets for developing specifications for fishing year (FY) 2026 and default FY 2027. The SSC will review catch specification methods when recommending overfishing limits (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) at the October 2025 SSC meeting.



Atlantic Sea Scallops

BACKGROUND

2025 Research Track Assessment for Atlantic sea scallops:

- Atlantic sea scallop population dynamics: Catch at Size Analysis (CASA) model with three regions: MAB, Open GB, Closed GB.
- Scallops are considered one stock unit, and thus the reference points are produced based on a single stock.
- Yield- and stock per-recruit analyses are used to derive region-specific reference points, which are then combined to produce stock-wide reference points (currently not overfished, overfishing not occurring).
- Notes from the assessment peer-review:
 - MAB yield-per-recruit curve is ill-defined.
 - Regional variation in environmental conditions, life history and fishing mortality are not fully captured when combining the region-specific reference points to a single stock reference point (risks not identifying or addressing overfishing in GB).



Atlantic Sea Scallops

BACKGROUND

- The Scallop PDT presented on developing specifications considering biological reference points.
- The PDT provided three different options (methods) and their challenges with producing FY26-27 ABCs for October SSC meeting:
 1. Use the combined reference points.
 2. Use the Georges Bank F_{MSY} and F_{ABC} in producing the stock-wide ABCs.
 3. Use combined F_{MSY} from the stock-wide approach, but modify p^* to calculate an F_{ABC} .



Atlantic Sea Scallops

ToR FINDINGS

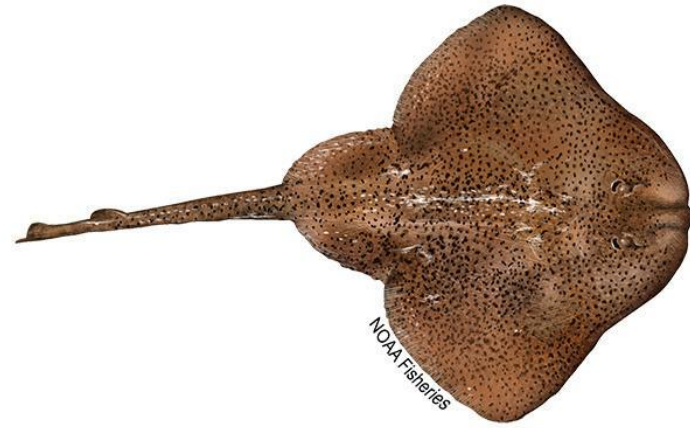
- The SSC found that the PDT's caution was warranted, and that developing several different options for setting FY 2026 and FY 2027 for consideration would be valuable.
- The SSC requested that ABCs be calculated using Methods 1 and 2 be produced, and Method 3 assuming a p^* of 20% (if time is a limiting factor, the SSC recommends prioritizing Methods 1 and 2.)



Atlantic Sea Scallops

SIGNIFICANT SOURCES OF UNCERTAINTY

- The SSC noted the contrasting nature of the MAB and GB Atlantic sea scallop resource and fishery (the fishing effort, growth rates, natural mortality.)
- The SSC asked whether there is evidence that the regions should be considered different stocks or not.
- Similar to the PDT, the SSC noted that the landings for Atlantic sea scallops are historically well below the ABCs, and thus the SSC discussed how a reduced ABC would correspond to realized landings, (e.g. would effort controls better address the this concern.)



Questions?

