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New England Fishery Management Council

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Daniel Salerno, *Chair* | Cate O'Keefe, PhD, *Executive Director*

DATE: September 4, 2026
TO: Council
FROM: Executive Director, Cate O'Keefe
SUBJECT: Executive Committee Meeting Summary – September 1, 2026

Attendance: The Executive Committee met via webinar. The committee members attending were Mr. Salerno, Ms. Griffin, Ms. Ware, and Mr. Pierdinock. Also attending were Executive Director Dr. Cate O'Keefe and Mr. Jonathon Peros from the Council staff, and Regional Administrator Mike Pentony from GARFO and Acting Director Nicole Cabana from NEFSC. Other Council staff and members of the public attended the meeting.

Agenda Items

The meeting began at 10:00 a.m. The Executive Committee reviewed the agenda and added two items for Other Business.

1. Executive Director's Report

- a. Funding Status: Dr. O'Keefe provided an update on the Council's active funding balances and grants. The Council has approximately \$500,000 remaining of the original \$2.5 million Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) award, which has been extended through December 31, 2027. Full Calendar Year 2026 funding for the 2025–2028 Cooperative Agreement has been received, and spending is on track, allowing previously paused IT infrastructure projects to move forward, all state technical assistance contracts have been paid. The Committee discussed tracking FY27 Congressional budget proposals for a Continuing Resolution running through December.

2. Inter-Agency Meetings

- a. US/Canada Updates: A virtual US/Canada Technical Science Coordination meeting was held on July 13th, and the resulting Integrated Science Advice for Transboundary Stocks (ISATS) report was completed and distributed. The Transboundary Management Guidance Committee (TMGC) Industry Advisory Group met on August 28th in New Bedford to gather industry input for the fall negotiations.
- b. New Council Member Training: Attorney Kirby Aarsheim joined the Council and completed initial orientation. Both Atty. Aarsheim and returning member Terry Alexander will complete required NOAA headquarters training later in the fall.

- c. NRCC Intersessional: The NRCC met virtually on August 27th to review the draft results and recommendations of the 2026 Regional Stock Prioritization effort (item #5 below).
- d. Executive Director's Meeting: Executive Directors met virtually on September 1st to discuss plans for the October Council Coordination Committee (CCC) meeting in Washington, D.C. A replacement search is underway for legislative liaison Dave Whaley, who is retiring.

3. Update on Council Activities

- a. Mr. Peros updated the Committee on management timelines and action status. An extended 5-meeting planning outlook capturing the full process through NOAA submission is now live on the Council website.
 - **Final Actions & Reports**: Final actions scheduled for the September Council meeting include Herring specifications (FY2027–2031), Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) designations, and the Holistic Strategic Plan. Reports will also be presented on the Great South Channel Surf Clam Exemption Area, Vessel Baseline Restriction evaluation, and Regional Stock Prioritization.
 - **Action Statutes**: The Management Flexibility Omnibus final rule is expected to be published soon. Monkfish Framework 17 final rule was published with an effective date of September 28, 2026. Groundfish Framework 72 interim rule comment period closes September 3rd.

4. Holistic Strategic Plan

- a. Mr. Peros informed the Committee that the Holistic Strategic Plan is finalized for approval by the Council. He presented updates on the implementation charter and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The Committee endorsed focusing short-term implementation efforts on Goal 1 (building flexibility into management plans and streamlining processes). The Committee approved the KPIs with the following minor adjustments:
 - **Strategy 1.1**: Refine KPI 1.1.2 to focus on decreasing within-year priority substitutions rather than December meeting only changes. Ensure KPI 1.1.3 focuses on system-wide resources and add explicit language linking priorities to strategic plan objectives.
 - **Strategy 1.3**: Replace the term "clean specifications" with explicit language defining the process as adjustments strictly to OFL, ABC, and ACLs without additional management measures. Replace ratio metrics in KPI 1.3.3 with percentages.
 - **Tracking**: Implement a simplified approach to display progress efficiency without imposing excess administrative burden on staff.

5. Regional Stock Prioritization

- a. Dr. O'Keefe presented information about the NRCC's 2026 Regional Stock Prioritization draft report (formerly the Risk/Value Matrix). Developed by a regional working group, the framework evaluates stocks across four quadrants based on commercial/recreational economic value and management risk. The Summary Report is being drafted by the working group and will be available for the September Council meeting. Recommended applications for the Council include:
 - Informing candidate stocks decisions for Ecosystem Component (EC) designation.

- Supporting the new 5-year stock assessment schedule (2028–2032) regarding assessment frequency and timing.
- Reinvesting management resources from low-risk/low-value stocks toward high-risk/high-value stocks.
- Justifying regional requests and formal responses to NOAA proposals.

6. Executive Order 14276 and 2027 Council Priorities

- Dr. O’Keefe reviewed NOAA Fisheries’ July 2nd letter outlining priority requests under Executive Order 14276 alongside the draft 2027 Council Priority list. The Executive Committee reviewed the EO14276 items and reached preliminary recommendations for Council response:
 - **EO1 (Northern Edge Scallop Access):** Defer decision to December and consider in context with other 2027 potential priority topics.
 - **EO2 (Scallop Permit Stacking):** Acknowledge that the Council lacks capacity to initiate action in 2027, noting NOAA may pursue Secretarial Action.
 - **EO3 (Herring IFM Rescission):** Recommend a September Council vote to add IFM rescission to the ongoing river herring/shad action to maintain an April 2027 final action timeline.
 - **EO4 (Ropeless Gear Mandates):** Pause additional activity while acknowledging NOAA’s Request for Information (RFI) and pending federal legislation.
 - **EO5 (Vessel Baseline Restrictions):** Receive evaluation report in September and consider prioritization of joint action with the Mid-Atlantic Council in December.
 - **EO6 (Great South Channel HMA):** Receive evaluation report in September and consider prioritization of activities in December.
- Priority Guidance for Committees/APs: The Executive Committee recommended that Advisory Panels and Committees should not solicit new priority ideas for 2027. APs and Committees may be asked to focus on sequencing and prioritizing existing items, with new ideas captured for a 2028-forward multi-year list.

7. Proposed Rule on Gear Regulations in Atlantic HMS Fisheries

- Mr. Pierdinock provided an overview of three proposed Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) regulatory changes regarding cast/dip nets, commercial speargun use for bait tunas, and expanded buoy gear. The Committee discussed safety concerns, gear conflicts, protected species risks, state/federal regulatory consistency, and missing circle hook requirements. The Committee recommended that Mr. Pierdinock present these concerns at the September Council meeting to determine if a formal comment letter with a narrow technical focus should be submitted to NOAA.

8. Council Meeting Preparations

- Mr. Salerno reviewed preparations for the September 15–17 Council meeting at the 1620 Hotel in Plymouth, MA. Agenda items include swearing-in new and reappointed members, officer elections for 2026–2027, final actions on herring and EFH, and a public meet-and-greet on Tuesday evening.

9. Other Business

- **SSC Minority Reports:** Draft guidelines clarifying the writing, submitting, and reporting process for SSC minority opinions will be presented at the October 7th SSC meeting and added to the Council Operations Handbook.
- **Recreational Data Timeline:** Following GARFO outreach, it was confirmed that recalibrated MRIP/FES recreational data will not be available for 2026 stock assessments or 2027 recreational measures. The Recreational Demand Model (RDM) will temporarily use uncalibrated data for 2027 specifications.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:00 p.m.