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New England Fishery Management Council

50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492

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

DATE: March 30, 2026
TO: Council
FROM: Executive Director, Cate O’Keefe
SUBJECT: Executive Committee Meeting Summary – March 25, 2026

Attendance: The Executive Committee met via webinar. The committee members attending were Mr. Salerno, Ms. Griffin, Ms. Ware, Mr. Pappalardo, and Mr. Pierdinock. Also attending were Council Executive Director Dr. Cate O’Keefe and Mr. Jonathon Peros from the Council staff, and Mr. Mike Pentony from GARFO and Dr. Mike Simpkins 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. The Committee met in closed session at the conclusion of the public meeting to review Advisory Panel updates.

1. Executive Director’s Report

- a. **Funding Status:** Dr. O’Keefe provided an update on active funding balances in the 2025–2029 Cooperative Agreement award and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) award. The Council has received funds for the first quarter of CY2026 and is awaiting distribution of the remaining funds through December 2026. The Committee discussed addressing deferred needs such as software and hardware upgrades, while maintaining reserves given ongoing budget uncertainty and pending Congressional decisions. The Council received a No Cost Extension to the IRA award through December 31, 2027. Spending on the award is on track to complete all projects within the extended timeline.
- b. **Council Stipend Policy:** The Executive Committee considered a memo from the Executive Director related to the half-day Council member stipend policy that was implemented on October 1, 2025. The Executive Committee recommended reverting to full-day stipends for all eligible Council members starting on April 1, 2026. Additional details are included in the “260330 Ex Com to Council: Council Stipend Policy” memo.
- c. **Council Outreach Updates:** Dr. O’Keefe presented new outreach materials related to Robert’s Rule of Order and updated the Committee about providing printed information at Council meetings to enhance public understanding of the Council system and process. New materials will be available at the April Council meeting.

- d. **Recent Events:** Dr. O’Keefe provided a summary of recent activities, including Council member and staff participation at the Maine Fishermen’s Forum and Boston Seafood Show. She announced that regional leadership met with NOAA headquarters leadership to develop a new structure for the Transboundary Management Guidance Committee.

2. Management Action Timelines

Mr. Peros presented a new format for updates on the status of ongoing fishery management actions. The revised approach is intended to inform current status, immediate next steps, and full timelines for all actions, reports, and other activities. The Executive Committee provided positive feedback on the new format. Mr. Peros updated the Committee about action status since the January Council meeting, including that skate, scallop, and groundfish actions have been implemented or are in final stages of rulemaking. The Committee noted the optimistic timeline for completion of Groundfish ABC Control Rules, scheduled for final action in September, and noted that the timeline may need to be extended.

3. Executive Order 14276

The Executive Committee considered a memo from the Executive Director related to Executive Order 14276, which focuses on regulatory efficiency and seafood productivity. The Executive Committee recommended maintaining the existing workplans for the Executive Order and emphasizing the activities that the Council has prioritized related to public comments in their response to NOAA, due by April 30, 2026. Additional details are included in the “260330 Ex Com to Council: Executive Order 14276 – Additional Comments” memo.

4. Framework to Narrow NMFS Management and Science

Dr. O’Keefe presented an update on activities related to NOAA’s Framework to Narrow NMFS Management and Science, focusing on activities of the Regional Risk/Value Working Group. The Regional WG had an initial meeting on March 4, 2026, to define the scope of activities and discuss questions related to NOAA’s Framework. The WG established a stepwise approach to complete the R/V Matrix, including consideration of existing regional investment for each managed stock, and quantitative and qualitative evaluation of risk and value considerations. The Executive Committee raised questions about how the results of the R/V Matrix will be applied by NOAA, how social and cultural risk and value will be considered in the process, and how the public and SSC will be engaged in the process. The Regional Administrator emphasized the differences across Council regions and emphasized that the outlook for science and management in the New England region, where most stocks have robust data streams and management is supported by stock assessments, is unlikely to substantially change. The Executive Director noted that the Council has already been working on a framework to classify Ecosystem Components, which may support the Regional R/V Matrix approach.

5. Holistic Strategic Plan

Mr. Peros presented an update on the draft Holistic Strategic Plan. The Parnin Group collaborated with Council staff to draft descriptions of the goals identified at the January workshop, as well as associated objectives, strategies, and potential actions. The Council will receive the draft in April.

6. Council Meeting Preparations

Mr. Salerno reviewed April Council meeting preparations. He reminded the Committee of the change in location to Portland, ME. Dr. O’Keefe summarized the March 19, 2026 Joint Monkfish and Skate Advisory Panel and Committee meeting, highlighting that the Committees passed a motion to disapprove the IFQ Scoping Document and discontinue the 2026 work priority related to IFQ Scoping for the monkfish and skate wing fisheries. Dr. O’Keefe explained that the scoping meetings have already been scheduled and there may be an opportunity to pivot from IFQ scoping to broader listening sessions to understand the challenges and potential improvement options for all sectors of the monkfish and skate fisheries.

The Executive Committee considered a strategic shift regarding the 2026 monkfish and skate management priorities. Specifically, they discussed pivoting the previously scheduled IFQ scoping meetings into a series of structured listening sessions. They considered the following factors:

- **Lack of Stakeholder Support:** Feedback from Advisory Panel (AP) members indicated near-unanimous input to discontinue the IFQ development process.
- **Absence of Immediate Priority:** Current industry input does not reflect IFQs as a high-priority need for the 2026 work year.
- **Resource Efficiency:** Staff expressed concerns regarding the time required to hold scoping meetings for a management tool that lacks support.

Rather than canceling the meetings entirely, which would result in the loss of a full year of engagement, the Committee suggested the Council could maintain the scheduled dates to host listening sessions to consider the following:

- **Utilize Existing Data:** Present ideas for monkfish/skate management that were developed by the APs and Committees in fall 2025, as well as current information from the white paper on governance and the recent monkfish CPUE review.
- **Target Specific Dynamics:** Elicit feedback on gear-type dynamics, skate fishery components, and the differences between northern and southern monkfish fishery components.
- **Inform 2027 Priorities:** Collect broad stakeholder concerns and ideas to help the Council articulate and prioritize critically important objectives for 2027 and future management cycles.

The Executive Committee did not provide a consensus recommendation but expressed that repurposing these meetings may be an effective way to provide a meaningful response to the Council’s interest in improving management of these fisheries.

7. Other Business

Dr. O’Keefe noted that the Council received the 2024 Northeast Multispecies Year End Catch Accounting Report, which indicated that catch overages for southern windowpane flounder and ocean pout will trigger Accountability Measures on May 1, 2026.

8. Closed Session

- a. Advisory Panel Updates

The public meeting ended at approximately 1:05 p.m.