

# SSC Report to NEFMC

## *2026 State of the Ecosystem - New England*

**Dr. Conor McManus, SSC Chair**  
**NEFMC Meeting**  
**April 14, 2026**



New England Fishery  
Management Council

# Terms of Reference

The SSC met on March 30 to address terms of reference:

- A. Recommend key signals described in the report that the Council should consider when making management decisions over the next year.
  
- A. Recommend potential improvements to future reports to support the Council's review and input to the NEFSC.



# Overarching Comments

- SSC received a presentation on the State of the Ecosystem (SOE) report and memo tracking progress updates on prior improvement requests.
- SSC appreciates the work that goes into producing this report by many contributors and how it has developed each year in response to feedback.
- SSC feels the report is a high quality and useful product to support regional fisheries management.



# TOR A - Key signals in the SOE

*A. Recommend key signals described in the report that the Council should consider when making management decisions over the next year.*

- **“Risks to Meeting Management Objectives”** gives high level bullets on spatial and seasonal management, catch limits and marine development.
- **“Bennet Indicator”** breaks total revenue into price and volume and by species guild, gives helpful socioeconomic context for decision-making.

### Risks to Meeting Fishery Management Objectives

#### Environmental Change and Ecosystem Risks

Climate and ecosystem change can pose risks to meeting fisheries management objectives by affecting the distribution, seasonal timing, productivity, and physiology of marine species. Marine development can impact marine species, surveys, and fisheries operations, which will affect fisheries management.

**Risks to Managing Spatially**

- **Observations:** Species distributions are trending to the northeast and into deeper water.
- **Potential Impacts:** Spatial mis-allocation of quotas may lead to unmet quotas, increased discards, and/or miscalculated fishing targets.

**Risks to Setting Catch Limits**

- **Observations:** Productivity and fish condition have changed across the ecosystem because of ecological and environmental changes.
- **Potential Impacts:** Unaccounted for and unknown productivity changes may lead to misspecified quotas and rebuilding plans, especially if they are not considered in stock reference points and short-term stock projections.

**Risks to Managing Seasonally**

- **Observations:** Seasonal spawning and migration timing has changed for some Council-managed species and whales.
- **Potential Impacts:** Spawning closures, seasonal openings, and seasonal quota allocations may be less effective if mis-timed with biological events, resulting in decreased seafood production.

**Risks of Marine Development**

- **Observations:** Wind lease areas have historically been used for fishing and as habitat for North Atlantic right whales. Only 6 of 38 offshore wind leases in the Northeast are operational and/or under construction.
- **Potential Impacts:** Average annual revenue in active project areas is <5% for most ports and for most Council-managed species. Project areas overlap

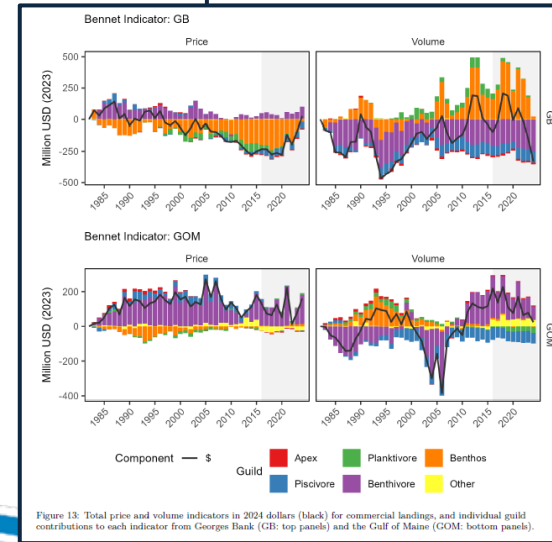


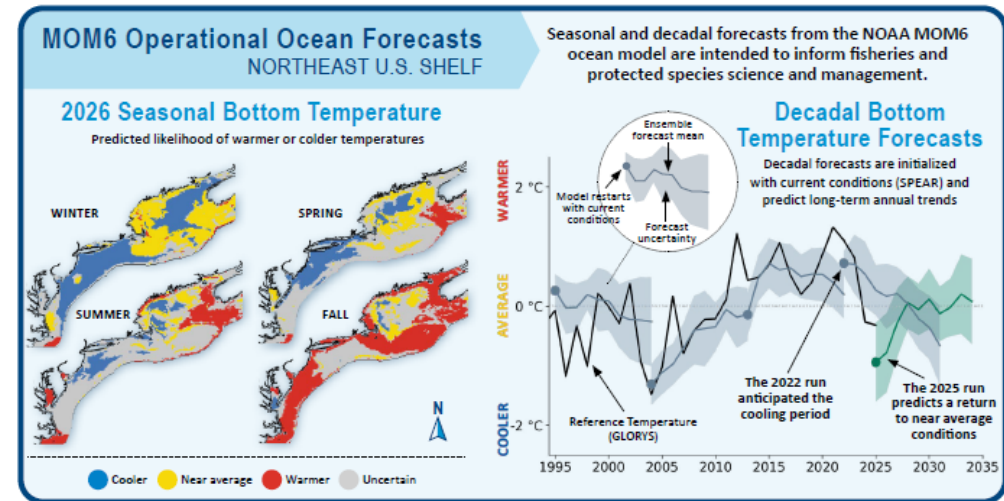
Figure 13: Total price and volume indicators in 2024 dollars (black) for commercial landings, and individual guild contributions to each indicator from Georges Bank (GB; top panels) and the Gulf of Maine (GOM; bottom panels).



# TOR A - Key signals in the SOE

*A. Recommend key signals described in the report that the Council should consider when making management decisions over the next year.*

- **Prey and thermal indicators** offer useful information regarding current conditions.
- **MOM6 bottom temperature forecasts** posit expected future ecosystem conditions, framing the outcomes of Council decisions.
- **Ecosystem trends associated with particular species** such as recent ocean acidification risk associated with scallops was lower in 2025 than in many recent years.



## TOR B - Potential improvements to the SOE

*B. Recommend potential improvements to future reports to support the Council's review and input to the NEFSC.*

- Curate species-specific information to facilitate on-ramps into management.
  - Include table or index to help locate.
  - Identify information used in particular stock assessments.
  - Develop more species-specific Ecosystem and Socioeconomic Profiles.
- For impacts of wind energy areas, include current and potential future exclusions of the Bottom Trawl Survey in addition to impacts on fishing activity.
- In addition to current stock status, identify progress relative to rebuilding plans, e.g., which stocks are moving into or out of “overfished” status.
- When discussing catch-based management objectives and outcomes, it could be useful to identify stocks that are underutilized relative to their management targets.



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- Identify ecosystem health as an objective to center the information on unfished species and ecosystem stability.
- Where species diversity is described for survey and fishery catches, identify cold- and warm-water species components.
- Regarding fishery and ecosystem “stability,” consider using “equilibrium” instead. Stability can have positive or negative connotations that are not always intended when conveying the degree of change.
- Where reporting on fisheries, clarify where including just NEFMC-managed fisheries and/or other.



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- For the Bennet Indicator, the magnitude of volume and price components of revenue depends on the reference year (1982 used). Consider sensitivity to the reference year or further justification of that assumption.
- As the indicators and metrics to understand communities expand, consider more specificity to distinguish the multiple ways “communities” are identified: ports, vessel groups, gear types, etc.

