



## New England Fishery Management Council

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

# MEETING SUMMARY

## Monkfish-Skate Joint Advisory Panel and Committee

Webinar

March 19, 2026

The Monkfish and Skate Advisory Panels (AP) and Committees met jointly on March 19, 2026 via webinar at 9:00 am to discuss: 1) the NEFMC AP Policies, 2) a summary of feedback on coordinated monkfish and skate efforts in 2025, 3) the development of a draft scoping document for a potential Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) program for the monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries, and 4) other business.

***MEETING ATTENDANCE:*** Joint Committee: Scott Olszewski (Skate (S) Committee Chair, M), Robert Ruhle (M Vice-Chair), Ted Platz (M, S Vice-Chair), Terry Alexander (M, S), Pete Christopher (M), Eric Hansen (M, S), Dr. Jay Hermsen (S), Laurie Nolan (M), John Pappalardo (M, S), Paul Risi (M), Jake Wiscott (M), Lisa Wooleyhan (M), Kelly Whitmore (M, S); Joint AP: Greg Mataronas (M AP Chair, S), Jeff Kneebone (S AP Chair), Aubrey Church (M Vice-Chair, S), Bonnie Brady (M), Josiah Dodge (M, S), Jamie Dopkin (M, S), Andrea Incollingo (S), Dan Nordstrom (S), Chris Rainone (M), Liam Sullivan (M, S), and John Whiteside (S). Council Chair: Daniel Salerno and other Council members Melanie Griffin, Jackie Odell, and Megan Ware. Council staff: Jenny Couture (Monkfish PDT Chair), Dr. Rachel Feeney (Skate PDT Chair), Emily Bodell, Dr. Cate O'Keefe, and Michelle Bachman (NEFMC staff); Jason Didden and Kiley Dancy (MAFMC staff); Mitch MacDonald, Scott Sakowski (NOAA General Counsel). In addition, about 24 other people attended.

### ***KEY OUTCOMES***

- **Fishery performance, timeline, and other updates:**
  - Received a brief update on the ongoing skate exempted fishery permit (EFP).
  - Several industry members shared their on-the-water experiences and ongoing challenges, including issues related to: acquiring the gear to comply with the Council's sturgeon action (i.e., lighter twine size off NJ) and the effectiveness of using such gear to harvest monkfish; shifting stocks; offshore wind development; overabundance of skates inhibiting monkfish harvest; increasing shipping and transportation costs with a continuing decline in fish prices; and other unknown factors adversely affecting skate bait harvest, for example.
- **Summary of feedback on coordinated monkfish and skate efforts in 2025:**
  - The Joint AP and Joint Committee discussed the summary report and the report's utility at this juncture, which is to provide feedback on the contents of the report, not to directly initiate an action to combine the monkfish and skate fishery management plans.
- **Draft IFQ Scoping document:**
  - The Joint AP strongly opposed moving forward with scoping for this.

- The Joint Committee recommended that the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils not approve the IFQ scoping document and discontinue the scoping process.
- **Other business:**
  - A member of the Joint AP clarified what they meant by latent fishing effort and that there should be a focus on marketing of monkfish and skates domestically versus continuing to rely on international markets that continue to evolve due to external factors.

The Joint Committee Chair facilitated introductions of the Committee and Advisory Panel members and reviewed the agenda. There were no changes to the agenda.

***AGENDA ITEM #1: NEFMC ADVISORY PANEL POLICIES***

Council staff reviewed the NEFMC Advisory Panel policies for the 2026-2028 AP term. There were no comments or questions from the Joint AP.

***AGENDA ITEM #2: 2026 TIMELINE AND OTHER UPDATES***

Council staff reviewed the 2026 Council priorities, timeline for the Monkfish and Skate FMPs, and monkfish and skate fishery performance, including a discussion on the outlook for Fishing Year 2026. GARFO staff provided an update on the skate wing fishery exempted fishing permit (EFP) approved in summer 2025. Since fishing activity under the EFP started in December 2025, participating vessels have taken 35 trips and landed 590,000 lb (whole weight) of skate wings. While skate wing landings have been higher in FY 2025 than FY 2024, this increase occurred prior to EFP effort and was therefore not driven by EFP activity.

Advisors from the Mid-Atlantic shared that there were lots of skates around in the spring fishery, both inshore and offshore. The fishing season in the Mid-Atlantic also ended about a month earlier than usual for some fishermen due to the weather. Some Advisors commented on the availability of monkfish, with one advisor noting that in the Mid-Atlantic they were not seeing many monkfish, and in southern New England, they were throwing back many smaller (16-20”) monkfish. Advisors also discussed using new, modified gear designed to reduce sturgeon bycatch in the Mid-Atlantic, explaining that it was generally less effective than their original nets as fish do not get caught up as easily, and there were unexpected lengthy delays in procuring the low-profile gillnet gear.

Advisors in the bait skate fishery shared differing experiences, with one explaining that the bait fishery was good through the spring and early summer but was challenging later in the year. Another Advisor had a great year of fishing for bait, stating that even though they could not access historic fishing grounds due to offshore wind projects, the new grounds they accessed had abundant skates. The Council Chair also noted a decline in bait skate effort with an overall decline in landings out of Point Judith, RI in the last year.

A Committee member asked if there are monkfish price data available, and Council staff provided a quick summary of and link to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center Fishery Performance Measures [webpage](#). The Committee member noted a correlation between decreasing prices and lower numbers of vessels in the monkfish fishery. Another Committee member was concerned about the ineffectiveness of the new nets and asked if that was a universal experience among Advisors. Advisors noted that the gear gets spun up more than other nets, and while the nets catch some fish, the new gear is not as effective since some fish fall out of the net as it is brought onboard. The gear is also expensive, and availability has been an issue. A Committee member asked if there were other areas where smaller monkfish have been observed, and an Advisor noted that they saw more small monkfish (10-12”) in southern New England in the spring. Another Committee member explained that while monkfish catch in the northern management area is high, prices remain low. Monkfish is an important component of the groundfish fishery in the northern area, where monkfish quota is typically close to fully utilized. Finally, an Advisor stated that they are

seeing more sturgeon, suggesting a healthy stock; the advisor felt that sturgeon are becoming a choke species for the southern New England gillnet fishery.

**Public Comment:**

- **Robert Elsey (commercial fisherman, Point Pleasant, NJ)** – The recent sturgeon action is hurting the fishery because the nets are not as high. Overall, there are fewer vessels fishing in New Jersey. Monkfish landings are low and the Korean export market has collapsed. There is very little domestic fishing pressure, and the stock is healthy. There are increasing costs in the fishery while prices for monkfish and skates are low. With fewer young people entering the fishery and the graying of the fleet, eventually fishing pressure will decline even further.
- **Tim Froelich (commercial fisherman, Riverhead, NY)** – Most income from their fishing operation was historically derived from the monkfish and skate fisheries, but profits have declined due to increasing costs without increasing prices, as well as a lack of local buyers on the east end of Long Island. Vessels used to get New Bedford prices for fish on Long Island but fishermen are now responsible for transporting catch to New Bedford, thus, incurring the costs of shipping and transit.

***AGENDA ITEM #3: SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK ON 2025 COORDINATED MONKFISH AND SKATE EFFORTS***

Council staff presented the feedback received on what did and did not work well with the 2025 joint monkfish and skate meeting structure and data analysis, ideas for improvement, and considerations for potential joint management of monkfish and skate wing fisheries in the future. The Joint AP and Joint Committee were encouraged to ask any questions and to provide any additional input to the summary report before the document is finalized for the April Council meeting.

**Joint AP:** Some Advisors supported continuing with a joint approach to managing monkfish and skates given the overlaps between the two fisheries and fishery participants. Another Advisor was concerned about the lack of representation on the AP for draggers compared to gillnets, and found it frustrating to sit through entire meetings with limited discussion of the bait fishery. An Advisor explained some of the reasoning for changing direction on the skate possession limits, noting that fishery participants were not worried about prices in the spring when the conversation started, but there were price drops over the summer that caused concern. The perspectives presented at meetings depend on the time of year and the individuals who attend. An Advisor was frustrated regarding the lack of information on the impacts of a possible IFQ program on the bait skate fishery and supported keeping the fishery management plan (FMP) structured as is.

**1. JOINT AP CONSENSUS STATEMENT:**

The Joint Monkfish/Skate AP accepts the 2025 Joint Management Summary Report, as revised today. The AP agrees with the sentiments conveyed in the report.

**Discussion on the Consensus Statement:** The AP Chair suggested putting forth a consensus statement to approve the joint management summary as revised today, but the AP was unable to come to consensus. Some members either wanted to review the document before it was finalized or were not comfortable approving/disapproving as new AP members, and a couple of advisors noted that some industry members were absent from the meeting who should have the opportunity to weigh in. The statement was tabled until after Committee discussion. The Skate Committee Chair determined that motions on this topic were not necessary.

The Joint AP Consensus Statement was not approved.

**Joint Committee:** A Committee member shared concerns about the lack of discussion and information regarding the Gulf of Maine trawl fishery, noting that monkfish in the northern area is an important part of overall catch, and this sector of the monkfish fishery will need to be included in any further discussions

regarding potential joint monkfish and skate management. A few Committee members asked about the joint management/governance workshop in February 2026. Council staff explained that the workshop was intended to look holistically at joint management, representation issues, Committee and AP structure, and other topics before additional discussions regarding any changes in joint management structure at the leadership level. The Executive Director noted that the Council will be participating in another workshop in early 2027 to continue discussions. Another Committee member supported a joint process for the skate wing and monkfish gillnet fisheries but pointed out the wide array of participants/factors in the process, which could complicate joint management. A Committee member felt that representation on the Council's APs had only declined in recent years, with fewer draggers from the northern area applying to be on the AP. They acknowledged the representation concerns, noting that they supported joint management and accommodating the bait fishery's interests as well. Another Advisor pointed out that the Northern monkfish area operates differently from the southern monkfish area; they supported joint monkfish and skate management in the southern area. Finally, a Committee member felt that discussions about structural change and merging fishery management plans would need to wait until the Inflation Reduction Act governance work had been completed, explaining that there is enough evidence to continue to discuss southern New England monkfish and skate fisheries together in the interim.

***AGENDA ITEM #4: DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENT FOR A POTENTIAL INDIVIDUAL FISHING QUOTA (IFQ) PROGRAM***

Council staff presented the draft scoping document for a potential IFQ program for the monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries. The document includes the timing/locations for the scoping meetings, why the Council is conducting scoping, what the Council is considering, what comments should address, what the process is, and background information on the monkfish and skate wing fisheries. Staff noted that a section that needs more development is the Council's rationale for scoping. Staff leaned on statements of individual Council members from the December 2025 Council meeting, but ultimately, the NEFMC and MAFMC will need to approve the scoping document in April with a strong statement of rationale. The Joint Monkfish and Skate AP and Committee were encouraged to ask questions and provide input on the draft IFQ scoping document before it is anticipated to be reviewed and approved during the April MAFMC and NEFMC meetings.

***Joint AP:*** Overall, Advisors were not supportive of moving forward with an IFQ program. An Advisor asked for clarification on how the skate FMP would be impacted by the development of an IFQ program for monkfish and/or skate wings, noting concerns about potential impacts to the skate bait fishery. Council staff explained that an IFQ program would require an amendment, and though the Council's priority specifies the monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries, any potential impacts to the skate bait fishery would be included in the document. The Advisor was also concerned about creating choke species in the skate fishery if IFQs are assigned by species where discards could potentially increase; they were unclear on how an IFQ program could move forward without structural changes to the Skate FMP. Staff noted that the details would be discussed and decided as part of the multi-year amendment process, should the Council initiate this amendment. The Advisor also asked why the bait skate fishery was not considered for an IFQ program. The maker of the motion at the December Council meeting explained that they made the motion because the IFQ program could address several issues in the monkfish and skate wing fisheries at once, and focused on the wing fishery specifically because they do not participate in the bait skate fishery. The seconder of the December Council motion felt that there were other issues that needed to be sorted out in the monkfish and skate wing fisheries, and did not support moving forward with IFQ at this time. The Advisor commented that this type of decision impacts the entire Skate FMP, not just the skate wing fishery, and all aspects of the skate fishery should be considered by Council members, not just based on a Council member's own interests.

Another Advisor was concerned about a potential IFQ program, particularly around the control dates for the fisheries, noting that their permit would likely qualify but other younger fishermen may not qualify. Taking an open access fishery (skates) that is controlled by groundfish or monkfish days-at-sea (DAS)

and implementing an IFQ would require a major change to the Skate FMP when the skate fishery already has issues that should be addressed with another approach. A few Advisors voiced possible impacts to smaller businesses and individual fishermen, noting that larger entities tend to benefit from IFQ programs. An Advisor described the impacts of the groundfish sector program in the northern area, which left some individuals unable to fish because they did not have quota. Some Advisors supported stopping work on IFQ scoping, if possible, to explore other management measures. Advisors suggested other possible measures, such as addressing latent effort, implementing a Skate DAS program, establishing a three-season skate wing management approach, developing a Skate research set-aside (RSA) program, allowing landing multiple skate trip limits at once (similar to what is permitted in the monkfish fishery by declaring an overage while at sea), and not managing monkfish with DAS (fishing against an overall quota). One Advisor supported limiting access to the skate fishery, noting concern that as other fisheries such as scallops or groundfish have more challenging years, there may be more entrants to the skate fishery if it remains open access, which could have market impacts (flooding the market with an excess amount of skate, which could further decrease the price). An Advisor summarized some of the issues in the two fisheries, noting that the abundance of skates is hindering monkfish catch, and fishing effort is impacted by the migration of predator species and increasing operational costs without a subsequent increase in fish price.

**Joint Committee:** A Committee member explained that monkfish is a profitable species in the northern area groundfish fishery and stated that catch shares have been challenging since the implementation of the sector system. They were not in favor of pursuing the IFQ program and, based on conversations since the December Council meeting, was not sure it would be supported through a referendum, which requires approval of at least two-thirds of eligible voters. Another Committee member stated that adjusting the IFQ scoping plan would be a change in Council priorities and would require a two-thirds majority vote to pass. Another Committee member noted that the Joint Monkfish and Skate Committee and Advisory Panel did not select IFQ as a priority last fall (the IFQ program was brought up when priorities were being determined during the December NEFMC meeting); given the lack of support expressed in the meeting today, the member asked whether scoping should continue or not. The Executive Director offered some process clarifications, noting that the Council has not noticed a potential change in priorities for the April NEFMC meeting, so General Counsel would have to be consulted to determine how to proceed. The Committee member asked if the New England Council could discontinue the work without formally changing priorities should the Mid-Atlantic Council decide to disapprove the IFQ scoping document. Mid-Atlantic Council staff noted that Mid-Atlantic Council motions would be contingent on the New England Council proceeding without major changes to the scoping document. The Mid-Atlantic Council could decide to revisit the scoping document during a future Council meeting, but that may lead to timing issues given the scoping meetings are planned for late April-early May (i.e., before the MAFMC meets again). Another Committee member felt that the IFQ program could represent a solution to a variety of issues, and noted that while they would be fine with not continuing scoping for an IFQ program if necessary, the Committee only heard from a small group of individuals via AP comments and that there may be others with differing opinions.

A few other Committee members voiced opposition to pursuing IFQ scoping given the commentary from the Joint AP. GARFO staff on the Committee stated that the Agency would not take a position on whether an IFQ is the appropriate management approach for monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries, but noted that there should be a strong commitment to move forward with such a program due to the nature of developing such a program over several years; the Committee member suggested that scoping is a way to determine whether to make such a commitment before initiating any amendment.

**Joint AP:** An Advisor provided some market perspectives, noting that monkfish and skates rely heavily on international markets, which are influenced by a variety of factors (price, politics, exchange rates). Monkfish prices have dropped, leaving U.S. dealers to accept either low offers or none, and other international markets will fill the gap as needed to satisfy the domestic demand. Skates also have an

international market, with exports to countries including France and Korea, but there is competition with cheaper prices from other markets, similar to monkfish. Processing capacity is limited, and prices fluctuate based on supply and demand over the course of the year.

The Council Chair acknowledged the robust discussion on this topic and cautioned that if the IFQ scoping process is removed from priorities during the April NEFMC meeting, the Council may not add another priority in its place. An Advisor was concerned about the Council staff resources already allocated to this process given the consternations discussed and suggested that if the process were to move forward, comments should include other ways to address problems in the fisheries (ex. dynamic trip limits). Another Advisor concurred with the previous comments, noting that they have not heard support for pursuing an IFQ program from fishermen in their port.

**Public Comment:**

- **Tim Froelich** – Mr. Froelich agreed with the comments thus far and had not heard any support for pursuing an IFQ program, suggesting waiting a few weeks for folks to come forward and if not, moving to other priorities for the fisheries. Regulations from the past several years are compounding, and there is limited processing capacity. There is no dockside support anymore unless someone is fishing out of New Bedford or a similarly large port.

**Joint Committee:** A Committee member asked for process clarification around what would happen if the Mid-Atlantic Council did not support the IFQ scoping document. The Executive Director explained that if the scoping document were not approved, scoping could not proceed, so if the document were disapproved by the Mid-Atlantic Council, the New England Council would discuss it during their April meeting; both Councils would need to approve the scoping document, otherwise the scoping meetings would have to be postponed. If both Councils disapproved the scoping document, the Councils would need to determine whether there is interest in reworking the scoping document or not moving forward with an IFQ scoping priority; this would be discussed during the June NEFMC meeting.

**1. JOINT COMMITTEE MOTION: ALEXANDER/HANSEN**

The Committee recommends that the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils not approve the IFQ scoping document and discontinue the scoping process.

*Rationale:* This is a solution in search of a problem, and the problems with the monkfish and skate fisheries require different solutions. The AP members and public in attendance today did not show support for moving ahead with scoping.

**Discussion on the Motion:** A Committee member noted that more rationale for pursuing an IFQ program was needed but was not discussed. There was another question about when and how the Council priorities may change. The Council Chair noted that the Councils would discuss the motion at their respective April meetings, and discussion during the New England Council’s June meeting would likely focus on a change in priorities. The Executive Director cautioned around pivoting priorities without discussing the priority options identified by the AP and Committee during their meetings last fall. A robust discussion around possible management measures and the priorities would be needed before there is any conversation about potentially selecting a different priority during the June NEFMC meeting. The Committee and NOAA General Counsel worked to perfect the motion language to clarify the intent.

**COMMITTEE MOTION #1 CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY WITH TWO ABSTENTIONS.**

**AGENDA ITEM #5: OTHER BUSINESS**

An Advisor commented on latent permits, explaining that some fishermen/vessels move to different fisheries, which would not take permits out of the permit bank but the permit would not necessarily be

latent. They also suggested focusing on improving marketing for skates in the US and noted the decreasing profit margin in the skate fishery given decreases in price and increases in fuel costs.

**Public Comment:**

- **Tim Froelich** – The monkfish population is healthy, and more fish will show up in the fishery in 2-4 years unless there is a major change. There are other avenues to explore to solve some of the problems in the fishery with existing tools.

The meeting adjourned at 1:07 pm.