



New England Fishery Management Council

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

MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 11, 2025
TO: Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)
FROM: Cate O'Keefe, Executive Director
SUBJECT: **Terms of Reference – Overfishing limits (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) for northern and southern monkfish for fishing years (FY) 2026 to 2030**

TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 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 (defaults for FY 2029 and 2030) that will prevent overfishing, meet the objectives of the fishery management plan, and consider the Council's Risk Policy Statement and Concept.

BACKGROUND

Assessments and data updates

Due to uncertainties with monkfish aging and growth, monkfish assessments since 2016 have been unable to estimate monkfish abundance and fishing mortality rates. Instead, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) has been using the recent trend in the trawl survey index to develop catch advice using the I-Smooth method. The 2016, 2019, and 2022 assessments concluded that the stock status of monkfish was unknown. In September 2022, the I-Smooth monkfish assessment approach was peer reviewed as a management track update. The assessment applied updated trawl survey indices, catch data, and revised the discard mortality rate for scallop dredges to provide updated recommendations for fishery removals. Additionally, the assessment report provided updated indices from the Shrimp Trawl Survey and the Virginia Institute of Marine Science Scallop Dredge Survey. In February 2023, NOAA Fisheries officially changed the status from the conclusion of the 2013 assessment from not overfished and overfishing not occurring to unknown status.

In 2025, the NEFSC conducted a data update for northern and southern monkfish including updates to the survey biomass indices and fishery catch data. The I-Smooth assessment method was not updated. The Monkfish PDT has provided recommendations for ABCs for FY 2026-2028 (and default specifications for FY 2029-2030) via Monkfish Framework 17.

Specification intervals

The SSC has traditionally recommended monkfish specifications at three-year intervals, but recent reductions in federal agency resources have highlighted a potential need for increased flexibility in management and regulatory processes. Thus, rather than recommend specifications for FY 2026-2028, the SSC is asked to make recommendations for a five-year period, considering specifications for FY 2029 and 2030 as defaults should future gaps in federal resources prevent the provision of updated data. The Council's 2025 monkfish action (Framework Adjustment 17) will only set specifications for FY 2026-2028.

With the SSC's recommendation for ABCs, the Council may consider adjusting effort controls (i.e., monkfish possession limits and monkfish days-at-sea). The Council expects to take final action at its September 2025 meeting. Specifications are expected to be implemented on May 1, 2026, for FY 2026 - 2028.

Risk Policy

The Council approved updates to its Risk Policy Statement with a new Risk Policy Concept in September 2024. Implementation of the updated Risk Policy began in January 2025 and is proceeding in stages. The Risk Policy aims to systematically account for factors that influence risk tolerance in Council decision making. During the initial phase of implementation, the template for the Risk Policy Matrix (Document b.iii.) has been revised to align with the factors in the Risk Policy Concept. The SSC can use the revised matrices in a similar manner to previous Risk Policy information.

INFORMATION

- a. NEFSC Monkfish Data Update Report, July 29, 2025
 - i. [Monkfish North Data Update](#)
 - ii. [Monkfish South Data Update](#)
- b. Monkfish Plan Development Team
 - i. Presentation by Council staff
 - ii. Monkfish PDT memo to SSC re FY 2026 – 2028 (and default for FY 2029-2030) OFLs and ABCs for monkfish, August 12, 2025
 - iii. Risk Policy Matrix for monkfish
- c. [Monkfish SAFE Report](#), including the most recent description of the social and economic status of the fishery (Framework Adjustment 13, Affected Environment Human Communities), monitoring and assessment reports, etc.
- d. FY 2024 monkfish catch accounting, GARFO
- e. Previous SSC recommendations regarding monkfish
 - i. Meeting materials, [January 20, 2023](#)
 - ii. SSC memo, [January 23, 2023](#)
- f. Correspondence (if any)

Background Documents

- 1. The Council's [Risk Policy Statement and Concept](#), implemented January, 2025
- 2. NOAA/NEFSC [2025 State of the Ecosystem Reports for the Northeast U.S. Shelf](#)