New England Fishery Management Council
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MEETING SUMMARY

Risk Policy Working Group

August 21, 2025

1:00 p.m. Webinar

The New England Fishery Management Council's (NEFMC) Risk Policy Working Group (RPWG) met by webinar on August 21, 2025 to: 1) Discuss use of the Risk Policy in upcoming Council actions; 2) Continue to refine elements of the Risk Policy Concept for future use. Review feedback from simulation testing and consider recommending adjustments to the Risk Policy factors, data sources, and scoring rubric; 3) discuss other business.

MEETING ATTENDANCE

Megan Ware (Chair), Dan Salerno (Vice-Chair), Jonathon Peros (Council Staff), Dr. Lisa Kerr, Dr. Jason McNamee, Dr. Naresh Pradhan, Dr. Jon Deroba, Melanie Griffin, Moira Kelly, Dr. Joe Caracappa. Ms. Angelia Miller participated in the meeting, along with several members of the Council and Council staff.

Materials for the meeting can be found at this link.

The meeting began at 1:01 p.m.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Ms. Ware opened the meeting and reviewed the agenda for the working group. She explainted that the focus of the meeting would be around refining risk policy factors based on feedback from public and Council input, simulation testing, and sub-groups. She noted that while the working group focused on weighting exercise at recent meetings, the current priority for the working group was to revisit the Risk Policy Concept and continue work in the Beta phases of Risk Policy implementation.

RISK POLICY ALPHA AND BETA PHASES

Mr. Peros recapped the Alpha/Beta applications of the Risk Policy. The Alpha Phase focuses on the use of the revised Risk Policy matrix, but no scoring of factors will occur. Mr. Peros explained that the Council's technical staff met in July to discuss assembling data for the matrix, and that instructions were developed.

In the Beta Phase, the Council and RPWG will continue to refine the Risk Policy concept. Adjustments to the Risk Policy will not occur on a rolling basis unless specifically directed by the Council. Mr. Peros also highlighted that multiple Council groups and projects are interconnected and advancing on different timelines.

Ms. Angelia Miller detailed her work populating matrices for groundfish stocks, and shared recommendations for improving readability with different formatting. This included a recommendation to transpose columns into rows to expand space on the page for descriptor text, and trim the number of columns that are presented, focusing on just data responses for public facing documents. She also shared ideas to avoid redundant documentation, and ensure the system is adaptable to new processes (e.g. stock assessment data updates).

Key feedback from the working group is summarized below:

- The working group supported proposed changes that are intended to make the matrix more approachable. These include adopting a new format of the matrix to reduce white space on the page by transposing columns to rows. A working group member suggested that a more detailed version of the matrix that includes data sources could be housed on the Council website as a reference. The group also felt that it is important to ensure placeholders are used when data is unavailable to maintain consistency across matrices.
- The working group supported exploring the concept of a cover sheet for groundfish stocks. Ms. Miller will develop a draft cover sheet for groundfish stocks, and the working group will provide feedback on this approach.
- The working group also supported continuing work to refine how recreational fishery information is shared through Risk Policy matrices.

REVIEW OF RISK POLICY CONCEPT AND SUB-GROUP INPUT

The working group opened with a discussion around recent feedback and new challenges observed during a recent SSC meeting. Dr. Kerr noted the shift from full stock assessments to streamlined data updates and the extension of catch advice periods from three to five years. These changes can introduce additional uncertainty, as data updates lack the depth of traditional assessments and longer specification periods increase discomfort about using outdated data. Dr. Kerr suggested incorporating these scenarios into the Risk Policy framework, possibly through scoring or guidance. Dr. McNamee supported these observations, noting that these issues were not previously contemplated and require planning. Mr. Salerno confirmed these concerns were echoed at the NRCC meeting and added that future assessments may include data updates with projections, signaling a need for the risk policy to adapt to evolving assessment formats.

Dr. Kerr and Dr. McNamee presented a comprehensive review of the recruitment factor, and identified challenges with the current rubric. Ambiguities in terms such as “multiple year classes” and “average recruitment,” unclear timeframes, and overlapping criteria could lead to conflicting scores. They proposed clarifying the factor’s goals—whether to capture process error, observation error, or future uncertainty—and suggested a quantile-based approach to classify recruitment as low, average, or high. Additionally, they introduced the idea of a second dimension for “trust” in recruitment estimates, creating a two-axis scoring table that combines

magnitude and confidence. They raised questions about species-specific timeframes and cautioned against double counting by cross-walking with related factors like climate and assessment uncertainty. Working group feedback was generally positive: several members endorsed the quantile approach and two-axis table but requested clearer, quantitative guidance for defining trust. Dr. Kerr proposed developing a checklist for PDTs.

For the stock assessment type factor, Mr. Salerno and Ms. Kelly recommended simplifying the assessment type and performance rubric to improve usability. Their proposal focused scoring based on the most recent assessment report rather than historical trends. They also suggested categorizing assessments as analytical or empirical, with subcategories for major retrospective patterns requiring rho adjustments and empirical assessments with or without stock status determination. The sub-group also proposed adding considerations for time since last assessment and projection quality. Feedback from the working group emphasized prioritizing projection quality over time gaps, noting that life history traits influence projection reliability. Dr. Deroba suggested using generation time ratios to adjust for species differences, while Dr. McNamee flagged evolving challenges with state-space models. The working group supported flip-flopping scores for empirical versus analytical rho-adjusted models based on simulation results.

Revisions to the commercial fishery characterization factor were proposed to better reflect socioeconomic conditions. Ms. Ware proposed changing the scale to 0 to -4, meaning the factor would only add risk rather than increase precaution. Six scoring questions were introduced, focusing on participation decline, revenue per vessel trends, consolidation, fuel cost increases beyond inflation, quota dependencies for other species, and port-level revenue concentration. Working group members supported the revisions but raised concerns about data availability and timeliness. Dr. Pradhan recommended narrowing the variables to participation, revenue, and fuel cost for simplicity, while other working group members suggested worked examples to illustrate interactions between fishery health and stock health.

Mr. Peros and Dr. Carracappa reviewed the fish condition factor, which is currently used as a proxy for climate and ecosystem considerations, and concluded it was insufficient. They recommended expanding the factor to include multiple indicators such as habitat quality and productivity drivers, while retaining fish condition at the stock level. They proposed integrating data streams from the State of the Ecosystem (SOE) report and EDAB to capture broader ecosystem impacts. Dr. Kerr cautioned against excessive complexity and suggested testing simple versus comprehensive approaches. Mr. Andy Applegate from the Council staff noted that fish condition alone may misrepresent ecosystem health due to density dependence, reinforcing the need for multiple indicators.

RISK INDICATORS

Mr. Max Grezlik from the NEFSC introduced high-priority indicators for climate and ecosystem considerations to the working group, focusing on NEFSC products that are peer-reviewed, not used in stock assessments, have a mechanistic connection to life history for Council managed stocks. Working group members noted that these indicators are of interest given the feedback on fish condition as a stand-alone factor. Indicators temperature-based metrics (cold pool

persistence, heat wave index), recruitment drivers (Calanus abundance), and economic indicators (Shannon diversity index, Bennett index price component, net revenue) for several Council managed stocks. Discussion focused on integrating species-specific indicators into a broader risk policy framework and evolving toward a quantitative climate vulnerability index. Working group members considered this information in the context of the current Risk Policy, and suggested these granular indicators could eventually replace or complement the current climate vulnerability scores.

RISK POLICY SIMULATION TESTING UPDATE

Dr. Kerr provided a brief update on simulation testing, explaining that future work will demonstrate how risk scores translate into ABC buffers using logistic curves and risk tiers. The team is scoping Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) scenarios and preparing a report summarizing scoring demonstrations for Groundfish stocks.

OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed.