



New England Fishery Management Council

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

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

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 16, 2025
TO: Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)
FROM: Cate O'Keefe, Executive Director
SUBJECT: **Terms of Reference – Overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) for U.S./Canada transboundary stocks for fishing year 2026**

TERMS OF REFERENCE

- A. Review the recommendations from the Transboundary Management Guidance Committee (TMGC) based on results from the most recent U.S. and Canada stock assessments and information provided by Council staff.
- B. Confirm TMGC guidance for U.S. equivalent OFLs and ABCs for fishing year (FY) 2026 for the following stocks:
 1. Georges Bank cod
 2. Georges Bank haddock
 3. Georges Bank yellowtail flounder

BACKGROUND

Transboundary Science and Management

The Transboundary Management Guidance Committee (TMGC) was established in 2000 as an advisory process to address how catches of transboundary stocks of Eastern Georges Bank cod, Eastern Georges Bank haddock, and Georges Bank yellowtail flounder should be allocated to the U.S. and Canada within the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area. The committee is comprised of U.S. fishing industry representatives from the New England Fishery Management Council, NOAA Fisheries officials, Canadian fishing industry representatives, and Canada Department of Fisheries and Oceanography (DFO) officials. The TMGC has typically negotiated the U.S./Canada allocations annually based on the historic proportions of fishery utilization and resource distribution in the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area.

In 2025, the TMGC process was changed to include only NOAA Fisheries officials representing U.S. interests with Canadian fishing industry representatives and DFO officials, without inclusion of New England Council members. The resulting guidance requires confirmation from the New England SSC to integrate into the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan.

The TMGC provided recommendations for Eastern Georges Bank cod and haddock catch advice (Document 3) based on the Integration of Science Advice for Transboundary Species (ISATS) process as described in the “Compilation of Scientific Advice for Eastern Georges Bank Cod and Haddock for Fishing Year 2026” (Documents 4 and 5). A Technical Science Coordination (TSC) process was conducted to consider domestic products from the U.S. Georges Bank cod and

haddock stock assessments and the Canadian Eastern Georges Bank cod and haddock stock assessments. Additionally, the TMGC provided recommendations for Georges Bank yellowtail flounder catch advice (Document 2) based on the 2025 Management Track Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report for Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder (Document 6).

The ISATS process replaced the previous joint science approach under the Transboundary Resources Assessment Committee (TRAC) and supported the decision-making process for the transboundary stocks. ISATS compiles, but does not seek to reconcile, domestic science advice products from each country. In 2025, the Georges Bank yellowtail flounder Management Track stock assessment peer review was conducted after the ISATS process and results were considered directly by the TMGC.

SPECIFICATION SETTING

Eastern Georges Bank Cod

The 2025 TMGC agreed that the Canadian Eastern Georges Bank (EGB) cod stock assessment should be the basis for catch advice in FY2026. This assessment incorporates data through 2024 and includes a fleet structure that was considered more reflective of differences in fishing behavior and practices between the two countries than the U.S. Georges Bank cod assessment approach. The spawning stock biomass from the Canadian EGB cod assessment is within the confidence intervals for spawning stock biomass from the U.S. assessment and applies a fishing mortality strategy defined as a very low risk of preventable decline for the stock. The “biomass apportionment” method to determine the proportion of cod distribution across Georges Bank indicated that 100% of Georges Bank cod biomass is currently distributed within the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area. The TMGC recommended catch advice of 473 mt for Eastern Georges Bank cod under the resource sharing agreement with 32% allocated to the U.S, resulting in an OFL/ABC = 473 mt and U.S. ABC = 151 mt (Document 2).

Eastern Georges Bank Haddock

The 2025 TMGC agreed that the U.S. Georges Bank (GB) haddock stock assessment should be the basis for catch advice in FY2026. This assessment incorporates population dynamics for the overall Georges Bank haddock stock that was considered more reflective of the stock structure of GB haddock than the Canadian Eastern Georges Bank haddock assessment approach. The catch advice is above the range of advice from the Canadian EGB model results but below the biomass apportionment method, which indicated that 75% of Georges Bank haddock biomass is currently distributed within the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area. The TMGC recommended catch advice of 4,750 mt for Eastern Georges Bank haddock under the resource sharing agreement with 21% allocated to the U.S, resulting in an OFL/ABC = 8,177 mt and U.S. ABC = 4,425 mt (Document 2).

Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder

The 2025 TMGC agreed that the U.S. GB yellowtail flounder stock assessment should be the basis for catch advice in FY2026. Only the U.S. conducts stock assessments for GB yellowtail flounder, which underwent a Research Track peer review in November 2024 and a Management Track peer review in September 2025. The TMGC recommended catch advice of 57 mt for Georges Bank yellowtail flounder under the resource sharing agreement with 54% allocated to the U.S, resulting in an OFL/ABC = 57 mt and U.S. ABC = 31 mt (Document 2).

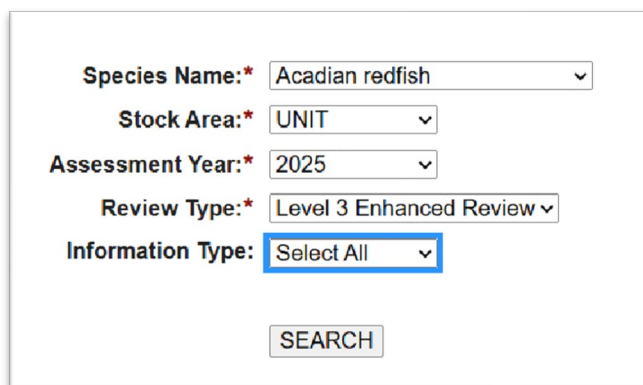
Specifications Process

In May 2024, the U.S./Canada Steering Committee endorsed a new approach for the provision of science advice to TMGC. The strategy, which replaced TRAC, aims to enhance science collaboration and streamline advice for the management process. In 2025, this process was applied by the TMGC participants to determine U.S. and Canada allocations of the shared Eastern Georges Bank Total Allowable Catches (TACs). For the U.S., the 2025 TMGC TACs were agreed upon by a NOAA official based on the ISATS process, input from non-Council U.S. fishing industry members, and negotiations with the Canadian TMGC representatives. The TMGC recommendations considered, but are not constrained by, ABC control rules for the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan and the Council's Risk Policy. All TMGC recommendations considered stock status, resource conditions, and risk-averse management approaches. The 2025 TMGC process was conducted outside of the Council's scope, and the SSC is requested to confirm U.S. equivalent OFL and ABC values for applications to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan Framework 72.

INFORMATION

1. Presentation by Council staff
2. 251016 NEFMC Staff to SSC Memo – FY2026 U.S. OFL and ABC for U.S./Canada Transboundary Stocks
3. DRAFT Transboundary Management Guidance Committee 2026 Guidance Document
4. Report - [Compilation of Scientific Advice for Eastern Georges Bank Cod and Haddock for Fishing Year 2026](#)
5. Presentation – Compilation of Scientific Advice for Eastern Georges Bank – US Pre-TMGC Meeting, September 26, 2025
6. [September 2025 Management Track Assessment for Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder](#)
 - a. [2025 Management Track Assessment Peer Review Report, October 4, 2023](#)
 - b. Stock Assessment Support Information [portal](#)*

* The NEFSC [Stock Assessment Support Information](#) portal includes reports, presentations, and supporting materials for all NEFSC stock assessments. Use the drop-down menus to access information. A screenshot example is provided here:



The screenshot shows a search form with the following fields and values:

- Species Name: * Acadian redfish
- Stock Area: * UNIT
- Assessment Year: * 2025
- Review Type: * Level 3 Enhanced Review
- Information Type: Select All
- SEARCH button