



New England Fishery Management Council

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

MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 4, 2025
TO: Social Sciences Subcommittee of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC/SSS)
FROM: Cate O'Keefe, Executive Director
SUBJECT: **Terms of Reference and information for November 12 SSC/SSS meeting**

TERMS OF REFERENCE

- A. Consider: 1) the range of fishery performance information products available to the Council, including Risk Policy Matrices, monitoring reports, Council action documents, and information provided by Advisory Panels, and 2) staff updates on work to generate information products in a more efficient and consistent manner that meets a range of needs.
- B. Provide recommendations on 1) how to gather and report on fishery performance information from Advisory Panels; 2) the content of fishery performance information that is provided to the SSC when developing recommendations for specifications; and 3) how best to report on fisheries performance that efficiently meets multiple needs for information.

BACKGROUND

The Council reviewed and approved the work plan of the SSS at its June 2025 meeting, as drafted during the inaugural SSS meeting earlier in June. The purpose and objectives of the SSS have been confirmed:

Purpose: *To foster communication and collaboration between the NEFSC Social Sciences Branch (SSB) and Council to improve the use of social science information in the Council process.*

Objectives:

- 1. *Create more opportunities for integrating social sciences tools to inform management.*
- 2. *Better understand the Council's socioeconomic objectives to help address management needs.*

3. *Increase coordination between SSS and SSB staff in various Council PDTs.*
4. *Better integrate existing tools and data from SSB and other sources into fisheries management advice and decision-making processes.*
5. *Improve effectiveness and optimize timing of social science data inputs and recommendations.*

The primary focus of the second SSS meeting on November 12 will be to give input on how the Council can be more efficient, consistent, and effective in providing information on the performance of the fisheries that it manages. This meeting will be a step towards meeting SSS objectives related to integrating social sciences and increasing coordination across science and management partners. Specifically, the SSS workplan (Document 2, Table 1) includes: “Advise on content/template of a fishery performance document that can be brought to the NEFMC SSC, including Advisory Panel input and information from industry-generated documents, e.g., groundfish sector manager reports.” In addition to a staff presentation, a range of example products are provided as meeting documents to consider and provide feedback on.

Advisory Panel Feedback

In June 2025, the SSS discussed wanting to review the questions asked of Advisors and develop recommendations for improving how AP feedback is sought and reported on. Advisory Panels are periodically asked to provide feedback on how their fishery is operating, including the factors that influence fishing activity, impacts of recent regulatory changes, and the outlook of the fishery. Council staff have generated questions to ask Advisors (Document 3), though have not necessarily coordinated questions across fishery management plans. Primarily the AP feedback has been documented in meeting summaries (e.g., Documents 5e-g). In 2022, a Monkfish fishery performance report was prepared that included AP input and fishery data (Document 5a). In 2023, the Small-Mesh Multispecies SAFE Report included AP input (Document 5b, Section 3.3).

Though not directly organized by the Council, in June 2024, during the development of the Atlantic Herring Research Track Stock Assessment, the Atlantic Herring Research Track Working Group held a [stakeholder engagement session](#) immediately following a meeting of the Atlantic Herring Advisory Panel. Advisors and other stakeholders provided feedback on a series of questions relevant to the stock assessment and fishery performance (Document 5c). The summary of stakeholder input was also presented to the [peer review panel](#) in March 2025. It was also included in the assessment materials for the SSC for their [April 2025 meeting](#) for the Atlantic herring agenda item.

Risk Policy

The Council approved updates to its [Risk Policy Statement with a new Risk Policy Concept](#) in September 2024. The Risk Policy Concept aims to systematically account for factors that influence risk tolerance in Council decision making. Implementation of the updated Risk Policy began in January 2025 and is proceeding in two concurrent stages (Alpha and Beta). During the initial Alpha phase, the template for the Risk Policy Matrix has been revised (e.g., Document 4a) from the original version (e.g., Document 4b) to align with the focus areas of the Risk Policy Concept. The Risk Policy Working Group is currently focused on refining elements of the Risk

Policy Concept based on input from Council bodies and recommendations from a simulation testing project being conducted by Dr. Lisa Kerr and Dr. Roger Brothers at the University of Maine (Beta Phase). Revisions to the Risk Policy Concept may include changes to factors and data used in scoring, along with mechanistic changes. The SSC and SSS should be aware that the Risk Policy Concept is expected to be updated in 2026. Future iterations of the Risk Policy could rely on information provided in fishery performance reports for the scoring of factors.

Other Fishery Performance Information

A variety of approaches have been taken to communicate the performance of fisheries managed, and the Council is currently considering how to be more effective and consistent in fishery reporting, in collaboration with partners and considering available resources. Fishery regulations for the Monkfish, Skate, and Small-mesh Multispecies FMPs require an annual PDT review (Document 6, Section 4.4). These reviews may be communicated to the Council via a report, though only the Small-Mesh regulations require a report. The regulations for these FMPs detail the specific content of a review, but that content varies by FMP. The Northeast multispecies (groundfish), Scallop, and Herring FMPs do not have this requirement, though since specifications are set annually in the Scallop and Groundfish FMPs and biannually in the Herring FMP, the Council receives periodic updates on performance through Council action processes.

Skate specifications have been set every two years. In years when specifications have not been set, the PDT has prepared an “[Annual Monitoring Report](#)” (e.g., Document 5d). Otherwise, fishery performance information is included in the Council action document for specifications.

Monkfish specifications have been set every three years. In the years when specifications have not been set, the PDT review may be documented in a meeting summary, but in 2022, the Council prioritized preparing a report, with AP input included (Document 5a).

Small-Mesh multispecies [Annual Monitoring Reports](#) have been prepared annually or when specifications have not been set. These reports have been lengthy, and the PDT is developing approaches to automate data query and reporting (Document 5h).

During the SSC meetings this October, Council staff noted that the Council approved an omnibus amendment to its fishery management plans in September that includes an action allowing a specifications frequency of up to five years. Additionally, that action would remove the regulatory requirements for an annual performance review for the Monkfish, Skate, and Small-Mesh Multispecies FMPs (Document 6, Section 4.4). If approved, this action would allow the Council to determine the appropriate timing and content of fishery performance reporting across all the FMP as resources allow.

INFORMATION

1. Staff presentation
2. [SSC 2025 work plan](#)
3. Sample questions recently asked of Advisory Panels about fishery performance
4. Risk Policy matrices (examples)
 - a. [Risk Policy matrices for groundfish](#), October 14, 2025
 - b. [Risk Policy matrix for redfish](#), October 27, 2023
5. Fishery information (examples)
 - a. [2022 Monkfish Fishery Performance Report](#), September 1, 2022
 - b. [Small-Mesh Multispecies SAFE Report](#), December 2023
 - c. [Atlantic Herring Research Track Working Group June 13, 2024, Stakeholder Engagement Session – Meeting Summary](#)
 - d. [Skate Annual Monitoring Report for Fishing Year 2023](#), September 9, 2024
 - e. [Skate and Monkfish Advisory Panel meeting summary](#), March 19, 2025
 - f. [Scallop Advisory Panel meeting summary](#), April 1, 2025
 - g. [Joint Groundfish Advisory Panel and Recreational Advisory Panel meeting summary](#), June 10, 2025
 - h. [Draft Small-Mesh Multispecies Fishery Performance and Prototype Risk Policy Factor Summary](#), October 2025
6. [Omnibus Management Flexibility Amendment](#), draft as of September 12, 2025