

New England Fishery Management Council

Groundfish Advisory Panel Meeting

By Webinar

November 17, 2025

DRAFT Meeting Motions

Attendance

Groundfish Advisory Panel

Present: Hank Soule (Chair), Bonnie Brady, Gib Brogan, Al Cottone

Absent: Cassie Canastra Larsen (Vice-Chair), Linda Hunt, Ben Martens, Lucas Raymond

The meeting started at approximately 9:00 am.

Framework 72 / Specification and Management Measures

The Groundfish Advisory Panel did not have a quorum. The Groundfish Advisors proceeded in discussion format for those advisors present (4).

Discussion Statement 1:

Groundfish advisors in the meeting support Action 1, Alternative 2 – Updated Status Determination Criteria for Georges Bank yellowtail flounder.

Discussion Statement 2:

Groundfish advisors in the meeting support consideration for setting white hake catch advice at a higher risk level for FY2026 through the next assessment.

For purposes of discussion - 3 *did support* and 1 *did not support*

Rationale provided for discussion:

- The stock is neither overfished nor subject to overfishing.
- The 2025 assessments of SSB over time significantly depart from the relatively close convergence of the prior 6 assessments, raising concerns of error.

- There is a significant disparity between the assessment’s perception of a biomass 33% lower than the 2022 estimate, versus commercial fishermen’s realization stable catch rates, ACE lease prices, and limited ACE availability over the last 4-5 years.
- White hake is a critical stock to the commercial groundfish sector program (commercial multispecies and some monkfish trips). In recent years it has largely been caught incidentally.
- Catches have been consistent between 1,700 mt and 2,000 MT over the past five years. Utilization has been over 90% over the past five years.
- Its strong availability across its stock range is seen by both inshore and offshore vessels.
- There are no signals within the commercial data (reduced age, contracting spatial footprint, or lower CPUE) that indicates a significant concern with white hake.
- The assessment shows two years of modest increases in recruitment, and some groundfish sectors report an increasing proportion of landings in the first six months of FY 2025 are of the smaller size classes.

The advisor who did not support provided rationale:

Procedural concerns with delaying Framework 72

Discussion Statement 3:

Groundfish advisors in the meeting support consideration for setting redfish catch advice at a higher level of risk level for FY2026 through the next assessment. Groundfish advisors also support consideration for examining the redfish sector exemption program and impacts of a potential suspension of the redfish sector exemption program on catches and quotas.

For purposes of discussion - 3 did support and 1 did not support

Rationale provided for discussion:

- The stock is neither overfished nor subject to overfishing.
- The recent reduction in SSB may just reflect a natural decline from a high abundance regime, similar to what may be occurring in the lobster fishery at present.
- It’s possible reduced prey availability may be affecting stock population. Among other shrimps, redfish feed on *Pandalus borealis* which has apparently largely vacated the Gulf of Maine. Adults and larvae alike feed on among other copepods *Calanus finmarchicus*, whose abundance declined from 2015-2020. [Bigelow & Schroeder; *Climate impacts on the Gulf of Maine ecosystem: A review of observed and expected changes in 2050 from rising temperatures*, Pershing et. al.]
- Two relatively strong recruitment classes (for years 2017-2024; average 11,000) should recruit to the fishery in roughly 2027-28 (18,000) and 2029-2030 (34,000).
- The stock assessment notes a decline may be partly a result of migration to Canadian waters.
- The stock assessment readily acknowledges missing age data requires some assessment metrics (maturity, fishery selectivity) “to be held constant over time, which is unlikely to

reflect reality,” and ongoing problems with retrospective patterns even with the new WHAM model.

The advisor who did not support provided rationale:

Procedural concerns with delaying Framework 72, should not take additional risk for this stock as a long-lived species, implications to fishery if a rebuilding program is triggered again in the future

Discussion Statement 4:

Groundfish advisors in the meeting support the recommendations for the U.S. biomass apportionment method from the SSC and TMGC, particularly around those supporting incorporation of fishery catch data.

For purposes of discussion - 3 *did support* and 1 *did not support (abstained)*

Discussion Statement 5:

Groundfish advisors in the meeting support adding to 2026 Council priorities revisiting the white hake rebuilding plan.

For purposes of discussion - 3 *did support* and 1 *did not support*

Discussion Statement 6:

Groundfish advisors in the meeting support the proposed 2026 U.S./Canada TACs.

For purposes of discussion - 3 *did support* and 1 *did not support (abstained)*

Discussion Statement 7:

Groundfish advisors in the meeting support under Action 2/Alternative 2 - Revised Specifications, the FY2026 specifications for GB cod, GB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder.

For purposes of discussion - 3 *did support* and 1 *did not support (abstained)*

Discussion Statement 8:

Groundfish advisors in the meeting support under Action 2/ Alternative 2 – Revised Specifications, the FY2026-2030 specifications for all stocks listed except those noted earlier (white hake and redfish).

For purposes of discussion - 3 *did support* and 1 *did not support (abstained)*

Discussion Statement 9:

Groundfish advisors in the meeting support the PDT's sub-component recommendations.

For purposes of discussion - *3 did support and 1 did not support (abstained)*

Discussion Statement 10:

Groundfish advisors in the meeting support the PDT's recommendation for the SNE/MA yellowtail flounder scallop fishery sub-ACL.

For purposes of discussion - *3 did support and 1 did not support (abstained)*

The meeting ended at approximately 12:30 pm.