New England Fishery Management Council
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Daniel Salerno, *Chair* | Cate O'Keefe, PhD, *Executive Director*

MEETING SUMMARY

Recreational Advisory Panel Meeting

Webinar

January 20, 2026

The Recreational Advisory Panel (RAP) met on January 20, 2026, via webinar to discuss: 1) Recreational measures for fishing year 2026, 2) 2026 Council Priorities for Groundfish, and 3) Other business, as necessary.

MEETING ATTENDANCE:

Recreational Advisory Panel: Frank Blount (Chair), Jonathon Sterritt (Vice-Chair), Rick Bellavance, Leo Chomen, Rip Cunningham, Tom DePersia, Andy Fishbein, Willy Hatch, William Vanderhoop, Mike Waine

New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) Staff: Robin Frede (Groundfish Plan Coordinator), Mark Grant, Angelia Miller (Maris Collaborative)

Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC): Min-Yang Lee, Kimberly Bastille, Dr. Lou Carr-Harris

In addition, about 26 other people attended. Among them were:

Terry Alexander, Peter Christopher, Andy Dangelo, Melanie Griffin, Jackie Odell, Mike Pierdinock, Megan Ware, Paul Risi, Geoff Smith, and Peter Whelan (Groundfish Committee members); Matt Gates (Council member); Liz Sullivan, Spencer Talmage, Heather Nelson, Laura Smith, Mitch MacDonald, and Travis Ford (Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office);, Paul Nitschke, Glenn Chamerlain, and Gabrielle Clardy-Pryor (NEFSC); Kelly Whitmore, Matt Ayer (Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries), Corrin Flora (Maine Department of Marine Resources); Sefatia Romeo Theken (Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game; Deputy Commissioner), Darlene Tran, and Willy Goldsmith.

The meeting began at approximately 9:00 AM.

KEY OUTCOMES

- THE NEW RAP MEMBERS WERE INTRODUCED.
- ADVISORY PANEL POLICIES WERE REVIEWED.

- THE RAP PASSED A MOTION RECOMMENDING WGOM COD RECREATIONAL MEASURES AND A CONSENSUS STATEMENT RECOMMENDING GOM HADDOCK RECREATIONAL MEASURES.

AGENDA ITEM #1: RECREATIONAL MEASURES FOR FISHING YEAR 2026 FOR WGOM COD AND GOM HADDOCK

Presentation by Council staff:

Council staff presented a summary of the status of the Council's management transition to the new Atlantic cod stock units, including an update on Amendment 25 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and Framework Adjustment 69 to the FMP. The presentation included the current recreational measures implemented by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) through an emergency action and the Council's recommended recreational measures proposed for fishing year (FY) 2025 that are part of Framework 69, and the Council's proposed recreation sub-ACLs for FY 2025 (in Framework 69) and FY 2026 (in Framework 72). The Council developed recreational measures last year for FY2025 for WGOM cod, but implementation of the new cod stock units was delayed and the emergency action measures for FY2025 applied to GOM cod under the existing 2-cod stock unit model. This year the Council is developing recreational measures for FY2026 with the assumption that the new cod stock unit structure will be implemented and measures will apply to WGOM cod; however, approval and implementation of Amendment 25 is still to be determined. Council staff also described the proactive and reactive accountability measures for the recreational fishery.

Questions/Discussion on the presentation:

A RAP member asked when the current emergency measures will end. The emergency measures are in effect through April 30, 2026. The RAP member then asked what would be in place on May 1, 2026, if Framework 69 is not implemented. A staff member from NMFS explained that there is not a clear path for the cod stocks, but that other stocks have default allocations. The RAP member pointed out that statistical areas 521, 526, and 541 would be part of the new Western Gulf of Maine (WGOM) cod stock area, but are currently part of the old Georges Bank (GB) cod stock area and noted the current emergency measures close those statistical areas as part of the prohibition of recreational possession of GB cod. The RAP member highlighted that the current Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod recreational measures implemented through an emergency action were based on a sub-ACL calculated from the four proposed new cod stocks and asked if the GOM cod sub-ACL calculation included areas closed as GB cod under the emergency measures. The NMFS staff member explained that on May 1, 2026, if Amendment 25 is approved, there will be a WGOM cod stock area including statistical areas 521, 526, and 541 which would have a May open season for recreational possession of cod. The new Southern New England (SNE) cod stock area would have zero possession of cod for the recreational fishery. The current recreational cod measures implemented by the emergency rule were based on sub-ACLs for the two old stocks, GOM and GB, that were calculated from the proposed four sub-ACLs for the four new stocks. Proposed cod sub-ACLs associated with statistical areas 521, 526, and 541 were not included in the calculation of the interim GOM cod sub-ACL. The emergency

rule used ABCs from FW69 but allocated those ABCs among sub-ACLs using the proportions the Council included in previous approved actions.

A groundfish committee member asked how the cod from statistical areas 521, 526, and 541 would be apportioned to the new WGOM cod stock area. If Amendment 25 is approved, there will only be recreational sub-ACLs for SNE cod and WGOM cod. The intent is to set WGOM cod recreational measures using the current recreational demand model. The Council expressed its intent to set similar recreational measures for cod in the EGOM stock area, but the recreational demand model does not have data to model separate measures for the EGOM. The SNE cod stock area would have zero recreational possession. The Committee member then asked whether the recreational fishery would receive the same percentage of cod from statistical areas 521, 526, and 541 as is allocated to the recreational fishery from the statistical areas of the old GOM cod stock area. The same Council-approved method for calculating the cod allocation split between the commercial and recreational sectors in the old GOM cod stock area was applied to the new WGOM cod stock area and resulted in a lower percentage (27.5% vs 37.5%) of the new WGOM cod ACL being allocated to the recreational fishery.

Presentations by NESFC staff:

Dr. Lou Carr-Harris, an economist with the NEFSC Social Sciences Branch (SSB), presented an overview of how the Recreational Demand Model operates, including which statistical areas are included in the cod and haddock stock units. Statistical areas 511 and 512 (the new EGOM stock area) and 521 and 526 (part of the new WGOM stock area) had practically zero recreational activity in MRIP to contribute to the model. Historical data on recreational fishing behavior is used with FY 2026 projected stock length-structures and regulations. Modeled measures are evaluated 100 times to reflect sampling uncertainty. New angler survey data, from a survey implemented in 2025, was included in the model this year. Compared to the 2019 survey, the 2025 survey showed anglers valued kept cod, kept haddock, and released haddock at a higher dollar value than previously, but valued released cod at a lower dollar value than previously. The relationship of the model's predicted haddock catch to MRIP-estimated catch varies more than cod predictions. The presentation highlighted the main model and data caveats as context for developing recreational measures for FY2026, namely the delayed availability of 2025 Wave 5 MRIP data and the model's underestimation of cod mortality associated with opening May for cod possession. Typically, the model uses data through Wave 5 of the most recent year, but given delays stemming from the federal government shutdown this fall, data through Wave 4 of 2025 was used, and 2024 Wave 5 data was used as a proxy for the model runs. NEFSC staff plan to evaluate the model runs for the preferred measures with the updated Wave 5 data when it becomes available. Mortality estimates for scenarios that maintain the current cod open season have more certainty than scenarios that open an additional cod season because the model relies on the available MRIP data from the most recent year, which would be missing or not reflective of potential effort and catch for any period of time is that was closed for cod. The presentation also included a diagnostic sensitivity analysis on the underestimation of May cod catch in the model.

Kimberly Bastille, NEFSC SSB, presented the on-line cloud-based Decision Support Tool (DST) and a summary of this year's model runs. This is the second year the Council has used the new DST process to develop recreational measures, which allows recreational advisors and Groundfish Committee members to directly run potential measures in the on-line DST and compare outputs across total cod and haddock mortality estimates.

Questions/Discussion on the presentation:

Recreational Demand Model Overview
A RAP member asked how cod catch (Table 1 in the presentation) could average greater than 1 when the bag limit was 1. Table 1 shows total cod catch, including kept fish and discarded fish. Another RAP member asked whether the 60 mt of cod catch predicted in May for the Status Quo Proposed measures included the 42 mt from the sensitivity analysis. The model projection only included about 2 mt of cod caught in May and approximately 40 mt of cod would need to be added to the model prediction, which would mean a total predicted catch of 100 mt of cod if May is open with a 1 cod possession limit. A RAP member asked what $\sum_{MY}$ represented in the equation for the sensitivity analysis. That variable represents stochastic (random) error that is not part of the modeled variables. That RAP member then asked whether the difference in the number of trips between 2024 and 2025 (Table 1) used some 2024 data to fill in missing 2025 data, with the potential that the reduction in trips from 2024 to 2025 could be even larger. Table 1 did use 2024 data to fill in unavailable 2025 MRIP data. The RAP member then posited the reduction in trips might reflect that the regulations are disenfranchising customers.

A RAP member stated that the cod harvest data from 2010 to 2015 is from a time of a better stock condition, which means it may not well predict current conditions. That RAP member then asked whether there is any commercial data available to help characterize the change in cod stock condition over time. Commercial data is not included in the Recreational Demand Model because it is not yet known how to use commercial data to estimate recreational effects. A RAP member asked which historic years were used. For the diagnostic check, data from 2010-2014 was used to estimate the effect of an open season for cod in May. That RAP member then noted that period was when the cod stocks were very healthy, before commercial vessels were allowed on Stellwagen Bank and Jeffreys Ledge and does not represent the current state[1]. The RAP member went on to say the recreational fleet is seeing more cod now and opined that the data used are wrong.

Groundfish Recreational Decision Support Tool
Council staff explained that the additional 40 mt of cod mortality for a 1-fish cod possession limit in May that is projected by the sensitivity run used historical May data and should be added to the Decision Support Tool's estimated cod mortality when considering the effects of measures. A RAP member stated that on Massachusetts' south shore, the main demand for cod is May and June, and that customers don't want to target cod in September and October because

[1] Jeffreys Ledge and Stellwagen Bank were not closed to commercial fishing during this period.

other fisheries are open then. The RAP member stated he thought the RAP had previously voted for a May and June opening, but that the Committee had opted for September and October. The RAP member also explained he pushed for a May and June opening in last year's discussions.

The RAP chair asked for a recap of why a May closure was originally considered for cod. There are spawning concerns around fishing for cod in the spring. When evaluating options to limit cod mortality to prevent exceeding low sub-ACLs, a fall opening balanced providing an opportunity for the recreational community to access the limited cod resource while minimizing the potential for an overage and negative biological consequences, because there is less targeted cod fishing in fall. Multiple options were run with open seasons for cod in different waves, but most were predicted to exceed the recreational sub-ACL for cod. A May open season was approved by the Council last year but was not implemented by NMFS as part of the emergency action for FY 2025. Those measures are still proposed in Framework 69 and Amendment 25.

A RAP member stated that the model does not capture the effect of catching spawning cod versus catching cod in other seasons. The RAP member described a trip to Platts Bank when he had to apologize to the passengers for moving 20 miles further to avoid spawning cod. The RAP member emphasized that eggs make beautiful fat fish, but that the spawning fish have little meat and all the eggs in a spawning cod that are caught will not hatch. In conclusion, the RAP member expressed opposition to a May open season when the cod numbers are lower than they were in the past. Another RAP member stated that spawning varies by location but expressed full support for protecting spawning fish. A RAP member explained that historically, there was cod spawning at different times in different locations in the Gulf of Maine, noting that the Whaleback area was closed to protect spawning. The RAP member stated he would not choose just one month for spawning. Another RAP member was trying to evaluate his own risk tolerance and asked if there was information about the spring GOM spawners vs winter GOM spawners in terms of contribution to the overall WGOM cod stock. The WGOM stock unit includes two distinct populations: spring and winter spawners. During development of recreational measures for FY 2025 and the potential for a May cod season, it was discussed that the spring spawning population is in worse shape than the winter spawning population. A RAP member then asked how important the different spawning populations are to the WGOM stock. Council staff recalled that the winter spawners are a larger population than the spring spawners but need to confirm that information.[2] A RAP member asked if Phase II of the Atlantic Cod Transition Plan would include spawning closures. When Phase II is resumed, the Council will look at cod spawning protections. The Council is currently updating essential fish habitat (EFH) designations for all species. Last year the Council worked on EFH for cod and that action is currently being prepared for submission to NMFS. Another RAP member asked for more clarity on the spawning concerns for May, noting the potential for the May 2024 catch estimate to be low is uncertain

[2]As of 2019, spring-spawners account for nearly one-third of the spawning stock in the Gulf of Maine, but spring cod have contributed <2% to annual recruitment since 2010. See:
Micah J Dean, Scott P Elzey, William S Hoffman, Nicholas C Buchan, Jonathan H Grabowski, The relative importance of sub-populations to the Gulf of Maine stock of Atlantic cod, ICES Journal of Marine Science, Volume 76, Issue 6, November-December 2019, Pages 1626–1640, https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fsz083

and could go back up, and asked about the possible effects of a rebuilding plan for WGOM cod. It is anticipated that all four of the new cod stocks will be determined by NMFS to be overfished and that the WGOM cod stock will be determined to be subject to overfishing. The current GOM cod stock is in a rebuilding plan, and it is anticipated NMFS will notify the Council that all four of the new cod stocks require rebuilding plans. A rebuilding plan would require a lower quota than a stock at a healthy population size.

The vice chair stated agreement with concerns (see correspondence) about the effects on spawning fish of a May open season. He noted the recreational community previously fished around spawning stocks and didn't think it was a problem, but in retrospect it was problem, and that he considers opening in May to target cod to be a bad idea. A RAP member explained that Massachusetts has cod avoidance charts that facilitate targeting haddock while avoiding cod and stated that the cod retained by the for-hire fleet with a 1-fish possession limit in May would be existing bycatch while targeting haddock away from cod spawning aggregations.

A RAP member stated desire to make a motion for the current cod open season, preferably with a possession limit higher than one cod, and an open season in May with a 1-cod possession limit. The RAP member's rationale was that cod is necessary for customers, that the for-hire flee won't target cod, and that cod would be bycatch while fishing for haddock.

Motion 1 (DePersia/Hatch):
The RAP recommends to the Groundfish Committee recreational measures for fishing year 2026 for WGOM cod that includes opening May for at least 1 fish possession limit (status quo from what was proposed for FY2025).

Western Gulf of Maine Cod:

- Open season: May 1-31; September 1 - October 31
- Minimum size: 23 inches
- Possession limit: 1 fish per day

Rationale:

- Model runs, including the added cod mortality estimated by a sensitivity run, demonstrated cod mortality for this option (for 1 cod) to be below the recreational sub-ACL
- Main demand for cod is May and June from charter customers (in southern Gulf of Maine). Fall has business competition for other recreational species.
- Anglers won't target cod, but will catch them while fishing for haddock (converts dead discards to harvest)
- Balances access to cod in GOM for fisheries in north and south

- Based on risk tolerance – there are spawning closures in place and haddock targeting maps (for reducing cod bycatch) that have been well-received by anglers. Additionally, there are accountability measures (AMs) to address a potential overage.

  Motion *carried* (5/3/0) (1 advisor out of the room).

Discussion on the Motion: A RAP member spoke in opposition to the motion, preferring to have the cod open season after spawning season and expressing concern that it would be tempting for people to try and catch large fish just outside the spawning aggregations. Another RAP member spoke in support, citing that we should know the spawning areas and focus on closing those rather than having a closed season. A third RAP member spoke in support, acknowledging the difference in spawning areas and times, and the fisheries north and south, but seeing this as balancing access across the entire Gulf of Maine. A fourth RAP member spoke in support, explaining it came down to risk tolerance, citing existing spawning closures, haddock targeting maps that have been well-received by anglers, and accountability measures to address any potential overage. A fifth RAP member spoke in support of the motion citing that a 1-fish possession limit for cod would not undermine the fishery.

The RAP then developed a consensus statement on GOM haddock recreational measures.

Consensus Statement:
The Recreational Advisory Panel recommends to the Groundfish Committee recreational measures for fishing year 2026 for GOM haddock that maintain status quo from what was proposed for FY2025:

Gulf of Maine Haddock:

- Open season: May 1 – February 28/29; April 1–30
- Minimum size: 17 inches
- Possession limit: 15 fish per day

Discussion on the motion: There was no discussion on the consensus statement.

AGENDA ITEM #2: 2026 COUNCIL PRIORITIES FOR GROUNDFISH

Presentation by Council staff:

Council staff presented the 2026 Council priorities approved at the December 2025 meeting. The 2026 priorities include: Final submission of Amendment 25 (Revised), development of recommended recreational measures for FY26, completion and submission of Framework 72, the Amendment 23 review, the redfish sector exemption review, Framework 68 (ABC Control Rules), a framework to set specifications for stocks with assessments in 2026, work on the Atlantic Cod Transition Plan, a review of the white hake rebuilding plan and reference points,

stock assessments for GB cod, GB haddock, GB yellowtail flounder, GOM haddock, American plaice, and data updates for pollock, witch flounder, and Atlantic halibut.

Questions/Discussion on the presentation:

A RAP member asked whether setting specifications for FY2027-2031 precludes considering changes to SNE cod recreational measures before 2031. The Council is setting 5-year specifications in case updated assessments are not available prior to then, but plans to revisit the specifications sooner. Setting 5-year specifications does not preclude changes to SNE cod recreational measures.

AGENDA ITEM #3: OTHER BUSINESS, INCLUDING SNE COD UPDATE

Council staff presented the GB cod recreational measures implemented for FY2025 by NMFS through an emergency action, the SNE cod recreational measures that are proposed for FY 2026 in Amendment 25 (Revised), the proposed recreational sub-ACL for SNE cod for FY2026 and estimates of recreational catch of SNE cod in FY2025.

The RAP chair stated that the change from an open cod season to zero possession in SNE resulted in no real decline in catch and suggested that could mean there is not a targeted fishery for cod in SNE and that the cod catch is bycatch.

A RAP member brought up a provision in Amendment 25 to set separate recreational and commercial sub-ACLs for SNE cod and asked if there was a plan to revisit that. Council staff explained it is an open question about whether that interim split could be reconsidered for FY2027. A more permanent split between the recreational and commercial fisheries would likely be considered once the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) recalibration is available. That reconsideration would include WGOM cod as well as SNE cod. The Council will receive an update on that MRIP work at the January Council meeting.

The RAP chair asked if commercial groundfish sector landings for SNE cod are known for FY2025. GARFO is currently tracking GB cod catch by sectors, rather than SNE cod, consistent with the measures implemented through an emergency action. All fisheries, commercial and recreational, are operating under a 2-stock cod model (GOM and GB) in FY 2025. It will take more work behind the scenes to calculate SNE cod catch by the sector fishery. That number has been ~4mt in recent years.

The chair noted that Table 2 in the presentation showed 2,079 haddock caught from shore, suggested that was unrealistic and should be checked, and noted that there were also 2,079 trips in Table 2. The matching number of trips and fish caught are likely an artifact from a single trip sampled by MRIP being expanded up to all trips.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 12:15 PM.