Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan

Framework Adjustment 72

Including a Supplemental Information Report, Regulatory Impact Review, and
Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis

Preliminary Submission

March 3, 2026

Prepared by the
New England Fishery Management Council
In consultation with the
National Marine Fisheries Service and
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

New England
Fishery Management Council

NOAA
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FRAMEWORK ADJUSTMENT 72

TO THE NORTHEAST MULTISPECIES FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Proposed Action: Propose specifications for groundfish stocks for fishing years 2026-2030.

Responsible Agencies:

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Abstract:

The New England Fishery Management Council, in consultation with NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, has prepared Framework Adjustment 72 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan, which includes a Supplemental Information Report. It addresses the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Regulatory Flexibility Act, and other applicable laws.

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1.4 APPENDICES

Appendix I: Quota Change Model (QCM) results.

1.5 ACRONYMS

ABC	Acceptable Biological Catch
ACL	Annual Catch Limit
AIM	An Index Method of Analysis
ALWTRP	Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan
AM	Accountability Measure
AP	Advisory Panel
APA	Administrative Procedures Act
ASMFC	Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
B_{MSY}	Biomass that would allow for catches equal to Maximum Sustainable Yield when fished at the overfishing threshold (FMSY)
BiOp, BO	Biological Opinion, a result of a review of potential effects of a fishery on Protected Resource species
CAI	Closed Area I
CAII	Closed Area II
CPUE	Catch per unit of effort
DAS	Day(s)-at-sea
DFO	Department of Fisheries and Oceans (Canada)
DMF	Division of Marine Fisheries (Massachusetts)
DMR	Department of Marine Resources (Maine)
DSEIS	Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement
EA	Environmental Assessment
EEZ	Exclusive economic zone
EFH	Essential fish habitat
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EO	Executive Order
ESA	Endangered Species Act
F	Fishing mortality rate
FEIS	Final Environmental Impact Statement
FMP	Fishery management plan
FW	Framework
FY	Fishing year
GAR	Greater Atlantic Region
GARFO	Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office
GARM	Groundfish Assessment Review Meeting
GB	Georges Bank
GOM	Gulf of Maine
HAPC	Habitat area of particular concern
HPTRP	Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan

IFM	Industry-funded monitoring
IFQ	Individual fishing quota
ITQ	Individual transferable quota
MA	Mid-Atlantic
MAFMC	Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
MMPA	Marine Mammal Protection Act
MPA	Marine protected area
MRI	Moratorium Right Identifier
MRIP	Marine Recreational Information Program
MSA	Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act
MSY	Maximum Sustainable Yield
NEFMC	New England Fishery Management Council
NEFOP	Northeast Fisheries Observer Program
NEFSC	Northeast Fisheries Science Center
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
OLE	Office for Law Enforcement (NMFS)
OY	Optimum yield
PBR	Potential Biological Removal
PDT	Plan Development Team
PRA	Paperwork Reduction Act
RFA	Regulatory Flexibility Act
RMA	Regulated Mesh Area
RPA	Reasonable and Prudent Alternatives
SA	Statistical Area
SAFE	Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation
SAP	Special Access Program
SARC	Stock Assessment Review Committee
SAS	Stock Assessment Subcommittee
SAW	Stock Assessment Workshop
SBNMS	Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary
SIA	Social Impact Assessment
SNE	Southern New England
SNE/MA	Southern New England-Mid-Atlantic
SSB	Spawning stock biomass
SSC	Scientific and Statistical Committee
TAL	Total allowable landings
TED	Turtle excluder device
TEWG	Technical Expert Working Group
TMS	Ten-minute square
TRAC	Trans boundary Resources Assessment Committee
USCG	United States Coast Guard
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
VMS	Vessel monitoring system
VEC	Valued ecosystem component
VPA	Virtual population analysis
VTR	Vessel trip report
WGOM	Western Gulf of Maine
YPR	Yield per recruit

2.0 PURPOSE OF THIS SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION REPORT (SIR)

The purpose of this SIR is to determine if the proposed fishing years 2026-2030 groundfish specifications contained in Framework Adjustment (FW) 72 will require a supplement to the Environmental Assessment (EA) that was prepared for FW69 (NEFMC 2025) to the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery Management Plan (FMP), as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). FW69 set specifications for fishing years 2025-2027, adjusted scallop fishery accountability measures (AMs) triggers for flatfish stocks, and revised sector reporting requirements (NEFMC 2025).

In determining the need for additional analysis under NEPA, the New England Fishery Management Council (Council) considered and has been guided by NOAA's Policy and Procedure for Compliance with NEPA and applicable case law. The Council and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) have preliminarily analyzed the proposed action and its impacts, in addition to those analyzed in FW69. This document describes the proposed action and compares it to the alternatives and analyses presented in FW69. It then considers whether there are any substantial changes or significant new circumstances or information that are relevant to environmental concerns and could affect the proposed action or its impacts. Based on these analyses, the FW69 EA does not require supplementation. The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) signed on February 4, 2026, remains valid to support the proposed action.

For the consideration of new circumstances and information, the following have been consulted, among other sources: the Council's Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT), Groundfish Committee, Groundfish Advisory Panel, Recreational Advisory Panel, the NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office's (GARFO) Protected Resources and Sustainable Fisheries divisions, GARFO's Environmental Analyses and NEPA Program, and Council habitat staff.

3.0 PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action would update groundfish specifications for FY2026-2030 based on the stock assessments and data updates provided by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) in fall 2025.

The purpose of FW72 is to set status determination criteria (SDC) for Georges Bank (GB) yellowtail flounder, specifications for several groundfish stocks and management units, and a regulatory process for the regional administrator to adjust recreational measures for cod and haddock. FW72 incorporates the results of new stock assessments completed in 2025. The need for this action is to prevent overfishing, ensure rebuilding, and help achieve optimum yield in the commercial and recreational groundfish fisheries consistent with the status of stocks and the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA).

This proposed action (Table 1) would:

- Set SDC for GB yellowtail flounder,
- Set FY2026 total allowable catches (TACs) for U.S./Canada management units of Eastern GB cod, Eastern GB haddock and the GB yellowtail flounder stock,
- Set FY2026 specifications for GB cod, GB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder,
- Set FY2026-FY2030 specifications for Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine (CC/GOM) yellowtail flounder, Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) yellowtail flounder, GB winter flounder, Gulf of Maine (GOM) winter flounder, SNE/MA winter flounder, white hake, Acadian redfish, ocean pout, and Atlantic wolffish, and
- Establish a regulatory process for the regional administrator to adjust recreational measures for cod and haddock.

Table 1 – Purpose and need for FW72.

Purpose	Need
Measures to adopt status determination criteria for Georges Bank yellowtail flounder	Ensure that groundfish stocks are managed consistently with the status of stocks and the requirements of the MSA. Help prevent overfishing and achieve optimum yield.
Measures to adopt ACLs, including relevant sub-ACLs and incidental catch TACs. Measure to adopt TACs for U.S./Canada area.	Ensure that groundfish stocks are managed consistently with the status of stocks and the requirements of the MSA. Ensure that levels of catch for fishing years 2026-2030 are consistent with recent assessments, the ABC control rule in the Northeast Multispecies FMP, the International Fisheries Agreement Clarification Act, and the most recent relevant law. Help prevent overfishing and achieve optimum yield.
Measures to manage the recreational fishery	Ensure that groundfish stocks are managed consistently with the status of stocks and the requirements of the MSA.

Updated Status Determination Criteria for Georges Bank yellowtail flounder

The proposed action would adopt new SDC for GB yellowtail flounder, consistent with NS1 guidelines (Table 2). The NEFSC conducted a stock assessment in 2025 for GB yellowtail flounder, producing new SDC and numerical estimates of the SDC based on peer review recommendations. Stock assessment results for the numerical values corresponding to the SDC definitions are provided in Table 3 and these numerical values would be updated in subsequent stock assessments.

In 2024, the NEFSC conducted a research track assessment of GB yellowtail flounder that transitioned the assessment to a Woods Hole Assessment Model (WHAM). The WHAM model replaced the previous empirical approach that was unable to provide numerical estimates of SDCs. The 2025 management track assessment updated commercial fishery catch data, survey indices of abundance, and the analytical WHAM and reference points through 2024. A peer review of the management track assessment approved the outcomes for use in management, making it the best scientific information available, consistent with NS2. The new numerical estimates of SDCs in the 2025 assessment would be used to evaluate progress toward the existing rebuilding target.

Table 2 – Proposed SDC.

Stock	Biomass Target	Minimum Biomass Threshold	Maximum Fishing Mortality Threshold
GB Yellowtail Flounder	SSB_{MSY} Proxy	½SSB_{MSY} Proxy	F_{MSY}

Table 3 – Proposed numerical estimates of SDCs (based on the 2025 management track stock assessment).

Stock	Model/Approach	SSB_{MSY} (mt)	F_{MSY}	MSY (mt)
GB Yellowtail Flounder	WHAM	7,072	0.09	597

Changes in specifications based on SSC proposed OFLs and ABCs for FY2026-2030

Revised specifications

The proposed specifications include updated annual specifications for FY2026 for the three transboundary stocks of GB cod, GB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder, and updated FY2026-FY2030 specifications for CC/GOM yellowtail flounder, SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, GB winter flounder, GOM winter flounder, SNE/MA winter flounder, redfish, white hake, ocean pout, and Atlantic wolffish as specified in Table 6. This is the first time that 5-year specifications would be adopted, consistent with the most recent stock assessment information. The Council's intent is to revisit specifications prior to FY2029.

The proposed specifications include adjustments to the state waters and other sub-component values for several groundfish stocks including: CC/GOM yellowtail flounder, SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, GB winter flounder, GOM winter flounder, SNE/MA winter flounder, redfish, and ocean pout. GB winter flounder and white hake ABCs include adjustments for Canadian catch estimates. These adjustments are included in Table 6.

The proposed action also reaffirms specifications previously set for other stocks without changes. If Framework Adjustment 69 is not approved ahead of the submission of Framework 72, this action incorporates the specifications from Framework 69 for approval, as shown in Table 6, based on the analyses supporting those actions.

U.S./Canada Total Allowable Catches

The proposed specifications include updated total allowable catches (TACs) for the U.S./Canada Management Area for FY2026 for Eastern GB cod, Eastern GB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder as listed in Table 4. If NMFS determines that the FY2025 catch of GB cod, haddock, or yellowtail flounder from the U.S./Canada Management Area exceeded the respective 2025 TACs, the U.S./Canada Resource Sharing Understanding and regulations require that the 2026 TAC for each be reduced by the amount of the overage. Any overage reduction would be applied to the components of the fishery that caused the overage of the U.S. TAC in 2025. To minimize any disruption to the fishing industry, NMFS would attempt to make any necessary TAC adjustments in the first quarter of the fishing year.

A comparison of the proposed FY2026 and FY2025 U.S. TACs is shown in Table 5. Changes to the U.S. TACs reflect changes to the percentage shares, stock status, and the Transboundary Management Guidance Committee's (TMGC) recommendations. 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, for the October TMGC meeting, the TMGC process included NOAA's Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Fisheries, representing U.S. interests with Canadian fishing industry representatives and Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans officials for the Canadian TMGC. New England Council members on the US TMGC were not included in negotiations but participated as observers. Other NOAA staff that are members or support the US TMGC were unable to attend the October meeting of the TMGC due to overlap with the partial federal government shutdown.

In 2025, science advice used by the TMGC to develop the joint annual harvest recommendations for cod and haddock for 2026, was provided through the new approach called the Integration of Science Advice for Transboundary Stocks (ISATS) process. ISATS supports the decision-making process for the management of cod, haddock, and yellowtail flounder in the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area. This process includes a Technical Science Coordination (TSC) meeting of stock assessment leads where the outcomes from U.S. and Canadian domestic assessments are compiled into a joint document to provide scientific advice for the shared transboundary stocks. Domestic assessments from both countries are considered equally as the basis for informing catch advice. In 2025, the Georges Bank yellowtail flounder Management Track Assessment peer review was conducted after the ISATS process and results were considered directly by the TMGC.

Removal of the management uncertainty buffer for sectors for white hake if at-sea monitoring coverage target is 90%

The proposed action would also remove the management uncertainty buffer for sectors for white hake if the at-sea monitoring (ASM) target coverage rate is set at 90% or greater. This measure would remain in place for FY2026-FY2030. Under Amendment 23 (A23) measures, when the target coverage rate is set to 100%, the management uncertainty buffer for sectors for allocated groundfish stocks will default to zero. This maintains the change for white hake that was previously implemented in FW65 and FW66. The aim is to mitigate the economic impacts of low white hake ACLs, as white hake is a highly utilized stock for the fishery, by increasing the sector ACL to the sector ABC (+5%) for FY2026-FY2030. Adequacy of fishery monitoring data is one of the five elements of management uncertainty evaluated when fishery specifications are developed, and the increased at-sea monitoring coverage level in the commercial sector groundfish fishery will reduce uncertainty. The management uncertainty buffer would still remain in place for the common pool fishery, and there is a portion of the ABC set aside for other fisheries components.

Table 4– Proposed FY2026 U.S./Canada TACs (mt).

	Eastern GB Cod	Eastern GB Haddock	GB Yellowtail Flounder
Total Shared TAC	473	4,750	57
U.S. TAC	151	998	31
Canada TAC	322	3,752	26

Table 5 – Comparison of the Proposed FY2026 U.S. TACs and the FY2025 U.S. TACs (mt).

Stock	U.S. TAC		Percent Change
	FY2025	FY2026	
Eastern GB cod	82	151	+84%
Eastern GB haddock	1,556	998	-36%
GB yellowtail flounder	96	31	-68%

Table 6 –Revised Northeast Multispecies OFLs, ABCs, ACLs for FY2026-FY2030 (metric tons, live weight), based on final 2025 sector rosters. Stocks in gray would not have changes in specifications through this action. Values are rounded to the nearest metric ton or tenth. Underlined stocks are subject to adjustments in 2026 based on US/CA quotas, 2025 CA quotas were used to adjust in the interim. Includes adjustments for Canadian catches (*), and state waters component and other sub-components.

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub-Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub-ACL	Total ACL
EGOM Cod	2026	50	39	0.2	0.4		37	36.5		35.1	1.4		37
	2027	39	30	0.2	0.3		28	28.1		27.0	1.1		29
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
WGOM Cod	2026	603	460	23	5.0		407	289.8	118	278.9	10.9		436
	2027	769	586	30	6.4		519	369.2	150	355.3	13.9		555
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
GB Cod	2026	473	151		12.1		132	132.3		127.7	4.6		144
	2027												
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
SNE Cod	2026	47	36	6.1	3.2		25	6.7	18	6.5	0.23		34

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub-Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub-ACL	Total ACL
	2027	65	36	6.1	3.2		25	6.7	18	6.5	0.2		34
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
GB Haddock	2026	8,177	4,425		22.1		4,098	4,098.2		4,004.0	94.2	82	4,203
	2027												
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
GOM Haddock	2026	4,709	3,634	36			3,359	2,213.2	1,146	2,155.2	58.0	34	3,429
	2027	4,700	3,631	36			3,356	2,211.4	1,145	2,153.4	57.9	34	3,426
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
GB Yellowtail Flounder	2026	57	31			4.8	25	24.5		22.9	1.6	0.6	30
	2027												
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub-Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub-ACL	Total ACL
SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	2026	46	33	0.2	0.7	2.7	28	28.0		20.4	7.6		32
	2027	56	33	0.2	0.7	2.7	28	28.0		20.4	7.6		32
	2028	67	33	0.2	0.7	2.7	28	28.0		20.4	7.6		32
	2029	80	33	0.2	0.7	2.7	28	28.0		20.4	7.6		32
	2030	92	33	0.2	0.7	2.7	28	28.0		20.4	7.6		32
CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder	2026	2,224	1,736	17	35		1,600	1,599.8		1,505.7	94.1		1,652
	2027	2,638	1,736	17	35		1,600	1,599.8		1,505.7	94.1		1,652
	2028	3,086	1,736	17	35		1,600	1,599.8		1,505.7	94.1		1,652
	2029	3,505	1,736	17	35		1,600	1,599.8		1,505.7	94.1		1,652
	2030	3,860	1,736	17	35		1,600	1,599.8		1,505.7	94.1		1,652
American Plaice	2026	8,866	6,979		35		6,597	6,596.9		6,392.5	204.4		6,632
	2027	7,368	5,791		29		5,474	5,473.9		5,304.3	169.6		5,503
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
Witch Flounder	2026		1,526	7.6	38		1,406	1,406.2		1,352.4	53.8		1,452
	2027		1,526	7.6	38		1,406	1,406.2		1,352.4	53.8		1,452
	2028												
	2029												

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub-Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub-ACL	Total ACL
	2030												
GB Winter Flounder*	2026	2,279	1,713		43		1,620	1,620.0		1,539.8	80.2		1,663
	2027	2,148	1,609		40		1,522	1,521.7		1,446.3	75.4		1,562
	2028	2,070	1,555		39		1,471	1,470.6		1,397.8	72.8		1,510
	2029	2,061	1,541		39		1,457	1,457.4		1,385.2	72.2		1,496
	2030	2,060	1,540		39		1,456	1,456.4		1,384.3	72.1		1,495
GOM Winter Flounder	2026	1,064	798	96	8		660	659.5		558.2	101.3		763
	2027	1,064	798	96	8		660	659.5		558.2	101.3		763
	2028	1,064	798	96	8		660	659.5		558.2	101.3		763
	2029	1,064	798	96	8		660	659.5		558.2	101.3		763
	2030	1,064	798	96	8		660	659.5		558.2	101.3		763
SNE/MA Winter Flounder	2026	961	507	25	81		381	380.5		323.6	56.9		487
	2027	1,009	532	27	85		399	399.3		339.6	59.7		511
	2028	1,055	556	28	89		417	417.3		354.9	62.4		534
	2029	1,101	556	28	89		417	417.3		354.9	62.4		534
	2030	1,148	556	28	89		417	417.3		354.9	62.4		534
Redfish	2026	7,519	5,665	28			5,355	5,354.8		5,288.4	66.4		5,383
	2027	7,203	5,427	27			5,130	5,129.9		5,066.3	63.6		5,157
	2028	6,999	5,273	26			4,984	4,984.3		4,922.5	61.8		5,011

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub-Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub-ACL	Total ACL
	2029	6,723	5,065	25			4,788	4,787.7		4,728.3	59.4		4,813
	2030	6,513	4,907	25			4,638	4,638.3		4,580.8	57.5		4,663
White Hake*	2026	1,943	1,362		7		1,287	1,287.4		1,272.6	14.8		1,294
	2027	1,760	1,230		6		1,163	1,162.7		1,149.3	13.4		1,169
	2028	1,640	1,143		6		1,081	1,080.5		1,068.0	12.5		1,086
	2029	1,618	1,126		6		1,064	1,064.4		1,052.1	12.3		1,070
	2030	1,698	1,184		6		1,119	1,119.2		1,106.3	12.9		1,125
Pollock	2026	14,583	11,170	670	614		9,391	9,391.2		9,288.3	102.9		10,676
	2027	13,383	10,252	615	564		8,619	8,619.3		8,524.9	94.4		9,798
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
Northern Windowpane Flounder	2026		136		6.8	26.6	94	93.6			93.6		127
	2027												
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
Southern Windowpane Flounder	2026	284	213	6.4	98	71.3	30	29.7			29.7		205
	2027												

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub-Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub-ACL	Total ACL
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
Ocean Pout	2026	125	87	0.9	30		52	51.8			51.8		83
	2027	125	87	0.9	30		52	51.8			51.8		83
	2028	125	87	0.9	30		52	51.8			51.8		83
	2029	125	87	0.9	30		52	51.8			51.8		83
	2030	125	87	0.9	30		52	51.8			51.8		83
Atlantic Halibut*	2026		35	9.1	1.6		23	23.1			23.1		34
	2027		35	9.1	1.6		23	23.1			23.1		34
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
Atlantic Wolffish	2026	124	93				87	86.5			86.5		87
	2027	124	93				87	86.5			86.5		87
	2028	124	93				87	86.5			86.5		87
	2029	124	93				87	86.5			86.5		87
	2030	124	93				87	86.5			86.5		87

Revisions to the regulatory process for the Regional Administrator to adjust recreational measures for cod and haddock

The proposed action would establish a regulatory process for the Regional Administrator, in consultation with the Council, to adjust recreational fishing measures for all stocks of cod and haddock, on a permanent basis. This would add any cod and haddock stocks without a sub-ACL (i.e., EGOM cod, GB cod, and GB haddock) to the existing regulatory process for the Regional Administrator to adjust recreational fishing measures for stocks with recreational sub-ACLs (Western Gulf of Maine (WGOM) cod, Southern New England (SNE) cod, and Gulf of Maine (GOM) haddock). After consultation with the Council, the Regional Administrator would set recreational measures for these stocks of cod and haddock consistent with the Administrative Procedure Act, NEPA, and other applicable laws. The consultation with the Council would allow for review of any measures under consideration. If time permits, the Council's Recreational Advisory Panel and the Groundfish Committee would review the measures proposed by NMFS and make recommendations to the Council. The recreational measures implemented by this process would remain in place until they are changed.

Establishing a regulatory process for the Regional Administrator to adjust recreational measures for all stocks of cod and haddock streamlines recreational management by creating a single process of all stocks of cod and haddock. This would allow recreational measures to be consistent across stock units, if appropriate. Recently, the Council included this authority on a 1-year basis in both Amendment 25 and FW69. Establishing this regulatory process on a permanent basis, rather than on a temporary basis as was done in the past, reduces the burden for the Council to address changes to cod and haddock stocks without a sub-ACL and does not change the effects previously analyzed in Framework 69. The Council would retain the option to adjust recreational measures for cod and haddock through management actions (i.e., framework adjustments) should there be a desire to change this process in the future.

4.0 NEW INFORMATION AND CIRCUMSTANCES

The proposed action would update groundfish specifications for FY2026-2030 based on the stock assessments and data updates provided by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) in fall 2025. FW72 incorporates the results of new stock assessments in 2025. This section presents updated information and circumstances for this action relative to what is included in FW69. Overall, the new information and circumstances suggest that the fishery remains stable and similar to the conditions evaluated in Framework 69.

FW69 previously set specifications for FY2025-2027 for several groundfish stocks, adjusted scallop fishery AM triggers for flatfish stocks, and revised sector reporting requirements (NEFMC 2025). The need for FW69 was to prevent overfishing, ensure rebuilding, and help achieve optimum yield in the commercial and recreational groundfish fisheries consistent with the status of stocks and the requirements of the MSA.

4.1 REGULATED GROUNDFISH SPECIES

This section describes stock population status for stocks harvested under the Northeast Multispecies FMP with updated stock assessments and data updates provided by the NEFSC in fall 2025. Descriptions of the life history for all groundfish stocks and stock population status for stocks without updated assessments in 2025 can be found in the FW69 EA. Further information on life history and habitat characteristics of the stocks managed in this FMP can be found in the EFH Source Documents at http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/nefsc/habitat/efh/.

The allocated target stocks for the Northeast Multispecies FMP are: EGOM cod, WGOM cod, GB cod, SNE cod, GOM haddock, GB haddock, American Plaice, witch flounder, GOM winter flounder, GB winter flounder, SNE/MA winter flounder, CC/GOM yellowtail flounder, GB yellowtail flounder, SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, Acadian redfish, pollock and white hake. The subset of these species that would have specifications set by this action are discussed in Sections 4.1.1– 4.1.10.

The Northeast Multispecies FMP also manages Atlantic halibut, ocean pout, windowpane flounder (GB/GOM- northern and SNE/MA- southern stocks), and Atlantic wolffish. While OFLs, ABCs, and ACLs are specified for these stocks, they were not allocated to sectors through Amendment 16. The subset of these species that would have specifications set by this action are discussed in Sections 4.1.11–4.1.12.

Discussions have been adapted from the most recent stock assessment reports (NEFSC 2023a, NEFSC 2023b, NEFSC 2023c, NEFSC 2023d, and NEFSC 2024, in prep).

Additional information following the most recent stock assessments is also provided in Sections 4.1.13-4.1.14.

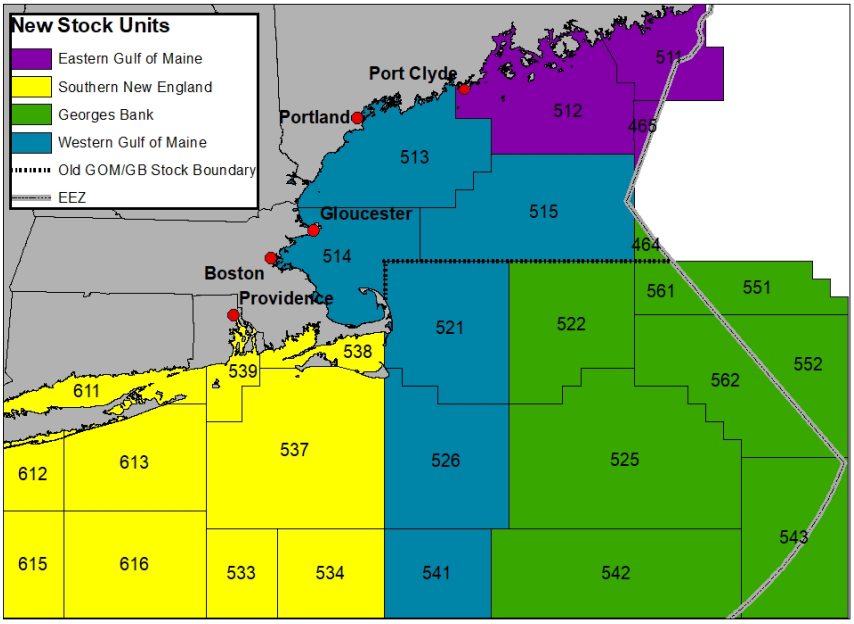
4.1.1 Atlantic cod

Population and Management History. In U.S. waters, prior to 2020, Atlantic cod was assessed and managed as two independent stocks – Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod and Georges Bank cod. The 2020 Atlantic Cod Stock Structure Working Group concluded there are five biological units of cod – Georges Bank, Southern New England, Western Gulf of Maine and Cape Cod winter spawners, Western Gulf of Maine spring spawners, and Eastern Gulf of Maine (McBride and Smedbol, 2022). The 2023 Research Track Assessment developed assessments for four biological cod units – Eastern Gulf of Maine (EGOM), Georges Bank (GB), Southern New England (SNE), and Western Gulf of Maine (WGOM), which serve

as the basis of the latest peer reviewed scientific information available on Atlantic cod stock structure to date (Figure 1). GB cod is a transboundary stock co-managed by the U.S. and Canada.

The Council is working on a multi-year effort to transition management of Atlantic cod in response to this new understanding of four cod stock units according to the Atlantic Cod Management Transition Plan. Phase 1 of this transition plan includes revising the Atlantic cod stock units in the Northeast FMP, establishing status determination criteria, and setting specifications for fishing years 2026 through 2027 under Amendment 25. Modifications to the current management units or management measures for Atlantic cod will be a part of Phase 2 of the transition plan, to occur after final action of Phase 1. FW72 would set specifications only for GB cod for FY2026.

Figure 1 - New stock unit boundaries for the four new Atlantic cod stocks along with the previous GOM/GB stock boundary outlined for reference.



Section 4.1.1.1 summarizes the population status of the new GB stock definition based on findings from the June 2024 management track assessment which will be used to determine stock status and was used to produce proposed catch levels for the fishery for the 2026 and 2027 fishing years.

4.1.1.1 Georges Bank Cod

Population Status. GB cod is a transboundary stock co-managed by the U.S. and Canada. The stock area for GB cod was adjusted in response to the ACSSWG and research track definition and includes statistical areas from the old GB and eastern GB management unit (522, 525, 561, 562, 551, 552, 542, and 543) and statistical area 464 which was previously part of the old GOM management unit (Figure 1). The adjustment to new stock definitions constitutes this as a new GB stock thereby eliciting its first management track assessment under the new stock units in June 2024. The research track peer review also approved an analytical model which was lacking for this stock in previous years. According to the

new analytical assessment, this GB cod stock is overfished but overfishing is not occurring (NEFSC 2024, in prep). An official stock status will be determined after status determination criteria are established, which is a part of Amendment 25. The 2023 SSB is estimated to be 2,668 mt, which is 32% of the biomass target but an all-time low (NEFSC 2024, in prep). The 2023 fully selected fishing mortality is estimated to be 0.13, which is 56% of the F_{MSY} proxy (NEFSC 2024, in prep). The GB cod stock continues to show a truncated age structure with the NEFSC fall bottom trawl survey noting a lack of fish older than age 4 in the last two years of the assessment, while recruitment is a major source of uncertainty for this stock (NEFSC 2024, in prep).

4.1.2 Georges Bank Haddock

Population Status. The GB haddock stock underwent a management track assessment in 2024. The 2024 Peer Review Panel concluded that the stock is not overfished, and overfishing is not occurring (NEFSC 2024, in prep). The 2023 SSB was estimated to be 32,730 mt, which is 135% of the biomass target, and the average fishing mortality on ages 5-7 was estimated to be 0.17 which is 65% of the overfishing threshold proxy (NEFSC 2024). GB haddock shows a broad age structure and has had several strong year classes. Specifically, the 2013-year class is the largest observed for this stock, while the 2020-year class accounts for 47% of the estimated SSB in 2023. However, as the 2013 year-class ages out of the population, the stock's abundance returns to levels last observed in the early 2000s, and its spatial distribution contracts, and it becomes less broadly distributed. The GB haddock stock is a transboundary stock co-managed by the U.S. and Canada, with catches in recent years well below the total quota (U.S. + Canada).

4.1.3 Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder

Population Status. The GOM winter flounder stock underwent a management Track assessment in 2025. The 2025 assessment indicated the stock biomass status is unknown and overfishing is not occurring (NEFSC 2025a). The analytic method was rejected in 2008 with GARM (2008) and again at SARC52 (2011). Area swept assessments have been used since then. The stock's size structure has not responded to the large declines in commercial and recreational removals since 2018 nor has it resulted in a change in the survey indices of abundance. The 2022 Peer Review Panel expressed concern about the uncertainty surrounding the rapid increase in catch advice given the stocks depressed condition despite low fishing pressure (Merrick, et. al. 2025). However, the 2025 assessment showed some signs of increase in area-swept biomass.

4.1.4 Georges Bank Winter Flounder

Population Status: The GB winter flounder stock underwent a management track assessment in 2025 that used a Woods Hole Assessment Model (WHAM) that is an update of the 2024 State-Space Methods Research Track assessment. The 2025 Peer Review Panel concluded the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring (Merrick, et. al. 2025) using the same approach to reference points adopted in the 2024 Research Track assessment. This is consistent with the findings of the 2022 management track assessment. The estimate of F_{MSY} proxy in the 2025 research track assessment is similar to the estimate in the 2022 management track assessment. Estimates of SSB_{MSY} proxy were lower in the 2025 assessment than in 2022 due to lower mean recruitment over the time series related to correcting an error in historical catch data. SSB has continued to increase since the terminal year of the 2022 assessment and was indicated to be above the biomass target. SSB in 2024 was estimated to be 5,477 mt which is 106% of the biomass target (SSB_{MSY} proxy = 5,182). The 2024 fully selected fishing mortality was estimated to be

0.177 which is 41% of the overfishing threshold proxy (F_{MSY} proxy = 0.431). The 2025 assessment has a minimal retrospective pattern and recruitment in recent years has been near or above the long-term average. GB winter flounder is in a rebuilding plan with an $F_{rebuild}$ rate defined as 70%F_{MSY} with an end date of 2029, but 2025 assessment indicates the stock is now rebuilt.

4.1.5 Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder

Population Status: SNE/MA winter flounder underwent a management track assessment in 2025. Consistent with the 2022 management track assessment, the 2025 assessment indicates the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. In the 2022 assessment, the method for calculating the reference points changed, which resulted in the stock immediately being considered rebuilt. However, F_{MSY}, SSB_{MSY}, and MSY are all reduced compared to the 2022 assessment. SSB in 2024 was estimated to be 2,787 mt which is 89% of the biomass target (3,114 mt), and 179% of the biomass threshold ($SSB_{Threshold}$ = 1,557 mt. The 2024 fully selected fishing mortality was estimated to be 0.048 which is 21% of the overfishing threshold (F_{MSY} = 0.233). The SSC observed that there are some positive signs of recruitment at the end of the data set worth watching, but noted the projections tend to be overly optimistic and the current F_{MSY} proxy may not be correct. A lack of biological data in the terminal years of the assessment and recruitment that is heavily driven by fluctuations in the Gulf Stream Index add uncertainty to the stock status.

4.1.6 Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine Yellowtail Flounder

Population Status: The CC/GOM yellowtail flounder stock underwent a management track assessment in 2025 using a WHAM model that is an update of the 2024 Research Track assessment. Based on the assessment, the stock is overfished, and overfishing is not occurring. SSB in 2024 was estimated to be 4,795 mt which is 44% of the biomass target (SSB_{MSY} proxy = 10,907). The 2024 fully selected fishing mortality was estimated to be 0.144 which is 29% of the overfishing threshold proxy (F_{MSY} proxy= 0.497). The F_{MSY} proxy, SSB_{MSY}, MSY, and median recruits all increased in this management track assessment in comparison to the 2022 management track assessment (which used a Virtual Population Analysis model) which had indicated that the stock was rebuilt as of 2022. Assessment diagnostics show the 2025 assessment has moderate systematic bias that overestimates fishing mortality while underestimating recruitment and SSB which remains a source of uncertainty around the status of this stock.

4.1.7 Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder

Population Status: The GB yellowtail flounder stock is a transboundary stock co-managed by the U.S. and Canada. Historically the stock was assessed under the Transboundary Resources Assessment Committee (TRAC). In March 2024, a TRAC Process Improvement Workshop was held in Halifax, Nova Scotia where it was recommended that the management of GB yellowtail flounder be based on scientific advice from the U.S. domestic assessment. In 2025, the GB yellowtail flounder stock underwent a management track assessment using a WHAM model that is an update of the 2024 Research Track assessment. This is a change from the 2024 use of the Limiter approach to derive catch advice. The stock is in a rebuilding plan with a rebuilding date of 2032.

Based on the assessment, the stock is overfished and overfishing is not occurring. Based on the 2025 assessment, SSB in 2024 was estimated to be 713 mt which is 10% of the biomass target (SSB_{MSY} proxy = 7,072). The 2024 fully selected fishing mortality was estimated to be 0.017, which is 19% of the

overfishing threshold proxy (F_{MSY} = 0.09). Previously, NMFS had determined the stock was overfished, with overfishing status unknown because of the empirical nature of the Limiter approach, which was unable to calculate historical estimates of biomass, fishing mortality, or recruitment. Low catch rates in the surveys make it difficult to track cohorts and to estimate changes in maturity and growth. Average bottom water temperature, as determined by an updated change point analysis, since 2009 is used to inform recruitment deviations from a Beverton-Holt stock recruit function. There is no retrospective pattern in the new assessment.

4.1.8 Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Yellowtail Flounder

Population Status: In 2025, the SNE/MA yellowtail flounder stock underwent a management track assessment using a WHAM model that is an update of the 2024 Research Track assessment. This is a change from the 2022 management track assessment that used an ASAP model. The stock is in a rebuilding plan with a rebuilding date of 2029.

Based on this updated assessment, the SNE/MA yellowtail flounder stock is overfished, but overfishing is not occurring. The new assessment downscaled the SSB_{MSY} and MSY estimates, but the stock status is unchanged. SSB in 2024 was estimated to be 38 mt which is 14% of the biomass target (SSB_{MSY} proxy = 270 mt). The 2024 fully selected fishing mortality was estimated to be 0.051 corresponding to 14% of the overfishing threshold (F_{MSY} proxy = 0.374). Commercial landings and discards are at historical lows. Bycatch in the scallop fishery is a significant source of mortality. The largest source of uncertainty for this stock is the lack of biological data (length, age, maturity) in the terminal years of the assessment. Due to the lack of age information in the most recent 5 years, recruitment is now driven by the Gulf Stream Index which adds uncertainty to the model. All available indicators for this stock are concerning.

4.1.9 Acadian Redfish

Population Status: In 2025, the Acadian redfish stock underwent a management track assessment using an ASAP-like version of the WHAM model approved in the 2024 State-Space Research Track. This is a change from the 2023 management track assessment that used an ASAP model. The Acadian redfish stock is rebuilt.

Based on this updated assessment, the Acadian Redfish stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. Retrospective adjustments were made to the model results for the purpose of stock status determination. Retrospective adjusted SSB in 2024 was estimated to be 188,005 mt which is 143% of the biomass target (SSB_{MSY} proxy of SSB at F50% = 131,411). The retrospective adjusted 2024 fully selected fishing mortality was estimated to be 0.031 which is 84% of the overfishing threshold (F_{MSY} proxy of F50% = 0.037). SSB and F showed a retrospective pattern, but a retrospective adjustment was not made because the WHAM model does not offer that option. The assessment shows a lack of fit to the spring and fall survey indices in recent years. However, transitioning from an ASAP-like WHAM to a full WHAM in the future may address these issues. Uncertainty for this stock also comes from a lack of age data from the commercial fishery and surveys.

Recent catches have been generally consistent, with some increases, but the overall utilization of the stock is low. However, the latest assessment lowers the ABC to near recent catch. This reflects the new model estimating a lower MSY driven by poor recruitment in the survey indices. The redfish fishery is a specialized one and is driven by high-volume trips and an unusual market dominated by purchasing programs (e.g., USDA). Lack of age data remains a source of uncertainty, although additional years of age data were included in this assessment update.

4.1.10 White Hake

Population Status: The white hake stock underwent a management track assessment in 2025. Based on this updated assessment, the white hake stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring, which is consistent with the 2022 assessment. Retrospective adjustments were not made to the model results. SSB in 2024 was estimated to be 14,153 mt, which is 57% of the biomass target (SSB_{MSY} proxy = 25,004). The 2024 fully selected fishing mortality was estimated to be 0.133 which is 76% of the overfishing threshold proxy (F_{MSY} proxy = 0.176). SSB, MSY, and median recruits all were scaled down slightly in the new assessment. The stock is in a rebuilding plan with a rebuilding deadline of 2031 and defines $F_{Rebuild}$ as $70\%F_{MSY}$.

Catch at age information is not well characterized, due to possible misidentification of this species in the commercial and observer data (particularly in early years), low sampling of commercial landings in some years, and sparse discard length data. The recent addition of an extra-large market category is causing possible bias in the age composition. Pooled age-length keys (ALKs) and use of survey ALKs to age commercial catch is another source of uncertainty. Possible seasonal movement of white hake out of the defined stock area is an open question. There is also inconsistency between recruitment methods used in the long-term and short-term projections (explored in this assessment but not resolved).

4.1.11 Ocean Pout

Population Status: In 2025, a data update was provided for ocean pout in lieu of a management track assessment. This was the first time this approach was taken and is a response to recent reductions in federal agency resources. The data update does not include use of the assessment methods for setting catch advice. This update included landings and discards through 2024 (landings beginning in 1964 and discards beginning in 1968), spring bottom trawl survey indices from 1968 through 2025 (biomass, kg/tow) and stratified mean indices at length (numbers/tow) for the bottom trawl survey from 1968 through 2025. Ocean pout has been managed as a zero-possession stock since 2010. To develop recommendations, the PDT reviewed the 2025 data updates provided by the NEFSC and the 2022 management track assessment and specification setting information (stock assessment, SSC report, and PDT report).

Based on the 2022 assessment, which used an exploitation ratio index-based method, ocean pout is overfished but overfishing is not occurring as of 2021. Ocean pout is in a rebuilding plan with a rebuild by date of 2029. The Council has managed ocean pout as a non-allocated discard-only stock, since 2010. Therefore, catch that does occur is considered bycatch. The 2022 assessment noted that despite 20 years with realized fishing mortality rates below the F_{MSY} proxy, ocean pout biomass has continued to decline and remains near historic lows in the time series. No major changes in abundance were evident since the 2022 assessment and catch recommendations, and uncertainty and concerns suggest a cautious approach is warranted.

4.1.12 Atlantic Wolffish

Population Status: In 2025, a data update was provided for ocean pout in lieu of a management track assessment. This was the first time this approach was taken and is a response to recent reductions in federal agency resources. The data update does not include use of the assessment methods for setting catch advice. This update included landings and discards through 2024 (landings beginning in 1964 and discards beginning in 1989), spring bottom trawl survey indices from 1963 through 2025 (biomass, kg/tow) and stratified mean indices at length (numbers/tow) for the bottom trawl survey from 1963

through 2025. Ocean pout has been managed as a zero-possession stock since 2010. To develop recommendations, the PDT reviewed the 2025 data updates provided by the NEFSC and the 2022 management track assessment and specification setting information (stock assessment, SSC report, and PDT report).

Based on the 2022 assessment, wolffish is overfished but overfishing is not occurring. The 2021 SSB was estimated to be 690 mt which is 46% of the biomass target, and the 2021 fully selected fishing mortality was estimated to be 0.004 which is 2% of the overfishing threshold proxy (NEFSC 2023b). Wolffish is in a rebuilding plan, but the end date is not defined. Catch has been limited almost exclusively to discards since the implementation of the no possession rule in May 2010. The 2025 data update also includes additional sources of discards in the fishery catch data in recent years including from the lobster fishery. These lobster fishery discards are low and do not have much impact on total catches. This is in part due to the low discard mortality rate of 8% currently applied for Atlantic wolffish. No age-1 recruits have been caught in the NEFSC spring survey since 2005. However, as was noted during the 2022 assessment, the stock has not responded to low catches, and it is possible the stock is driven primarily by environmental conditions.

The primary sources of uncertainty in the wolffish assessment are the use of the ocean pout research vessel survey catch calibration coefficient to standardize R/V Albatross and R/V Bigelow survey catches (i.e., wolffish calibration coefficients are unknown) and the apparent lack of impact from the restrictive management indicating likely unaccounted for environmental effects on the population dynamics for this species. It is also unclear whether the lack of a recruitment index signal since 2005 is due to an actual decrease in recruitment or a change in survey catchability resulting from the increase in liner mesh size associated with the switch to the R/V Bigelow as the survey vessel. Additionally, the surveys may have reached the limit of wolffish detectability due to the decline in stock abundance, or the ineffectiveness of the stratified random sampling design to sample current wolffish habitats, especially if wolffish exhibit range-collapsing behavior that could translate to density-dependent catchability or detectability with respect to survey gear.

4.1.13 Summary of Stock Status

Table 7 summarizes the status of the northeast groundfish stocks as determined by NMFS, noting which groundfish stocks are overfished or are experiencing overfishing.

Table 7 – Current status of groundfish stocks, determined by NMFS.

	Status	
Stock	Overfishing?	Overfished?
Georges Bank Cod*	No	Yes
Southern New England Cod*	Yes	Yes
Western Gulf of Maine Cod*	Yes	Yes
Eastern Gulf of Maine Cod*	No	Yes
Georges Bank Haddock	No	No
Gulf of Maine Haddock	No	No
Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder	Unknown	Yes
Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Yellowtail Flounder	No	Yes
Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine Yellowtail Flounder*	No	Yes
American Plaice	No	No
Witch Flounder	Unknown	Yes
Georges Bank Winter Flounder	No	No
Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder	No	Unknown
Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder	No	No
Acadian Redfish	No	No
White Hake	No	No
Pollock	No	No
Northern Windowpane Flounder	No	Yes
Southern Windowpane Flounder	No	No
Ocean Pout	No	Yes
Atlantic Halibut	Unknown	Yes
Atlantic Wolffish	No	Yes

*Stock status from 2024 management track assessments, determination by NMFS pending addition to the FMP through Amendment 25

Table 8 provides the SDC and Table 9 summarizes the updated numerical estimates of the SDCs for all groundfish stocks, based on most resent assessment – either the 2022, 2023, 2024, or 2025 management track assessments. The MSA requires that every fishery management plan specify "objective and measurable criteria for identifying when the fishery to which the plan applies is overfished." Guidance on this requirement identifies two elements that must be specified: a maximum fishing mortality threshold (or reasonable proxy) and a minimum stock size threshold.

The MSA also requires that FMPs specify the maximum sustainable yield and optimum yield for the fishery. The NEFSC conducted assessments for 11 groundfish stocks in 2025. Two stocks, wolffish and ocean pout, received data updates in lieu of management track assessments. The data update does not include use of the assessment methods for updating biological reference points (BRP). The peer review recommended updated numerical values are provided in Table 9.

Table 8 - Current status determination criteria.

Stock	Biomass Target (SSB_{MSY} or proxy)	Minimum Biomass Threshold	Maximum Fishing Mortality Threshold (F_{MSY} or proxy)
Georges Bank Cod*	SSBMSY: SSB/R (40% MSP)	½ Btarget	F40% MSP
Southern New England Cod *	SSBMSY: SSB/R (40% MSP)	½ Btarget	F40% MSP
Western Gulf of Maine Cod*	SSBMSY: SSB/R (40% MSP)	½ Btarget	F40% MSP
Eastern Gulf of Maine Cod*	SSBMSY: SSB/R (40% MSP)	½ Btarget	F40% MSP
Georges Bank Haddock	SSBMSY: SSB/R (40% MSP)	½ Btarget	F40% MSP
Gulf of Maine Haddock	SSBMSY: SSB/R (40% MSP)	½ Btarget	F40% MSP
Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder	SSBMSY: SSB/R (40% MSP)	½ Btarget	F40% MSP
Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Yellowtail Flounder	SSBMSY: SSB/R (40% MSP)	½ Btarget	F40% MSP
Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine Yellowtail Flounder	SSBMSY: SSB/R (40% MSP)	½ Btarget	F40% MSP
American Plaice	SSBMSY: SSB/R (40% MSP)	½ Btarget	F40% MSP
Witch Flounder	SSBMSY: SSB/R (40% MSP)	½ Btarget	F40% MSP
Georges Bank Winter Flounder	SSBMSY: SSB/R (40% MSP)	½ Btarget	F40% MSP
Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder	Unknown	Unknown	F40% MSP
Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder	SSBMSY: SSB/R (40% MSP)	½ Btarget	F40% MSP
Acadian Redfish	SSBMSY: SSB/R (50% MSP)	½ Btarget	F50% MSP
White Hake	SSBMSY: SSB/R (40% MSP)	½ Btarget	F40% MSP
Pollock	SSBMSY: SSB/R (40% MSP)	½ Btarget	F40% MSP
Northern Windowpane Flounder	External	½ Btarget	Rel F at replacement
Southern Windowpane Flounder	External	½ Btarget	Rel F at replacement
Ocean Pout	External	½ Btarget	Rel F at replacement
Atlantic Halibut	Internal	½ Btarget	$F_{0.1}$
Atlantic Wolffish	SSBMSY: SSB/R (40% MSP)	½ Btarget	F40% MSP

*As proposed in this action (see Section 3.0).

Table 9 - Current numerical estimates of Status Determination Criteria, based on 2022, 2023, 2024, or 2025 assessments.

Stock	Model/ Approach	B_{MSY} or Proxy (mt)	F_{MSY} or Proxy	MSY (mt)
Georges Bank Cod*	WHAM	8,290	0.233	1,930
Southern New England Cod*	WHAM	11,258	0.121	1,317
Western Gulf of Maine Cod*	WHAM	62,677	0.19	11,271
Eastern Gulf of Maine Cod*	WHAM	2,184	0.27	476
Georges Bank Haddock	WHAM	24,225	0.26	5,766
Gulf of Maine Haddock	WHAM	9,185	0.32	2,045
Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder	WHAM	7,072	0.09	597
Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Yellowtail Flounder	WHAM	270	0.374	94
Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine Yellowtail Flounder	WHAM	10,907	0.497	3,165
American Plaice	WHAM	12,963	0.519	5,090
Witch Flounder	empirical area swept	NA	NA	NA
Georges Bank Winter Flounder	WHAM	5,182	0.431	1,808
Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder	empirical area swept	NA	0.23 (exploitation rate)	NA
Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder	ASAP	3,114	0.233	910
Acadian Redfish*	WHAM ASAP-like	131,411	0.037	4,965
White Hake	ASAP	25,004	0.176	3,818
Pollock	ASAP	84,446	0.205	10,370
Northern Windowpane Flounder	empirical area swept	NA	NA	NA
Southern Windowpane Flounder	AIM	0.250 kg/tow	1.333 catch/survey index	333
Ocean Pout	exploitation ratio	4.94 kg/tow	0.76 catch/survey index	3,754
Atlantic Halibut	FSD	NA	NA	NA
Atlantic Wolffish	SCALE	1,509	0.192	211

*As proposed in this action (see Section 3.0).

4.1.14 Rebuilding Plan Status for Groundfish Stocks in Formal Rebuilding Plans

Table 10 summarizes the rebuilding status for each groundfish stock in a formal rebuilding plan that would have specifications set by this action.

Table 10- Summary of rebuilding status for groundfish stocks in a formal rebuilding plan based on the most recent assessment in 2022, 2023, 2024, or 2025.

Groundfish Stock	Rebuilding Plan Start of the Current Plan	Planned Rebuilding Date	Years Remaining in Plan, starting with FY2026	Total ACLs exceeded within past three completed FYs?	Has the original rebuilding F been achieved? Or is this unknown?	What is current SSB estimate relative to SSBMSY? Or is this unknown?
Georges Bank cod*	5/1/2004	2026	0	Yes [120.7% of the total ACL in FY2023]	Unknown	Unknown
Georges Bank yellowtail flounder[1]	11/22/2006	2032	7	No	Unknown	Unknown
Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic yellowtail flounder	7/18/2019	2029	4	No	$F_{rebuild}$ (plan start) = 0.243 F_{2024} = 0.017	SSB_{2024} = 713 mt 10% of SSB_{MSY}
Georges Bank winter flounder	7/18/2019	2029	4	No	$F_{rebuild}$ (plan start) = 0.365 F_{2024} = 0.177	SSB_{2024} = 4,503 mt 106% SSB_{MSY}
White hake	5/1/2004	2031	6	No	$F_{rebuild}$ (plan start) = 0.117 $F_{2024full}$ = 0.133	SSB_{2024} = 14,153 mt 57% of SSB_{MSY}

*Stock no longer in the FMP – replaced by revised Atlantic cod stock units (see section 4.1.1).
[1]This action would revise the SDCs for GB yellowtail flounder.

4.2 NON-GROUNDFISH SPECIES

The following are non-groundfish species routinely caught by the commercial groundfish fishery with updated stock assessments and data updates provided by the NEFSC in 2025. Descriptions of the life history for all non-groundfish species routinely caught by the commercial groundfish fishery and stock population status for stocks without updated information in 2025 can be found in the FW69 EA. Further information on life history and habitat characteristics of those stocks can be found in the EFH Source Documents at http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/nefsc/habitat/efh/.

4.2.1 Spiny Dogfish

Population and Management Status. The NEFMC and MAFMC jointly manage the spiny dogfish FMP for federal waters and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) has a state waters plan. Spawning stock biomass of spiny dogfish declined rapidly in response to a directed fishery during the 1990s. NFMS initially implemented management measures adopted by the Councils for spiny dogfish in 2001. These measures have been effective in reducing landings and fishing mortality. NMFS declared the spiny dogfish stock rebuilt for the purposes of federal management in May 2010 and a directed fishery resumed. Spiny dogfish underwent a research track assessment in 2022, where a new model was recommended for use for status determination and fishery management advice. As of the 2023 management track assessment, the stock was not overfished and overfishing was not occurring, a change from 2022 due to reduced catch compared to the terminal year in the previous assessment (NEFSC 2023e). The new assessment and biomass declines in recent years resulted in a 55% ABC reduction from 2023, to about 7,800 MT in 2023. Minor projection adjustments and risk tolerance adjustments have kept the ABC relatively stable since 2023, and the 2026-2027 ABCs are anticipated to be about 7,600 mt.

4.2.2 Monkfish

Life History. Monkfish, *Lophius americanus*, (i.e., "goosefish"), occur in the western North Atlantic from the Grand Banks and northern Gulf of St. Lawrence south to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. Monkfish occur from inshore areas to depths of at least 2,953 ft (900 m). Monkfish undergo seasonal onshore-offshore migrations, which may relate to spawning or possibly to food availability. Female monkfish begin to mature at age 4 with 50% of females maturing by age 5 (~17 in [43 cm]). Males generally mature at slightly younger ages and smaller sizes (50% maturity at age 4.2 or 14 in [36 cm]). Spawning takes place from spring through early autumn. It progresses from south to north, with most spawning occurring during the spring and early summer. Females lay a buoyant egg raft or veil that can be as large as 39 ft (12 m) long and 5 ft (1.5 m) wide, and only a few mm thick. The larvae hatch after 1 - 3 weeks, depending on water temperature. The larvae and juveniles spend several months in a pelagic phase before settling to a benthic existence at a size of ~3 in (8 cm).

Population and Management Status. NMFS implemented the Monkfish FMP in 1999 (NEFMC 1998) and the fishery is jointly managed by the NEFMC and MAFMC. The FMP included measures to stop overfishing and rebuild the stocks through a number of measures. These measures included:

- Limiting the number of vessels with access to the fishery and allocating DAS to those vessels;
- Setting trip limits for vessels fishing for monkfish; minimum fish size limits;
- Gear restrictions;
- Mandatory time out of the fishery during the spawning season; and
- A framework adjustment process.

The Monkfish FMP defines two management areas for monkfish (northern and southern), divided roughly by an east-west line bisecting Georges Bank. Management track assessments for the northern and southern areas were conducted in 2022 and changed the status of both stocks to unknown from not subject to overfishing and not overfished (NEFSC 2023b). In 2025, a data update was provided. Northern monkfish catch has been relatively stable with a similar level of landings and discards in recent years. Likewise, indices of Northern monkfish biomass through 2025 (biomass, kg/tow) have been relatively stable with a slight increase in fall and a more pronounced increase in spring. Length distribution over time suggests a decrease in smaller fish (0-15 cm) in 2023-2024 (fall index), potentially indicative of decreased recruitment. Southern monkfish commercial landings have declined in recent years with variable commercial discards. Bottom trawl survey indices for Southern monkfish have remained stable in recent years at low levels. Fall length distributions seem to indicate variable recruitment for Southern monkfish.

4.2.3 **Summer Flounder**

Population and Management Status. The FMP was developed by the MAFMC in 1988, and scup and black sea bass were later incorporated into the FMP. Amendment 2, implemented in 1993, established a commercial quota allocated to the states, a recreational harvest limit, minimum size limits, gear restrictions, permit and reporting requirements, and an annual review process to establish specifications for the coming fishing year. In 1999, Amendment 12 revised the overfishing definitions for all three species, established rebuilding programs, addressed bycatch and habitat issues and established a framework adjustment procedure for the FMP to allow for a streamlined process for relatively minor changes to management measures. Results from the 2025 management track assessment indicate that the summer flounder stock is not overfished, and overfishing is not occurring (NEFSC 2025b), which is a change from the 2023 Assessment (NEFSC 2023c) that showed the stock was subject to overfishing. The estimated SSB in 2024 was 40,516 mt, which is 83% of the updated biomass target reference point of 48,571 mt. Fully selected fishing mortality was estimated to be 0.35 in 2024, which is 74% of the overfishing threshold proxy (NEFSC 2025 in press).

4.2.4 **American Lobster**

Population and Management Status. The states, in cooperation with NMFS, manage the American lobster resource through the ASMFC under the provisions of the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (ACFCMA). States have jurisdiction for implementing measures in state waters, while NMFS implements complementary regulations in federal waters. Stock status is based on the 2025 benchmark assessment (ASMFC 2025). The Gulf of Maine/ Georges Bank abundance is favorable but shows declines from recent highs, with exploitation (0.465) just above the threshold for overfishing (0.464) creating an overfishing status. SNE abundance and recruitment is the lowest on record, resulting in a depleted status, but overfishing is not occurring.

4.2.5 **Atlantic Sea Scallops**

Population and Management Status. The NEFMC established the Atlantic Scallop FMP in 1982. The commercial fishery for sea scallops is conducted year-round, primarily using New Bedford style and turtle deflector scallop dredges. A small percentage of the fishery employs otter trawls, mostly in the Mid-Atlantic. The principal U.S. commercial fisheries are in the Mid-Atlantic (from Virginia to Long Island, New York) and on Georges Bank and neighboring areas, such as the Great South Channel and Nantucket Shoals. There is also a small, primarily inshore fishery for sea scallops in the Gulf of Maine. The scallop

resource was last assessed through a research track assessment in 2025, and it was not overfished, and overfishing was not occurring (NEFSC in press). Combined biomass in 2023 from the three CASA models is 69,956 mt meats. This is below the target biomass of B_{MSY} = 93,282 but above $B_{threshold}$ = 46,641 mt of meats, so the stock is not overfished. Combined fully recruited fishing mortality in 2023 was 0.33. This is below F_{MSY} = 0.49 so overfishing is not occurring. It should be noted, however, that fully recruited fishing mortality in both the Georges Bank Closed and Georges Bank Open area in 2023 was about 0.47, which is above the Georges Bank F_{MSY} = 0.36. Thus, if sea scallops were managed as two separate stocks (Mid-Atlantic and Georges Bank), overfishing would be occurring on Georges Bank.

4.2.6 **Scup**

Population and Management Status. The scup fishery is cooperatively managed by the MAFMC and the ASMFC under the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The primary commercial fishery management measure is a quota that is distributed to three trimester periods and to individual states. Other federal regulations include minimum mesh size, gear restricted areas (GRA), and a minimum fish size. States typically restrict harvest to their quota using seasons and trip limits. Scup were under a formal rebuilding plan from 2005 through 2009. NMFS declared the scup stock rebuilt in 2009 based on the findings of the Data Poor Stocks Working Group (DPSWG 2009). The most recent stock assessment (2025) indicates that scup was not overfished, and overfishing was not occurring in 2024 (NEFSC 2025 in press). SSB in 2024 was estimated to be 235,613 mt which is 323% of the biomass target (SSB_{MSY} proxy = 72,855). The adjusted 2024 fully selected fishing mortality was estimated to be 0.098 which is 55% of the overfishing threshold proxy (F_{MSY} proxy=0.177).

4.2.7 **Atlantic Herring**

Population and Management Status. The Atlantic herring fishery is cooperatively managed by both the NEFMC and ASMFC. Presently, herring from the GOM (inshore) and GB (offshore) stock components are combined for assessment purposes into a single coastal stock complex. The fishery uses quotas by area and season. Prosecuted primarily by mid-water trawls (single and paired), purse seines, and to a lesser degree, bottom trawls. Management measures include restrictions on the incidental catch of haddock and other regulated groundfish. Mid-water trawls are allowed access to the groundfish closed areas as an exempted fishery, but their use of the areas is subject to numerous regulatory restrictions. The Atlantic herring stock underwent a management track assessment in 2024. The stock is overfished, and overfishing is not occurring (NEFSC 2024). The 2023 SSB was estimated to be 47,955 mt, which is 26% of the biomass target, and the average fishing mortality rate for ages 7-8 was estimated to be 0.263 which is 58% of the overfishing threshold proxy. Continued poor recruitment is the main issue driving stock status. Management decisions that reduced US catches had the effect of avoiding overfishing (NEFSC 2023). Catch limits are significantly lower for 2025-2027 compared to previous specification packages (2023-2025)[1]. The previous action projected a 2025 catch limit of 23,961 mt. Based on the 2024 stock assessment and to reduce the risk of overfishing the stock, an in-season adjustment reduced the catch limit to 2,710 mt for most of the fishing year[2]. Late in the fishing year, the catch limit was increased to 4,556 mt based on updated catch projections[3]. The Atlantic Herring Research Track Stock Assessment passed

[1] https://www.nefmc.org/library/2023-2025-atlantic-herring-specifications

[2] https://www.nefmc.org/library/2025-herring-in-season-adjustment

[3] https://www.nefmc.org/library/2025-2027-atlantic-herring-specifications

peer review in March 2025, which uses a state-space model (WHAM)[4]. A management track stock assessment to update the state-space model through 2025 is planned for June 2026.

4.3 PROTECTED SPECIES

Numerous protected species occur in the affected environment of the Northeast Multispecies FMP and could be impacted by the proposed action (i.e., there have been observed/documented interactions in the fisheries or with gear types like those used in the fisheries (i.e., recreational fishery: hook and line; commercial fishery: bottom trawl and gillnet gear)). These species are under NMFS jurisdiction and are afforded protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 and/or the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) of 1972. Section 5.6 of Framework 69 provides comprehensive descriptions of all protected species that may occur in the affected environment of the FMP; those descriptions remain valid. Section 6.4 in the FW69 EA, which provides an assessment of the potential impacts of the specifications considered in the EA on protected species (i.e., ESA-listed and/or Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) protected), was used to inform the potential impacts of the proposed action on protected species (see Section 7 below).

In addition to the information considered in FW69 EA, the following new information and circumstances for protected species are relevant to this action:

- On May 27, 2021, the NMFS completed formal consultation pursuant to section 7 of the ESA of 1973, as amended, and issued a biological opinion (2021 Opinion) on the authorization of eight FMPs, two interstate fishery management plans (ISFMP), and the implementation of the New England Fishery Management Council's Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Amendment 2[5]. On September 13, 2023, NMFS issued a 7(a)(2)/7(d) memorandum that reinitiated consultation on the 2021 Biological Opinion; this memorandum was updated with a new 7(a)(2)/7(d) memorandum issued by NMFS on January 8, 2025, and amended on November 25, 2025. Additional information on the reinitiation is provided in Section 7.4

4.4 HUMAN COMMUNITIES

A detailed description of the Northeast Multispecies fishery and fishing communities, including the sector, common pool, and recreational participants' groundfish fishing and the important port communities in the fishery, may be found in Section 5.7 of FW69. Those descriptions of the sector, common pool, and recreational fisheries are still valid. This section includes updated fishery information for the most recent five years that was considered in the proposed action. Generally, fishery data in this section comes from the Catch Accounting and Management System (CAMS) tables, but other tables may use information from other sources, as noted.

[4] https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/71350

[5] The eight Federal FMPs considered in the May 27, 2021, Biological Opinion include: 1) Atlantic Bluefish; 2) Atlantic Deep-sea Red Crab; 3) Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish; 4) Monkfish; 5) Northeast Multispecies; 6) Northeast Skate Complex; 7) Spiny Dogfish; and 8) Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass. The two ISFMPs are American Lobster and Jonah Crab.

4.4.1 **Groundfish Fishery Overview**

A description of the commercial groundfish fishery (sectors and common pool) can be found in Section 5.7 of the FW69 EA. Sectors are allocated subdivisions of ACLs called Annual Catch Entitlements (ACE) based on each sector's collective catch history[6]. Sectors have received ACE for nine of 13 groundfish species (15 stocks + quotas for Eastern US/Canada cod and haddock); 17 ACEs in the FMP and are exempt from many of the effort controls previously used to manage the fishery. Beginning in FY2026, sectors will be allocated 19 ACEs with the transition from two cod stocks to four.

Each sector establishes its own rules for using its allocations. As of FY2024, 52% of the limited access groundfish permitted vessels are in a sector, and 48% are in the common pool (Table 11) [7]. Common pool vessels act independently of one another, with each vessel constrained by the number of DAS it can fish, by trip limits, and by all of the time and area closures. These restrictions help ensure that the groundfish catch of common pool vessels does not exceed the common pool's portion of the commercial groundfish sub- ACL for all stocks (about 1% in recent fishing years) before the end of the fishing year. In this section, "groundfish trips", unless otherwise stated, are defined as vessels with a limited access groundfish permit that landed at least 1 pound of any stock (groundfish or non-groundfish) on a trip that declared into the groundfish fishery. Groundfish landings only refer to landing stocks that are allocated species in the Northeast Multispecies plan (cod, haddock, pollock, redfish, yellowtail flounder, witch flounder, American plaice, etc.), but may have been caught on either sector or common pool trips. Non-groundfish landings include all other species caught, including whiting, lobster, skates, dogfish, and any other federally reported catch.

[6] To determine the ACE, the sum of all of the sector members' potential sector contributions (PSCs) (a percentage of the ACL) are multiplied by the ACL.

[7] The number of LA permits overall has changed relatively little since the beginning of the sector program, the decline in number of vessels is due to the number of permits not currently affiliated with a vessel, but is eligible for renewal based on the previous vessels' fishing and permit history (i.e., Confirmation of Permit History, or CPH, see 50 CFR 648.4).

Table 11 - Number of eligibilities (MRIs), eligibilities in CPH, permitted vessels, and active vessels (landing on groundfish trips) by fishing year from FY2020 to FY2024.

Fishing Year	Group	MRIs	CPH	Elig. Vessels	Not Renewed	Permitted Vessels	Any revenue	GF revenue	No landings	% inactive
2020	CP	488	102	407	23	384	246	35	140	36
2020	SECT	820	346	504	9	495	335	162	159	32
2021	CP	496	112	408	21	387	249	28	137	35
2021	SECT	798	352	471	9	462	311	142	149	32
2022	CP	482	115	393	24	369	246	32	117	32
2022	SECT	800	386	441	8	433	305	125	127	29
2023	CP	489	118	400	17	383	243	33	132	34
2023	SECT	780	392	435	6	429	292	116	136	32
2024	CP	480	120	387	16	371	251	22	116	31
2024	SECT	784	404	414	7	407	284	126	123	30

Total MRIs = MRIs not in CPH + those in CPH
Total MRIs and those in CPH represent the number of MRIs not in CPH and those in CPH as of May 1st of the fishing year, while the total number of eligible vessels reflects the number of non-CPH eligible permits at any point in the fishing year. Over time the number of vessels will differ from the number of eligibilities because eligibilities can be transferred from vessel to vessel during the fishing year. Amendment 16 authorized CPH owners to join sectors and to lease DAS.
Source: NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office. Accessed: 2026-01-06.

4.4.2 **Fleet Characteristics**

Over the past five fishing years, there has been limited variability in the number of groundfish eligibilities (Moratorium Right Identifiers, MRIs), shown in Table 11. This represents the number of individual fishing privileges and catch histories associated with each Northeast multispecies permit, through which Potential Sector Contributions (PSC) are calculated. While a given set of privileges may move from one vessel to another, and change permit numbers, the MRI always stays the same. Over time, the number of sector eligibilities in CPH (Confirmation of Permit History) has increased from 346 at the start of FY2020 to 404 in FY2024. The increase of eligibilities in CPH represents a decline in the number of permits associated with vessels, but because eligibilities in CPH may still join sectors, the number of eligibilities in CPH does not necessarily change individuals' PSC, nor the ability for participants to passively obtain income from the groundfish fishery by leasing their ACE. Eligibilities may also move out of CPH during the fishing year, allowing the number of Limited Access permitted vessels to exceed the number of eligible permits at the start of the fishing year. Overall, there has been a decline in the number of permitted vessels in any year, from 879 in FY2020 to 778 in FY2024. Of these permitted vessels in FY2024, 31% were inactive, and the number of sector vessels that were inactive was similar to the number of vessels landing allocated groundfish stocks. A key aspect of Amendment 16 is the ability of a sector to jointly decide how its ACE will be harvested, through redistribution within a sector and/or transferring ACE between sectors. Because inactive sector vessels may benefit if they lease their allocation, changes in the number of inactive vessels may result from a transfer of allocation and not necessarily vessels exiting the fishery.

4.4.3 Effort

The groundfish fishery has traditionally been made up of a diverse fleet, comprised of a range of vessel sizes and gear types. The number of active vessels has declined somewhat since FY2020 across size classes (Table 12). From FY2020 to FY2024, the <50' vessel size category declined from 82 to 67 active sector vessels. The common pool had 32 vessels in the same size class in 2020, while only 20 were active in 2024. Active vessels in the 50' to 75' vessel size category have also declined, from a maximum of 54 sector vessels in 2020 to 37 vessels in 2024. The number of sector vessels >75' has slightly decreased from 36 vessels in 2020 to 33 in 2024.

Figure 2 shows for each vessel size class, total landed pounds (groundfish and non-groundfish), total gross ex-vessel revenue, total number of days absent on groundfish trips, and total number of groundfish trips. Total pounds landed on groundfish trips slightly increased in 2024 from 2023, though total gross revenue continued to decline to a 5-year low in 2024. Effort levels for all size categories have been relatively similar in the last 3 years.

Primary gear types in the groundfish fishery are trawls (primarily otter trawls) and gillnet, but several other gear types including handline, longline, and pot gear may be used on groundfish trips, even if not used primarily to target groundfish stocks (Table 13).

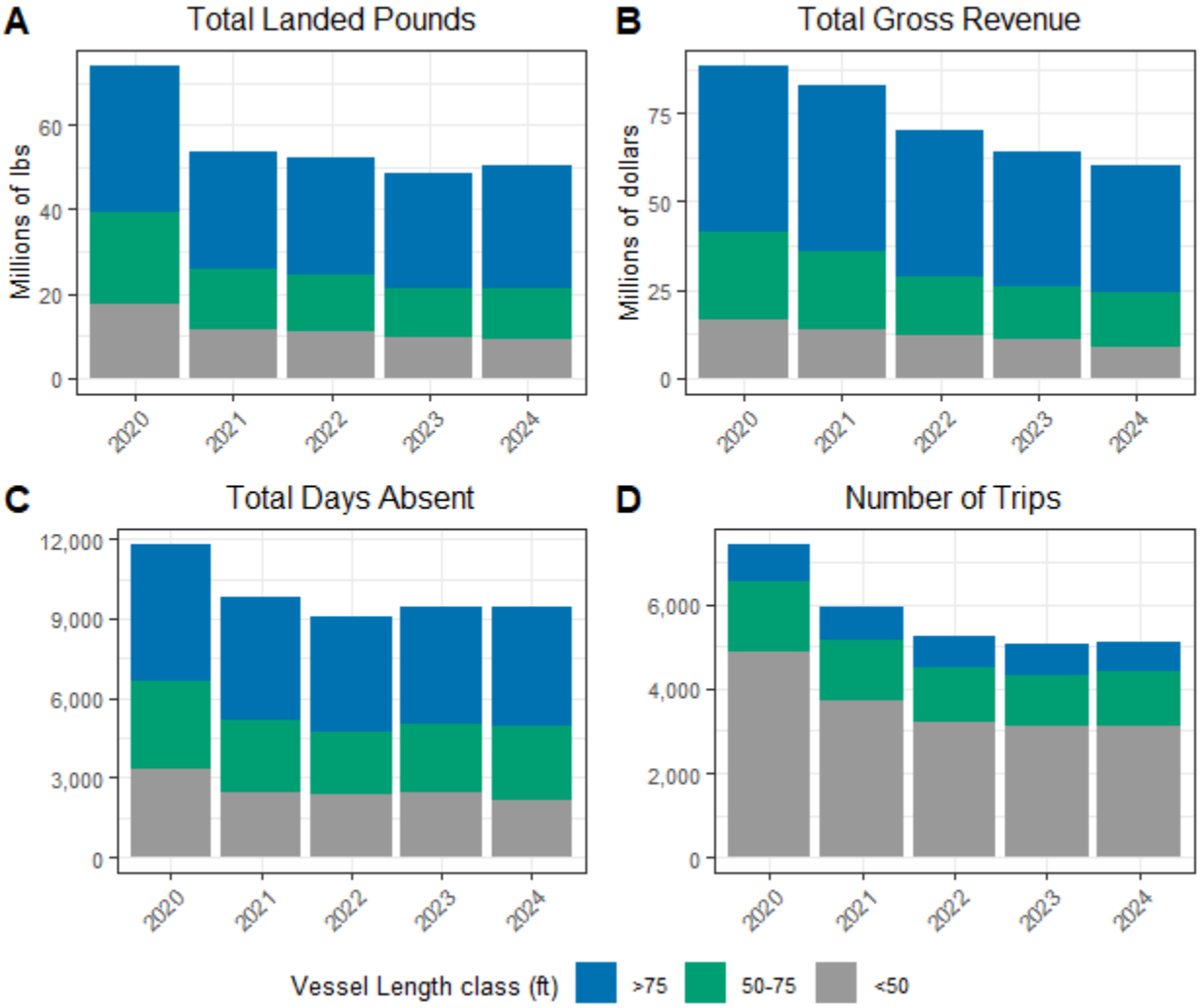
Table 12 - Number of permitted vessels by group and length class, FY2020 – 2024.

Fishing Year	Group	<50 ft.	50-75 ft.	>75 ft.
2020	Common Pool	32	5	0
2020	Sector	82	54	36
2021	Common Pool	25	4	0
2021	Sector	72	45	30
2022	Common Pool	28	5	C
2022	Sector	66	39	31
2023	Common Pool	28	8	0
2023	Sector	60	32	32
2024	Common Pool	20	4	0
2024	Sector	67	37	33

"C" indicates confidential data.

Source: CAMS data. Accessed February 2026.

Figure 2 – Fishery performance by vessel length category, FY2020 – 2024 - (A) Total landed pounds (in millions; groundfish and non-groundfish); (B) Total gross ex-vessel revenue (millions of $2024); (C) Total number of days absent on groundfish trips; and (D) Total number of groundfish trips.



Source: CAMS data. Accessed February 2026.

Table 13 - Number of groundfish trips by group and gear type used, FY2020 – 2024.

Fishing Year	Group	Trawl	Gillnet	ELM	Handline	Longline	Pot/Trap	Other
2020	Common Pool	377	28	41	86	0	0	C
2020	Sector	4,195	1,262	1,935	77	148	18	4
2021	Common Pool	253	6	31	35	0	C	0
2021	Sector	3,604	899	1,377	33	54	28	0
2022	Common Pool	289	70	35	70	4	6	0
2022	Sector	2,995	813	1,285	17	43	10	0
2023	Common Pool	248	42	85	79	5	5	0
2023	Sector	2,870	538	1,412	15	32	11	12
2024	Common Pool	286	21	41	30	8	13	0
2024	Sector	2,963	543	1,482	16	46	C	11

Note: "C" indicates confidential data. Lobster pots/traps can only be used on a declared groundfish trip in combination with longline/hook gear; gillnet and trawl gear is not allowed on the same trip as pots/traps

Source: CAMS data. Accessed February 2026.

4.4.4 **Landings and Revenue**

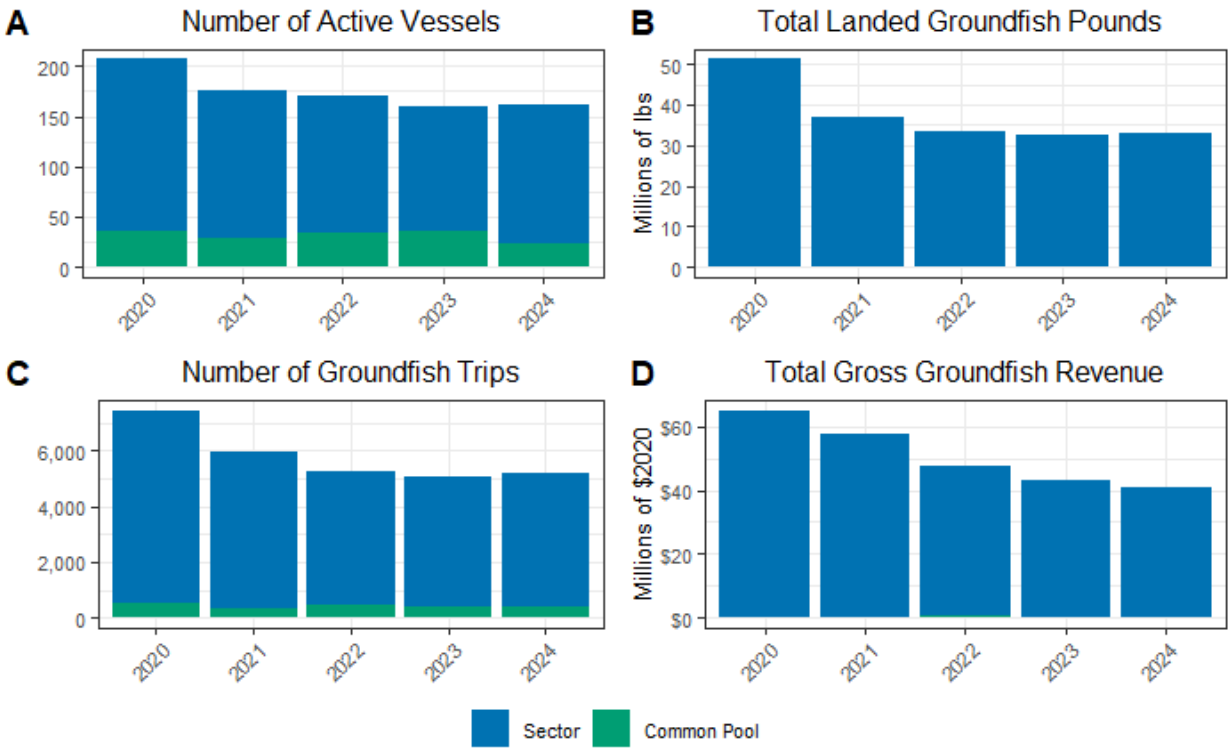
Table 14 and Figure 3 summarize major landings and revenue trends for the groundfish fishery over the last five fishing years. Landed pounds of groundfish increased slightly in 2024 from a five-year low in 2023. Groundfish revenue was at a five-year low in 2024. The average price of regulated groundfish landed on groundfish trips from sector vessels was $1.24/lb. in 2024, representing a five-year low (Figure 4). The average non-groundfish price for sector vessels increased in 2024 ($1.14/lb.) was the lowest mark since 2020 (Figure 4).

Table 14 - Summary of major landings, revenue, and effort trends in the groundfish fishery by fishing year and group, FY2020 – 2024. Pounds reflects total landed lbs. (in millions) on groundfish trips. Revenue presented in millions of $2024.

Fishing Year	Group	GF Pounds	GF Revenue	GF Price	NGF Pounds	NGF Revenue	NGF Price	Vessels	Trips	Days Absent
2020	Common Pool	0.11	0.18	1.60	2.05	1.04	0.51	35	517	319
2020	Sector	51.08	64.88	1.27	20.94	22.45	1.07	172	6,926	11,489
2021	Common Pool	0.12	0.24	1.99	1.29	0.91	0.70	29	326	235
2021	Sector	36.74	57.34	1.56	15.45	24.23	1.57	147	5,625	9,580
2022	Common Pool	0.20	0.44	2.24	2.54	1.43	0.56	34	469	377
2022	Sector	33.10	46.93	1.42	16.25	21.08	1.30	136	4,773	8,689
2023	Common Pool	0.19	0.35	1.82	2.38	1.39	0.58	36	431	523
2023	Sector	32.47	42.48	1.31	13.45	19.89	1.48	124	4,624	8,901
2024	Common Pool	0.13	0.24	1.82	2.03	1.02	0.50	24	389	292
2024	Sector	32.97	40.76	1.24	16.25	18.60	1.14	137	4,779	9,214

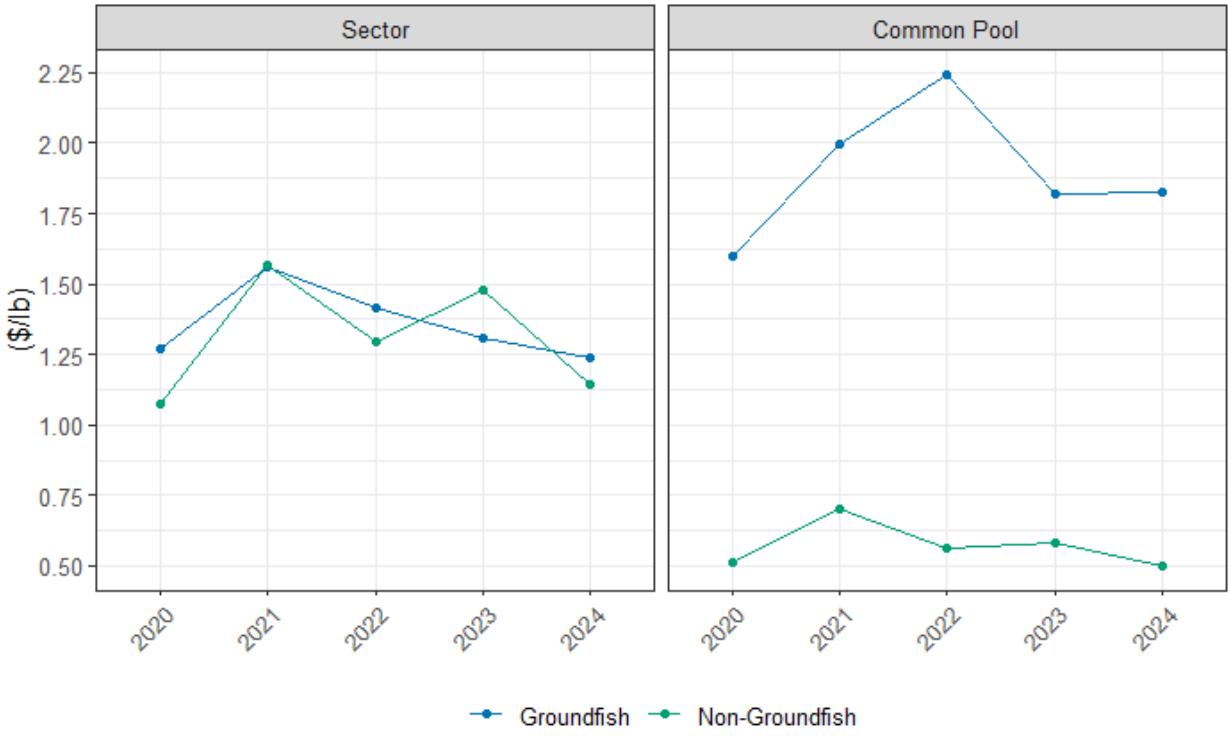
Source: CAMS data. Accessed February 2026.

Figure 3 – Fishery performance by group, FY2020 – 2024 - (A) Number of active vessels (at least one groundfish trip); (B) Total landed pounds (in millions) of allocated groundfish stocks; (C) Number of groundfish trips with >1 lb landed of any species; (D) Total ex-vessel revenue (millions of $2024) from allocated groundfish stocks.



Source: CAMS data. Accessed February 2026.

Figure 4 – Average annual groundfish and non-groundfish price ($2024), FY2020 – 2024.



Source: CAMS data. Accessed February 2026.

Recent ex-vessel prices by stock are shown in Table 15 and revenue by stock in Table 16. The majority of groundfish stocks exhibited 2024 prices below the most recent five-year average. A number of stocks reached five-year lows in price including GB winter flounder, pollock, redfish, and white hake. Of note, many of these stocks showing declining trends in price are amongst the most important to the fishery in terms of gross revenue. Map 1 identifies the four broad stock areas used in the fishery, referred to above. The cod stocks areas are shown in Figure 1 in Section 4.1.1.

Table 15 - Stock-level commercial (sector and common pool) ex-vessel prices ($2024/lb.), FY2020 – 2024. Averages represent total value divided by total landings over the five-year period.

Stock	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Avg.
EGOM Cod	3.44	3.44	3.37	3.40	2.54	3.24
GB Cod	2.72	2.39	1.99	2.09	2.38	2.40
SNE Cod	2.97	2.82	4.06	2.47	2.43	3.02
WGOM Cod	3.18	2.71	2.62	2.36	2.64	2.71
GB Haddock	1.30	1.65	1.87	1.43	1.61	1.50
GOM Haddock	1.47	1.86	1.72	1.49	1.82	1.67
GB Yellowtail Flounder	1.60	1.65	1.88	0.85	0.73	1.46
GOM Yellowtail Flounder	1.07	0.99	0.81	0.78	0.79	0.88
SNE Yellowtail Flounder	1.07	1.91	1.27	1.21	1.52	1.07
GB Winter Flounder	2.44	3.19	2.45	2.18	1.94	2.32
GOM Winter Flounder	2.57	2.70	1.75	1.78	2.31	2.17
SNE Winter Flounder	2.38	3.03	2.03	1.95	2.25	2.39
Halibut	7.19	8.26	7.84	7.18	7.64	7.59
Plaice	2.00	2.00	1.52	1.53	1.82	1.73
Pollock	1.34	1.69	1.30	1.41	0.99	1.36
Redfish	0.64	0.67	0.74	0.70	0.58	0.66
White Hake	1.73	2.04	1.87	1.72	1.67	1.81
Witch Flounder	1.90	1.84	1.64	1.39	1.40	1.61

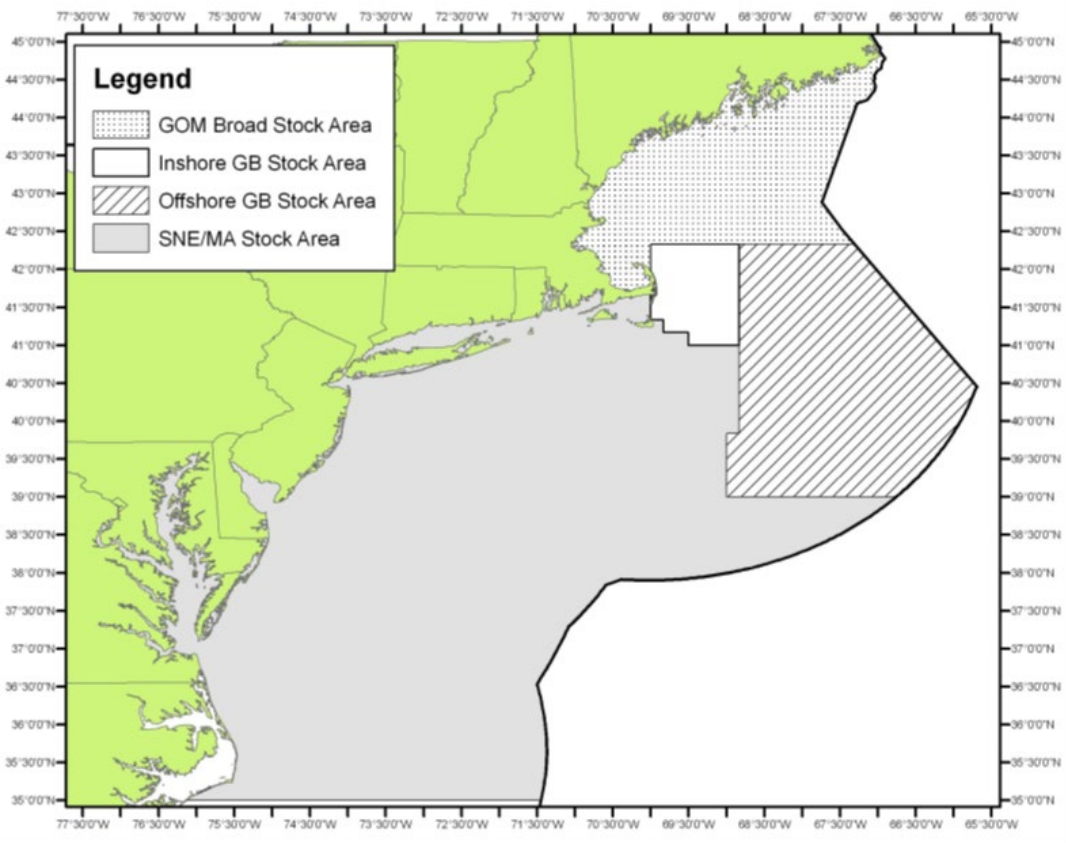
Source: CAMS data. Accessed February 2026.

Table 16 - Stock-level commercial (sector and common pool) revenue (millions of $2024), FY2020 – 2024.

Stock	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Avg.
EGOM Cod	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
GB Cod	0.9	0.8	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.5
SNE Cod	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
WGOM Cod	2.6	2.6	1.5	2.0	2.2	2.2
GB Haddock	15.9	9.7	8.2	7.2	6.0	9.4
GOM Haddock	11.4	12.2	9.1	3.6	4.1	8.1
GB Yellowtail Flounder	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
GOM Yellowtail Flounder	0.4	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
SNE Yellowtail Flounder	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
GB Winter Flounder	1.6	1.8	0.8	1.1	2.7	1.6
GOM Winter Flounder	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.4
SNE Winter Flounder	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.3
Halibut	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3
Plaice	2.5	2.8	2.7	4.4	5.2	3.5
Pollock	10.0	9.9	8.8	9.1	4.2	8.4
Redfish	9.4	6.3	6.2	5.8	6.7	6.9
White Hake	5.1	6.4	5.7	5.0	4.8	5.4
Witch Flounder	3.5	3.4	2.8	3.2	3.3	3.2

Source: CAMS data. Accessed February 2026.

Map 1 – Northeast Multispecies Broad Stock Areas.



4.4.5 **ACE Leasing**

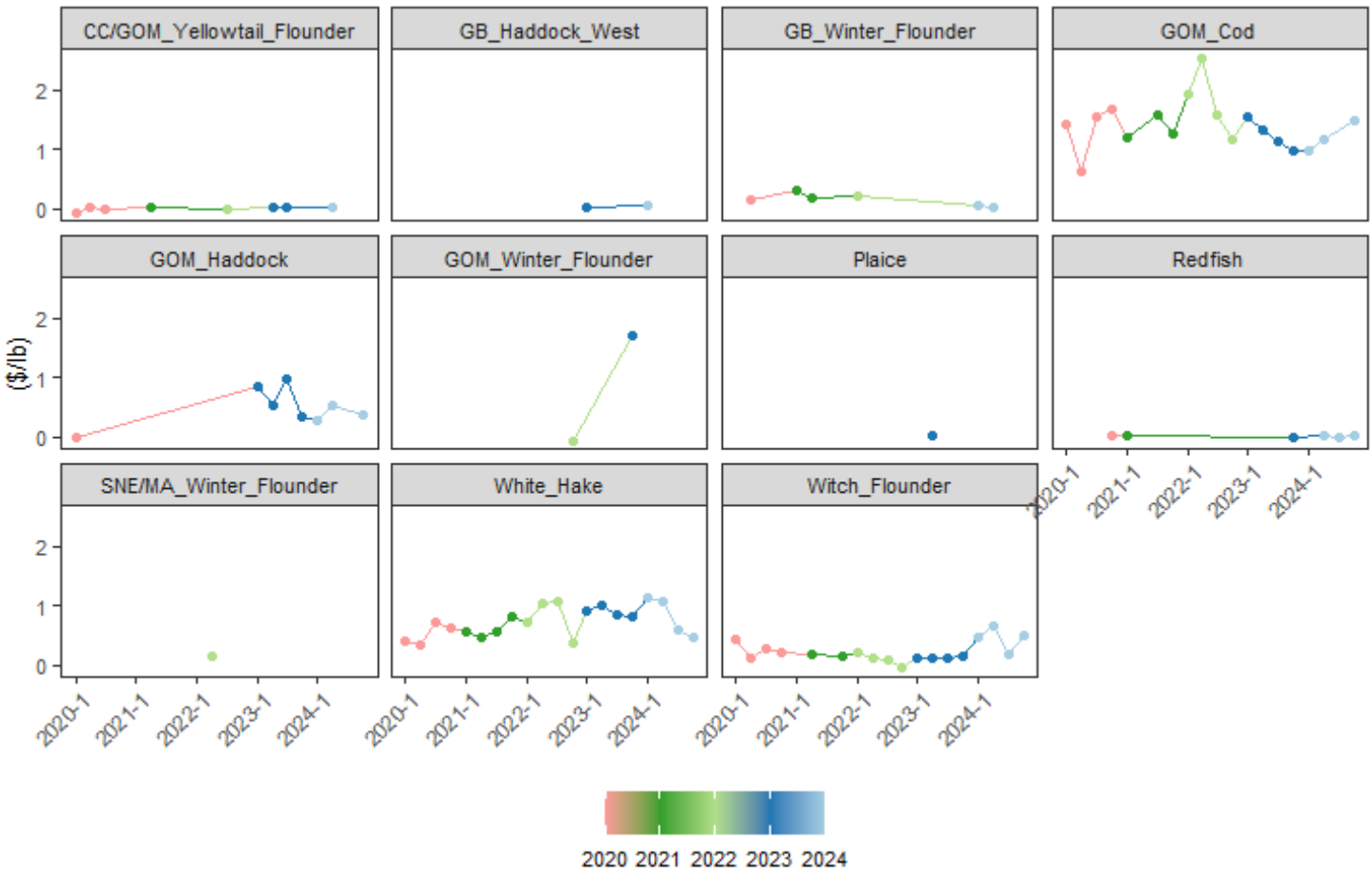
Starting with allocations in FY2010, each sector was given an initial ACE determined by the pooled potential sector contribution (PSC) from each entity joining that sector. Every limited access groundfish permit also has a tracking identification number called a Moratorium Right Identifier (MRI). PSC is technically allocated to MRIs, which are subsequently linked to vessels through Northeast Multispecies limited access fishing permits. A vessel's PSC is a percentage share of the total allocation for each allocated groundfish stock based on that vessel's fishing history. Once a sector roster and associated PSC is set at the beginning of a fishing year, each sector is then able to distribute its ACE among its members. By regulation, ACE is pooled within sectors, however most sectors seem to follow the practice of assigning catch allowances to member vessels based on PSC allocations. This is an important assumption because vessels catching more than their allocation of PSC must have leased additional quota, either as PSC from within the sector or as ACE from another sector.

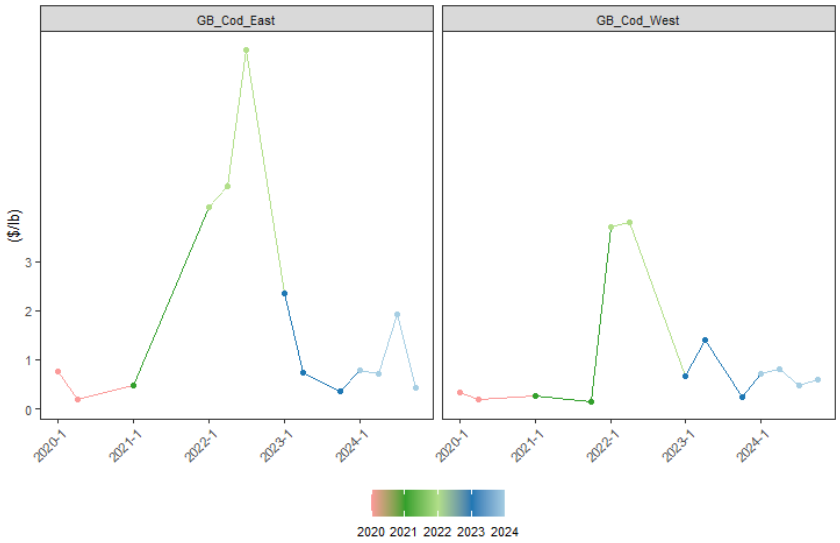
A hedonic price model[8] of reported inter-sector ACE leases between FY2020 and FY2024 shows quarterly price trends in ACE leasing over time (Figure 5). Missing points indicate quarters where there were no reported trades for that stock. A few stocks do not have reported trades, or are not associated with

[8] A model that identifies the internal and external factors and characteristics that affect an item's price in the market. The model estimates the implicit price, or hedonic price, of these observable factors. The theoretical framework for hedonic pricing can be found in Rosen's 1974 article, "Hedonic Prices and Implicit Markets: Product Differentiation in Pure Competition".

prices greater than $0.00, and thus are not included in Figure 5. Other stocks show substantial changes in price over time. GOM cod and white hake lease prices have generally been among the highest of any stocks. For information on ACE leasing in earlier years of the sector program, see the 2015 groundfish fishery performance report (Murphy, et al. 2018).

Figure 5 – Hedonic model of quarterly ACE lease prices for allocated groundfish stocks, FY2020 – 2024.





4.4.6 **Fishing Communities**

A detailed description of the Northeast Multispecies fishing communities can be found in Section 5.7.6 in Framework 69. Groundfish fishery primary ports are defined as the fishing communities with the highest average level of engagement with the groundfish fishery, as determined by the Groundfish-Specific Commercial Engagement Indicators. These include, in order of engagement score: New Bedford, MA; Gloucester, MA; Boston, MA; Narragansett/Point Judith, RI; Portland, ME; Montauk, NY; Chatham, MA; Hampton Bays/Shinnecock, NY; Cape May, NJ; and Scituate, MA. These commercial fishing engagement indicators, along with indicators of reliance and other community characteristics, are produced by NOAA social scientists and are collectively referred to as the Social Indicators of Fishing Community Vulnerability and Resilience (Jepson and Colburn 2013).

The Socio-Economic Survey of Hired Captains and Crew in New England and Mid-Atlantic Commercial Fisheries (hereafter referred to as the Crew Survey) is an ongoing effort conducted by the Social Sciences Branch (SSB) of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC). The Crew Survey gathers general information about the characteristics and experiences of commercial fishing crew (including hired captains) because little is known about this critical segment of the commercial fishing industry. Information collected by the survey include demographics, remuneration, well-being, fishing practices, job satisfaction, job opportunities, and attitudes towards fisheries management, among other subjects (Henry and Olson 2014; Silva et al. 2021; Cutler et al. 2022). There have been three waves of Crew Survey data collection thus far – Wave 1 in 2012 – 2013, Wave 2 in 2018 – 2019, and Wave 3 in 2023 – 2024. Detailed information is available in FW69.

Recreational fishing communities are defined by the Recreational Engagement Indicators. Unlike the commercial engagement indicator, there is no groundfish-specific recreational engagement indicator. Most of the top communities in recreational engagement in the Northeast are in the Mid-Atlantic region, except for Narragansett/Point Judith, RI. Recreational fishermen in these communities are unlikely to rely on Northeast Multispecies, though some fishermen in these ports may seasonally target GB cod. When expanding out to the top 20 communities in recreational engagement in the Northeast, several additional New England communities are included: Newburyport, MA and Barnstable, MA, which have each seen increased recreational engagement in recent years. Other ports of interest with relatively high engagement

(i.e., ranking somewhere outside the top 20) in the last five years include Gloucester, MA; Waterford, CT; East Lyme/Niantic, CT; and Old Saybrook, CT.

For a detailed description of the Groundfish-Specific Commercial Engagement Indicators, Recreational Engagement Indicators, and Community Social Vulnerability and Gentrification Pressure Indicators, see Section 5.7.7.1 in Framework 69.

4.4.6.1 Community Fishing Engagement and Social Vulnerability Indicators

In addition to primary and secondary port classifications for groundfish landings and revenue, fishing communities can also be understood in terms of overall engagement in the commercial groundfish fishery and other social and economic community conditions. NMFS social scientists produce indicators of commercial fishing engagement, reliance, and other community characteristics for virtually all fishing communities throughout United States, referred to as the Social Indicators of Fishing Community Vulnerability and Resilience (Jepson and Colburn 2013). The Social Indicators are composite indices of factors that comprise community-level latent constructs, such as commercial fishing engagement or social vulnerability. The strength of these indicators is that they provide greater depth and contextualization to our understanding of fishing communities than the more commonly utilized landings and revenue statistics. The Social Indicators provide a more comprehensive view of fishing communities by including social and economic conditions that can influence the viability of commercial fishing activities, such as gentrification pressure, poverty, and housing characteristics, among other factors. For a detailed description of the Community fishing engagement and social vulnerability, see Section 5.7.7.1 in Framework 69.

4.4.7 Regulated Groundfish Stock Catch

The Northeast Multispecies FMP specifies ACLs for 20 stocks[9]. Exceeding an ACL for a stock results in the implementation of AMs to prevent overfishing. The ACL is sub-divided into different components. Those components that are subject to AMs are referred to as sub-ACLs. There are also components of the fishery that are not subject to AMs. These include state waters catches that are outside of federal jurisdiction, and a category referred to as "other sub-components" that combines small catches from various fisheries. Year-end catch for FY2024 is not yet available. FW69 contains the most recently complete year of data and a discussion.

[9] Currently 20 stocks. Amendment 25 proposes to incorporate four revised Atlantic cod stocks, which would bring the total stocks in the FMP to 22.

4.4.8 Fishery Sub-Components

4.4.8.1 Commercial Harvesting Component

4.4.8.1.1 Sector Harvesting Component

In all years, the sector vessels landed the overwhelming majority of groundfish landed. For a detailed description of the sector fishery, see Section 5.7 in Framework 69. Each sector receives a total amount of fish it can harvest for each stock, its Annual Catch Entitlement (ACE). Because the ACE is dependent on the amount of the ACL in a given fishing year, the ACE may be higher or lower from year to year even if the sector's membership remains the same. There have been large shifts in commercial groundfish sub-ACLs for various stocks between FY2020 and FY2024. There has been a general decrease in trips, and catch for sector vessels, and there has been a shift in effort out of the groundfish fishery into other fisheries. However, these changes may correlate to a certain extent with the decrease in ACL. Year-end catch for FY2024 is not yet available. Therefore, FW69 contains the most recent complete year of data and a discussion. In-season catch information for FY2025 is available on the GARFO quota monitoring website[10].

4.4.8.1.2 Common Pool Harvesting Component

Most commercial groundfish fishing activity occurs under sector management regulations. Some vessels have elected to not join sectors and continue to fish under the effort control system. Collectively, this part of the fishery is referred to as the "common pool." These vessels fish under both limited access and open access groundfish fishing permits. Common pool vessels accounted for only a small amount of groundfish catch in FY2024 (Figure 3). For a description of the common pool fishery, see Section 5.7 in Framework 69. Year-end catch for FY2024 is not yet available. Therefore, FW69 contains the most recent complete year of data and a discussion. In-season catch information for FY2025 is available on the GARFO quota monitoring website[11].

4.4.8.2 Recreational Harvesting Component

The recreational fishery includes private anglers, party boat operators, and charter vessel operators. Several groundfish stocks are targeted by the recreational fishery, including GOM cod, GOM haddock, pollock, GOM winter flounder, and GB cod. GB haddock is targeted as well, but to a lesser extent. SNE/MA winter flounder and redfish are also target species. Wolffish was occasionally caught in the past. A16 (Section 6.2.5, NEFMC 2009b) includes a detailed overview of recreational fishing activity.

This section provides data on trends in landings, permits, and effort over the last five years. Table 19 and Table 20 contain sub-ACLs and recreational catch of GOM cod and GOM haddock for the most recent 5 years. Table 51 in FW69 provides a summary of groundfish and non-groundfish landings (fish kept, not pounds) by year. Year-end catch for FY2024 is not yet available. Therefore, FW69 contains the most recent complete year of data. There has been a general declining effort trend, both in terms of vessels and

[10] See the groundfish monitoring website at:

https://apps-garfo.fisheries.noaa.gov/quota-monitoring/groundfish/Sector_Summary_2025.html

[11] See the groundfish monitoring website at:

https://apps-garfo.fisheries.noaa.gov/quota-monitoring/groundfish/Common_Pool_Summary_2025.html

trips, over the last five fishing years. Table 17 provides information on active party/charter permits by year.

Table 17 - Count of the number of active party and charter groundfish vessels and number of trips taken, FY2020 – 2024. An active vessel is defined as taking any party or charter trip in which groundfish FMP species are kept among groundfish party or charter permit holders (Category I).

Fishing Year	Vessels	Trips
2020	182	3187
2021	173	3690
2022	177	3180
2023	162	2717
2024	156	2517

*Other includes DE, FL, MD, NC, PA, SC, VA
Source: VTRs and permit database. A vessel is included if they: 1) have a groundfish party or charter permit (Category I) and 2) took at least one party or charter trip, as indicated on the VTR.

4.4.8.2.1 Gulf of Maine Cod and Gulf of Maine Haddock Recreational Effort and Catch

Table 18 provides a breakdown of the number of vessels active in the for-hire component of the recreational fishery for FY2020 to FY2024. An overview of the management history and recreational fishery performance for the most recent 5 years is provided for GOM cod and GOM haddock (see Table 19 and Table 20). A more detailed discussion and history of recreational management is included in FW69.

Table 18 - For-hire recreational vessels catching cod or haddock from the Western Gulf of Maine.

Fishing Year	Party	Charter	Total*
2020	21	80	91
2021	22	74	87
2022	24	65	79
2023	26	57	69
2024	20	56	68

Notes: *Total may not sum due to vessels taking both categories of trips during the fishing year.
Based on vessel reporting via vessel logbook.
Vessels landing or discarding cod or haddock from Western Gulf of Maine statistical areas based on vessel logbook.
Source: NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office. Accessed: 2026-01-06.

Table 19 provides recreational measures for GOM cod for the last 5 years. A more detailed discussion and history of recreational management is included in FW69.

Table 19 - Summary of GOM cod recreational catch performance and federal management.

Fishing Year	Sub-Annual Catch Limit (mt)	Catch (mt)	Percent of catch limit taken	Minimum Size (inches)	Bag Limit Fish per angler -daily	Season Open	Season Closed	Additional Measures/Notes
2021	193	146.2	75.8	21	1	9/15/21-9/30/21 and 4/1/22-4/14/22 (Private) 9/8/21-10/7/21 and 4/1/22-4/14/22 (Charter/Party)	5/1/21-9/14/21 and 10/1/21-3/31/22 (Private) 5/1/21-9/7/21 and 10/8/21-3/31/22 (Charter/Party)	
2022	192	165.7	86.2	22	1	9/1/22-10/7/22 and 4/1/23-4/14/23	5/1/22-8/31/22, 10/8/22-3/31/23 and 4/15/23-4/30/23	Final rule effective 8/30/22
2023	192	170.4	88.7	22	1	9/1/23-10/31/23	11/1/23-4/30/24	Final rule effective 8/14/23
2024	192			23	1	9/1/24-10/31/24	11/1/24-4/30/25	An increase in the minimum fish size from 22" to 23". Final rule effective August 14, 2023.
2025	Proposed FW69 99*			23	1			The Council recommended an additional opening for the month of May. Pending.
	Emergency Action 120**							

*sub-ACL proposed for WGOM cod in Framework 69, new cod stock units not implemented.

**sub-ACL specified in emergency action (based on Framework 69 proposed ABCs, adjusted from 4 cod stock units to 2 existing stock units) [12].

[12] See: https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/05/02/2025-07635/magnuson-stevens-fishery-conservation-and-management-act-provisions-fisheries-of-the-northeastern

Table 20 - Summary of GOM haddock recreational catch performance and federal management.

Fishing Year	Sub-Annual Catch Limit (mt)	Catch (mt)	Percent of catch limit taken (%)	Minimum Size (inches)	Bag Limit Fish per angler -daily	Season Open	Season Closed	Additional Measures/Notes
2021	5,295	901.5	17.0	17	15	5/1/21-2/28/22 and 4/1/22-4/30/22	3/1/22-3/31/22	
2022	3,634	477.2	13.1	17	20	5/1/22-2/28/23 and 4/1/23-4/30/23	3/1/23-3/31/23	An increase in the bag limit from 15 fish to 20 fish became effective August 30, 2022.
2023	FW65: 610 Emergency Action: 793	474.3	59.8	For hire: 18 Private: 17	For hire: 15 Private: 10	5/1/23-2/28/24 and 4/1/24-4/30/24	3/1/24-3/31/24	The Council proposed an 18-inch minimum size and 15 fish limit for both the for-hire and private angler sector. NMFS implemented split measures out of concerns that an 18-inch minimum would unnecessarily constrain catch and increase dead discards in the private angler sector. This rule became effective August 14, 2023.
2024	759			18	15	5/1/24-2/28/25 and 4/1/25-4/30/25	3/1/25-3/31/25	These changes make the measures the same for all recreational vessels, rather than having different bag limits and minimum fish sizes for private vessels and for-hire vessels. This rule became effective July 24, 2024.
2025	Emergency Action: 729 Proposed FW69: 1,075*				15	5/1/24-2/28/25 and 4/1/25-4/30/25	3/1/25-3/31/25	The Council proposed a decrease in the minimum fish size (18" to 17"). Pending – still no proposed and final rule at this time.

*sub-ACL as proposed in Framework 69. Pending – still no proposed and final rule at this time. Current sub-ACL in place through emergency action [13]

[13] See: https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/05/02/2025-07635/magnuson-stevens-fishery-conservation-and-management-act-provisions-fisheries-of-the-northeastern

4.4.8.2.2 Southern New England Cod Recreational Effort and Catch

Table 21 provides a breakdown of the number of vessels active in the for-hire component of the recreational fishery for FY2019 to FY2023.

Table 21 - For-hire recreational vessels catching cod from Southern New England.

Fishing Year	Party	Charter	Total*
2020	44	73	111
2021	47	71	110
2022	48	70	114
2023	49	55	100
2024	39	56	93

Notes: *Total may not sum due to vessels taking both categories of trips during the fishing year. Based on vessel reporting via vessel log book.
Vessels landing or discarding cod from Southern New England statistical areas based on vessel log book.
Source: NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office. Accessed: 2026-01-06

"Old Georges Bank Cod" Recreational Catch Target

Framework 57 established a regulatory process for the Regional Administrator to adjust recreational measures to prevent the recreational catch target from being exceeded for fishing years 2018 and 2019. Framework 63 modified the process to apply to fishing years 2023 and 2024. For FY2025, NMFS prohibited recreational possession of GB cod as part of an emergency action. An overview of the management history for the most recent 5 years is provided for GB cod in Table 22. Year-end catch for FY2024 is not yet available. Therefore, FW69 contains the most recent complete year of data and a discussion.

Table 22 - Summary of changes in federal recreational management measures for GB cod.

Fishing Year	Catch target	Minimum Size (inches)	Bag Limit Fish per angler - daily	Season Open	Season Closed
2021	138	21	10	All year	NA
2022	75	Slot limit: 22 - 28	5	8/1/2022-4/30/2023	5/1/2022-7/31/2022
2023	113	23	5	5/1/2023-5/31/2023 and 9/1/2023-4/30/2024	6/1/2023-8/31/2023
2024	113	23	5	5/1/2024-5/31/2024 and 9/1/2024-4/30/2025	6/1/2024-8/31/2024
2025	N/A	N/A	0	N/A	4/1/2025-5/30/2026

4.4.8.3 Evaluation of other fisheries catches of groundfish stocks

Year-end catch for FY2024 is not yet available. Therefore, FW69 contains the most recent complete year of data and a discussion. Summaries of recent catches of GB yellowtail flounder, SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, northern windowpane flounder, and southern windowpane flounder in the scallop and groundfish fisheries are provided in FW69 tables 61 – 69. A summary of recent catches by the small-mesh fisheries for GB yellowtail flounder is provided in FW69 Table 66. A summary of recent catches in the midwater trawl Atlantic herring fishery is provided for GOM haddock in FW69 Table 67 and GB haddock in FW69 Table 68. A summary of recent catches by the other sub-components for southern windowpane flounder is provided in FW69 Table 69.

5.0 NEPA COMPLIANCE AND SUPPORTING ANALYSES

NEPA provides a mechanism for identifying and evaluating the full spectrum of environmental issues associated with federal actions and for considering a reasonable range of alternatives to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts. Not every change to a proposed action, including the presence of new information, necessitates the development of a new or supplemental NEPA analysis. NMFS provided guidance to Councils on the use of "non-NEPA documents" to help determine whether a new or supplemental NEPA document is necessary or if a non-NEPA document (for example this SIR) may be used to demonstrate that an original NEPA document sufficiently considered and analyzed the proposed actions and its effects. This action considers the new information and additional years of data included in this section, in addition to information provided in the FW69 EA. Overall, the new information and circumstances suggest that there are minor changes to the groundfish resource and fishery relative to FW69. While there have been changes in both the groundfish resource with updated stock assessments and the fishery based on those updates, these changes are within the range previously seen and analyzed in FW69 and expected in a multispecies fishery.

As noted in Section 3.0, the proposed action sets specifications for 5 years (FY 2026-2030; except for the US/Canada stocks for which specifications are set for 1 year) and assumes approval of a concurrent omnibus management flexibility amendment that, in part, would allow extending the time-period for setting Northeast Multispecies specifications for up to 5 years. The impacts of setting specifications for an additional 2 years through the proposed action are within the range of impacts of measures previously analyzed through FW69 across all valued ecosystem components (VEC). This conclusion is supported by the fact that the Council can review and recommend adjustments to specifications at any time based on fishery performance and other new information. The fourth and fifth years of specifications are not expected to have additional impacts beyond those expected for the first 3 years, the proposed action is based on the best scientific information available, and the proposed action supports continued sustainability of the Northeast Multispecies resource and stability in the fishery. Lastly, the Council is generally proposing declining or constant specifications for the stocks considered in this action over the 5-year period, which would limit any negative biological impacts. The one exception is white hake, which has declining specifications except for a modest increase in 2030 that is still below the specifications for 2026 and 2027. This is consistent with the current stock rebuilding plan.

The environmental impacts of the proposed action (FW72) are similar to those in the previous action (FW69) because the risk of overfishing is about the same as previously analyzed and the changes in fishery specifications are expected to cause little change in fishing behavior, fishing costs, projected landings, or revenue. Updated information and analyses considered for adjusting the specifications are presented in Section 4.0 of this document.

5.1 IMPACTS ON REGULATED GROUNDFISH AND OTHER SPECIES - *BIOLOGICAL*

Overall, the impacts of the proposed action on regulated groundfish would remain negative to slight positive, consistent with the previous action. Revised specifications would reflect the results of the 2023, 2024, and 2025 management track assessments, and the 2025 U.S. and Canadian domestic stock assessments for U.S./Canada stocks considered through the Transboundary Management Guidance Committee (TMGC). Impacts are negative because for several stocks with revised specifications, updated ABCs would be higher relative to not updating specifications. However, this action would adopt OFLs and ABCs that are consistent with the most recent science, which should have slight positive impacts on regulated groundfish from setting specifications using updated data. Updated status determination criteria for GB yellowtail flounder and revisions to the regulatory process for the Regional Administrator to

adjust recreational measures for cod and haddock are administrative measures and have no impacts, direct or indirect, on regulated groundfish.

The impacts of the proposed action on other non-groundfish species such as monkfish, dogfish, skates, and Atlantic sea scallops that are captured incidentally during groundfish trips would remain slight negative to slight positive. There are only limited opportunities for groundfish vessels to target other stocks in other fisheries, so the shifting of effort into other fisheries is not likely to occur on a large scale. These other fisheries will also have ACLs and AMs so while such effort shifts may have economic effects, the biological impacts should not be negative. Updated status determination criteria for GB yellowtail flounder and revisions to the regulatory process for the Regional Administrator to adjust recreational measures for cod and haddock are administrative measures and have no impacts, direct or indirect, on other non-groundfish species.

Overview

This action would update specifications for several groundfish stocks based on the results of the 2025 stock assessments and data updates; and the Council's groundfish ABC control rule, rebuilding plans, and Risk Policy. Revised specifications are determined according to updated stock assessments. These updated OFLs and ABCs are anticipated to prevent overfishing and increase the probability of rebuilding. The Council sets OFLs at a level that will prevent overfishing and then applies the ABC control rules to reduce the portion of the OFL available to the fishery. The groundfish ABC control rules set ABCs at 75% of the ABC for healthy stocks and generally sets ABCs lower for stocks in a rebuilding plan. Thus, the possibility of overfishing for the specifications in the proposed action has a risk of overfishing that is no greater than 50% and is consistent with the analyses in FW69. A summary of the recommendations by stock is provided below, and details on the recommendations are in Appendix I. Given that the updated OFLs and ABCs are based on the most recent science, the anticipated impact would be positive. For stocks without revised specifications, there is no material change in the prior year's scientific information supporting projected specifications; the analysis sufficiently supports adopting the projected specifications and the amounts remaining the same for the upcoming year as set previously by FW66, FW69, and A25.

CC/GOM yellowtail flounder – The Council recommends setting the ABCs at 75% F_{MSY}, holding catch constant from 2026 through 2030. The FY2026 ABC at 75%F_{MSY} represents an approximate 90% increase from the ABC value for CC/GOM yellowtail flounder in FY2025. The stock is below SSB_{MSY}, and the recommended ABCs will limit the risk of overfishing on an overfished stock and promote rebuilding. There are significant questions about the biological plausibility of the assessment results and projections.

The Council recommended a conservative approach for catch setting and held the 2026 ABC constant for all 5 years (Table 23). The 2025 stock assessment found CC/GOM yellowtail flounder to be overfished, noting that the stock remains below the new SSB_{MSY} proxy even though fishing pressure has been at historically low levels and that recruitment has been generally weak to moderate over the past decade. Despite these results, scaling changes in the model suggest catch could increase 10-fold and the projections suggest biomass will nearly double between 2024 and 2025. Maintaining the ABC at the 2026 value tries to account for the results that were seemingly biologically implausible while also allowing for an increase in catches.

Table 23 - Projection results for CC/GOM yellowtail flounder (F_{MSY} proxy = 0.497 and SSB_{MSY} = 10,907 mt).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2026	2,224	1,736	0.373	9,056
2027	2,638	1,736	0.307	10,449
2028	3,086	1,736	0.257	11,719
2029	3,505	1,736	0.223	12,813
2030	3,860	1,736	0.200	13,737

SNE/MA yellowtail flounder – The Council recommends setting the ABCs at the $F_{rebuild}$ of 70% F_{MSY}, holding the ABC constant from 2026 through 2030 (Table 24). There is uncertainty in the assessment and projections. With no age data available for the past 5 years, the terminal year starting point for projections is highly uncertain and recruitment in the terminal year is based on the long-term average influenced by the recent decrease in the Gulf Stream Index. Recruitment has been chronically low, and the reliance of setting future catch limits based on projected recruitment and "paper fish" is especially acute for this stock. Given these uncertainties, the Council followed Option C of the Council's groundfish control rule, wherein catch is based on incidental bycatch only. In the absence of other values, the Council is holding ABCs constant for FY 2026-2030 at the FY 2026 level of 33 mt, based on 70% of F_{MSY}. By following Option C, the intent is that catch of the stock will be bycatch-only, reflective of its continued poor status. The ABC represents an approximate 18% decrease from the ABC value for SNE/MA yellowtail flounder in the previous three years. These ABCs will limit the risk of overfishing on a severely overfished stock and ideally, if environmental conditions allow, promote rebuilding.

Table 24 - Projection results for SNE/MA yellowtail flounder (F_{MSY} proxy = 0.374 and SSB_{MSY} = 270 mt).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2026	46	33	0.26	132
2027	56	33	0.21	166
2028	67	33	0.17	204
2029	80	33	0.14	246
2030	92	33	0.12	287

GB winter flounder – The assessment indicated the stock was rebuilt as of 2025. The FY2026 ABC at 75%F_{MSY} represents an approximate 17% increase from the ABC value for GB winter flounder in FY2025 (Table 25). The Council recommends holding the ABC constant in the final two years to address the uncertainty associated with the increased reliance of those years on projected recruits (i.e., "paper fish"), because the stock was assessed to be above SSB_{MSY}. The recommended ABCs are expected to sufficiently limit the risk of overfishing.

Table 25 - Projection results for GB winter flounder (F_{MSY} proxy = 0.431 and SSB_{MSY} = 5,182 mt).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2026	2,279	1,785	0.32	6,534
2027	2,148	1,681	0.32	6,213
2028	2,079	1,627	0.32	6,035
2029	2,061	1,613	0.32	5,974
2030	2,060	1,612	0.32	5,970

SNE/MA winter flounder – The FY2026 ABC represents an approximate 19% decrease from the ABC value for SNE/MA winter flounder in the previous 3 years. The Council recommends setting the ABC based on the projections at 50%F_{MSY} and with a modification to hold the 2028 ABC constant through 2030 (Table 26). The Council chose this approach to address uncertainty in projections, continued poor stock condition, and uncertainty regarding the F_{MSY} proxy. The recommended ABCs are unlikely to result in overfishing for this stock and are expected to meet the Council's management objectives for this stock.

Table 26 - Projection results for SNE/MA winter flounder (F_{MSY} proxy = 0.233 and SSB_{MSY} = 3,114 mt).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2026	961	507	0.117	3,434
2027	1,009	532	0.117	3,691
2028	1,055	556	0.117	3,882
2029	1,101	556	0.112	4,072
2030	1,148	556	0.107	4,281

Acadian redfish - The FY2026 ABC at 75%F_{MSY} represents an approximate 32% decrease from the ABC value for redfish in FY2025 (Table 27). The recommended ABC is unlikely to result in overfishing for this stock.

Table 27 - Projection results for Acadian redfish (F_{MSY} proxy = 0.037 and SSB_{MSY} = 131,411 mt).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2026	7,519	5,665	0.028	201,902
2027	7,203	5,427	0.028	194,296
2028	6,999	5,273	0.028	187,354
2029	6,723	5,065	0.028	181,267
2030	6,513	4,907	0.028	176,177

White hake – The ABC is set at $F_{rebuild}$ for white hake which uses projections at 70%F_{MSY}. The FY2026 ABC represents an approximate 30% decrease from the ABC value for white hake in FY2025 (Table 28). The recommended ABC is unlikely to result in overfishing for this stock.

Table 28 - Projection results for white hake (F_{MSY} proxy = 0.176 and SSB_{MSY} = 25,004 mt).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2026	1,943	1,393	0.123	12,293
2027	1,760	1,261	0.123	11,497
2028	1,640	1,174	0.123	11,204
2029	1,618	1,157	0.123	11,252
2030	1,698	1,215	0.123	11,673

Transboundary Stocks

GB cod and GB haddock include transboundary Eastern Georges Bank management units which, along with GB yellowtail flounder, are jointly managed with Canada. The OFL and ABC will be set for these transboundary stocks for future year(s) as part of the annual U.S./Canada TMGC deliberations.

GB cod –The Council recommends setting this ABC equal to the OFL derived from the Canadian DFO 2025 Eastern GB cod assessment (consistent with applying an F strategy defined as a very low risk of preventable decline) and consistent with the TMGC approach of reducing fishing pressure when stock productivity is poor. The recommended OFL and ABC aim to prevent overfishing. The FY2026 ABC represents an approximate 19% increase from the ABC value for GB cod proposed in FY2025 (Table 29).

Table 29 - Projection results for GB cod (based on Canadian EGB cod assessment).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2026	473	473	0.052	6,462

GB haddock –The Council recommends setting this ABC equal to the OFL derived from the U.S. management track assessment (associated with 50% chance of overfishing) and consistent with a neutral (50%) risk of exceeding the fishing mortality reference point in the Canadian assessment. The recommended OFL and ABC are not likely to result in overfishing for this stock (Table 30). The FY2026 ABC represents an approximate 10% increase from the ABC value for GB haddock in FY2025.

Table 30 - Projection results for GB haddock (FMSY proxy = 0.26 and SSBMSY = 24,225 mt).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2025	8,177	8,177	0.264	36,029

GB yellowtail flounder –The Council recommends setting the ABC equal to the OFL (associated with a 50% chance of overfishing) that aligns with the recommendation from the TMGC for the shared U.S./Canada TAC for FY2026. The FY2026 ABC represents an approximate 66% decrease from the ABC value for GB yellowtail flounder in FY2025 (Table 31).

Table 31 - Projection results for GB yellowtail flounder (F_{MSY} = 0.09 and SSB_{MSY} = 7,072 mt).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2026	57	57	0.09	646

Stocks Without Analytical Assessments

It is not possible to project stock sizes for the following stocks, because these stocks do not have an accepted analytical assessment model:

- GOM winter flounder;
- Ocean pout; and
- Atlantic wolffish.

For index-assessed stocks, an estimate of the probability of overfishing cannot be determined but the proposed ABC is based on the default control rule applied at 75% of F_{MSY}, an exploitation rate (such as the ratio of catch to a survey index), or an alternative approach applied to the most recent estimate of stock size. Because the proposed ABCs for stocks with an empirical assessment are determined using control rules which are intended to account for scientific uncertainty when setting ABCs in the absence of other information, the proposed ABCs are not expected to lead to declines in biomass for these stocks.

For stocks without projections and in some cases for stocks with projections, the SSC has recommended constant ABCs, and the Council adopted these recommendations.

Due to the impact of recent reductions in force on the NEFSC's stock assessment capacity, the Center provided a data update in lieu of an assessment for ocean pout and Atlantic wolffish.

GOM winter flounder – The Council recommends keeping the OFL and ABC constant for each year of the specification period. The ABC represents an approximate 1% decrease from the ABC value for GOM winter flounder in the previous three years (Table 32). The recommended ABC is not likely to result in overfishing for this stock.

Table 32 - OFLs and ABCs (mt) for GOM winter flounder for FY2026-FY2030.

Year	OFL	ABC
2026	1,064	798
2027	1,064	798
2028	1,064	798
2029	1,064	798
2030	1,064	798

Ocean pout - The Council recommends keeping the OFL and ABC constant for each year of the specification period (Table 33). This maintains the OFL and ABC that had been in place for the previous 8 years given no major changes in abundance were evident since the last assessment and catch recommendations issued, and uncertainty and concerns that suggested a cautious approach was warranted. The recommended ABC is unlikely to result in overfishing for this stock.

Table 33 - OFLs and ABCs (mt) for ocean pout for FY2026-FY2030.

Year	OFL	ABC
2026	125	87
2027	125	87
2028	125	87
2029	125	87
2030	125	87

Atlantic wolffish – The Council recommends keeping the OFL and ABC constant for each year of the specification period (Table 34). This maintains the OFL and ABC that had been in place for the previous 3 years, given that the catch and survey information for wolffish was generally stable (at apparently low abundance levels). The recommended ABC is unlikely to result in overfishing for this stock.

Table 34 - OFLs and ABCs (mt) for Atlantic wolffish for FY2026-FY2030.

Year	OFL	ABC
2026	124	93
2027	124	93
2028	124	93
2029	124	93
2030	124	93

Sub-ACLs for Other Fisheries

The ABCs and ACLs in the proposed action include specifications of sub-ACLs for other fisheries. Sub-ACLs are designed to limit the incidental catch of yellowtail flounder and windowpane flounder by the scallop fishery. Exceeding those sub-ACLs may trigger AMs for the scallop fishery. The overall impact of the ABCs and ACLs in the proposed action are likely to remain slight positive, neutral, or slight negative with respect to the Atlantic sea scallop resource. Year-end catch for FY2024 is not yet available. Therefore, FW69 contains the most recent summary of recent catches by other fisheries. Summaries of recent catches of GB yellowtail flounder, SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, northern windowpane flounder, and southern windowpane flounder in the scallop and groundfish fisheries are provided in FW69 tables 61 – 69.

Scallop FW40 will update Atlantic sea scallop fishery specifications for FY2026 and FY2027 (default) and manage removals from the Northern Gulf of Maine (NGOM) management area based on the results of the 2025 scallop surveys and the 2025 research track assessment. The Council was provided qualitative information about potential scallop fishery effort in FY2026 as it relates to stock areas for the four flatfish stocks with scallop fishery sub-ACLs. Generally, scallop fishery effort is anticipated to be lower on Georges Bank, especially given that the Council is not considering access to Area II for FY2026. Open area effort in areas west of Area II is anticipated. These areas are within the GB yellowtail flounder and northern windowpane flounder stock areas. Increased open area effort in the Mid-Atlantic region is also anticipated, which overlaps the SNE/MA yellowtail flounder and southern windowpane flounder stock areas. The updated specifications in FW72 would have a lower sub-ACL for GB yellowtail flounder and a higher sub-ACL for SNE/MA yellowtail flounder relative to FY2025. The sub-ACLs for northern windowpane flounder and southern windowpane flounder would remain unchanged. FW40's changes to the scallop fishery specifications are expected to cause little change in fishing behavior. FW69 contains

the most recent summary of recent catches by the scallop fishery. Summaries of recent catches of GB yellowtail flounder, SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, northern windowpane flounder, and southern windowpane flounder in the scallop and groundfish fisheries are provided in FW69 tables 61 – 69.

In addition, sub-ACLs are designed to limit the incidental catch of GB yellowtail flounder by small-mesh fisheries, and exceeding the allocations results in triggering AMs in subsequent years. FW69 contains the most recent summary of recent catches by the small-mesh fisheries for GB yellowtail flounder in Table 66. The small-mesh AM requires vessels to fish an approved selective trawl gear that reduces the catch of flatfish in the GB yellowtail flounder stock area. As small-mesh species can be effectively prosecuted using modified trawl gear, it is difficult to predict if groundfish sub-ACLs may affect fishing mortality and stock size of small-mesh species (e.g., whiting and squid). Under the proposed action, the sub-ACL for GB yellowtail flounder for the small mesh fisheries (e.g., whiting and squid) would decrease compared to what was proposed in FW69.

Sub-ACLs are also designed to limit the incidental catch of GOM and GB haddock by MWT herring fisheries, and exceeding the allocations results in triggering AMs in-season. A summary of recent catches in the midwater trawl Atlantic herring fishery is provided for GOM haddock in FW69 Table 67 and GB haddock in FW69 Table 68. The updated specifications in the proposed action for GB haddock would have higher sub-ACLs while the sub-ACLs for GOM haddock would be unchanged.

Lastly, the other sub-component of southern windowpane flounder is used to evaluate if an AM would be triggered for large-mesh non-groundfish fisheries (e.g., summer flounder and scup trawl fisheries). Exceeding the sub-component and the overall ACL results in triggering AMs in a future year. AMs for this stock are GRAs designed to reduce catches of flatfish, which would have positive biological benefits for summer flounder and to a lesser extent scup by reducing fishing mortality. A summary of recent catches by the other sub-components for southern windowpane flounder is provided in FW69 Table 69. The ABC for southern windowpane flounder in the proposed action is the same as in FY2025.

5.2 IMPACTS ON *PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AND ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT*

The impacts of the proposed action on the physical environment and Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) would remain slight negative. Multiple fisheries are affected by the updated specifications. Those fisheries that have negative impacts to habitat include the sector and common pool commercial groundfish fishery, which uses a combination of bottom trawls and fixed gears, the scallop fishery, which is mostly operated with dredges, and the small mesh bottom trawl fishery. The updated specifications are not expected to have a large influence on scallop or small mesh fishing effort. Other fisheries influenced by these specifications include the recreational groundfish fishery, which is prosecuted with hook and line, and the mid-water trawl fishery for herring, both of which have negligible impacts to habitat and EFH. For the commercial groundfish fishery, the updated specifications in the proposed action will result in 7 of the stocks (all allocated) experiencing a decrease in the total ACL relative to FY2025, 4 stocks (all allocated) experiencing some increase in the total ACL, and 7 stocks (2 allocated and 5 non-allocated) experiencing no change in ACL. Given these are new stocks being added to the FMP under Amendment 25, the four Atlantic cod stocks do not have FY2025 ACLs to directly compare to, though collectively there will be an increase in ACL summed across all cod stocks.

Annual catch limits can be considered a proxy for relative fishing effort (e.g., amount of gear set or towed, gear soak or tow duration, number of trips, number of vessels) and behavior (e.g., area fished). As information on fishing effort and behavior informs potential interaction risks to habitat and EFH, changes (if any) in ACL can be used as a means to identify potential changes in fishing behavior/effort from one year to the next, and therefore, used to identify new or additional interaction risks to habitat and EFH. As the proposed action will result in an increase in the ACL for several stocks, some increase in effort is possible; however, any potential increase in effort is expected to be tempered by constraining stocks that are spread out across broad stock areas. In particular, there would be a decrease in ACL for white hake

which is predicted to be the most constraining stock for the sector groundfish fishery. Based on this, and the fact that the updated specifications in the proposed action are no greater than or are within the range of the specifications that have been authorized by the fishery over the last five or more years, resultant fishing behavior and effort in the groundfish fishery is expected to remain similar to what has been observed in the fishery over this timeframe and thus, the proposed action is not expected to change the gear soak or tow duration, increase the amount of gear in the water, or change area fished. As a result, relative to FY2025 (and the impacts considered in FW69) the proposed action is not expected to introduce new or elevated interaction risks to habitat or EFH. As a result, impacts to habitat and EFH are likely to remain slight negative. Updated status determination criteria for GB yellowtail flounder and revisions to the regulatory process for the Regional Administrator to adjust recreational measures for cod and haddock are administrative measures and have no impacts, direct or indirect, on habitat and EFH.

5.3 IMPACTS ON PROTECTED RESOURCES

The impacts of the proposed action on protected resources would remain slight negative to slight positive depending on the status of the specific species and its risk of interacting with bottom trawl, gillnet, and/or hook and line gear, the primary gear types used in the groundfish fishery. Interaction risks with bottom trawl, gillnet, and/or hook and line gears remain for some ESA-listed and MMPA protected species, with the risk of an interaction associated with gear type, amount of gear in the water, gear soak or tow duration, as well as the area of overlap of the gear and a protected species. The updated specifications in the proposed action will result in 7 of the stocks (all allocated) experiencing a decrease in the total ACL relative to FY2025, 4 stocks (all allocated) experiencing some increase in the total ACL, and 7 stocks (2 allocated and 5 non-allocated) experiencing no change in ACL. Given these are new stocks being added to the FMP under Amendment 25, the four Atlantic cod stocks do not have FY2025 ACLs to directly compare to, though collectively there will be an increase in ACL summed across all cod stocks.

Annual catch limits can be considered a proxy for relative fishing effort (e.g., amount of gear set or towed, gear soak or tow duration, number of trips, number of vessels) and behavior (e.g., area fished). As information on fishing effort and behavior informs potential interaction risks to protected species, changes (if any) in ACL can be used as a means to identify potential changes in fishing behavior/effort from one year to the next, and therefore, used to identify new or additional interaction risks to protected species. As the proposed action will result in an increase in the ACL for several stocks, some increase in effort is possible; however, any potential increase in effort is expected to be tempered by constraining stocks that are spread out across broad stock areas. In particular, there would be a decrease in ACL for white hake which is predicted to be the most constraining stock for the sector groundfish fishery. Based on this, and the fact that the updated specifications in the proposed action are no greater than or are within the range of the specifications that have been authorized by the fishery over the last 5 or more years, fishing behavior and effort in the groundfish fishery is expected to remain similar to what has been observed in the fishery over this timeframe. The proposed action is not expected to change the gear soak or tow duration, increase the amount of gear in the water, or change area fished. As a result, relative to FY2025 (and the impacts considered in FW69) the proposed action is not expected to introduce new or elevated interaction risks to protected species. As a result, impacts to protected species are likely to remain slight negative to slight positive. Updated status determination criteria for GB yellowtail flounder and revisions to the regulatory process for the Regional Administrator to adjust recreational measures for cod and haddock are administrative measures and have no impacts, direct or indirect, on protected species.

As noted in Section 4.3, on September 13, 2023, NMFS issued a 7(a)(2)/7(d) memorandum that reinitiated consultation on the 2021 Biological Opinion; this memorandum was replaced with an updated 7(a)(2)/7(d) memorandum issued by NMFS on January 8, 2025, and amended on November 25, 2025. Given the information provided above, the proposed action does not entail making any changes to the groundfish fishery during the extended reinitiation period that would cause an increase in interactions

with or effects to ESA-listed species or their critical habitat beyond those considered in NMFS' amended January 8, 2025, reinitiation memorandum. Therefore, the proposed action is consistent with NMFS' 7(a)(2) and 7(d) determinations, and as such, this new information is not expected to change any of the impacts previously considered in the EA and FONSI.

5.4 IMPACTS ON HUMAN COMMUNITIES – ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL

The impacts of the proposed action on human communities, both from an economic and social impact standpoint, would remain negative to positive. The updated specifications in the proposed action will result in 5 of the stocks (all allocated) experiencing a decrease in the total ACL relative to FY2025, 4 stocks (all allocated) experiencing some increase in the total ACL, and 2 non-allocated stocks experiencing no change in ACL. The four Atlantic cod stocks do not have FY2025 ACLs for direct comparison because these are new stocks being added to the FMP under Amendment 25. However, collectively there will be an increase in ACL summed across all cod stocks. Comparisons between enacted FY2025, proposed FY2025, and proposed FY2026 total are provided Table 35.

Table 35 - Comparison of Total ACLs Proposed for FY2026, Proposed for FY2025, and Enacted in FY2025 (mt).

Stock	FY2025 Enacted ACL	FY2025 Proposed ACL	FY2026 Proposed ACL
GB Cod*	140	186	144
GB Haddock	1,478	1,478	4,203
GB Yellowtail Flounder	69	93	30
SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	38	38	32
CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder	873	873	1,652
GB Winter Flounder	1,446	1,446	1,663
GOM Winter Flounder	772	772	763
SNE/MA Winter Flounder	604	604	487
Redfish	7,859	7,859	5,383
White Hake	1,825	1,825	1,294
Ocean Pout	83	83	83
Atlantic Wolffish	87	87	87

*The GB cod ACL enacted in FY2025 is for a different stock area than the proposed GB cod ACLs for FY2025 and FY2026.

Commercial Groundfish Fishery – Sector Fishery

Quota Change Model (QCM) runs were conducted using FY2026 proposed sector sub-ACLs and results are summarized in Appendix 1. The QCM predicts reductions in revenue based on the proposed specifications for FY2026 relative to realized revenues in FY2024, but increased predicted revenues for FY2026 in comparison to the predicted revenues for FY2025. This increase in predicted revenue is primarily a result of higher collective cod quotas relative to FY2025.

The predicted FY2026 values are within the range experienced by the groundfish sector fishery within recent years. Economic impacts to the sector fishery would remain positive relative to No Action and FY2025 predictions. While these impacts are anticipated to be widespread and will likely affect commercial fishery participants across the region, several ports in particular may see disproportionately high negative impacts based on community social vulnerabilities present in those places. According to the latest available 2020 CSVIs (see Table 38 in FW69), New Bedford and Boston, MA, and Portland, ME, had medium to medium-high poverty. New Bedford and Boston, MA also had medium to medium-high vulnerability concerns related to population composition and personal disruption. These indices are key measures that comprise the suite of indicators designed to consider communities where there may be a presence of underserved or marginalized populations. The social impacts resulting from the proposed action and the possible reduction in revenues from groundfish, relative to FY2024, could be disproportionately distributed among those vulnerable populations in these three New England communities. However, negative social impacts will very likely extend to many groundfish industry participants and community members in the other highly engaged ports in the region, including Gloucester, Chatham, and Scituate, MA; Narragansett, RI; Montauk and Hampton Bays/Shinnecock, NY; and Cape May, NJ (see Figure 9 in FW69). Compared to the predicted values for FY2025, the proposed action is predicted to have increased revenues that would be a positive social impact for the affected communities.

The proposed action is anticipated to have substantial individual-level impacts on commercial fishing vessel crews and hired captains due to the predicted decrease in groundfish revenue relative to FY2024, but would have positive effects compared to predicted revenues for FY2025. According to the latest 2023 – 2024 Crew Survey results, the average age of commercial crews and hired captains across the entire Northeast region was about 40. While the average did not change from 2018-19, there was a 6% decrease in crews aged 35 or younger and a 3% increase among those aged 55 or older (see Table 41 in FW69). Taken together, these results provide evidence of the ongoing "graying" or aging of the fleet, which means fewer young adults are considering commercial fishing for employment. Vessel owners and captains have expressed difficulty finding reliable crew throughout the past two waves (2018 –2019 and 2023 – 2024) of Crew Survey fieldwork. The predicted reductions in groundfish revenues compared to realized revenues in FY2024 will likely further reduce opportunities for young adults to enter the industry and for commercial captains and vessel owners to attract reliable, young, and new crew members to employ on their vessels. However, the predicted increase relative to predicted FY2025 values would not exacerbate these impacts.

Beyond the impacts to the size and demographic characteristics of the commercial groundfish fishery, the proposed action is anticipated to have negative social impacts with respect to the attitudes, beliefs, and values of the commercial industry participants in the fishery. According to the latest available 2023-24 Crew Survey results, about 77% of crews and hired captains reported that the regulations of their primary fishery change too quickly and 70% reported the regulations were too restrictive (see Table 43 in FW69). Given the limited changes in specifications compared to those proposed for FY2025, it is likely that the proposed action will not improve attitudes towards management among fishery participants. This will likely be exacerbated by industry participants' perceptions of inadequacies or flaws in recent stock assessments that comprise the latest and best available scientific information underpinning the proposed changes.

Stock-level predictions show that four stocks (white hake, redfish, WGOM cod, and GB cod) have utilization rates >90% (See Appendix 1). White hake and WGOM cod show the largest reductions in revenue relative to FY2024 while other less constraining stocks such as plaice, GOM haddock, and witch flounder show more moderate reductions. Port-level predictions are shown for both home port (see Appendix 1 Table 4) and trip port (see Appendix 1 Table 5) with most areas showing value reductions relative to FY2024. By vessel length (see Appendix 1 Table 6), all size classes are predicted to yield a reduction in total revenues from groundfish trips relative to FY2024.

Of note, behavioral changes in the fishery may occur with the transition from two cod stocks to four for FY2026. For example, few trips occurred in the EGOM cod broadstock area during FY2024. With separate WGOM and EGOM cod quotas in FY2026, and the WGOM quota predicted to be constraining, there is the potential for a shift of effort to the east. The QCM is unable to predict these sorts of potential large effort shifts.

Stocks with predicted high levels of utilization in FY2026 are expected to have higher quota prices relative to less utilized stocks. Stock-level quota prices and costs are summarized in Appendix 1 Table 7. Quota costs represent the opportunity cost of quota where each pound of catch is multiplied by the estimated quota price. That is, every pound of fish caught can no longer be leased out. Quota accounting costs would look quite different as sectors/vessels will have varying needs to lease in quota, based in part on their initial allocations.

Commercial Groundfish Fishery - Common Pool

As discussed in Section 4.4.8, most commercial groundfish fishing activity occurs under sector management regulations. Some vessels have elected to not join sectors and continue to fish under the effort control system. Collectively, this part of the fishery is referred to as the "common pool." These vessels fish under both limited access and open access groundfish fishing permits. Common pool vessels accounted for only a small amount of groundfish catch in FY2024 (Figure 3). Similar to the sector fishery, behavioral changes in the fishery may occur with the transition from two cod stocks to four cod stocks.

Recreational Groundfish Fishery

None of the stocks included in the proposed action are allocated to the recreational fishery, and so economic impacts to the recreational fishery would be neutral.

Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery

The scallop fishery is required to use modified gear if in specific areas if flatfish AMs are triggered. As the proposed sub-ACL would be a decrease for GB yellowtail flounder, economic impacts to the scallop fishery could be negative compared to No Action. For SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, the proposed sub-ACL would increase slightly compared to the specifications under No Action, and so economic impacts would be slight positive relative to No Action. For northern windowpane flounder and southern windowpane flounder, the economic impacts to the scallop fishery are neutral relative to No Action as the proposed sub-ACLs are unchanged. Based on expected scallop fishing activity and projected bycatch estimates for FY2026, overages of the scallop fishery sub-ACLs are not expected (see Table 36).

Table 36 - Comparison of 2026 Scallop fishery flatfish sub-ACLs (mt) to projected FY 2026 scallop fishery bycatch. Values in metric tons. Bycatch projections are based on observed FY 2025 scallop discard/kept ratios.

Stock	OFL	US ABC	Scallop sub-ACL	Projected Catch
GB Yellowtail Flounder	57	31	4.8	1.8
SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	46	33	2.7	1.2
Northern Windowpane Flounder	Unknown	136	26.6	24.5
Southern Windowpane Flounder	284	213	71.3	18.1

Midwater trawl (MWT) directed Atlantic herring fishery and Atlantic mackerel fishery

GB haddock – The proposed FY2026 sub-ACL for GB haddock would have positive to neutral impacts on the MWT Atlantic herring fishery. The economic impacts would be positive because the GB haddock sub-ACL in FY2026 would be 82 mt, much higher than the 29 mt FY 2025 sub-ACL. Therefore, it would be less likely for the AM to be triggered in-season under the proposed action.

However, recent GB haddock catches by the MWT Atlantic herring fishery have been low in part due to lower Atlantic herring ACLs and fishing activity on GB. Therefore, the economic impact may be neutral given recent catches of GB haddock.

GOM haddock – The proposed FY2026 sub-ACL for GOM haddock would have slight positive to neutral impacts on the MWT Atlantic herring fishery. The economic impacts would be positive because the GOM haddock sub-ACL in FY2026 would be 34 mt, slightly higher than the 32 mt FY 2025 sub-ACL, and therefore less likely for the AM to be triggered in-season.

However, recent GOM haddock catches by the MWT Atlantic herring fishery have been low in part due to lower Atlantic herring ACLs and fishing activity on GB. Therefore, the economic impact may be neutral given recent catches of GOM haddock.

Small-mesh fisheries

GB yellowtail flounder - Under the proposed action, the sub-ACL for GB yellowtail flounder for the small mesh fisheries (e.g., whiting and squid) would decrease compared to what was proposed in FW69 and could have negative economic impacts on the squid fishery. However, economic impacts on the small mesh fishery are expected to be neutral because catches in recent years have generally been low.

Large-mesh non-groundfish fisheries

Southern windowpane flounder - The southern windowpane flounder "other fisheries" sub-component is used to evaluate when an AM could be triggered for large-mesh non-groundfish fisheries (e.g., summer flounder and scup trawl fisheries). Under the proposed action, the other sub-component would remain unchanged from FY2025 at 98 mt. If bycatch of southern windowpane flounder is low in FY2026, there would be neutral economic impacts compared to FY2025. The "other fisheries" sub-component was exceeded in FY2023 but the total ACL was not exceeded for southern windowpane flounder; therefore, AMs were not triggered. AMs may be triggered in the future if overall catches increase. Relative to Alternative 1/No Action, impacts and expected to be neutral.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The previous EA for FW69 considered impacts of specifications on the VECs (target, non-target, protected species, physical environment and EFH, and human communities). The basis for previously analyzed management measures is not proposed to be changed in this action.

The environmental impacts of the proposed action are similar to those in the previous action (FW69) because the risk of overfishing for groundfish stocks is about the same as previously analyzed, and overall the changes in ABCs are expected to cause little change in fishing behavior, targeting of groundfish or other species, fishing costs, or revenue from landing groundfish. While the changes in ABCs for some groundfish stocks may result in changes in fishing behavior, targeting (or avoidance) of groundfish or other species, fishing costs, or revenue, these changes are anticipated to be within the range previously analyzed and as expected in a multispecies fishery. Relative to FY2025, the proposed FY2026 total ACLs would increase for GB haddock, GOM haddock, CC/GOM yellowtail flounder, and GB winter flounder. There would be decreases in the total ACLs for GB yellowtail flounder, SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, American plaice, GOM winter flounder, SNE/MA winter flounder, redfish, and white hake. There would be no change in the total ACLs for witch flounder, pollock, northern windowpane flounder, southern windowpane flounder, ocean pout, Atlantic halibut, and Atlantic wolffish. The four Atlantic cod stocks of EGOM, WGOM, GB, and SNE are being added to the FMP for FY2026 (through Amendment 25) and so do not have comparative FY2025 ACLs, though collectively there is an increase in ACL summed across all cod stocks. Updated information and analyses considered for adjusting the groundfish specifications are presented in Section 4.0 of this document.

In accordance with NOAA's NEPA procedures, after considering the proposed action in Section 3.0 and new information in Section 4.0, NMFS has preliminarily determined that a supplement to the EA prepared for FW69 to the Northeast Multispecies FMP is not needed. Further supplementation is not needed because 1) the new proposed specifications do not amount to a substantial change relevant to environmental concerns; and 2) new circumstances and information do not alter the significance of the adverse effects that bear on the proposed action or its effects. The changes to the northeast multispecies specifications are not expected to substantially change the risk of overfishing or change the profits or revenue from the groundfish fishery. The FONSI signed on February 4, 2026, remains valid to support the proposed action.

Table 37 - Summary of impacts on VECs from FW69 and the proposed action (FW72).

VEC	Expected Impacts of Specifications	
	FY2025-FY2027	FY2026-FY2030 (proposed action)
Target Species	Uncertain or slight positive	Uncertain or slight positive
Non-target Species	Moderate positive	Moderate positive
Protected Resources	Slight negative to moderate positive	Slight negative to moderate positive
Physical Environment & EFH	Slight negative	Slight negative
Human Communities	Slight positive to positive	Slight positive to positive

7.0 APPLICABLE LAWS/EXECUTIVE ORDERS

7.1 MSA – NATIONAL STANDARDS

7.1.1 National Standards

Section 301 of the MSA requires regulations implementing any fishery management plan or amendment be consistent with ten national standards. Below is a summary of how this proposed action is consistent with the National Standards and other required provisions of the MSA.

National Standard 1 - The Northeast Multispecies FMP includes measures to end overfishing on groundfish stocks. This action adjusts those measures to maximize optimum yield while preventing overfishing and continuing rebuilding plans. For overfished fisheries, the MSA defines optimum yield as the amount of fish that provides for rebuilding to a level consistent with producing the maximum sustainable yield from the fishery. The measures are designed to achieve the fishing mortality rates, and yields, necessary to rebuild the overfished stocks as well as to keep fishing mortality below overfishing levels for stocks that are not in a rebuilding program. The proposed measures in Section 3.0 set controls on catch to ensure the appropriate fishing mortality rates are implemented by adjusting OFLs, ABCs, and ACLs for several stocks, setting SDC for GB yellowtail flounder, and establish a regulatory process for the regional administrator to adjust recreational measures for cod and haddock. These measures are designed to facilitate achieving optimum yield through considering a balance of conservation needs and mitigating adverse socioeconomic impacts.

National Standard 2 - The proposed action is based on the most recent information on stock status available for all stocks in the Northeast multispecies complex, which is provided by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center in the 2023, 2024, and 2025 Groundfish Management Track Assessments and prior Research Track Assessments. Additionally, the mortality limits were determined based on the scientific advice of the NEFMC SSC, which recommends ABCs to the Council.

With respect to bycatch information, the action uses information from the most recent assessments. While additional observer data has been collected since the most recent assessments were completed, it has not been analyzed or reviewed through the stock assessment process and thus cannot be used. The supporting science and analyses, upon which the proposed action is based, are summarized and described in Section 4.0 of this document.

The economic analyses in this document are based primarily on landings, revenue, and effort information collected through the NMFS data collection systems used for this fishery. The QCM is used to analyze the economic impacts of the measures on the sector portion of the groundfish fishery. QCM information is contained in Appendix 1.

National Standard 3 - The proposed action manages each individual groundfish stock as a unit throughout its range. Management measures specifically designed for one stock are applied to the entire range of the stock. In addition, the groundfish complex management measures are designed and evaluated for their impact on the fishery as a whole. This action recognizes the four revised Atlantic cod stocks that are being added to the FMP through Amendment 25.

National Standard 4 - The proposed action does not discriminate between residents of different states. They apply equally to all permit holders, regardless of homeport or location. While the measures do not discriminate between permit holders, they have different impacts on different participants because of the differences in the distribution of fish and the varying stock levels in the complex. Some of these impacts may be localized, as often communities near a fish stock may have developed small boat fisheries that target that stock. These distributive impacts are difficult to avoid given the requirement to rebuild

overfished stocks and the uneven geographical distribution of fish stocks and the targeting of different stocks by individual vessels. The proposed action allocates fishing privileges, via specifications, consistent with the Council's past actions as implemented by the FMP.

National Standard 5 - The proposed action is not expected to significantly reduce the efficiency of fishing vessels. These measures are considered practicable because they allow rebuilding of depleted groundfish stocks and have considered efficiency to the greatest extent possible. None of the measures in this action have economic allocation as their sole purpose; all are designed to contribute to the control of fishing mortality.

National Standard 6 - The primary controls used in this management plan - effort controls and sectors - allow each vessel operator to fish when and how it best suits their business. Vessels can make short or long trips and can fish in any open area at any time of the year. The measures allow for the use of different gears, vessel sizes, and fishing practices. The specific measures adopted in this action do not reduce this flexibility.

While some of the measures used in the management plan tend to increase costs, those measures are necessary for achieving the plan's objectives. For example, measures that reduce the efficiency of fishing vessels, including time area closures, tend to increase the costs of fishing vessels because fishing catches are reduced. These measures accomplish other goals, however, by allowing groundfish stocks to rebuild. The measures do not duplicate other regulatory efforts. Management of multispecies stocks in federal waters is not subject to coordinated regulation by any other management body. Absent Council action, a coordinated rebuilding effort to restore the health of the overfished stocks would not occur.

National Standard 7 - The Council considered the costs and benefits of a range of alternatives to achieve the goals and objectives of this FMP. It considered the costs to the industry of taking no action relative to adopting the measures herein, and the expected benefits are greater in the long-term if stocks are rebuilt as a result. Under these proposed measures, revenues are projected to be less than realized revenues in 2024, but higher than projected revenues in 2025, and higher than no action.

National Standard 8 - Consistent with the requirements of the MSA to prevent overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks, the proposed action may restrict fishing activity through the implementation of low ACLs for several groundfish stocks to achieve rebuilding targets. Analyses of the impacts of these measures show that landings and revenues are likely to decline for many participants in upcoming years due to the rebuilding programs in place for many stocks. In the short-term, these declines will probably have negative impacts on fishing communities throughout the region, but particularly on those ports that rely heavily on groundfish; however, they are needed for the long-term sustainability and benefit of these communities.

National Standard 9 - Many measures limit the discards of both groundfish and some other species, including the sector management program, and this action is expected to continue those benefits with no substantial changes. The proposed action is necessary to minimize bycatch. Changes that permit annual catch limits to adjust to changing fish stock abundance levels are needed to prevent wasteful bycatch compared to taking no action.

National Standard 10 - The flexibility in sector management and the ability to use common pool DAS at any time promote safety by not incentivizing vessels to fish in dangerous conditions. The proposed action, in conjunction with existing FMP measures, is the best option for achieving the necessary mortality reductions while having the least impact on vessel safety.

7.1.2 **Other MSA Requirements**

This action is also consistent with the fifteen additional required provisions for FMPs. Section 303 (a) of MSA contains required provisions for FMPs.

1. *Contain the conservation and management measures, applicable to foreign fishing …*

   Foreign fishing is not allowed under this management plan or this action. Therefore, specific measures are not included to specify and control allowable foreign catch.

2. *Contain a description of the fishery …*

   Amendment 16 included a thorough description of the multispecies fishery from 2001 through 2008, including the gears used, number of vessels, landings, actual and potential revenues, costs likely to be incurred in management, and effort used in the fishery. This information was updated for Amendment 18 and again in Amendment 23. FW69 includes a summary of that information and this action (FW72) provides additional relevant information about the fishery in Section 4.0.

3. *Assess and specify the present and probable future condition of, and the maximum sustainable yield and optimum yield from the fishery …*

   The present biological status of the fishery was described in Section 5.0 of FW69 and is updated in Section 4.0 of this action (FW72). Likely future conditions of the resource are also described in FW69. Impacts resulting from other measures in the management plan other than the measures included here can be found in Amendments 16, 18, 23, and 25. The maximum sustainable yield for each stock in the fishery is defined in Amendments 16 and 25, and optimum yield for the fishery is defined in Amendment 9.

4. *Assess and specify-- (A) the capacity and the extent to which fishing vessels of the United States, on an annual basis, will harvest the optimum yield specified under paragraph (3); etc.*

   U.S. fishing vessels are capable of, and expected to, harvest the optimum yield from this fishery as specified in Amendments 16 and 25, Frameworks 44, 45, 47, 49, 50, 51, 53, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 61, 63, 65, 66, 69, and this action FW72. U.S. processors are also expected to process the harvest of U.S. fishing vessels. None of the optimum yield from this fishery is available to foreign fishing.

5. *Specify the pertinent data which shall be submitted to the Secretary with respect to commercial, recreational, and charter fishing in the fishery …*

   Current reporting requirements for this fishery have been in effect since 1994 and were originally specified in Amendment 5. They were slightly modified in Amendments 13, 16, and 23, and VMS requirements were adopted in FW42. The requirements include VTRs that are submitted by each fishing vessel. Dealers are also required to submit reports on the purchases of regulated groundfish from permitted vessels. Sector vessels are also required to contract with service providers for ASM or EM services. ASM and EM provide catch and bycatch data that vessels are required to submit. Current reporting requirements are detailed in 50 CFR 648.7 and monitoring requirements are detailed in § 648.11.

6. *Consider and provide for temporary adjustments, after consultation with the Coast Guard and persons utilizing the fishery, regarding access to the fishery for vessels otherwise prevented from harvesting because of weather or other ocean conditions…*

   Provisions in accordance with this requirement were implemented in earlier actions and continue with this action. For common pool vessels, the carry-over of a small number of DAS is allowed from one fishing year to the next. If a fishing business is unable to use all of its DAS because of weather or other conditions, this measure allows its available fishing time to be used in the subsequent fishing year. Sectors are allowed to carry forward a small amount of ACE into the next fishing year. This will help sectors react should adverse weather interfere with harvesting the entire ACE before the end of the year. Neither of these practices requires consultation with the Coast Guard.

7. *Describe and identify essential fish habitat for the fishery…*

   Impacts of this action on EFH are summarized in section 5.2. A more detailed summary of the EFH can be found in Section 5.5 of FW69.

8. *In the case of a fishery management plan that, after January 1, 1991, is submitted to the Secretary for review under section 304(a) assess and specify the nature and extent of scientific data which is needed for effective implementation of the plan;*

   Scientific and research needs are not required for a FW action.

9. *Include a fishery impact statement for the plan or amendment …*
   Impacts of this framework on fishing communities directly affected by this action and adjacent areas can be found in Section 5.4.

10. *Specify objective and measurable criteria for identifying when the fishery to which the plan applies is overfished …*

    Objective and measurable status determination criteria for all stocks in the management plan have been updated in framework actions, including framework adjustments 48, 51, 53, 55, 56, 61, 63, 69 and this action FW72.

11. *Establish a standardized reporting methodology to assess the amount and type of bycatch occurring in the fishery …*

    Vessels fishing under this FMP must participate in the Northeast Fishery Observer Program consistent with Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM) implemented by the National Marine Fisheries Service's Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office. This action does not include changes to the current SBRM. This methodology is expected to assess the amount and type of bycatch in the northeast multispecies fishery. The northeast multispecies fishery also has an at-sea monitoring program requirement for sectors that is administered by the National Marine Fisheries Service in conjunction with the SBRM program. None of the measures in this framework are expected to increase bycatch beyond what was considered in previous actions.

12. *Assess the type and amount of fish caught and released alive during recreational fishing under catch and release fishery management programs and the mortality of such fish …*

    This management plan does not include a catch and release recreational fishery management program and thus does not address this requirement.

13. *Include a description of the commercial, recreational, and charter fishing sectors which participate in the fishery …*

    As noted above, updated information about the commercial, recreational, and charter fishing sectors is Section 5.0 and a more complete summary of these sectors is in Section 5.7.10 of FW69.

14. *To the extent that rebuilding plans or other conservation and management measures which reduce the overall harvest in a fishery are necessary, allocate any harvest restrictions or recovery benefits fairly and equitably among the commercial, recreational, and charter fishing sectors in the fishery.*

    The proposed action does not allocate harvest restrictions or stock benefits to the fishery. Such allocations were adopted in Amendment 16. This action adjusts management measures for some stocks within the existing allocation structure in a fair and equitable manner.

15. *Establish a mechanism for specifying annual catch limits in the plan (including a multiyear plan), implementing regulations, or annual specifications, at a level such that overfishing does not occur in the fishery, including measures to ensure accountability.*

The FMP already contains a mechanism for establishing ACLs and this action uses that mechanism to specify ACLs for future fishing years.

7.2 NEPA

NEPA provides a mechanism for identifying and evaluating the full spectrum of environmental issues associated with federal actions and for considering a reasonable range of alternatives to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts. We have preliminarily determined that the proposed action and its effects fall within the scope of the previous EA completed for Framework 69, as described above, and that those analyses remain valid for this action. Thus, there is no need for supplemental NEPA analyses or to revise the previous FONSI.

7.2.1 Point of Contact

Questions concerning this document may be addressed to:

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7.2.2 Agencies Consulted

The following agencies, in alphabetical order, were consulted in preparing this document:

- Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council;
- National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA, Department of Commerce;
- New England Fishery Management Council, including representatives from:
  - Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection
  - Maine Department of Marine Resources
  - Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries
  - New Hampshire Fish and Game
  - Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management; and
- United States Coast Guard, Department of Homeland Security.

7.2.3 List of Preparers

The following personnel participated in preparing this document:

- ***New England Fishery Management Council***. Robin Frede (Groundfish Plan Coordinator), Mark Grant, Angelia Miller, Dr. Jamie Cournane, Michelle Bachman, Dr. Cate O'Keefe, Jonathon Peros, Connor Buckley, and Woneta Cloutier
- ***National Marine Fisheries Service.*** Liz Sullivan, Timothy Cardiasmenos, Glenn Chamberlain, Paul Nitschke, Chuck Adams, Greg Ardini, Dr. Matt Cutler, Min-Yang Lee, Danielle Palmer, Laura Smith, Heather Nelson, and Spencer Talmage.
- ***State Agencies.*** Robyn Linner (Maine DMR), Matt Ayer and Tara Dolan (MA DMF), Renee Zobel (NHF&G), and Rich Balouskus (RI DEM)
- ***Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council***. Jason Didden

7.2.4 Opportunities for Public Comment

This action was developed from June 2025 through December 2025, and there were several public meetings related to this action (Table 38). Opportunities for public comment occurred at Advisory Panel, Committee, and Council meetings. There were more limited opportunities to comment at PDT meetings. Meeting discussion documents and summaries are available at www.nefmc.org.

Table 38 - Public meetings related to FW72.

Date	Meeting Type	Location
06/10/2025	GAP/RAP	Webinar
06/11/2025	Committee	Webinar
06/25/2025	Council	Freeport, ME
07/29/2025	PDT	Webinar
09/03/2025	GAP/RAP	Webinar
09/03/2025	Committee	Webinar
09/24/2025	Council	Gloucester, MA
09/29/2025	PDT	Webinar
10/07/2025	PDT	Webinar
10/21-22/2025	SSC	Boston, MA
10/31/2025	PDT	Webinar
11/17/2025	GAP/RAP	Webinar
11/18/2025	Committee	Wakefield, MA and Webinar
12/03/2025	Council	Newport, RI
01/21/2026	SSC	Webinar

7.3 MMPA

The proposed action is not expected to alter fishing methods or activities. Section 5.3 assesses the impacts of the proposed action on marine mammals. The Council has reviewed the impacts of the proposed 2026-2030 Northeast Multispecies fishery specifications on marine mammals and has concluded that the management actions proposed are consistent with the provisions of the MMPA. Although they are likely to affect marine mammals inhabiting the management unit, the specifications will not alter the effectiveness of existing MMPA measures to protect those species, such as take reduction plans, that may occur in the management unit of the Northeast Multispecies FMP.

7.4 ESA

Section 7 of the ESA requires federal agencies conducting, authorizing, or funding activities that affect threatened or endangered species to ensure that those effects do not jeopardize the continued existence of listed species and do not adversely affect designated critical habitat of listed species.

On May 27, 2021, the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) completed formal consultation pursuant to section 7 of the ESA of 1973, as amended, and issued a biological opinion (2021 Opinion) on the authorization of eight FMPs, two interstate fishery management plans (ISFMP), and the implementation of the New England Fishery Management Council's Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat

(EFH) Amendment 2[14]. The 2021 Opinion considered the effects of the authorization of these FMPs, ISFMPs, and the implementation of the Omnibus EFH Amendment on ESA-listed species and designated critical habitat, and determined that those actions were not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any ESA-listed species or destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitats of such species under NMFS jurisdiction. An Incidental Take Statement (ITS) was issued in the 2021 Opinion. The ITS includes reasonable and prudent measures and their implementing terms and conditions, which NMFS determined are necessary or appropriate to minimize impacts of the incidental take in the fisheries assessed in the 2021 Opinion.

The 2021 Opinion was reinitiated on September 13, 2023. The Federal actions to be addressed in this reinitiation of consultation include the authorization of the Federal fisheries conducted under the aforementioned eight Federal FMPs (see footnote 14). The reinitiated consultation will not include the American lobster and Jonah crab fisheries, which are authorized under ISFMPs. On December 29, 2022, President Biden signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act (CAA), 2023, which included the following provision specific to NMFS' regulation of the American lobster and Jonah crab fishery to protect right whales, "Notwithstanding any other provision of law ... for the period beginning on the date of enactment of this Act and ending on December 31, 2028, the Final Rule ... shall be deemed sufficient to ensure that the continued Federal and State authorizations of the American lobster and Jonah crab fisheries are in full compliance with the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (16 U.S.C. 1361 et seq.) and the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.)." Given this, the American lobster and Jonah crab fisheries remain in compliance with the ESA through December 31, 2028.

On January 8, 2025, and amended on November 25, 2025, NMFS issued a memorandum titled, "Section 7(a)(2) and 7(d) Determinations for the Extended Reinitiation Period for Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultation on Eight Fishery Management Plans." This reinitiation memorandum determined that the authorization of these fisheries during the extended reinitiation period would not violate section 7(d) of the ESA and would not be likely to jeopardize the continued existence of ESA-listed large whales, sea turtles, Atlantic sturgeon, Atlantic salmon, or giant manta rays, or adversely modify designated critical habitat.

Given the information provided above, it has been determined that the proposed action does not entail making any changes to the skate fishery during the extended reinitiation period that would cause an increase in interactions with or effects to ESA-listed species or their critical habitat beyond those considered in NMFS' January 8, 2025, reinitiation memorandum, as amended. Therefore, the proposed action is consistent with NMFS' January 8, 2025, 7(a)(2) and 7(d) determinations.

7.5 ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE ACT (APA)

Sections 551-553 of the Administrative Procedure Act established procedural requirements applicable to informal rulemaking by federal agencies. The purpose is to ensure public access to the federal rulemaking process, and to give public notice and opportunity for comment. The Council did not request relief from notice and comment rule making for this action and expects that NMFS will publish proposed and final rules for this action.

[14] The eight Federal FMPs considered in the May 27, 2021, Biological Opinion include: (1) Atlantic Bluefish; (2) Atlantic Deep-sea Red Crab; (3) Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish; (4) Monkfish; (5) Northeast Multispecies; (6) Northeast Skate Complex; (7) Spiny Dogfish; and (8) Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass. The two ISFMPs are American Lobster and Jonah Crab.

7.6 PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT (PRA)

The purpose of PRA is to minimize the paperwork burden for individuals, small businesses, nonprofit institutions, and other persons resulting from the collection of information by or for the Federal Government. It also ensures that the Government is not overly burdening the public with information requests. This action does not include any revisions to the current PRA collection requirements; therefore, no review under PRA is necessary.

7.7 COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT ACT (CZMA)

Section 307(c)(1) of the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended, requires that all Federal activities that directly affect the coastal zone be consistent with approved state coastal zone management programs to the maximum extent practicable. The CZMA includes measures for ensuring stability of productive fishery habitat while striving to balance development pressures with social, economic, cultural, and other impacts on the coastal zone. It is recognized that responsible management of both coastal zones and fish stocks must involve mutually supportive goals. The Council has developed this action and will submit it to NMFS; NMFS must determine whether this action is consistent, to the maximum extent practicable, with the coastal zone management programs for each state (Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina). Letters documenting NMFS' determination will be sent to the coastal zone management program offices of each state.

7.8 INFORMATION QUALITY ACT (IQA)

Section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (Public Law 106-554, also known as the Data Quality Act or Information Quality Act) directed the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to issue government-wide guidelines that "provide policy and procedural guidance to federal agencies for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information (including statistical information) disseminated by federal agencies." OMB directed each federal agency to issue its own guidelines, establish administrative mechanisms allowing affected persons to seek and obtain correction of information that does not comply with the OMB guidelines, and report periodically to OMB on the number and nature of complaints. The NOAA Section 515 Information Quality Guidelines require a series of actions for each new information product subject to the Data Quality Act. Information must meet standards of utility, integrity, and objectivity. This section provides information required to address these requirements.

Utility of Information Product

FW72 and the proposed FY2026 – 2030 fishery specifications include: a description of the management issues to be addressed, a statement of the goals and objectives, a description of the proposed action and other alternatives/options considered, analyses of the impacts of the proposed specifications and other alternatives/options on the affected environment, and the reasons for selecting the proposed specifications. These proposed modifications implement the FMP's conservation and management goals consistent with the MSA as well as all other existing applicable laws.

Utility means that disseminated information is useful to its intended users. "Useful" means that the content of the information is helpful, beneficial, or serviceable to its intended users, or that the information supports the usefulness of other disseminated information by making it more accessible or easier to read, see, understand, obtain, or use. The information presented in this document is helpful to the intended users (the affected public) by presenting a clear description of the purpose and need of the proposed action, the measures proposed, and the impacts of those measures. A discussion of the reasons

for selecting the proposed action is included so that intended users may have a full understanding of the proposed action and its implications. The intended users of the information contained in this document are participants in the groundfish fishery and other interested parties and members of the general public. The information contained in this document may be useful to owners of vessels holding a groundfish permit as well as groundfish dealers and processors because it serves to notify these individuals of any potential changes to management measures for the fishery. This information will enable these individuals to adjust their fishing practices and make appropriate business decisions based on the new management measures and corresponding regulations.

The information being provided in the 2026 – 2030 specifications concerning the status of the groundfish fishery is updated based on landings and effort information through the 2023 fishing year, and the 2024 fishing year when possible. Information presented in this document is intended to support FW72 and the proposed specifications for the 2026 – 2030 fishing years, which have been developed through a multi-stage process involving all interested members of the public. Consequently, the information pertaining to management measures contained in this document has been improved based on comments from the public, fishing industry, members of the Council, and NMFS.

Until a proposed rule is prepared and published, this document is the principal means by which the information herein is publicly available. The information provided in this document is based on the most recent available information from the relevant data sources, including detailed and relatively recent information on the affected target and non-target species and, therefore, represents an improvement over previously available information. This document will be subject to public comment through proposed rulemaking, as required under the APA and, therefore, may be further improved based on comments received.

This document is available in several formats, including printed publication, and online through the NEFMC's web page (www.nefmc.org). The *Federal Register* notice that announces the proposed rule and the final rule and implementing regulations will be made available in printed publication, on the website for the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov), and through the Regulations.gov website. The *Federal Register* documents will provide metric conversions for all measurements.

Integrity of Information Product

Integrity refers to security – the protection of information from unauthorized access or revision, to ensure that the information is not compromised through corruption or falsification. Prior to dissemination, information associated with this action, independent of the specific intended distribution mechanism, is safeguarded from improper access, modification, or destruction to a degree commensurate with the risk and magnitude of harm that could result from the loss, misuse, or unauthorized access to or modification of such information. All electronic information disseminated by NMFS adheres to the standards set out in Appendix III, "Security of Automated Information Resources," of OMB Circular A-130; the Computer Security Act; and the Government Information Security Act. All confidential information (e.g. dealer purchase reports) is safeguarded pursuant to the Privacy Act; Titles 13, 15, and 22 of the U.S. Code (confidentiality of census, business, and financial information); the Confidentiality of Statistics provisions of the MSA; and NOAA Administrative Order 216-100, Protection of Confidential Fisheries Statistics.

Objectivity of Information Product

Objective information is presented in an accurate, clear, complete, and unbiased manner, and in proper context. The substance of the information is accurate, reliable, and unbiased; in the scientific, financial, or statistical context, original and supporting data are generated and the analytical results are developed using sound, commonly accepted scientific and research methods. "Accurate" means that information is

within an acceptable degree of imprecision or error appropriate to the *kind* of information at issue and otherwise meets commonly accepted scientific, financial, and statistical standards.

For purposes of the Pre-Dissemination Review, this document is a "Natural Resource Plan." Accordingly, the document adheres to the published standards of the MSA; the Operational Guidelines, Fishery Management Plan Process; the EFH Guidelines; the National Standard Guidelines; and NOAA Administrative Order 216-6, Environmental Review Procedures for Implementing NEPA.

This information product uses information of known quality from sources acceptable to the relevant scientific and technical communities. Stock status (including estimates of biomass and fishing mortality) reported in this product are based on either assessments subject to peer-review through the Northeast Region Coordinating Council (NRCC) stock assessment process or on updates of those assessments prepared by scientists of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center. Landing and revenue information is based on information collected through the VTR and Commercial Dealer databases. Information on catch composition, by tow, is based on reports collected by NMFS observer program, including at-sea monitoring and electronic monitoring, and incorporated into the sea sampling or observer database systems. These reports are developed using an approved, scientifically valid sampling process. In addition to these sources, additional information is presented that has been accepted and published in peer-reviewed journals or by scientific organizations. Original analyses in this document were prepared using data from accepted sources, and the analyses have been reviewed by members of the Groundfish PDT and by the SSC where appropriate.

Despite current data limitations, the conservation and management measures proposed for this action were selected based upon the best scientific information available. The analyses conducted in support of the proposed action were conducted using information from the most recent complete calendar years, through 2024, and in some cases includes information that was collected during calendar years 2024 and 2025. Complete data were not available for fishing year 2024 (ended April 30, 2025) and 2025. The data used in the analyses provide the best available information on the number of harvesters in the fishery, the catch (including landings and discards) by those harvesters, the sales and revenue of those landings to dealers, the type of permits held by vessels, the number of DAS used by those vessels, the catch of recreational fishermen and the location of those catches, and the catches and revenues from various special management programs. Specialists (including professional members of PDTs, technical teams, committees, and Council staff) who worked with these data are familiar with the most current analytical techniques and with the available data and information relevant to the groundfish fishery.

The policy choices are clearly articulated in Section 3.0 of this document, as the proposed action considered in this action (FW72). The supporting science and analyses, upon which the policy choices are based, are summarized and described in Section 4.0 of this document and in FW69. All supporting materials, information, data, and analyses within this document have been, to the maximum extent practicable, properly referenced according to commonly accepted standards for scientific literature to ensure transparency.

The Council review process involves public meetings at which affected stakeholders have opportunity to comment on the document. Review by staff at GARFO is conducted by those with expertise in fisheries management and policy, habitat conservation, protected species, and compliance with the applicable law. The Council also uses its SSC to review the background science and assessments to approve the OFLs and ABCs, including the effects those limits would have on other specifications in this document. The SSC is the primary scientific and technical advisory body to the Council and is made up of scientists that are independent of the Council. A list of current committee members can be found at https://www.nefmc.org/committees/scientific-and-statistical-committee.

Final approval of the action proposed in this document and clearance of any rules prepared to implement resulting regulations is conducted by staff at NMFS Headquarters, the Department of Commerce, and the OMB. In preparing this action for the Northeast Multispecies FMP, NMFS, the APA, PRA, CZMA, ESA, MMPA, IQA, and Executive Orders (E.O) 12630 (Property Rights), 12866 (Regulatory Planning), 13132 (Federalism), and 13158 (Marine Protected Areas), the Council has determined that the proposed action is consistent with the National Standards of the MSA and all other applicable laws.

7.9 E.O. 13158 (Marine Protected Areas)

E.O. 13158 on Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) requires each federal agency whose actions affect the natural or cultural resources that are protected by an MPA to identify such actions, and, to the extent permitted by law and to the maximum extent practicable, in taking such actions, avoid harm to the natural and cultural resources that are protected by an MPA. The E.O. directs Federal agencies to refer to the MPAs identified in a list of MPAs that meet the definition of MPA for the purposes of the E.O. The E.O. requires that the Departments of Commerce and the Interior jointly publish and maintain such a list of MPAs. A list of MPA sites has been developed and is available at: http://marineprotectedareas.noaa.gov/nationalsystem/nationalsystemlist/. No further guidance related to this E.O. is available at this time.

In the Northeast U.S., the MPAs are the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary (SBNMS), the Tilefish GRAs in the canyons of Georges Bank, and the National Estuarine Research Reserves and other coastal sites. The only MPA that overlaps the groundfish fishery footprint is the SBNMS.

This action is not expected to more than minimally affect the biological/habitat resources of the SBNMS MPA, which was comprehensively analyzed in the Omnibus Habitat Amendment 2 (NEFMC 2016). Fishing gears regulated by the Northeast Multispecies FMP are unlikely to damage shipwrecks and other cultural artifacts because fishing vessel operators avoid contact with cultural resources on the seafloor to minimize costly gear losses and interruptions to fishing.

7.10 E.O. 13132 (Federalism)

E.O. 13132 on federalism established nine fundamental federalism principles for Federal agencies to follow when developing and implementing actions with federalism implications. However, no federalism issues or implications have been identified relative to the measures proposed in this action, thus preparation of an assessment under E.O. 13132 is unwarranted. The affected states have been closely involved in the development of the proposed action through their representation on the Council; all affected states are represented as voting members of at least one Regional Fishery Management Council. No comments were received from any state officials relative to any federalism implications that may be associated with this action.

7.11 Regulatory Impact Review (RIR)

An RIR was conducted for the proposed action.

7.11.1 Regulatory Flexibility Act

The purpose of the Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (RFA) is to reduce the impacts of burdensome regulations and record-keeping requirements on small businesses. To achieve this goal, the RFA requires government agencies to describe and analyze the effects of regulations and possible alternatives on small

business entities. Based on this information, the RFA determines whether the proposed action would have a "significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities."

The Chief Counsel for Regulation of the Department of Commerce previously certified to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration (SBA) that FW69, if adopted, would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. This document describes the proposed action (FW72) and compares it to the alternatives and analyses presented in FW69. It then considers whether there are any substantial changes or significant new circumstances or information that are relevant to environmental concerns and could affect the proposed action or its impacts. Based on these analyses (see below), the Chief Counsel for Regulation of the Department of Commerce is expected to also certify that this proposed action, if adopted, would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities.

Description and estimate of the number of small entities to which the rule applies

As of June 1, 2025, NMFS had issued 652 commercial limited-access groundfish permits associated with vessels (including those in confirmation of permit history [CPH]), 734 party/charter groundfish permits, 713 limited access and general category Atlantic sea scallop permits, 788 small-mesh multispecies permits, 74 Atlantic herring permits, and 734 large-mesh non-groundfish permits (limited access summer flounder and scup permits). Therefore, 3,695 permits are potentially regulated by this action. When accounting for overlaps between fisheries, this number falls to 2,148 permitted vessels. Each vessel may be individually owned or part of a larger corporate ownership structure, and for RFA purposes, it is the ownership entity that is ultimately regulated by the proposed action. Ownership entities are identified on June 1st of each year based on the list of all permit numbers, for the most recent complete calendar year, that have applied for any type of Northeast Federal fishing permit. The current ownership data set is based on calendar year 2024 permits and contains gross sales associated with those permits for calendar years 2020 through 2024.

For RFA purposes only, NMFS has established a small business size standard for businesses, including their affiliates, whose primary industry is commercial fishing (see 50 CFR § 200.2). A business primarily engaged in commercial fishing (NAICS code 11411) is classified as a small business if it is independently owned and operated, is not dominant in its field of operation (including its affiliates), and has combined annual receipts not in excess of $11 million for all its affiliated operations worldwide. The determination as to whether the entity is large or small is based on the average annual revenue for the five years from 2020 through 2024. The SBA has established size standards for all other major industry sectors in the U.S., including for-hire fishing (NAICS code 487210). These entities are classified as small businesses if combined annual receipts are not in excess of $8.0 million for all its affiliated operations. As with commercial fishing businesses, the annual average of the five most recent years (2020-2024) is utilized in determining annual receipts for businesses primarily engaged in for-hire fishing.

Ownership data collected from permit holders indicates that there are 1,657 distinct business entities that hold at least one permit regulated by the proposed action. All 1,657 business entities identified could be directly regulated by this proposed action. Of these 1,657 entities, 906 are commercial fishing entities, 332 are for-hire entities, and 419 did not have revenues (were inactive in 2024). Of the 906 commercial fishing entities, 897 are categorized as small entities and 9 are categorized as large entities, per the NMFS guidelines. Furthermore, 409 of these commercial fishing entities held limited access groundfish permits, with 407 of these entities being classified as small businesses and 2 of these entities being classified as large businesses. All 332 for-hire entities are categorized as small businesses.

Summary of the Proposed Action and significant alternatives

As outlined in Section 3.0, the purpose of this action is to implement FW72 to the Northeast Multispecies FMP. FW72 would set SDC for GB yellowtail flounder, specifications for several groundfish stocks and management units, and a regulatory process for the Regional Administrator to adjust recreational

measures for cod and haddock. FW72 incorporates the results of new stock assessments in 2025. The need for this action is to prevent overfishing, ensure rebuilding, and help achieve optimum yield in the commercial and recreational groundfish fisheries consistent with the status of stocks and the requirements of MSA.

This proposed action (see Table 1) would:

- Set SDC for GB yellowtail flounder;
- Set FY2026 TACs for U.S./Canada management units of Eastern GB cod, Eastern GB haddock and the GB yellowtail flounder stock;
- Set FY2026 specifications for GB cod, GB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder;
- Set FY2026-FY2030 specifications for CC/GOM yellowtail flounder, SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, GB winter flounder, GOM winter flounder, SNE/MA winter flounder, white hake, Acadian redfish, ocean pout, and Atlantic wolffish; and
- Establish a regulatory process for the Regional Administrator to adjust recreational measures for cod and haddock.

Description and estimate of economic impacts on small entities, by entity size and industry

The proposed action in Section 3.0 is estimated to generate $36.8 – $38.6 million in sector revenue from the catch of multispecies groundfish, $52.6 - $55.1 million in total revenue from all fish caught on sector groundfish trips, and $33.1 - $34.6 million in operating profit from sector groundfish trips during FY2026 (See Appendix 1 Table 2). The lower bound predictions represent fishery values MUBs in place while the upper bound predictions are with the removal of MUBs. Under No Action, the fishery is estimated to generate $16.8 million in sector revenue from the catch of multispecies groundfish, $23.9 million in total revenue from all fish caught on sector groundfish trips, and $18.7 million in operating profit from sector groundfish trips during FY2026 (See Appendix 1 Table 2). As described above, the vast majority of entities with limited access groundfish permits are classified as small businesses. Small entities engaged in the commercial sector groundfish fishery will be positively impacted by the proposed action relative to No Action. Sector vessels comprised 99% of commercial groundfish landings and revenue in recent fishing years. Small entities engaged in the common pool component of the commercial groundfish fishery are also expected to be positively impacted by the proposed action, relative to No Action.

The overall proposed action is predicted to result in positive impacts to the commercial groundfish fishery relative to No Action. The QCM estimates revenues and operating profits with the management uncertainty buffers (MUB) in place for sectors and with the MUBs removed for sectors. If the target ASM coverage set by NMFS for FY2026 is 100%, then the MUBs will be removed for sectors. Since the implementation of Amendment 23, each fishing year the NMFS has set the target coverage level at 100% based on available federal funding.

With the MUBs in place for sectors, operating profits are predicted to decrease relative to predicted FY2025 values (if FW69 is approved and implemented). Sector groundfish revenues are predicted to increase by $2.1M (6%) but operating profits are predicted to decline by $0.8M (2.4%) relative to predicted FY2025 values.

With the MUBs removed for sectors, sector revenues and operating profits are predicted to increase relative to predicted FY2025 values (if FW69 is approved and implemented). Sector groundfish revenues are predicted to increase by $3.9M (11.2%) and operating profits are predicted to increase by $0.7M (2.1%) relative to predicted FY2025 values.

None of the stocks included in the proposed action are allocated to the recreational fishery. Thus, economic impacts to the recreational fishery would be neutral.

For other fisheries (Atlantic sea scallop, Atlantic herring mid-water trawl, small-mesh multispecies, and large-mesh non-groundfish), the proposed measures when compared to No Action have a range of impacts (see Section 7.11.2). The sea scallop fishery is expected to have negative effects. The proposed action would have positive to neutral effects for the Atlantic herring mid-water trawl fishery. The allocation of GB yellowtail flounder to the small-mesh multispecies fishery would be unchanged under the proposed action and would have neutral impacts.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this action is to implement FW72 to the Northeast Multispecies FMP. Framework 72 would revise groundfish fishery specifications for FYs 2026 - 2030 for a number of groundfish stocks. The setting of specifications can potentially impact other fisheries in the region that have sub-ACLs for groundfish stocks.

The proposed action, assuming MUBs in place, is estimated to generate $36.8 million in sector revenue from the catch of multispecies groundfish, $52.6 million in total revenue from all fish caught on sector groundfish trips, and $33.1 million in operating profit from sector groundfish trips during FY2026. Under No Action, the fishery is estimated to generate $16.8 million in sector revenue from the catch of multispecies groundfish, $23.9 million in total revenue from all fish caught on sector groundfish trips, and $18.7 million in operating profit from sector groundfish trips during FY2026. Small entities engaged in the commercial sector groundfish fishery will therefore be positively impacted by the proposed action, relative to No Action. Small entities engaged in common pool groundfish fishing are expected to be positively impacted by the proposed action as well. However, relative to predicted values for FY2025, the commercial groundfish fishery could be negatively to positively impacted by the proposed action, depending on whether or not sector MUBs are removed. With the MUBs in place for sectors, operating profits are predicted to decrease by $0.8M (2.4%) relative to predicted FY2025 values. With the MUBs removed for sectors, operating profits are predicted to increase by $0.7M (2.1%) relative to predicted FY2025 values.

None of the stocks included in the proposed action are allocated to the recreational fishery; Thus, no economic impacts to the recreational fishery would be neutral.

Entities participating in the Atlantic sea scallop fishery would be negatively impacted. Entities engaged in the midwater trawl Atlantic herring fishery would have positive to neutral impacts. Entities engaged in the small-mesh multispecies fishery would have neutral impacts.

7.11.2 E.O. 12866 (Regulatory Planning and Review)

Determination of significance under E.O. 12866

The purpose of E.O. 12866 is to enhance planning and coordination with respect to new and existing regulations. This E.O. requires the OMB to review regulatory programs that are considered to be "significant." Section 7.11 of this document represents the RIR, which includes an assessment of the costs and benefits of the Proposed Action in accordance with the guidelines established by E.O. 12866. NMFS guidelines provide criteria to be used to evaluate whether a proposed action is significant.

E.O. 12866 requires a review of proposed regulations to determine whether or not the expected effects would be significant, where a "significant regulatory action" means any regulatory action that is likely to result in a rule that may:

(1) Have an annual effect on the economy of $100 million or more[15], or adversely effect in a material way the economy, a sector of the economy, productivity, competition, jobs, the environment, public health or safety, or State, local or tribal governments or communities;

(2) Create a serious inconsistency or otherwise interfere with an action taken or planned by another agency;

(3) Materially alter the budgetary impact of entitlements, grants, user fees, or loan programs or the rights and obligations of recipients thereof; or

(4) Raise novel legal or policy issues arising out of legal mandates, the President's priorities, or the principles set forth in the Executive Order.

Section 5.4 and Appendix 1 present detailed economic analyses for the proposed action. These analyses are summarized below, with references to relevant tables in Section 4.4. Together, the economic analysis included in Section 5.4, Appendix 1, and this RIR demonstrate that the proposed action is not significant under E.O. 12866, as it will not have an annual effect on the economy of $100 million or more; or adversely affect in a material way the economy or a sector of the economy, productivity, jobs, the environment, public health, or safety; or State, local, or tribal governments or communities.

Objectives

The goals and objectives of FW72 to the Northeast Multispecies FMP are consistent with the goals of the original FMP, which are as follows:

Goal 1: *Consistent with the National Standards and other required provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and other applicable law, manage the northeast multispecies complex at sustainable levels.*

Goal 2: *Create a management system so that fleet capacity will be commensurate with resource status so as to achieve goals of economic efficiency and biological conservation and that encourages diversity within the fishery.*

Goal 3: *Maintain a directed commercial and recreational fishery for northeast multispecies.*

Goal 4: *Minimize, to the extent practicable, adverse impacts on fishing communities and shore-side infrastructure.*

Goal 5: *Provide reasonable and regulated access to the groundfish species covered in this plan to all members of the public of the United States for seafood consumption and recreational purposes during the stock rebuilding period without compromising the Amendment 13 objectives or timetable. If necessary, management measures could be modified in the future to insure that the overall plan objectives are met.*

Goal 6: *To promote stewardship within the fishery.*

Objective 1: *Achieve, on a continuing basis, optimum yield (OY) for the U.S. fishing industry.*

Objective 2: *Clarify the status determination criteria (biological reference points and control rules) for groundfish stocks so they are consistent with the National Standard guidelines and applicable law.*

Objective 3: *Adopt fishery management measures that constrain fishing mortality to levels that are compliant with the Sustainable Fisheries Act.*

[15] All monetary values are reported in nominal dollars, where FY2026 predictions draw from FY2024 (May 1, 2024, - April 30, 2025) trips.

Objective 4: *Implement rebuilding schedules for overfished stocks, and prevent overfishing.*

Objective 5: *Adopt measures as appropriate to support international trans-boundary management of resources.*

Objective 6: *Promote research and improve the collection of information to better understand groundfish population dynamics, biology and ecology, and to improve assessment procedures in cooperation with the industry.*

Objective 7: *To the extent possible, maintain a diverse groundfish fishery, including different gear types, vessel sizes, geographic locations, and levels of participation.*

Objective 8: *Develop biological, economic and social measures of success for the groundfish fishery and resource that insure accountability in achieving fishery management objectives.*

Objective 9: *Adopt measures consistent with the habitat provisions of the M-S Act, including identification of EFH and minimizing impacts on habitat to the extent practicable.*

Objective 10: *Identify and minimize bycatch, which include regulatory discards, to the extent practicable, and to the extent bycatch cannot be avoided, minimize the mortality of such bycatch.*

Description

This proposed action would affect entities engaged in the following fisheries: commercial groundfish (sector and common pool), recreational groundfish, Atlantic sea scallop, Atlantic herring, small-mesh multispecies, and large-mesh non-groundfish (summer flounder and scup). Entities affected are defined here as individual permits engaged in these fisheries.

Problem Statement

The need and purpose of the actions proposed in this proposed action are explained in Section 3.0 (see Table 1) of this document and are incorporated herein by reference.

Analysis of Alternatives

This section provides an analysis of the proposed actions in FW72 as mandated by E.O. 12866. The focus will be on the expected changes 1) in net benefits and costs to entities engaged in the groundfish fishery, 2) changes to the distribution of benefits and costs within the industry, 3) changes in income and employment, 4) cumulative impacts of the regulation, and 5) changes in other social concerns. Much of this information is captured already in the detailed economic impacts and social impacts analyses of Sections 4.4 and 5.4 of this document.

This RIR will summarize and highlight the major findings of the economic impacts analysis provided in Sections 4.4and 5.4 of this document, as mandated by E.O. 12866. When assessing net benefits and costs of the proposed FY2026 specifications, it is important to note that the analysis will focus on impacts to producers and fishing businesses. Consumer surplus is not expected to be substantially affected by any of the regulatory changes proposed in FW72.

Impacts on entities engaged in the sector and common pool components of the commercial groundfish fishery, the recreational groundfish fishery, the Atlantic sea scallop fishery, the Atlantic herring fishery, the small-mesh multispecies fishery, and the large-mesh non-groundfish fisheries are analyzed separately where appropriate.

A detailed description of the proposed action under consideration can be found in Section 3.0 of this document.

Updated Status Determination Criteria for GB yellowtail flounder

Entities engaged in the commercial groundfish fishery

The proposed action would adopt new SDC for GB yellowtail flounder, consistent with NS1 guidelines. In the short-term, economic impacts could be positive or negative, because SDCs are needed to specify OFLs, ABCs, and ACLs, and these levels of catch may be lower than the fishery has experienced. In the long-term, Setting SDC is expected to have positive economic impacts, because adopting SDC for GB yellowtail flounder according to the most recent scientific assessments decreases the likelihood of overfishing or the stock becoming overfished over the long run (stock status must be determined by NMFS after SDC are implemented), which allows for increased fishery revenues. Overall, setting SDC for GB yellowtail flounder is expected to have low positive economic impacts. Compared to No Action, economic impacts are expected to be positive.

Changes in specifications based on SSC proposed OFLs and ABCs for FY2026-2030

Entities engaged in the sector component of the commercial groundfish fishery

The overall proposed action is predicted to result in positive impacts to the commercial groundfish fishery relative to No Action. With the MUBs in place for sectors, operating profits are predicted to decrease relative to predicted FY2025 values (if FW69 is approved and implemented). Sector groundfish revenues are predicted to increase by $2.1M (6%) but operating profits are predicted to decline by $0.8M (2.4%) relative to predicted FY2025 values.

With the MUBs removed for sectors, sector revenues and operating profits are predicted to increase relative to predicted FY2025 values (if FW69 is approved and implemented). Sector groundfish revenues are predicted to increase by $3.9M (11.2%) and operating profits are predicted to increase by $0.7M (2.1%) relative to predicted FY2025 values (see Section 5.4 and Appendix 1)

Entities engaged in the common pool component of the commercial groundfish fishery

Sectors comprised 99% of commercial groundfish landings and revenue in recent fishing years. Small entities engaged in the common pool component of the commercial groundfish fishery are also expected to be positively impacted by the proposed action, relative to No Action.

Entities engaged in the recreational groundfish fishery

None of the stocks included in the proposed action are allocated to the recreational fishery; Thus, economic impacts to the recreational fishery would be neutral.

Entities engaged in the Atlantic sea scallop fishery

The sea scallop fishery is expected to have negative effects (see Section 5.4). As the sub-ACL would be a decrease for GB yellowtail flounder, economic impacts to the scallop fishery would be negative compared to No Action. For SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, the sub-ACL would also decrease slightly compared to No Action, and so economic impacts would be slight negative relative to No Action. Relative to the status quo, negative economic impacts are anticipated if AMs are triggered due to overages. However, based on expected scallop fishing activity and projected bycatches estimates for FY2026, overages of the scallop fishery sub-ACLs are not expected (see Table 36).

Entities engaged in the midwater trawl directed Atlantic herring fishery

The estimate of GB haddock catch in the Atlantic herring midwater trawl fishery has been relatively low. Low catches of haddock have occurred in parallel with decreasing quotas and catch of Atlantic herring. Observer coverage used to estimate catch rates has been variable. GOM haddock catches are also very low. If the haddock incidental catch cap is caught, any vessel issued a herring permit and using MWT gear may not fish for, possess, or land more than 2,000 lb of Atlantic herring in the Herring Haddock AM Area. Given recent low catches of GB and GOM haddock, entities engaged in the midwater trawl Atlantic herring fishery are not expected to be negatively impacted by the proposed action.

Entities engaged in the small-mesh multispecies fishery

Under the proposed action, the sub-ACL for GB yellowtail flounder for the small mesh fisheries (e.g., whiting and squid) would decrease compared to what was proposed in FW69 and could have negative economic impacts on the squid fishery. However, there would be neutral impacts on the small mesh fishery because catches in recent years have generally been low.

Entities engaged in the large-mesh non-groundfish trawl fisheries (included within the 'other' sub-component)

The southern windowpane flounder "other fisheries" sub-component is used to evaluate when an AM could be triggered for large-mesh non-groundfish fisheries (e.g., summer flounder and scup trawl fisheries). Under the proposed action, the other sub-component would remain unchanged at 98 mt from FY2025 and No Action. If bycatch of southern windowpane flounder is low in FY2025, there would be neutral economic impacts of the sub-ACL under the proposed action compared to FY2024. Relative to No Action, impacts are expected to be neutral.

Revisions to the regulatory process for the Regional Administrator to adjust recreational measures for cod and haddock

Establishing a regulatory process for the Regional Administrator to adjust recreational measures for all stocks of cod and haddock streamlines recreational management by creating a single process of all stocks of cod and haddock. This would allow recreational measures to be consistent across stock units, if appropriate. Recently, the Council included this authority on a 1-year basis in both Amendment 25 and FW69. Establishing this regulatory process on a permanent basis, rather than on a temporary basis as was done in the past, reduces the burden for the Council to address changes to cod and haddock stocks without a sub-ACL and does not change the effects previously analyzed in Framework 69.

Establishing this regulatory process is administrative, resulting in neutral economic impacts on the commercial fishery and recreational fishery relative to No Action. If the NMFS/Council consultation process includes consideration of the recommendations of the Recreational Advisory Panel, it could lead to positive social benefits for the recreational cod fishery participants in EGOM and GB with respect to the process of management decisions.

Summary of expected economic impacts from implementation of FW72 proposed action

The regulations proposed in FW72 are expected to have a positive impact on gross revenues and operating profits for entities engaged in the commercial groundfish fishery relative to No Action.

The overall proposed action is predicted to result in positive impacts to the commercial groundfish fishery relative to No Action. The proposed action is estimated to generate $36.8 million in sector revenue from

the catch of multispecies groundfish, $52.6 million in total revenue from all fish caught on sector groundfish trips, and $33.1 million in operating profit from sector groundfish trips during FY2026. Under No Action, the fishery is estimated to generate $16.8 million in sector revenue from the catch of multispecies groundfish, $23.9 million in total revenue from all fish caught on sector groundfish trips, and $18.7 million in operating profit from sector groundfish trips during FY2026. Small entities engaged in the commercial sector groundfish fishery will therefore be positively impacted by the proposed action, relative to No Action. Small entities engaged in common pool groundfish fishing are expected to be positively impacted by the proposed action as well. However, relative to predicted values for FY2025, the commercial groundfish fishery could be negatively to positively impacted by the proposed action, depending on whether or not sector MUBs are removed. With the MUBs in place for sectors, operating profits are predicted to decrease by $0.8M (2.4%) relative to predicted FY2025 values. With the MUBs removed for sectors, operating profits are predicted to increase by $0.7M (2.1%) relative to predicted FY2025 values.

None of the stocks included in the proposed action are allocated to the recreational fishery; Thus, no economic impacts to the recreational fishery would be neutral.

Entities participating in the Atlantic sea scallop fishery would be negatively impacted. Entities engaged in the midwater trawl Atlantic herring fishery would have positive to neutral impacts. Entities engaged in the small-mesh multispecies fishery would have neutral impacts.

Determination of Significance

The proposed action does not constitute a significant regulatory action under EO 12866 for the following reasons: the proposed action will not have an annual effect on the economy of more than $100 million. Adverse impacts on fishermen and fishing businesses, ports, recreational anglers, and operators of party/charter businesses are not expected to be substantial.

In addition, there should be no interactions with activities of other agencies and no impacts on entitlements, grants, user fees, or loan programs. The proposed action does not raise novel legal or policy issues. As such, the Proposed Action is not considered significant as defined by EO 12866.

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Appendix I

Quota Change Model Results

Quota Change Model Prediction for 2026 Groundfish Fishing Year

Methods

The Quota Change Model (QCM) is used to analyze the impacts of each combination of measures on the sector portion of the groundfish fishery, which has comprised 99% of commercial groundfish revenues over the last five fishing years (see Affected Environment: Human Communities). The QCM is a Monte Carlo simulation model that selects from existing records the trips most likely to take place under new regulatory conditions. To do this, a large pool of actual trips is created from a reference dataset. For this prediction, the reference dataset consists of groundfish trips taken from the 2024 fishing year (May 1, 2024 – April 30, 2025). The composition of this pool is conditioned on each trip's utilization of allocated Annual Catch Entitlement (ACE), under the assumption that the most likely trips to take place in the FY being analyzed are those fishing efficiently under the new sector sub-ACLs. The more efficiently a trip uses its ACE, the more likely that trip is to be drawn into the sample pool. ACE efficiency is determined by the ratio of ACE expended to net revenues on a trip, iterated over each of the allocated groundfish stocks. Operating profits are calculated as gross revenues minus trip costs minus the opportunity cost of quota, where trip costs are from at-sea observer data (Figure 6) and quota opportunity costs are estimated from a model of inter-sector lease price and quantity data.

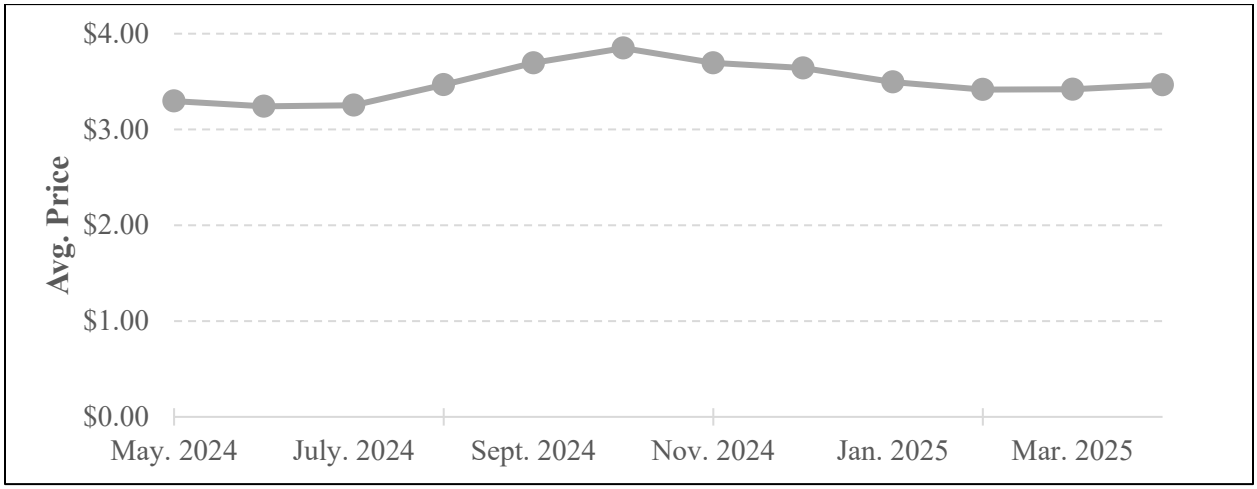

Figure 6- Monthly average fuel price (nominal $), sector vessel trips, May 2024 – April 2025. Source: Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP) and At-Sea Monitoring (ASM) data.

Once the sample pool is constructed, trips are pulled from the pool at random, summing the ACE expended for all allocated groundfish stocks as each trip is drawn. When one stock's ACE reaches the sector sub-ACL limit, no further trips from that broad stock area are selected. The model continues selecting trips until sector sub-ACLs are achieved for areas that encompass the WGOM cod and GB broadstock areas or if sub-ACLs are reached for one of the unit stocks.

This selection process forms a synthetic fishing year. A total of 250 synthetic years are constructed, and median values and confidence intervals are reported. By running simulations based on actual fishing trips, the model implicitly assumes the following:

- stock conditions, fishing practices and harvest technologies existing during the data period are representative;
- sector enrollment from the data period are representative (i.e. a shift from sectors to the common pool could cause an overestimate in fishery revenue)
- allocations to individual sectors are not considered, as the fishery is modeled as a whole;
- trips are repeatable;
- demand for groundfish is constant, noting that fish prices do vary between the reference population and the sample population, but this variability is consistent with the underlying price/quantity relationship observed during the reference period;
- operating costs are constant;
- ACE flows seamlessly from lesser to lessee such that fishery-wide caps can be met without leaving ACE for constraining stocks stranded;

The net effect of the constraints imposed by these assumptions is unclear. The selection algorithm draws mainly from efficient trips—if fishermen make relatively less efficient trips the model estimates will be biased high. Through a combination of technological improvement (gear rigging, equipment upgrades, etc.) or behavioral modifications, fishermen are likely to improve on their ability to avoid constraining stocks. If these adjustments are successful, the model predictions may be biased low. Furthermore, the model will under-predict true landings and/or revenues if stock conditions for non-constraining stocks improve, if demand for groundfish rises, or if fishing practices change and fishermen become more efficient at maximizing the value of their ACE. Conversely, the model will over-predict true landings and/or revenues if stock conditions of non-constraining stocks decline, markets deteriorate, or fishing costs increase.

The model is intended to capture fishery-wide behavioral changes with respect to groundfish sub-ACL changes, and groundfish catch is maximized by the constrained optimization algorithm. Catch of non-groundfish stocks on groundfish trips are captured in the model, but not explicitly modeled, such that constraints on other fisheries are not incorporated. At-sea monitoring costs are assumed to be fully subsidized/reimbursed to sectors.

Model Performance (FY2021-FY2025)

Performance of the QCM from recent fishing years is shown in Table 1. The model under-predicted revenues and profit for FY2021, followed by over-predictions for FY2022-2023, and performed well for FY2024. Based on fishing activity through the first half of FY2025, the model is likely to under-predict values for the current fishing year, noting that FW69 has not been implemented to date.

From a revenue perspective, the accuracy of predictions depends on the total volume of landings, the composition of landings, and fish ex-vessel prices. A drop-off in landings from FY2020-2022 was primarily responsible for the FW63 over-prediction. A drop-off in fish prices was primarily responsible for the FW65 over-prediction. The FW66 accurate revenue predictions were a function of slight over-estimates in harvest and relatively stable/slight decline in prices. Thus far FY2025 is showing a relatively large increase in fish prices. If these increases continue into FY2026, the revenue predictions that follow may be under-estimated.

Table 1- Performance of Quota Change Model, fishing years 2021-2025. Revenues and costs are for the sector component of the groundfish fishery (nominal USD).

	FY2021		FY2022		FY2023		FY2024		FY2025
	Predicted[16]	Realized	Predicted[17]	Realized	Predicted[18]	Realized	Predicted[19]	Realized	Predicted[20]
Groundfish Revenue	45.3	51.9	51.9	45.1	47.9	41.7	40.8	41.0	34.7
Total Revenue	63.5	75.1	73.3	66.6	74.2	61.6	58.2	59.8	51.7
Operating Cost	10.9	16.1	10.9	17.5	19.1	14.8	15.0	14.5	11.6
Sector Cost	1.8	1.6	1.8	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.2	1.2
Quota Cost	3.6	4.3	2.7	4.2	4.3	6.1	6.1	6.9	5.0
Operating Profit	47.1	53.1	59.4	43.4	51.0	39.3	36.1	37.2	33.9

[16] FW61, reference pool = FY2019

[17] FW63, reference pool = September 2020 – August 2021

[18] FW65, reference pool = November 2021 – October 2022

[19] FW66, reference pool = November 2022 – October 2023

[20] FW69, reference pool = FY2023

Results

Table 2- Summary of realized FY2024 and predicted FY2025 and FY2026 revenues and costs for the sector portion of the commercial groundfish fishery; median values; nominal dollars.

Option	Groundfish Gross Revenues	Total Gross Revenues	Operating Cost	Sector Cost	Quota Cost	Operating Profit	Days Absent
FY2024 Realized	41.0	59.8	14.5	1.2	6.9	37.2	9,214
FY2024 Prediction	40.8	58.2	15.0	1.3	6.1	36.1	8,342
FY2025 Prediction (FW69)	34.7	51.7	11.6	1.2	5.0	33.9	7,192
FY2026 (No Action)	16.8	23.9	5.2	0.5	3.3	18.7	3,405
FY2026 (Alt. 2 with MUBs; white hake 70% Fmsy)	36.8	52.6	11.9	1.0	6.5	33.1	7,511
FY2026 (Alt. 2 w/o MUBs; white hake 70% Fmsy	38.6	55.1	12.6	1.1	6.9	34.6	7,869

Results- Alternative 1/No Action ACLs for FY2026

Under No Action, the groundfish fishery would operate under default specifications until Oct. 31, 2026. The QCM simulates revenue and operating profit for a complete fishing year. To estimate 6 months of activity, the QCM outputs (revenue, costs, operating profit) were multiplied by the percentage of respective values that have occurred in May-October over FYs 2020-2024. For groundfish revenue, the multiplier was .502 (Figure 7). Multipliers were also used for total revenue (.487) and days absent (.526), with the latter being applied to operating cost as well. Finally, a multiplier for groundfish landings (.510) was applied to sector costs and quota costs.

Since there is a seasonal component to stock-level, port-level, and vessel size-level revenues, these results are not presented under No Action. Given the substantial reduction in revenues and profits under No Action relative to Alternative 2, all components of the groundfish fishery are expected to incur negative impacts. In anticipation of an Oct. 31 fishery closure, an increase in effort would certainly be possible. This potential increase was not incorporated in the No Action estimates given uncertainty around how the profitability of groundfish trips would be impacted in a situation with a large volume of landings occurring in a condensed fishing year.

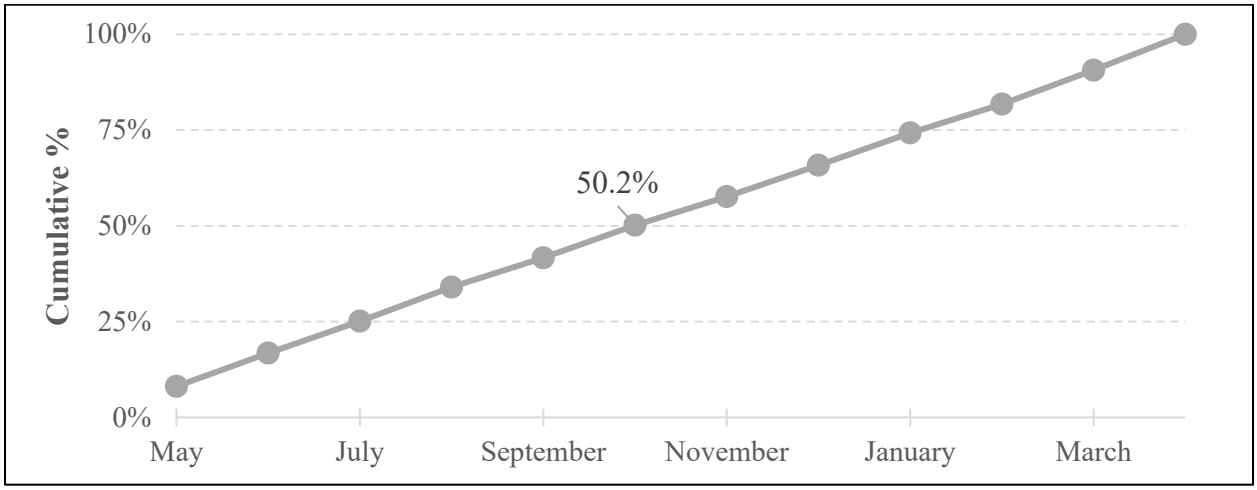

Figure 7- Cumulative percentage of groundfish revenue by month, fishing year 2020-2024

Results- Alternative 2, Revised ACLs for FY2026

The FY2026 Alternative 2 prediction includes the management uncertainty buffer (MUB) in place for all groundfish stocks and a separate prediction for the MUB removed for all stocks (Table 3).

When all MUBs are included, predicted groundfish revenue for FY2026 is $36.8M, representing a $4.2M (-10.2%) decrease from the FY2024 realized value of $41.0M. Total predicted gross revenues from groundfish trips for FY2026 is $52.6M. This represents a $7.2M decrease from the FY2024 realized value of $59.8M. Predicted operating profit is $33.1M, representing a $4.1M (-11.0%) reduction from the FY2024 value of $37.2M.

When MUBs are removed for all stocks, predicted groundfish revenue for FY2026 is $38.6M, an increase of $1.8M compared to the inclusion of buffers. Total revenue from groundfish trips is $55.1M, an increase of $2.5M compared to the inclusion of buffers. However, even with the removal of MUBs for groundfish stocks, FY2026 predicted groundfish revenue is still $2.4M (5.9%) lower than the FY2024 value. Total revenue from groundfish trips is still $4.7M (7.9%) lower. Operating profit during FY2026 is predicted to be $34.6M in the absence of management uncertainty buffers. Disaggregated results (by stock, port, and vessel size class) are shown below for Alternative 2 without MUBs.

Stock-level predictions show that four stocks (GB cod, WGOM cod, white hake, and redfish) have utilization rates >90% (Table 3). White hake and WGOM cod show the largest reductions in revenue relative to FY2024 while other less constraining stocks such as plaice, GOM haddock, and witch flounder show more moderate reductions. Port-level predictions are shown for both home port (Table 4) and trip port (Table 5) with most areas showing value reductions relative to FY2024. By vessel length (Table 6), all size classes are predicted to yield a reduction in total revenues from groundfish trips relative to FY2024.

Of note, behavioral changes in the fishery may occur with the transition from two cod stocks to four for FY2026. For example, few trips occurred in the EGOM cod broadstock area during FY2024. With separate WGOM and EGOM cod quotas in FY2026, and the WGOM quota predicted to be constraining, there is the potential for a shift in effort east. The QCM is unable to predict these sorts of potential large effort shifts as noted in the model assumptions listed under the methods section: “stock conditions, fishing practices and harvest technologies existing during the data period are representative”.

Stocks with predicted high levels of utilization in FY2026 are expected to have higher quota prices relative to less utilized stocks. Stock-level quota prices and costs are summarized in Table 7. Quota costs represent the opportunity cost of quota where each pound of catch is multiplied by the estimated quota price. That is, every pound of fish caught can no longer be leased out. Quota accounting costs would look quite different as sectors/vessels will have varying needs to lease in quota, based in part on their initial allocations.

Table 3- Alternative 2 (**MUB removed for all stocks**) stock-level catch and revenue predictions, median values with 5% and 95% confidence intervals, nominal dollars (millions). Stocks are presented in order of FY2026 predicted ex-vessel value.

Stock	Sub-ACL (mt)	Predicted Catch (mt)	Predicted Utilization	FY26 Prediction	*p(5%) Revenue*	*p(95% Revenue)*	FY24 Realized Revenue
Redfish	5,567	5,380	96.6%	6.8	6.2	7.2	6.7
GB Haddock	4,215	1,871	44.4%	5.8	4.9	6.8	6.0
American Plaice	6,729	1,272	18.9%	5.0	4.5	5.5	5.2
Pollock	9,777	2,187	22.4%	4.0	3.7	4.3	4.2
GOM Haddock	2,269	1,136	50.1%	3.9	3.6	4.3	4.1
White Hake	1,340	1,330	99.3%	3.8	3.5	3.9	4.8
Witch Flounder	1,424	1,033	72.5%	3.1	2.8	3.3	3.3
GB Winter Flounder	1,587	662	41.7%	2.8	2.3	3.3	2.7
WGOM Cod	294	283	96.3%	1.4	1.3	1.5	2.2
GB Cod	134	121	90.3%	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.5
GOM Winter Flounder	588	102	17.4%	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.5
CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder	1,585	272	17.1%	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3
Halibut	23	35	150.7%	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
SNE/MA Winter Flounder	341	47	13.9%	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.2
EGOM Cod	37	1	1.6%	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1
GB Yellowtail Flounder	24	2	10.0%	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1
SNE Cod	7	<0.1	5.8%	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1
SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	22	<0.1	0.8%	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1

Table 4- Alternative 2 revenue prediction by **home port**, mean values with 5% and 95% confidence intervals in parenthesis, nominal dollars (millions).

	Groundfish Revenue		**Total Revenue**	
State/Port	FY2026 Prediction	FY2024 Realized	FY2026 Prediction	FY2024 Realized
Massachusetts				
Gloucester	8.6 (7.6 – 9.5)	11.9	12.0 (10.7 - 13.2)	16.0
Boston/Scituate	8.5 (7.5 – 9.4)	10.1	11.1 (9.8 – 12.3)	13.1
New Bedford	16.7 (15.2 – 18.3)	13.9	23.6 (21.6 – 25.6)	19.8
Outer/Lower Cape	<0.1 (<0.1 - 0.1)	0.1	0.7 (0.6 - 0.8)	2.8
Other MA ports	<0.1 (<0.1 - <0.1)	<0.1	<0.1 (<0.1 - 0.1)	<0.1
Maine				
Portland	2.7 (2.3 – 3.2)	3.0	3.2 (2.7 - 3.8)	3.7
Other ME ports	0.7 (0.6 – 0.9)	0.7	0.9 (0.7 - 1.1)	0.9
Rhode Island (all)	0.5 (0.3 - 0.6)	0.4	2.1 (1.7 - 2.5)	1.9
New Hampshire (all)	0.8 (0.6 – 1.0)	0.9	1.4 (1.1 - 1.6)	1.4

Table 5- Alternative 2 revenue prediction by **trip port**, mean values with 5% and 95% confidence intervals in parenthesis, nominal dollars (millions).

	Groundfish Revenue		**Total Revenue**	
State/Port	FY2026 Prediction	FY2024 Realized	FY2026 Prediction	FY2024 Realized
Massachusetts				
Gloucester	10.9 (9.7 - 11.9)	11.8	14.7 (13.1 - 15.9)	15.6
Boston/Scituate	9.1 (8.2 - 10.0)	10.5	11.9 (10.7 - 13.1)	13.5
New Bedford	16.2 (14.9 - 17.7)	15.9	22.2 (20.5 – 24.2)	20.8
Outer/Lower Cape	0.1 (<0.1 - 0.1)	0.1	1.5 (1.2 – 1.8)	4.6
Other MA ports	<0.1 (<0.1 - <0.1)	<0.1	<0.1 (<0.1 - <0.1)	<0.1
Maine				
Portland	1.7 (1.4 - 2.1)	1.9	2.2 (1.8 - 2.6)	2.3
Other ME ports	0.3 (0.2 - 0.4)	0.3	0.3 (0.3 - 0.4)	0.4
Rhode Island (all)	0.1 (0.1 - 0.1)	0.1	1.5 (1.2 – 1.8)	1.3
New Hampshire (all)	0.3 (0.2 - 0.3)	0.4	0.6 (0.5 - 0.8)	0.8

Table 6- Alternative 2 (**MUB removed for all stocks**) groundfish species revenue and total revenue prediction by size class, mean values with 5% and 95% confidence intervals in parenthesis, nominal dollars (millions).

	Groundfish Revenue		**Total Revenue**	
Vessel Length Category	FY2026 Prediction	FY2024 Realized	FY2026 Prediction	FY2024 Realized
75'+	25.2 (23.6 – 26.7)	27.6	33.7 (31.5 – 35.8)	36.3
50'to<75'	8.9 (7.8 – 9.9)	9.8	14.4 (12.9 - 16.0)	15.4
<50'	4.4 (3.8 – 5.2)	3.6	6.9 (6.1 – 7.9)	8.1

Table 7. Stock-level landings (Alternative 2: MUB removed for all stocks, other than SNE cod), estimated quota prices, and quota costs. Stocks listed in order of predicted FY2026 revenue.

Stock	Predicted Catch (lbs.)	Estimated Quota Price	Quota Cost ($)
Redfish	11,860,094	0.10	1,186,009
GB Haddock	4,124,169	0.00	0
American Plaice	2,803,893	0.00	0
Pollock	4,820,552	0.00	0
GOM Haddock	2,504,148	0.36	896,435
White Hake	2,932,766	0.91	2,656,764
Witch Flounder	2,276,370	0.51	1,172,057
GB Winter Flounder	1,458,616	0.00	0
WGOM Cod	623,155	1.37	851,348
GB Cod	267,447	0.81	216,761
GOM Winter Flounder	225,653	0.00	0
CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder	598,704	0.00	0
Halibut	76,739	N/A	N/A
SNE/MA Winter Flounder	104,699	0.00	0
EGOM Cod	1,262	0.00	0
GB Yellowtail Flounder	5,180	0.00	0
SNE Cod	826	0.00	0
SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	359	0.00	0
Total	*34,684,631*		*6,979,373*

Quota Change Model Comparison for White Hake (70% F_{MSY} vs. 75% F_{MSY})

The Quota Change Model (QCM) is used to analyze the impacts of each combination of measures on the sector portion of the groundfish fishery, which has comprised 99% of commercial groundfish revenues over the last five fishing years (see Affected Environment: Human Communities). Information on the mechanics of the model as well as model performance is available in the document provided during the December Council meeting. This document provides a discussion of fishing year 2026 (FY2026) under two white sector sub-ACLs. Under 70% F_{MSY}, the white hake sector sub-ACL for FY2026 would be 1,339.6mt, assuming the removal of the management uncertainty buffer. Under 75% F_{MSY}, the white hake sector sub-ACL would be 1,443mt, representing an increase of 93.4mt (+7.0%).

During the December Council meeting, the QCM results presented used FY2024 (May 1, 2024 – April 30, 2025) as the reference period. The FY2026 summary results presented for that meeting are shown below (Table 8), as well as the predicted most constraining stocks (Table 9).

Table 8- Predicted FY2026 revenues and costs for the sector portion of the commercial groundfish fishery; median values; nominal dollars; FY2024 reference period for QCM.

Option	Groundfish Gross Revenues	Total Gross Revenues	Operating Cost	Sector Cost	Quota Cost	Operating Profit	Days Absent
FY2026 (Alt. 2 w/o MUBs; white hake 70% Fmsy	38.6	55.1	12.6	1.1	6.9	34.6	7,869

Table 9- Groundfish stocks with predicted FY2026 utilization rates >90%; FY2024 reference period for QCM.

Stock	Sub-ACL (mt)	Predicted Catch (mt)	Predicted Utilization
White Hake	1,340	1,330	99.3%
Redfish	5,567	5,380	96.6%
WGOM Cod	294	283	96.3%
GB Cod	134	121	90.3%

When evaluating a higher white hake sector sub-ACL using FY2024 as the reference period, the extra 93.4mt had little impact on fishery predictions. For example, groundfish gross revenues were still $38.6M and total gross revenues were $55.3M (+0.2M). These similar results under the two white hake sector sub-ACLs can be explained by the other constraining stocks listed in Table 9.

Thus far in FY2025, cod catch rates have been far below recent years. Given these declines, the QCM was re-run incorporating a more recent reference period of November 1, 2024 – October 31, 2025. This change in eligible trips produced a large change in predicted FY2026 catch for cod stocks, with WGOM cod utilization falling to 90.8% and GB cod utilization falling to 54.4% under a white hake sector sub-ACL of 1,399.6mt.

These lower catch rates for cod provided an indication that an increase in the white hake sector sub-ACL to 1,443mt may be impactful when considering more recent fishing activity. This in fact proved to be the case with fishery-wide revenues increasing by 4.9% and catch increasing by 4.8%. A 4.9% increase in revenues would translate to $40.5M in groundfish revenues for FY2026. This increase in revenues covers a variety of groundfish stocks, including white hake (+6.1%), GB haddock (+5.1%), and pollock (+4.5%).