



New England Fishery Management Council

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

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** March 23, 2026  
**TO:** Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)  
**FROM:** Cate O'Keefe, Executive Director  
**SUBJECT:** **Terms of Reference and information for March 30 SSC meeting re the 2026 State of the Ecosystem Report, June 2026 SSC workshop planning, Risk Policy, and data updates**

**2026 State of the Ecosystem Report**

***TERMS OF REFERENCE***

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) has provided the *2026 State of the Ecosystem Report* (SOE, Document #2). Please address the following Terms of Reference:

- A. Recommend key signals described in the report that the Council should consider when making management decisions over the next year.
- B. Recommend potential improvements to future reports to support the Council's review and input to the NEFSC.

***BACKGROUND***

Since 2017, the NEFSC has prepared annual *State of the Ecosystem* (SOE) *Reports* on the status of the Northeast Shelf marine ecosystems - Georges Bank, Gulf of Maine, and the Mid-Atlantic Bight. These reports are provided to the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils (MAFMC) and include information on the ecological, social, and economic state of the ecosystem. The Climate and Ecosystem Steering Committee will discuss selected sections of the SOE report at their upcoming March 27 meeting, and the MAFMC SSC will review the Mid-Atlantic SOE report in May.

**June SSC Workshop on Dynamic Reference Points**

***TERMS OF REFERENCE***

- A. Review, comment on, and as needed recommend revisions to the draft goals, expected outcomes, and agenda of the SSC workshop on dynamic reference points.

## ***BACKGROUND***

Reference points are an essential tool for understanding the condition of a fishery resource relative to a desired state. Traditional reference points assume stationarity in population dynamics in the absence of fishing, but assuming equilibrium conditions can lead to misspecification of reference points. Unlike static reference points, dynamic reference points can accommodate non-stationarity in population dynamics and track time-varying population vital rates.

The SSC will be convened in a two-day workshop in June to discuss existing reference points for NEFMC-managed stocks, and to consider alternative approaches to defining reference points that may better account for non-stationarity. While scientific definitions of dynamic reference points are currently being developed, practical applications in regional fishery management plans and adaptation to climate and environmental conditions are lacking. The SSC workshop aims to develop practical guidelines for integrating dynamic reference points into fisheries stock assessment and management.

## **Risk Policy**

### ***TERMS OF REFERENCE***

- A. Consider the information provided on the revised Risk Policy Concept, including factor revisions, mechanics of developing z-scores, example linking the Risk Policy with an ABC Control Rule, and options for the SSC's use of the Risk Policy. Provide feedback on the proposed application of the Risk Policy Concept.

## ***BACKGROUND***

The Council approved updates to its Risk Policy Statement with a new Risk Policy Concept in September 2024. The Risk Policy aims to systematically account for factors that influence risk tolerance in Council decision making. Implementation of the updated Risk Policy began in January 2025 and is proceeding in stages. From Summer 2025 through early 2026, the SSC received and used a revised Risk Policy Matrix when recommending specifications that aligned with the factors in the new Risk Policy Concept. The SSC used the revised matrices in a similar manner to previous Risk Policy information.

The Risk Policy Working Group (RPWG) has continued to refine elements of the Risk Policy Concept such as the factors, data sources, and scoring rubric, informed by simulation testing. On March 30, the SSC will receive an update on Risk Policy Concept revisions (factors, data, mechanics), an example of applying the Risk Policy with an ABC control rule, and potential ways for the SSC to use the Risk Policy with harvest control rules. The Council will receive updates on Risk Policy developments at its April meeting and is scheduled to approve revisions and conduct factor weightings in June. The SSC should focus on clarifying questions around the Risk Policy Concept, identifying areas of the Risk Policy for future development, and how the SSC might use the Risk Policy.

## **Information**

### ***SOE REPORT***

1. Presentation on SOE report by J. Caracappa, NEFSC
2. *2026 State of the Ecosystem Report*, with memo from NEFSC to SSC re: SOE request tracking, March 20, 2026

### ***DYNAMIC REFERENCE POINTS WORKSHOP***

1. Presentation on workshop planning by J. Courmane, NEFMC
2. Workshop overview white paper

### ***RISK POLICY***

1. Presentation on Risk Policy Concept revisions, SSC use of Risk Policy, and implementation plan by J. Peros, NEFMC
2. Presentation on Risk Policy mechanics and ABC control rule example by R. Brothers, UMaine
3. Risk Policy Concept and Appendices
4. Draft Risk Policy Workplan

### ***BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS***

1. [2025 State of the Ecosystem – New England](#), NOAA/NEFSC