



New England Fishery Management Council

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Monkfish and Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plans

Monkfish and Skate Fishery Improvements Listening Session Summary

**The Westin Portland Harborview Hotel
Portland, Maine
April 27, 2026, 4-6:30 pm**

Meeting Officer: Scott Olszewski, Skate Committee Chair

Other Council Members: Daniel Salerno (Council Chair), Terry Alexander, Geoff Smith

Council Staff: Jenny Couture (Monkfish Plan Coordinator), Dr. Rachel Feeney (Skate Plan Coordinator), Emily Bodell

GARFO Staff: Spencer Talmage

Attendance: Brian and Tracy Pearce (F/V Gracelyn Jane), Hannah MacDonald (Maine Coast Fishermen's Association), Corrin Flora (Maine Department of Marine Resources)

The meeting began at 4:00 pm. Chair Olszewski welcomed the audience and opened the meeting with some brief comments. This was the first of five listening sessions being held to solicit public comments on improvements to monkfish and skate fishery management. A report out of the listening sessions and all comments received from April 20- May 18, 2026 will be provided to the New England Council during its June meeting in Mystic, CT and to the Mid-Atlantic Council during its August meeting in Philadelphia, PA. Council staff briefly presented background information on the monkfish and skate fisheries, discussion questions, and on how to provide public comment.

A member of the public asked why the Council decided to change priorities from scoping for a potential individual fishing quota (IFQ) program to broader listening sessions, stating that they thought the scoping meetings were to hear from the industry. Council staff explained that when the IFQ scoping document was discussed at the March joint Monkfish and Skate Advisory Panel and Committee meeting, there was pushback from meeting participants on the IFQ program idea. The Skate Committee chair also noted that there was some industry discussion prior to the meeting as well, and there was little appetite for this type of management approach, though the listening sessions are an opportunity to express support for IFQs if there is interest. There was also a question about winter skate possession in the northern area. Council staff explained that if vessels are fishing on an appropriate day-at-sea (DAS), they can harvest the full skate wing possession limits, including winter skate. The individual noted that skate wings are typically a bycatch fishery when fishing for monkfish in the northern monkfish management area, and that skate wings caught in the area are typically barndoor skate.

There was a question about whether draggers participate in the monkfish fishery in the northern area, and the minimum mesh size. GARFO staff stated that there are draggers associated with the monkfish fishery, and that minimum mesh size is tied to the restrictions from groundfish permits/trips. A member of the public noted that a dragger can use a 6.5” mesh net in the monkfish fishery while gillnet vessels must use 12” mesh. GARFO staff clarified that on monkfish-only DAS, the minimum mesh size is 12”, and on gillnet split trips (where groundfish and monkfish are caught), gear requirements are subject to groundfish minimum mesh sizes.

Area-Specific Management. A monkfish fisherman felt that the southern and northern monkfish management areas should be managed separately, and that the southern area should be managed with skates.

Monkfish DAS. A monkfish fisherman suggested that monkfish vessels should have the option to use B-DAS when fishing for monkfish given the low bycatch in the fishery. They noted that if there are not enough DAS, vessels may go to another fishery instead of staying in the monkfish fishery, and suggested that DAS should be allocated based on landings history, as done in the groundfish fishery, rather than the same amount to each permit. When DAS were first set up in the groundfish fishery, all active participants, as determined by a minimum amount of landings within a set number of years, were assigned a certain number of DAS. They suggested this model be used for the monkfish fishery. They also felt that the monkfish fishery should be directed on monkfish, should have to use large mesh, and be exempt from having bycatch.

Monkfish IFQ program. Two participants supported considering an IFQ program for the monkfish fishery in the northern management area, stating that the program has worked well in the groundfish fishery. The monkfish fishery is currently healthy, and an IFQ program would prevent a large influx of effort from other fisheries if these other fisheries start performing poorly. A representative from the NH groundfish sector relayed a lack of support for an IFQ program in the northern area, noting that the sector participants were concerned about additional costs (quota leasing and extra monitoring) under an IFQ program. The Skate Committee Chair stated that fishery participants in Rhode Island were interested in preserving future opportunities, noting that there may be a market issue in the south, but in general, there is wide-ranging rationale for not supporting IFQs.

Latent effort. A northern area monkfish fisherman noted concern that latent permits could easily re-enter the fishery without a mechanism or management measure in place. A representative for the NH groundfish sector noted that members were concerned about the potential for latent effort to be realized if vessels entered the fishery due to restrictions in other fisheries. When asked why latent effort is a concern in the fishery, a monkfish fisherman explained that the monkfish fishery is relatively easy to get into, and vessels participating in other fisheries could easily return to monkfish fishing.

A Council member noted that latent effort is considered when determining the number of Monkfish DAS. There has been some discussion around changing this in the southern area such that fishermen could use all their DAS on one vessel. Council staff stated that most vessels in the southern area do not use their allotment of Monkfish DAS, so while latent effort is accounted for when determining DAS, DAS do not appear to be limiting. The Council member stated that there

have always been concerns about latent effort in the southern area, but less so in the northern area, and there has not been interest in changing monkfish management for the northern area. Another Council member asked if these concerns could be because the number of DAS allocated is too low.

Expansion of skate exemption areas. A representative for RI groundfish sector members noted support for expanded skate exemption areas to mitigate impacts from other activities and restrictions in southern New England, such as offshore wind development and windowpane flounder exemption areas.

Permit stacking. A member of the public asked if permit stacking would help. Another member of the public explained that when they run out of monkfish DAS, they will fish fewer nets on a groundfish DAS because they cannot buy another permit and stack it or lease monkfish DAS. Stacking permits could be an option, but they did not think they should have to pay to purchase another monkfish permit when they have a long fishing history.

The Chair and Council staff wrapped up the meeting by reviewing ways to provide further comments. The Chair closed the meeting at about 5:10 pm.