



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

**Fairfield Inn & Suites
New Bedford, MA
April 29, 2026, 4pm**

Meeting Officer: Matthew Gates, Monkfish Committee Chair

Other Council Members: Melanie Griffin (Council Vice-Chair), Scott Olszewski, Skate Committee Chair; Kelly Whitmore (Monkfish Committee member)

Council Staff: Jenny Couture (Monkfish Plan Coordinator), Emily Bodell (Skate staff), Cate O'Keefe (Council Executive Director)

GARFO Staff: Spencer Talmage

Attendance: Aubrey Church (Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Association), Garrett Klee (SMAST student), and Drew Minkiewicz

The meeting began at 4:00 pm. Chair Gates welcomed the audience and opened the meeting with some brief comments. This was the second 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 provided a briefly presented background information on the monkfish and skate fisheries, discussion questions, and on how to provide public comment.

A member of the public commented that many gillnet fishermen on the Cape and out of RI wanted to attend the listening session but decided to take advantage of the weather window to fish; the lack of attendance is not necessarily indicative of lack of interest.

Effort Controls. A member of the public noted that there was some interest from industry to better use the skate wing limits through dynamic weekly trip limits or slowly increasing trip limits by 500 lb or 1,000 lb, for example. A Skate Committee member asked if increased skate possession limits would lead to increased use of monkfish. Staff replied that the Plan Development Teams evaluated this in 2025 and the data and the catch per unit effort projects did not show this consistently; there are many factors involved. A Council member asked GARFO staff about the viability of dynamic trip limits on a weekly basis. GARFO staff thought this sounded challenging though needed to discuss this idea further for skates. A member of the

public thought that it could be helpful to explore trip limit adjustments based on landings. There was a brief discussion about changing the skate possession limit per DAS used. Staff had also heard this suggestion. The skate total allowable landings have continued to increase with a decrease in effort; this is one of the only fisheries that is intuitive in this regard.

Staff suggested removing effort controls entirely in the monkfish and skate fisheries for one year to see how the market would react. The Executive Director thought this could be done more incrementally, such as removing possession limits and retaining DAS or vice versa to see if one is more constraining than the other. A Council member wanted to understand whether industry would support this idea first. GARFO staff thought that there are other regulations besides possession limits that are barriers for fishing. A member of the public thought the main issue was lack of participation in both fisheries and another reiterated industry concerns regarding latent effort; staff commented that the number of active permits in both fisheries has declined over time and only a small subset is directing on monkfish with many latent permits. The Council needs to understand the concern regarding latent effort given there is no imminent event that will activate effort and the data do not support this concern.

Markets. Staff noted that market conditions appear to be more limiting than the skate total allowable landings and possession limits. In 2025, industry was interested in increasing skate possession limits early on, though as the year progressed, there was greater concern about the market impact from any increase in landings. A member of the public asked about the purpose of the possession limit and the need for consistent landings to build the market and thereby increase the price (match demand and supply); another public attendee commented that dealers say that they can sell any catch they receive, though fishermen continue to be concerned about declining prices and difficulty finding crew to catch skates. It seems that the possession limits are arbitrary, especially if the limits are not hurting the sustainability of the stock and the current management system is creating regulatory discards. There was interest in understanding from the fishing industry what can be done about the market, especially considering the new USDA seafood development office. The Committee Chair commented that the fishing industry perhaps wants additional flexibility, though he cautioned that the Council does not have much involvement in changes in price.

Skate Exempted Fishing Permit. A meeting participant noted that there were industry equity and market concerns regarding the skate exempted fishing permit (EFP) that allowed a double landing limit for skate wings. Specifically, there was concern that additional skate wing landings would flood the market, entice bottom trawlers to enter the fishery, and further reduce skate wing prices; this was discussed during a meeting hosted by the Fishermen's Alliance in summer 2025. Note that different DAS in different management areas have different landing limits (Monkfish versus Northeast Multispecies B DAS, etc.); these differences should be accounted for in any future management changes. The EFP expanded to multiple dealers (originally there was only one) and several boats were interested in participating, though only a few have landed skate wings under this program. Participation in the program was anticipated to start in fall 2025, though the first landings hadn't occurred until early 2026. Staff noted that the specific data could not be reported yet due to data confidentiality reasons.

Monkfish Research Set-Aside Program. There was a brief discussion regarding potential improvements to the research set-aside (RSA) program. Staff noted that the Monkfish RSA program is currently paused due to lack of participation and the selected projects to date are either incomplete or being funded through other sources external to selling RSA DAS. The Committee Chair thought perhaps there would be more success with a Skate RSA program given the higher utilization in the southern area relative to monkfish in this area. Council staff emphasized that the feasibility of generating money to fund the research should be the top objective. GARFO staff explained the work done by the 2023 Monkfish RSA Working Group, commenting that most of the group’s recommendations would be deferred until after the Inflation Reduction Act project on cross-jurisdictional governance is completed. There is a need to reconfigure the RSA program so it is less complex and more enticing for industry to buy RSA DAS before considering creating a Skate RSA program. Ultimately, the RSA program is a safety net should an individual run out of their allocated Monkfish DAS; because Monkfish DAS are currently underutilized in the southern area, it is not necessary to buy RSA DAS.

Simplify Monkfish and Skate Fishery Management Plans. The Council’s Executive Director asked the Council members in attendance whether there was interest in simplifying the monkfish and skate fishery management plans (FMP), specifically whether these fisheries should be decoupled from the groundfish FMP. Another staff member asked whether it made sense to manage the northern monkfish stock with the groundfish sector program. A Council member emphasized that the groundfish FMP is complex and that monkfish and skates have different sectors that need to be accounted for, though the Council is managing for everyone using the same rules. They also commented that the northern monkfish fishery appears to be doing well and that the southern fishery has issues to resolve. A Skate Committee member explained that RI has a weekly aggregate skate limit for state waters and a program like this for federal waters might be worth exploring to allow for better flexibility and utilization. A Council member explained that disentangling restrictions that exist in other fisheries would be in line with the Council’s goal of increased flexibility, so would be in favor of exploring the idea of decoupling fisheries. Staff noted that originally the programs were set up to create flexibility but now the fisheries have evolved and the integration with other fisheries created constraints instead.

Other Concerns. Other concerns mentioned included needing to understand the nuances between fishing for monkfish on a Monkfish day-at-sea (DAS) versus a Northeast Multispecies DAS and opportunities to reduce latent fishing effort.

With no additional comments, the Chair closed the meeting at about 5 pm.