



## 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**

**Cornell Cooperative Extension Suffolk County  
Riverhead, NY  
April 30, 2026, 4pm**

**Meeting Officers:** Matthew Gates, Monkfish Committee Chair; Scott Olszewski, Skate Committee Chair

**Other Council Members:** Laurie Nolan (MAFMC)

**Council Staff:** Jenny Couture (Monkfish Plan Coordinator), Emily Bodell (Skate staff), Jason Didden (Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) monkfish staff)

**Attendance:** Ed Chiofolo, Matthew Froelich, Timothy Froelich, John Gillin, Tyler Guteres (Cornell Cooperative Extension), Jesse Hornstein (NYS DEC), Tara McClintock (Cornell Cooperative Extension), Richard Ruck, and Rick Stevens.

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

***Individual Fishing Quota.*** The meeting began with an industry member strongly opposing development of an individual fishing quota (IFQ) program based on their experience over the last two decades. They noted that if this program were to move forward, the program should not exclude anyone, specifically people who are participating in other fisheries (scallops, groundfish, bycatch fishery, etc.), and should not burden the next generation with additional costs. Any allocation should be based on day-at-sea (DAS) usage and prior fishing effort but exclude use of Research Set-Aside (RSA) DAS. A few industry members discussed what landings would be used for allocation and that everyone who has a permit should qualify. Staff emphasized that the Councils discontinued work on development of an IFQ program at this time. The idea of IFQ continued to be brought up with a desire to understand who brought up this idea, why this was stopped, and how likely it is to move forward in the future.

***Suggestions for Changes in Effort Controls.*** The Committee Chair asked if it would be helpful if the Council addressed latent fishing effort and/or increase the number of Monkfish DAS allocated should be increased. A meeting participant thought that the market should be addressed first and foremost before allocating additional DAS; he suggested issuing more Monkfish DAS through an exempted fishing permit (EFP). The Committee Chair explained the RI weekly aggregate skate program, which allows the ability to harvest as much as you want on a given trip if the weekly limit is not exceeded, thereby reducing discards. A commenter asked what happens to the fish caught if the weekly limit is achieved. Another commenter explained that he is newer to the fishery and has spent time in Barnegat Light in the winter where a weekly limit in the winter would be helpful due to poorer weather conditions; he also suggested that DAS charges should be based on total landings and the ability to declare an overage in the skate wing fishery while at sea (like what is permitted in the monkfish fishery). Overall, the northern monkfish management area is operating well, and the northern fishery likely does not want seasonal quota across one stock area; in the southern monkfish management area, there are fewer monkfish being landed due to poor market conditions.

Council staff suggested the idea of removing DAS and trip limits and only fishing under a total quota; a few meeting participants were concerned that this could cause a derby fishery, making things worse for the price and overall participation. Another member commented that there are not enough fishing participants to create a derby fishery. One person suggested using an EFP to land more than a typical trip limit; this would require keeping track of all landings, like what is being done for the current skate wing EFP. Council staff suggested the idea of being charged based on total landings, which could be based on the monkfish catch per unit effort projects that were recently peer reviewed. Additional input included declaring an overage of skate wings while at sea would be helpful (like what is done in the monkfish fishery).

***Latent Fishing Effort.*** The Committee Chair asked if latent fishing effort should be addressed. A few meeting participants wanted to address latent fishing effort given concerns that effort from other fisheries would shift into the monkfish fishery. There are many RSA DAS still available, which was not always the case. One person was concerned if/how latent effort would be addressed and staff suggested the possibility of consolidating the many monkfish permit categories to help simplify the monkfish fishery management plan. Another person noted that he sold his boat but kept his limited access monkfish permit in case he entered the fishery again in the future.

***Interaction between Monkfish and Skate Fishing.*** One person provided context for the interaction between monkfish and skate fishing, specifically the inability to catch monkfish when the skates are present; he was interested in fishing with less gear for fewer days to keep the nets clean of skates. Council staff indicated that data analysis in 2025 evaluated the impacts of skates on monkfish harvest and data did not consistently show this as a consistent issue.

***Governance.*** There was a desire to keep monkfish jointly managed with MAFMC. There was a discussion on if/how changes to joint management of monkfish would work should only one Council manage the resource and fishery. There was opposition to changing management given differences between how the northern and southern fisheries operate; the MAFMC should continue to jointly manage the resource/fishery with NEFMC.

**Markets.** One commenter explained that there needs to be marketing and a better price for monkfish. A few participants repeatedly commented that increasing the value of fish on the market, improved demand, increased availability of crew, and shoreside processing capacity (even in New Bedford) are main concerns that should be addressed. Perhaps there is a need for a marketing campaign, like what was done in RI for integrating monkfish sliders into school lunches. Cornell Cooperative completed a two-year marketing campaign for monkfish and continued to ask the fishing participants whether the main issue is availability of monkfish or market conditions (participants stated fish disappeared due to offshore wind sonar testing). Re-establishing exports to the Korean market could be an improvement. There is concern that industry was fishing more and making less.

**New Monkfish Research Showing One Stock.** Staff from Cornell Cooperative Extension brought up their prior DNA analysis that shows monkfish is one genetic stock; they asked if/how management would change based on this new research and if there was the possibility of seasonal quota. A few participants were concerned that their fishing history would be affected and that quota would be used before the monkfish were available for them to harvest further north if stock boundaries and seasonal quotas are changed. Staff suggested considering gear-based solutions to improve and simplify management. The Committee Chair explained that management does not necessarily have to change if the research says there is only one genetic stock of monkfish.

There was a brief discussion on monkfish tagging to help determine where the resource is located and if indeed shifted away from offshore wind development activities. Another participant was frustrated that offshore wind development took over the ocean and that fishing has shifted from monkfish fishing to skate wing fishing, especially out of RI.

**Protected Resources: Atlantic Sturgeon.** There was a lengthy discussion regarding the presence of sturgeon and the Council regulations developed to minimize sturgeon interactions in the monkfish and spiny dogfish fisheries. The new gear requirements result in a substantial reduction in monkfish catch without a substantial reduction in sturgeon. Several meeting participants repeatedly commented that the sturgeon regulations are an added expense, overall burden, and are uncalled for given the status of the stock. The gear is also hard to acquire. There has been limited observer coverage since January when the new regulations were required; the observer data are used for bycatch estimation and Council staff expressed interest in further evaluating those data to understand whether it was possible to tweak any of the management measures recently implemented. Several participants stated that sturgeon are commonly found throughout the region now. Staff explained that the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission is working on the next sturgeon assessment, to be completed in 2028, and are asking for input from stakeholders on which data sources to include. There was concern from the meeting participants that if they shared any data, then that data would be used to further restrict fishing. Council and New York state staff explained that providing data would help illustrate any changes in the sturgeon population and encouraged collaboration. A member of the public explained that the sturgeon fishery has been closed for four decades and that the stock is rebuilt now; the fishing industry is catching sturgeon in areas not previously observed. The rebuilding threshold seems to

be a moving target and that is adversely impacting new entrants into the monkfish and skate fisheries due to increased gear costs.

A Council member asked industry members to further describe their experience and explain what they heard about a recent gillnet survey catching many sturgeon as these data could be helpful for the ongoing sturgeon stock assessment and could result in changes to net requirements. There was a desire to have sturgeon removed from the endangered species list; staff explained that this would be a lengthy process and would require many steps and data and an updated Biological Opinion.

***Protected Resources: Seals.*** The use of pingers was briefly mentioned. A few participants thought pingers acted as “dinner bells” for seals and were another added expense that is a burden to the industry, also noting that the pingers can get stuck in nets while setting out. Seals are more abundant than ever, and sharks are an increasing problem, such that gear must be removed from the water by the end of May. The use of pingers is an ongoing discussion with the harbor porpoise Take Reduction Team. One person commented that there was a decision to save the seals, Canada stopped harvesting them, and now seals are everywhere.

***Offshore wind.*** A few attendees discussed offshore wind farm development impacts on recent fishing activity, namely how fish are disappearing most likely due to sonar testing. They did not believe fish disappeared due to global warming because otherwise the fish would return a week or two later. There was concern that they are unable to catch enough volume to make it worth fishing and they recounted that the monkfish fishery was previously overharvested and resource overfished in the past, resulting in few DAS. Lower quota is being landed recently not because no one is trying to fish and not because of poor recruitment; there are external factors at play and fish are disappearing due to offshore wind development. A meeting participant explained that Cornell Cooperative Extension conducted trawl surveys where South Fork windfarm cable landings occurred and that the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation is conducting other surveys. A participant said that a few fishermen participated in the Cornell Cooperative surveys using the F permit category, though they no longer use that permit due to the large numbers of lobster pots. The original commenter was concerned that the substantial amount of offshore wind seismic testing done a few years ago was the culprit for the disappearing fish. A participant was frustrated that offshore wind development took over the ocean and that fishing has shifted from monkfish fishing to skate wing fishing, especially out of RI.

***Other Ideas for Improvement.***; There are challenges with one of the dealers in the area and in New Bedford, resulting in the dealer dictating prices that are not always favorable or perceived as fair for all participants due to lack of competition for a limited number of participants. There is hope that this could be addressed. A few participants also thought that additional cooperative research and science like the monkfish catch per unit effort is beneficial.

A Council member summarized the conversation as the fishing industry not wanting any changes to management. Industry members agreed and explained that normally they would want additional quota and increased fishing effort, though with the market and impacts from protected species (sturgeon) and offshore wind, the landscape has changed for the worse. With no additional comments, the Chair closed the meeting at about 5:45 pm.