



## New England Fishery Management Council

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

### **Monkfish and Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plans**

#### **Monkfish and Skate Fishery Improvements Listening Session Summary**

#### **Webinar**

**May 11, 2026, 4pm**

**Meeting Officer:** Matthew Gates, Monkfish Committee Chair

**Other Council Members:** Togue Brawn, Melanie Griffin, Megan Ware, Kelly Whitmore, Lisa Wooleyhan

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

**GARFO staff:** Pete Christopher, Jay Hermsen, Ashleigh McCord, Caroline Potter, Spencer Talmage

**Attendance:** Bonnie Brady, Terry Butler, Aubrey Church, Greg Connors, Sean Connors, Brendan Damm, Patrick Duckworth, Annabella Farabaugh, Corrin Flora, Alicia Lenci, Sam Linnell, Greg Mataronas, Bren Miles, Brian Pearce, Sefatia Romeo Theken, John Whiteside

The meeting began at 4:00 pm. Chair Gates welcomed the audience and opened the meeting with some brief comments. This was the fifth of five listening sessions being held to solicit public comments regarding 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 information on how to provide public comment.

A participant asked about the status of monkfish and skate stock assessments. Council staff confirmed that the monkfish research track assessment was paused, with no immediate timeline for resumption, and that a skate research track assessment has not been scheduled. The discussion shifted to summarizing feedback from prior listening sessions in New England and Mid-Atlantic regions, with staff noting varying attendance and industry engagement across different locations.

Participants discussed challenges facing the fisheries, with particular focus on market conditions, protected species regulations, and the need for more flexibility in fishing operations. Common suggestions included creating limited access permits for the skate fishery, adjusting how Days-at-Sea (DAS) are charged to allow for additional landings, and exploring ways to better use DAS

through mechanisms like switching from Groundfish to Monkfish DAS while at sea. The discussion revealed that while some fishermen preferred the current system, many sought minor tweaks to increase flexibility without overwhelming markets.

**Monkfish DAS.** Participants suggested exploring a system where DAS would be charged based on landings, rather than trip limits. There was caution though about potentially opening the fishery to larger vessels that could overwhelm the market. The group discussed the possibility of allowing vessels to switch from Groundfish DAS to Monkfish DAS or to a research set-aside (RSA) DAS, especially in the southern area. Northern area vessels can switch from a groundfish DAS to a Monkfish DAS, and the southern vessels would like similar flexibility.

Most meeting participants from the industry fished in the southern monkfish management area, but one fisherman from the northern area shared their perspective, advocating for increased Monkfish DAS for qualified northern area fishermen and a modest amount of Monkfish DAS leasing, though cautioned about opening access too widely.

**Skate limited access.** A few participants suggested making skate permits limited access permits. Recalling the prior Council action that considered this (Amendment 5), there had been concern that the alternatives considered for qualification did not include enough fishermen, especially in the south. There were comments that limited access would help the skate fishery remain a small-boat fishery, encourage investment in the fishery, and allow stronger markets to be built.

**Skate effort controls.** For effort controls, there were suggestions for allowing skate wing limits to run with a 24-hour clock instead of by trip, specifically to allow a limit and a half of skate wings after 24 hours and a minute at sea or to consider a weekly landing limit during peak summer months to prevent discards, an approach used in Rhode Island's state waters fishery. A caution was shared about preventing too many landings that would trigger incidental limits. There was a desire to keep the skate fishery a small-boat fishery, but to allow for landing more skates when they are present. It was felt that flexibility is needed for the skate fishery in Southern New England and to the south where fishermen are "overrun with skates," while there are fewer skates in the Gulf of Maine, so the trip limits are less constraining.

To explain how skates limit monkfish landings, if a vessel is close to the skate limit with one more string of gillnets to pull, the vessel would head home and return to pull that net on the next trip. The skates would survive in the meantime, but the monkfish are not as hardy and would be discarded as a result. Just being able to pull the final string would be helpful, which could be done if there was flexibility to raise the skate possession limit.

**Skate Exempted Fishing Permit.** Participants shared positive experiences with the current exempted fishing permit (EFP) project that allows for higher skate wing possession limits. This enables more flexibility in skate landings, especially when coupled with using a Monkfish RSA DAS. Another meeting participant was concerned that the EFP unfairly excluded vessels from beyond Rhode Island and Massachusetts. It was explained how the EFP evolved from initially being limited to one dealer to including a second dealer. The EFP is limited to 700 DAS per year, not by the number of vessels participating, though the vessels need to sell to one of the two

dealers. Transporting fish to one of the two dealers is an issue, even for getting fish off the Cape daily.

***Governance.*** A participant from the Mid-Atlantic advocated for the Mid-Atlantic to have a seat at the skate management table. Staff clarified that the Mid-Atlantic Council has a seat on the Skate Committee who can vote at the committee level.

***Protected species.*** A few participants raised concerns about protected species regulations, particularly regarding sturgeon and harbor porpoise closure areas.

***Markets.*** Participants also discussed market-related issues, including the lack of domestic markets and low prices, which are deterring fishermen from fully using their allocation.

With no additional comments, the Chair closed the meeting at about 5:20 pm.