



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEETING SUMMARY

Atlantic Herring Committee and Advisory Panel Portsmouth, NH & Webinar

June 8, 2026

The Atlantic Herring Committee (Committee) and Advisory Panel (AP) met jointly on June 8, 2026, starting at 9:30 am in Portsmouth, NH and via webinar to discuss: a 2026 action to include Atlantic herring specifications for 2027-2031, river herring and shad management measures, and other measures; recommendations to the Committee or Council, as appropriate; and other business, as necessary.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Peter Whelan (Chair), Melanie Griffin (Vice-Chair), Terry Alexander, Greg Hueth (MAFMC), Moira Kelly (GARFO), Toni Kerns (ASMFC), Bill Lucey, Scott Olszewski, Robert Ruhle (MAFMC), Geoff Smith, Melissa Smith (Committee members); Jeff Kaelin, David Mussina, Gerry O'Neill, Suzannah Raber, Dr. Tammy Silva, Mary Beth Tooley, Buddy Vanderhoop (Advisory Panel members); Daniel Salerno (Council Chair); Dr. Jamie Cournane, Emily Bodell, Dr. Rachel Feeney, Dr. Cate O'Keefe (NEFMC Staff); Alli Murphy, Carrie Nordeen (NMFS GARFO Staff); Mitch MacDonald, Scott Sakowski (NOAA GC); Dr. Micah Dean (MA DMF/ Herring PDT, Invited Speaker). In addition, about 12 other people attended.

KEY OUTCOMES

- The Advisory Panel recommended that the Committee recommend that the Council separate out the Atlantic herring specifications for 2027-2031 into a separate action and continue the status quo approach to setting specifications.
- The Committee recommended prioritizing specifications for 2027-2031 in the 2026 action, and for the Plan Development Team (PDT) to continue working on modifying Atlantic herring management measures to avoid or minimize river herring and shad catch, updating the Atlantic herring specifications process, and modifying carryover provisions for unharvested catch.
- The Committee provided the PDT with two tasking motions related to developing time/area closures.

The Committee Chair opened the meeting at 9:30 am. The Herring AP Vice-Chair was unable to attend the meeting, so the Committee Chair ran the joint meeting. There were no changes to the agenda.

AGENDA ITEM #1: MANAGEMENT UPDATES

Council staff provided various management updates, including recent quota monitoring data for the Atlantic herring fishery, river herring and shad catch caps, and Georges Bank and Gulf of Maine haddock catch caps.

There were a few questions regarding the Atlantic herring stock assessment timing. Council staff stated that the draft assessment report will likely be available in the NEFSC data portal before the June Council meeting (June 23-35), but the peer review is scheduled for the following week (June 29-30).

AGENDA ITEM #2: PLAN DEVELOPMENT TEAM: DRAFT ANALYSIS FOR 2026 ACTION

Council staff provided updates on a series of topics and tasks related to the 2026 action, including fixed gear set-aside landings in recent years, a preliminary Area 1A transfer analysis, preliminary analysis of carryover for fishing year 2025 to fishing year 2027, and an update on the development of data estimates for river herring and shad by gear.

A Committee member asked if the fixed gear set-aside was more or less utilized in the more recent years of the range provided. More detailed information was not available due to confidentiality. Another Committee member asked why there is no river herring and shad catch cap in Area 3. Council staff stated that there is a catch cap area off of Cape Cod that overlaps a few herring management areas, and there is a Georges Bank catch cap area which can be assigned a catch cap value if needed.

Species distribution models for river herring, shad, and Atlantic herring (Dr. Micah Dean, MA DMF, Herring Plan Development Team)

Dr. Dean presented on PDT work to develop species distribution models for river herring, shad, and Atlantic herring. These models include observation data and several factors (year, environmental variables) to map species distribution across a defined spatial area and can predict abundance across the area. The models can be used to identify potential time-area closures and understand the impacts of these closures on river herring and shad species as well as the Atlantic herring fishery. The presentation included some hypothetical closure areas and potential metrics for evaluation, including the percent of observations of river herring, shad, and/or Atlantic herring covered by the hypothetical areas. These percentages were derived from observer data to ensure the data has adequate location information while being indicative of where the fishery operates.

A Committee member asked about the samples used in the model. Dr. Dean clarified that the table in the presentation included the total number of observed hauls by survey or gear type, noting that for the small-mesh bottom trawl observer data, all observed small-mesh bottom trawl trips were included. An Advisor asked if the model included mackerel fishery data, or whether there were distinctions of what qualified as a herring trip. Dr. Dean stated that while that does not impact the data for model fitting, it is a decision point for evaluation. There was a question about the percent of observations included as potential evaluation metrics. Dr. Dean clarified that the percentages were of all records from 2000-2022, but noted that fishing regulations have changed over time, so some of the observations making up these percentages may have occurred in areas/times where fishing is no longer happening. An Advisor pointed out that there is a 5% tolerance for river herring in the Maine menhaden fishery, so there is inequity in how river herring is managed within the region. A Committee member clarified that the 5% tolerance is for any fishery with the ability to catch river herring in Maine, and that it goes through an ASMFC process. Dr. Dean also noted with the state of the fishery and low observer coverage, there is some uncertainty around bycatch rates. A Committee member asked about monitoring potential time-area closures. Dr. Dean explained that the areas could be any shape, and Council staff noted that the Council's Enforcement Committee could review any proposed closure areas. Some past actions have included a review after a set number of years, potentially examining changes in distribution or abundance. A PDT member had some additional technical questions regarding the model.

A Committee member asked about creating a data layer with existing closures and trying to understand the impacts on outputs. Dr. Dean noted that considering existing closures would be helpful when evaluating alternatives and suggested further discussion on what constitutes a closure (e.g., while not technically a closure, MA has vessel size restrictions that precludes midwater trawl vessels from operating in state waters). The Committee member asked about possible impacts of displaced fishing effort. Dr. Dean explained that the model is designed to displace the fishery to areas where river herring/shad catch rates would inherently be lower. The model could also be fitted to Atlantic herring data, which could help identify where the fishery may go. A Committee member asked about the relationship between overall trip poundage and probability of bycatch in a trip and wondered if limiting

total catch could minimize bycatch. Dr. Dean noted that the model could be used to predict what bycatch may be in pounds on an average trip.

An Advisor asked if the model could be used to come up with catch cap values. Dr. Dean explained that there are not analytical assessments for river herring and shad species available to help estimate appropriate catch levels, so it is challenging to determine how much catch is “too much”. Another Advisor stated that once closed areas are implemented, they are difficult to undo and also expressed the importance of conducting a displacement analysis for the herring fishery. An Advisor noted that some of the higher threshold hypothetical scenarios may impact the mackerel fishery in the Gulf of Maine and asked if the PDT has reviewed the RHAPCAST project. The PDT’s work differs from the RHAPCAST project because it shows short-term projections, while the species distribution models would help to identify areas to avoid in the long term.

An Advisor noted that this has been a bad year for alewives on Martha’s Vineyard and suggested considering closures from March to May to protect the spring runs. Another Advisor suggested completing an analysis of what happened when fishing areas have closed in the past, and whether fishing could be made up elsewhere if closures were implemented. A Committee member was also interested in evaluating potential loss of income. Council staff noted that the PDT could estimate revenue in a distinct area, or model fleet behavior, though the latter could be challenging. A Committee member pointed out that other small-mesh bottom trawl fisheries occur in these times and areas, and an Advisor felt that things could be missed if analysis focused on certain gear types. The Committee Chair asked about how environmental variables fit into the model. Dr. Dean explained that they make the model predictions more accurate. A Committee member stated that vessels will have to go somewhere to fish, though an Advisor relayed that the fish may not be available in other areas. Dr. Dean noted that the model may account for a general pattern well but may not entirely accurately predict abundance in very small areas.

Public Comment:

- **Kevin Job (CT DEEP)** – shared that there was a 36% increase in river herring runs in 2024 and 39% increase in 2025, with blueback herring in Connecticut having their best year since 1997. The age structure is indicating older fish, pointing to more at-sea survival.

AGENDA ITEM #3: DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS TO COMMITTEE/ COUNCIL

The Council Chair shared some thoughts following the species distribution model presentation, emphasizing the importance of considering the size and enforceability of any potential closure areas, and felt that discussing a review time period would be helpful. The Chair also noted that the AP and Committee can discuss the interactions between the Atlantic herring fishery and other fisheries, but the Council’s work is specific to managing the herring fishery. An Advisor asked Council staff about the goals of the meeting, and staff noted that the Council will need to confirm the scope of the action slated for final action in September.

1. ADVISORY PANEL MOTION: TOOLEY/KAELIN

The Advisory Panel recommends that the Committee recommend that the Council separate out the Atlantic herring specifications for 2027-2031 into a separate action, which would continue the status quo approach to setting specifications.

Discussion: The maker of the motion wished to put forward a specifications package without any changes to the specifications process or additional management measures, stating that even minor changes to the process could delay the action. The seconder of the motion noted, that despite good work from the Plan Development Team related to river herring and shad, final recommendations from the PDT may not be available by the time final action must be taken on specifications. They also expected that the river herring and shad measures would require an amendment. An Advisor asked if adjusting the fixed gear set-aside would cause a delay in the action. Council staff explained that the proposed alternative does not

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exceed the range outlined in the specifications process, so it would be a simple update. Another Advisor asked about carryover, noting that they would like to see it restored. Staff clarified that carryover was suspended for 2025 and 2026 and would default to the current provisions unless the Council added a provision, which would not necessarily delay the action.

An Advisor asked if splitting the specifications into a separate action would slow down PDT analyses of time-area closures. Council staff noted that if the action was split, the specifications would likely be completed through a specifications action with a supplemental information report, which could help inform an environmental assessment for the other action. Not all PDT members are working on both topics at once, so splitting the action might not slow down progress. Another Advisor expressed their concerns about potentially delaying river herring and shad work if the action were split. Council Staff clarified that if the Council took this approach, final action on the other portion of the action would likely be brought forward at a later Council meeting. An Advisor was supportive of the industry having specifications for the start of the fishing year but was unsure if they could support the motion if both actions could not be brought forward in September. Other Advisors supported the motion and felt that more information was needed on the river herring and shad work before final action could be taken.

Roll-Call Vote:

Yes: Kaelin, O'Neill, Raber, Tooley

No: Mussina, Dr. Silva

Abstain: None

ADVISORY PANEL MOTION 1 CARRIED 4/2/0.

1. COMMITTEE MOTION: LUCEY/G. SMITH

To recommend that the Council include in the scope for the 2026 action (framework adjustment or amendment) to:

- 1) Set Atlantic herring specifications for fishing years 2027-2031
- 2) Modify Atlantic herring management measures to avoid or minimize the catch of river herring and shad through time/area closures with and without the existing catch cap methodology
- 3) Update the Atlantic herring specifications process
- 4) Modify carryover provisions for unharvested catch.

Rationale: This would keep the existing herring priorities bundled but revisions to catch caps will be deprioritized until the next management year (2027) to allow for additional analysis and development time. Framework /Amendment will be completed with the goal of implementation of measures in January of 2027.

Discussion: The maker of the motion stated that the outlined scope included tasks that were identified in the 2026 priorities process. Some of this work goes back to 2022, and river herring and shad time-area closure alternatives could be developed by the September Council meeting. The seconder agreed and felt it was appropriate to continue moving forward with this work. A Committee member was unsure if item #4 was needed if the Council was not planning on modifying the provisions and asked whether the action would be a framework or amendment and how that might impact specifications. Staff suggested that if the Committee decided to recommend that the Council leave carryover provisions as they are, they could report that to the Council but should include discussion in the motion rationale. Staff also recommended that the Council pursue an amendment if the river herring and shad management approach were modified to include time-area closures but noted that a framework is not always faster than an amendment. The

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river herring and shad measures would require an environmental assessment (EA). A Committee member felt that if the small-mesh bottom trawl fisheries had a wider impact, it could slow down the action. Another Committee member supported completing a specifications package but continuing to work on the river herring and shad measures.

Council staff brought up the AP motion from May 20 which prioritized completing the specifications for January 1, 2027 implementation. With all of the items (river herring and shad, carryover, etc.) in one action, it may be less likely to be completed and implemented by January 1. An Advisor stated that the specifications process is streamlined and moves more quickly. A Committee member understood the concerns about implementing specifications for January 1 but noted that the river herring and shad work has been ongoing for some time, and they would like to see work continue over the summer and evaluate in September. Another Committee member supported prioritizing the specifications and tasking the PDT to continue working on the other topics. The maker of the motion felt that the decision could be made to split the action in September. Another Committee member did not want to slow the process down but noted the low fishing effort in Areas 2 and 3, so there may not be a substantial impact to river herring and shad currently. An Advisor expressed their support for prioritizing the specifications, emphasizing the need for stability for the fishery. GARFO staff relayed Agency feedback to the Council Coordination Committee that clean specifications packages would be helpful for moving things along.

1a. COMMITTEE MOTION TO SUBSTITUTE: ALEXANDER/KELLY

To recommend that the Council prioritize in the scope for the 2026 action to:

- 1) Set Atlantic herring specifications for fishing years 2027-2031

And the PDT would continue working on:

- 2) Modify Atlantic herring management measures to avoid or minimize the catch of river herring and shad through time/area closures with and without the existing catch cap methodology
- 3) Update the Atlantic herring specifications process
- 4) Modify carryover provisions for unharvested catch

Discussion: A Committee member asked if this would create two actions to bring to the Council in September. Council staff suggested that the specifications action would come to the Council in September along with an update on other tasking, which may not be ready for final action. Staff provided some clarification on the framework process and suggested that the Committee focus on objectives and priorities, then staff could help determine the most appropriate vehicle. A Committee member asked if the motion would be a change in priorities – the Executive Director stated that since the Council would still be working on the same topics, it is not a change in priorities.

Public Comment:

- **Elizabeth Etrie (Conservation Law Foundation)** – asked if items 2-4 listed in the motion would be defaults in the Council’s 2027 priorities list. The Executive Director noted that this is an established Council priority, so they would roll over into 2027.

Roll-Call Vote:

Yes: Alexander, Olszewski, M. Smith, Kelly, Kerns, Hueth

No: Lucey, G. Smith

Abstain: None

MOTION 1A TO SUBSTITUTE CARRIED 6/2/0.

1b. MAIN MOTION AS SUBSTITUTED:

To recommend that the Council prioritize in the scope for the 2026 action to:

- 1) Set Atlantic herring specifications for fishing years 2027-2031

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And the PDT would continue working on:

- 2) Modify Atlantic herring management measures to avoid or minimize the catch of river herring and shad through time/area closures with and without the existing catch cap methodology
- 3) Update the Atlantic herring specifications process
- 4) Modify carryover provisions for unharvested catch

Roll-Call Vote:

Yes: Alexander, Olszewski, M. Smith, Kelly, Kerns, Hueth

No: G. Smith, Lucey

Abstain: None

COMMITTEE MOTION 1B CARRIED 6/2/0.

2. COMMITTEE MOTION: LUCEY/ G. SMITH (AS FRIENDLY AMENDED)

That the PDT develop time/area closure alternatives for herring management areas 1b, 2 and 3 to minimize to the extent practicable the amount of river herring and shad catch in the Atlantic herring fishery. The PDT should consider the following input from the Committee when developing the range of options:

- Be based on the PDT's species distribution models,
- Be based on month or season, area, and gear type
- Refine closure boundaries for compliance and enforcement considerations, and
- Consider existing management measures.

Discussion: A Committee member wanted to make sure that as draft areas are developed, they are feasible shapes for compliance. Another Committee member asked if the motion included analysis in all herring management areas, noting that Area 1A may not be suitable for inclusion due to the existing closures in the area. An Advisor was concerned about the specificity of the motion and asked how the Council will coordinate with other fishery management plans and regions, noting the overlap with other Councils and fisheries. The Council Chair noted that there is some consultation with the Mid-Atlantic Council, and there will be engagement beyond the Herring Committee. Mid-Atlantic Council staff has flagged this topic for their Executive Director. They also noted that actions related to a non-target species should be tied to the relevant directed fishery. A Committee member supported coordinating with other Councils as needed when appropriate. Another Committee member suggested overlaying existing management closures when considering alternatives.

Public Comment:

- **Elizabeth Etrie** – supported the motion and flagged comments CLF submitted with the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah), which identified potential time/area closures to evaluate based on impacts to their river herring run.

COMMITTEE MOTION 2 CARRIED BY CONSENSUS AND WITHOUT OBJECTION.

3. COMMITTEE MOTION 3: LUCEY/ G. SMITH

In evaluating time area closures, the PDT should examine the following metrics, if possible, in addition to others it may develop:

- number and value of directed Atlantic herring trips inside and outside of the closure alternative,
- average river herring and shad (RHS) catch inside and outside the closure alternative,

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- total RHS catch inside and outside of closure alternative,
- number of “high”, “medium”, and “low” RHS catch events inside and outside of the alternative,
- frequency of RHS catch events inside and outside of the alternative, by month, season, & gear type.

Discussion: There was some discussion about the river herring avoidance program run by SMAST and MA DMF. Dr. Dean noted that the observed trips under the program were included in the model information already, but the high, medium, and low designations may not mesh with the existing dataset. A Committee member asked if the PDT had discussed including portside sampling information, and asked if gear types should be specified, noting the lack of purse seine activity outside of Area 1A. Another Committee member suggested evaluating directed trips, and an Advisor described the difference between a directed versus a declared trip, noting that on mackerel trips there is no intention of directing on herring but if herring are caught they are retained. Another Advisor was hesitant about the level of detail in the PDT tasking.

COMMITTEE MOTION 3 CARRIED BY CONSENSUS AND WITHOUT OBJECTION.

With no other business, the Herring Committee meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:00 pm.