New England Fishery Management Council
50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492
Daniel Salerno, *Chair* | Cate O'Keefe, PhD, *Executive Director*

MEETING SUMMARY

Joint Meeting of the Groundfish Committee, Groundfish Advisory Panel, and Recreational Advisory Panel

Four Points by Sheraton Hotel, Wakefield, MA and via webinar

June 10, 2026

The Groundfish Committee, Groundfish Advisory Panel (GAP), and Recreational Advisory Panel (RAP) met on June 10, 2026, in Wakefield, Massachusetts and via webinar to: Discuss initiation of Framework Adjustment 74, receive an update on Framework Adjustment 68, provide industry updates, plan the recreational measures process, receive a presentation on the Amendment 23 Review, and discuss other business.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: John Pappalardo (Committee Chair), Terry Alexander (Committee Vice-Chair), Peter Christopher (Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office [GARFO]), Andy Dangelo, Jim Gilmore (MAFMC), Melanie Griffin, Jackie Odell, Paul Risi (MAFMC), Geoff Smith, Megan Ware, (Committee members); Dan Salerno (Council Chair); Hank Soule (GAP Chair), Cassie Canastra Larsen (GAP Vice Chair), Rick Bellavance, Bonnie Brady, Gib Brogan, Al Cottone, Joe Letourneau, Ben Martens (GAP members); Frank Blount (RAP Chair), Jonathon Sterritt (RAP Vice Chair), Leo Chomen, Rip Cunningham, Tom DePersia, Andrew Fishbein, Willy Hatch, Tim Tower, Mike Waine (RAP members); Council Staff: Robin Frede (Groundfish Plan Coordinator), Mark Grant, Cate O'Keefe (Executive Director), Julian Garrison, Andrew Applegate, Jonathon Peros; Anglia Miller (Maris Collaborative); Presenters: Min-Yang Lee, Lou Carr-Harris, Kim Bastille, and Tess Petesch (Northeast Fisheries Science Center [NEFSC]). In addition, about 15 other people attended, including: Liz Sullivan, Caroline Potter, Laura Smith, Spencer Talmage (GARFO staff); Mitch MacDonald (NOAA General Counsel); and Greg Ardini (NEFSC staff).

KEY OUTCOMES

- A motion was passed to recommend the Council initiate Framework Adjustment 74 to include fishing year (FY) 2027-2031 specifications and management measures.
- The GAP and RAP provided industry updates.

GARFO staff provided an update on recent management actions. Framework 72 and Amendment 25 were still in agency review. A rule was published on April 27, 2026, to implement sector annual catch entitlements (ACE) based on Framework 69 and default specifications. The ACEs would be replaced by Amendment 25 and Framework 72. An in-season action closed the Closed Area II Yellowtail Flounder/ Haddock Special Access Program (SAP) to targeting yellowtail flounder, but opened it to target haddock, and closed the Regular B Day-at-Sea (DAS) program. A proposed rule was published for Monkfish Framework17 on April 23, 2026. Two comments were received on Framework 17, and a final rule was in preparation.

Questions on the Management Update

A Committee member asked the current status of Amendment 25 and Framework 72, and whether they had completed the regional process and moved to NMFS headquarters.

Mr. Christopher replied that both actions had completed the regional process. He added that Amendment 25 was approved on April 26, 2026, and it was now on the agency to implement the measures.

Another Committee member highlighted that fishermen are now paying for fish they will be allocated under Framework 72 and stated that is unnecessary.

AGENDA ITEM #1: RECREATIONAL MEASURES PROCESS PLANNING

Min-Yang Lee presented an update on the Recreational Decision Support Tool (RecDST). The presentation addressed feedback previously provided on the RecDST, updates and improvements underway for the RecDST, and an explanation of the data used in the RecDST. Tess Petesch presented the new RecDST Data Dashboard. The Data Dashboard is under development, but will be a one-stop shop meant to improve stakeholder understanding of data used in the RecDST that will display summary statistics and intermediate model input data. It will not contain all recreational fishery metrics, but only those specific to the RecDST model. The Dashboard will include intuitive figures, tables, and documentation, as well as aggregated MRIP trips and catch. When development is further along, they will solicit input on the user interface and the metrics.

Questions/Discussion on the presentation

A RAP member requested that the DST be modified to incorporate additional stocks (e.g., Western Gulf of Maine cod) in the future.

A Committee member expressed appreciation for the Data Dashboard and noted the value of seeing data in tables as well as figures to facilitate decision-making.

Another Committee member asked whether the model would continue to use a single year of data for developing recreational measures for next year or to move to using 2 or 3 years of data to reduce the noise in recreational data. Mr. Lee explained that the plan for next year is to continue using a single year of data. He explained that any decision to use multiple years of data should be deliberate with the intent to use that same number of years of data moving forward, rather than changing the basis of the model annually. A different Committee member also had concerns with using a single year of data, particularly with annual regulation changes and frequent delays in implementing changes. A GAP member highlighted that catch data are more variable than actual catches and that additional years of data would smooth that mismatch.

Another RAP member asked how the RecDST acquires information about demand and angler preferences. Mr. Lee explained that, approximately every 5 years, a survey is sent out to recreational permit holders in Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. The survey is a 'choice experiment' with multiple regulation options and trip costs that allows anglers to indicate preferences. Those are incorporated into the model. The most recent survey was 2025 and was used to model options for 2026. Another RAP member asked if that survey could be expanded to surveys of charter/party captains and/or the angler intercept surveys. Mr. Lee responded that those options could be considered when the next survey is authorized.

AGENDA ITEM #2: INDUSTRY UPDATES

Members of the RAP and GAP were asked to provide industry updates.

A RAP member commented on the large numbers of Illex squid being caught inshore and washing up on the shore, noting they are usually in the canyons and that there are no fish chasing the squid.

Another RAP member commented that there are immediate economic consequences to the Southern New England (SNE) cod closure, noting that many cod were caught that could have been landed if allowed. They expressed hope that the Recreational Biology (RecBio) program's data would be incorporated into the next assessment.

A different member of the RAP stated this year they had seen the coldest surface water temperature, have seen herring decreases each year, highlighting that last year there was a great haddock season on Platts Bank where there was a high concentration of sand eels, but a huge decrease in herring. They added that pollock had declined in recent years with this year being the least pollock and noting that they were not seeing dogfish show up at the time of year they normally would appear.

Another RAP member concurred it had been a very cold winter which meant no opportunity for predators to eat juvenile winter flounder in the estuaries, noting it was good news that the Rhode Island survey is seeing more winter flounder.

A GAP member observed that around Fippennies Ledge and Cashes Ledge they were seeing shrimp in the stomachs of pollock in late winter and spring, estimating he found 200 pounds of shrimp in pollock stomachs and suggesting the last shrimp survey occurred in the wrong season and/or area.

Another GAP member highlighted that small pollock are showing up off mid-coast Maine for the first time in many years and was hopeful for a good fall pollock fishery. They also highlighted that Atlantic halibut would be an issue this year, noting Federal halibut catch exceeded the ACL last year and the Maine fishery was currently having a banner year for halibut catch. They suggested that the accountability measures (AMs) should be reviewed because catch is increasing and the data-poor approach to setting management advice lags the catch indices.

A RAP member stated that last summer he saw a herring boat stationed on Old Scantum for two weeks that would harvest herring whenever the tuna fleet returned to port. They added that there had been a lot trawling on Jeffreys Ledge that ended what had been a strong recreational catch of haddock. They concluded by saying that last summer and early fall they found few cod on Three Dory Ridge and Platts, had not seen any wolffish in years, and wondered if constant trawling was preventing recovery by affecting the bottom.

A GAP member commented that southern New England had seen sea temperatures that were three degrees colder and hoped that would help flatfish be able to grow to a size that they avoid predation.

A Committee member raised the delayed approval of Framework Adjustment 69 and its effects on lease prices, ACL utilization, and where fishing occurred. They were concerned that this information needed to be considered in stock assessments incorporating catch data from last year.

Another Committee member said they spent the winter avoiding fish, particularly cod and white hake, and had to stop targeting American plaice, witch flounder, and monkfish in deep water to avoid cod. They highlighted that fishing has become a business of catch avoidance and wondered how that could be incorporated into stock assessments. They went on to state they had re-rigged their vessel to target squid because they couldn't avoid white hake while groundfishing and would be unable to fish for groundfish in the winter for the same reason.

AGENDA ITEM #3: FRAMEWORK 74 / SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES

Council staff presented information on the potential range of alternatives for Framework 74. This action will set specifications for fishing years 2027-2031 based on new stock assessments or data updates; revise status determination criteria as necessary; review the Georges Bank (GB) haddock sub-ACL for the mid-

water trawl herring fishery; and modify a provision in the AM for southern windowpane flounder. Staff presented several PDT recommendations for measures to include in the scope of FW74 for the Committee to consider, including: set the GB haddock sub-ACL for the mid-water trawl herring fishery sub-ACL at a fixed percentage value and discontinue the review requirement, and two minor administrative measures. The timeline for Framework 74 was also reviewed.

Questions/Discussion on the presentation

A Committee member supported the scope of Framework 74. They then stated that the Executive Committee discussed keeping specifications actions 'clean' to help them move faster through NMFS review. They were sensitive to that, but requested input on whether Framework 74 should include a change to the halibut AM.

Another Committee member stressed it was a strong push for clean specifications and minimizing additional measures in those actions.

The Council stated that, at the meeting of the Council Coordinating Committee, Sam Rauch (Deputy Assistant Administrator of NMFS) stated that the cleaner a specification package is the better the likelihood that action moves through review quickly. The Chair added that the focus is on getting fisheries open on time with new specifications.

A Committee member asked whether there was a future in which each year the Council simultaneously had a clean specifications action and a separate framework with management tweaks. The Council Chair stated that question is currently open.

A different Committee member saw revising the AMs for southern windowpane flounder and Atlantic halibut as items to address to keep vessels able to fish in 2027.

The Council's Executive Director noted that there is an active discussion around decoupling specifications from other management measures. They added that fisheries are in a time of flux with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), that not all actions require an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS), and that other NEPA tools are being considered for the most streamlined approach. They added that a framework might not be necessary to revise the AM for Atlantic halibut.

A Committee member was confident an AM for halibut would be triggered for next year and opined the AM is a symptom of the issue rather than the cause. They continued that deducting increasing Canadian catch of halibut from the quota makes the US fishery quota unreasonable. They opined that the setting of specifications for halibut in Framework 74 provided an opportunity to evaluate the best available science for setting halibut quotas and noted that the AM is a separate issue.

Another Committee member asked whether a Council letter to the Regional Administrator regarding southern windowpane flounder consideration for an ecosystem component would meet the requirement to work on the AM.

The Council Chair stated the Council had paused work on the halibut AM this year before it knew about an overage. The Council knew it had triggered an AM for southern windowpane flounder and raised this issue to NMFS in response. They opined that the Council might consider a similar approach for halibut.

Council staff clarified that the overall halibut quota is the issue because of how catch is monitored. They explained that increasing Canadian catch in recent years had been a concern and is included in quota monitoring to determine whether an AM has been triggered. They concluded by saying the US ABC could be zero depending on the Canadian catch and suggested considering other science (e.g., whether the U.S. and Canadian halibut are a single stock) as the best available science for the basis of ABC, but noted there may be questions for NMFS on the topic of AM triggers for previous years.

Mr. Christopher responded that the agency is required to implement AMs in accordance with the regulations. He continued saying that the Council's response explaining its intent to work on southern windowpane flounder helps the agency evaluate possible approaches to implementing an AM. He ended by stating the halibut AM had not been implemented yet, but is required by the regulations, and not implementing the AM would not seem to be a viable alternative approach.

A Committee member stated that without a new assessment to update the stock status of halibut they weren't sure that the Council could take any action other than revising the halibut AM.

The Council Chair explained that the halibut AM was comprised of two gear restricted areas and a prohibition on possession of halibut by all Federal permit holders. They noted there are not different sized areas triggered by different levels of overages.

Council staff then presented additional information on the southern windowpane flounder AMs. They explained that the Council is narrowly focused on the question of whether stock status (when the stock is rebuilt) should be the only criteria needed to determine that the size of the AM area triggered by an overage could be reduced (from the Large area to the Small area). Currently, there are two criteria that must be met: stock status and whether recent catch met a biomass criterion. They added that the ecosystem component work for southern windowpane flounder is part of an on-going project funded under the Inflation Reduction Act and that the Council is considering a larger review of all AMs in a future year.

The Council Chair then asked whether a change to the process for determining a haddock sub-ACL for the herring fishery would apply to both Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank haddock stocks. Council staff answered that only Georges Bank haddock has a requirement to review and recalculate the percentage of the ACL allocated to the herring fleet, and the change being considered would align with the process for the GOM haddock sub-ACL.

GROUNDFISH COMMITTEE MOTION 1 (as friendly amended): GRIFFIN/ALEXANDER

To recommend to the Council to initiate Framework Adjustment 74 to include FY 2027-2031 specifications and management measures, as:

- Revise status determination criteria, as appropriate,
- Set FY2027 total allowable catches (TACs) for US/Canada management units of Eastern Georges Bank (GB) cod and Eastern GB haddock, and FY2027-FY2028 TACs for the GB yellowtail flounder stock,
- Set FY2027 specifications for GB cod and GB haddock,
- Set FY2027-FY2028 specifications for GB yellowtail flounder,
- Set FY2027-FY2031 specifications for Gulf of Maine (GOM) haddock, American plaice, witch flounder, pollock, northern windowpane flounder, southern windowpane flounder, and Atlantic halibut,
- Review sub-component analysis for stocks with revised specifications, and others as time permits,
- Review GB haddock sub-ACL in the mid-water trawl/herring fishery, set the sub-ACL at a fixed percentage amount, and discontinue the review requirement,
- Re-evaluate approach used for Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) yellowtail flounder scallop fishery sub-ACL,
- Modify the criteria for the provision of the southern windowpane flounder accountability measures to reduce the size of the AM area for the groundfish fishery and large-mesh non-groundfish trawl fisheries,
- Adjust administration of the B DAS Program and Closed Area II Yellowtail Flounder/Haddock SAP to change the default status, and

- Re-evaluate and potentially modify Atlantic halibut accountability measures (AMs).

Rationale: To set specifications and address management measures and administrative changes as recommended by the PDT. Important to address concerns raised around Atlantic halibut.

Discussion on the Motion

A Committee member asked whether the issue of best available science for halibut could be addressed as part of specifications in Framework 74 and whether the halibut AM should be added. Another Committee member supported adding the halibut AM.

The motion was friendly amended in response.

The MOTION CARRIED unanimously and without objection.

AGENDA ITEM #4: RISK POLICY, ABC CONTROL RULES, AND FRAMEWORK 68

Council staff presented a high-level summary of the Council's on-going work to revise its Risk Policy, contracted work to develop and analyze new risk policy-integrated Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) control rules for the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan, and past work on Framework 68. The presentation focused on the upcoming Risk Policy work for the Council's June meeting, current and upcoming steps to develop and analyze potential ABC control rules, what work had previously been done on Framework 68 and what would be included in Framework 68 when development resumed during the summer.

Questions/Discussion on the presentation

A Committee member asked how the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) is involved in the process of setting ABCs. Information from new stock assessments or data updates is used by the PDT to develop candidate Overfishing Limits (OFLs) and ABCs, consistent with the ABC control rules, which are presented to the SSC. Council staff explained that the SSC reviews the candidate OFLs and ABCs, along with supporting information, and makes decisions about OFLs and ABCs. Those decisions are used by the PDT to develop candidate Annual Catch Limits (ACLs). The OFLs, ABCs, and ACLs are included in the specifications setting action incorporating feedback from the Committee and ultimately the Council reviews the Committee's recommendations and makes a decision.

Another Committee member asked where fishery stability would be considered between the Risk Policy and the ABC Control Rule changes in Framework 68. Staff responded that stability is considered in two places. In the Risk Policy, the factors include stock status, recruitment, climate vulnerability, commercial fishery characterization, and recreational fishery characterization. The Council weighted those factors, the factors are scored by the PDT using the most recent information, and that is used to calculate the z-score that reflects the Council's risk tolerance for each stock. The Council will set the boundaries for the low-, medium- and high-risk tiers and that influences the rate of change of ABCs. The ABC Control Rule work will include simulations and the metrics for comparing the various ABC control rules include harvest opportunities, catch advice, and realized catch. Framework 68 will also consider three new tools for increasing stability: National Standard 1 Guidelines allowing phased-in ABCs and ABC carryover, and guidance on when to use constant ABCs.

A GAP member asked whether it would be possible to use data from previous years with the new processes to determine if and how the new process might have led to different outcomes. Staff responded that an analysis of that type would need to account for changed data and biological understanding over time as well as the different process. It would be up to the Committee and Council to decide whether to prioritize the time and work for that type of analysis. The planned management strategy evaluation uses

simulations to compare the various ABC control rule options using the specified metrics (e.g., harvest opportunities, catch advice, and realized catch).

Participants discussed that the new Risk Policy and new ABC Control Rules would combine to give the SSC more latitude and that neither the Council's new Risk Policy nor potential new ABC Control Rules would remove the Council's role or other existing tools to respond to emerging data and situations.

AGENDA ITEM #5: AMENDMENT 23 MONITORING SYSTEM REVIEW

Council staff presented a high-level summary of the PDT's on-going work to review the groundfish sector monitoring program that was expanded by Amendment 23. The presentation included only new and revised work that was not previously presented to the GAP and Committee at their joint meeting on May 27, 2026. The presentation included analysis of industry monitoring costs, discard estimates, exclusions from the at-sea monitoring (ASM) program, distribution of vessels among the different monitoring programs, and coverage equitability.

Questions/Discussion on the presentation

A Committee member asked whether the costs presented were exclusively the sea-day costs of having an at-sea monitor deployed. Council staff explained that the information presented excluded other costs, such as training and agency administration costs. Another Committee member asked about detailed costs for electronic monitoring (EM). Council staff replied that total costs for ASM and EM, broken out between industry costs and agency costs, will be included in the final report.

The GAP chair asked the source of the days absent value included in a table of costs that included in the meeting materials but was not presented. Staff answered that the sources for all data in the analyses will be fully documented in the final report along with a description of why the data sources were chosen.

A GAP member asked why a proportion of discards were still calculated, rather than observed, with a target coverage of 100 percent. Council staff explained that not all trips are observed due to waivers from monitoring and the exclusion of some trips from the ASM requirement. Trips fishing exclusively west of 71 30 and trips exclusively fishing 10+ -inch gillnets in the inshore Georges Bank and/or the Southern New England broad stock areas are excluded from the ASM requirement. Those unmonitored trips continue to have discards calculated using discard rates developed from observed trips.

A Committee member asked whether groundfish discards as a percentage of total kept groundfish catch was available in addition to groundfish discards as a percentage of total kept catch for all species. Council staff answered that unobserved discards are calculated based on total kept catch of all species, but groundfish discards as a percentage of groundfish kept catch could be included in the report as a comparison.

A Committee member asked what percentage of trips excluded from ASM because they occurred west of 71 30 were covered by the Northeast Fishery Observer Program (NEFOP). Council staff explained that NEFOP coverage is assigned by fleets, which are combinations of landing port and gear, so there is not a single target coverage for trips west of 71 30.

The GAP chair highlighted that the information presented showed vessels in the 75-foot and longer class did not use EM and explained that the audit EM model is too labor intensive for high-volume vessels and that the maximized retention EM program designed for higher-volume vessels has not been operation while Amendment 23 has been in effect.

A Committee member asked whether vessels waived from monitoring because they are on the Vessel of Concern (VOC) list were included in analyses of coverage equitability. Council staff answered that vessels on the VOC list were included in the analyses of coverage equitability.

Another Committee member asked whether the complete report would be available prior to the June Council meeting. Council staff stated that a draft of the report would be available prior to the June Council meeting but might not be complete due to staff availability.

A different Committee member asked whether the Council would need to approve or disapprove the report at its June meeting. Council staff responded that, similar to other reports, the Council would not need to approve the report but would be asked to determine whether the priority to Review the Amendment 23 Monitoring Program has been completed. At the December meeting, the Council would also determine whether to create a 2027 priority related to this review.

Another Committee member asked whether the final report would include details of data sources and metrics showing monitoring costs by various metrics such as days absent and pounds discarded. Council staff stated that the final report will include a description of why the data sources were chosen, and an explanation of how that matters when comparing the analyses and drawing conclusions.

The meeting adjourned at 3:15 PM.