



New England Fishery Management Council

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

MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 4, 2026
TO: Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)
FROM: Cate O'Keefe, Executive Director
SUBJECT: Terms of Reference and information for August 11-12 SSC meeting regarding: Risk Policy implementation, Social Science Subcommittee updates, Atlantic herring overfishing limits and acceptable biological catch for fishing years 2027 to 2031, and Dynamic Reference Points workshop follow-up

RISK POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The Council's Risk Policy aims to systematically account for factors that influence risk tolerance in Council decision making. The Council approved updates to its Risk Policy Statement in September 2024 and initiated a phased implementation of the updated Risk Policy in January 2025. From Summer 2025 through early 2026, the SSC received and used a revised Risk Policy Matrix that aligned with the factors in the new Risk Policy Concept when recommending overfishing limits (OFL) and acceptable biological catches (ABC). During this time, the Risk Policy Working Group continued to refine the elements of the new Risk Policy Concept (e.g., factors, data sources, and scoring rubric), with input from the Council, SSC, and Climate and Ecosystem Steering Committee (CESC). At their June 2026 meeting, the Council approved the new Risk Policy, establishing qualitative categories of low, medium, and high-risk tolerance to support management decisions and conducted factor weightings (policy preferences) that will be applied to all managed resources. The new Risk Policy does not integrate directly with ABC Control Rules at this time, and output should be considered as additional information to support decision making.

The Risk Policy Working Group completed their efforts and disbanded, and the Council is now focused on implementing the new Risk Policy. Staff will present an update on the implementation plan, and the SSC should focus on clarifying questions about the Risk Policy Concept and how the SSC will use the Risk Policy in 2026.

SOCIAL SCIENCE SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES

The last update by the Social Science Subcommittee (SSS) to the SSC occurred in August 2025. Since then, the SSS has met twice, and members coordinated a workshop on enhancing use of fisheries-dependent data for social and economic considerations in management. Members of the SSS will present an update on their activities. The SSC is encouraged to provide feedback to the SSS that will forward its objectives (see presentation).

ATLANTIC HERRING

Terms of Reference

- A. Consider the information provided by the Council's Atlantic Herring Plan Development Team (PDT) and ASMFC's Technical Committee (TC) on the most recent stock assessment for Atlantic herring and its peer review, and information on stock projections.
- B. Recommend OFLs and ABCs for Atlantic herring for fishing years (FY) 2027-2031 that will prevent overfishing, are consistent with the Council's Atlantic herring ABC control rule and rebuilding plan, and consider the Council's Risk Policy Statement and Concept.

Atlantic herring stock assessment

Atlantic herring was assessed in 2026 in a management track stock assessment using the Woods Hole Assessment Model (WHAM). Atlantic herring is overfished, but overfishing is not occurring, consistent with the results of the 2022 and 2024 management track stock assessments that both used the Age Structured Assessment Program (ASAP) model. The [Atlantic Herring Research Track Working Group](#) developed the WHAM state-space assessment model for A. herring, which was peer reviewed March 10-14, 2025. The 2026 assessment was the first use of WHAM to assess A. herring.

Notably, the 2026 peer review concluded that Term of Reference 5: Conduct short-term stock projections when appropriate was partially met:

“the Panel considered the OFLs (or Fmsy) and ABC projections based on the RT methodology to be useful but likely to be overly optimistic especially in light of the sensitivity analyses....After considerable discussion, the Panel concluded that the PDT and SSC should view the projections and sensitivity analysis as context for catch advice setting but that each has challenges that limit their utility.” (p. 16-17, peer review report)

This conclusion triggered additional work in July by the Herring PDT to identify and provide additional projection options to bring to the SSC for consideration.

Herring ABC control rule

Established in January 2021 via Amendment 8 to the Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan, the Council's Atlantic herring ABC control rule is biomass-based:

- When biomass is greater than 0.5 for the ratio of SSB/SSB_{MSY} , the maximum fishing mortality allowed is 80% of F_{MSY} .
- As biomass declines, fishing mortality declines linearly, and if biomass falls below 0.1 for the ratio of SSB/SSB_{MSY} , then ABC is set to zero, no fishery allocation.

Specification setting

The SSC has traditionally recommended specifications for A. herring at three-year intervals, but recent reductions in federal agency resources have highlighted a need for increased flexibility in management and regulatory processes. In September 2025, the Council approved an omnibus amendment to its fishery management plans that includes an action allowing a specifications frequency of one up to five years. The comment period on the [proposed rule](#) closes on August 7, 2026.

The SSC is asked to make recommendations for a five-year period, through FY 2031, should future gaps in federal resources prevent the provision of updated data. The Council expects to take final action at its September 2026 meeting. Specifications are expected to be implemented on January 1, 2027.

Risk Policy

For Atlantic herring, the SSC will be provided with a Risk Policy Matrix and Risk Tolerance output. The Council's policy preferences were determined using a weighting exercise at the June 2026 Council meeting, and the Herring PDT has scored each factor in preparation for this meeting. The SSC will receive an output from the Risk Policy Toolkit that will include the matrix, risk tiers, Z-score, and an associated recommended probability of meeting management objectives. This information can be used to inform its ABC recommendations.

DYNAMIC REFERENCE POINTS WORKSHOP FOLLOW-UP

Terms of Reference

- A. Consider the outcomes of the SSC workshop on dynamic reference points, and make any refinements to the recommendations for indicators, candidate stocks, and other recommendations for next steps.

Background

During the SSC workshop on dynamic reference points (DRP) on June 1-2, 2026, the SSC agreed to several next steps to further advance the application of DRPs to NEFMC-managed species. One step was, at the next SSC meeting, to review the indicators developed and further discuss applying them to the three identified DRP candidate stocks to determine whether pursuit of DRPs for those stocks is warranted. The three candidate stocks are white hake, Georges Bank Atlantic cod, and witch flounder.

Since the workshop, the [2027 stock assessment schedule](#) has been finalized. Note that Georges Bank cod will be peer reviewed in June, white hake and witch flounder will be reviewed in September, and witch flounder will have an empirical assessment.

Information

RISK POLICY

1. Presentation on Risk Policy Concept and implementation, J. Peros, NEFMC
2. Risk Policy Statement and Concept, August 4, 2026

SOCIAL SCIENCE SUBCOMMITTEE

1. Presentation on SSS updates, SSS members
2. SSS report, [November 21, 2025](#)
3. SSS report, [April 1, 2026](#)
4. CINAR Workshop Report, July 31, 2026

ATLANTIC HERRING

1. June 2026 Management Track Assessment*
 - a. Assessment presentation
 - b. Atlantic Herring 2026 Management Track Assessment Report, June 5, 2026
 - c. 2026 Management Track Assessment Peer Review Report
2. Herring PDT information
 - a. PDT presentation
 - b. Atlantic Herring PDT and TC memo to the SSC on OFLs and ABCs for FY 2027-2031
 - c. Risk Policy Report for Atlantic herring
3. [Framework Adjustment 9 Affected Environment](#) (Section 5.0, p. 25-75), February 11, 2022
4. Previous SSC recommendations
 - a. July 2024 for FY2025-2027
 - i. Meeting materials, [July 30-31, 2024](#)
 - ii. SSC report, [August 16, 2024](#)
 - b. April 2025, for FY 2025-2027
 - i. Meeting materials, [April 4, 2025](#)
 - ii. SSC report, [April 10, 2025](#)

DYNAMIC REFERENCE POINTS

1. Presentation by SSC Chair
2. Workshop final report, [July 30, 2026](#)

OTHER DOCUMENTS

1. Presentation on Other Business topics
2. NOAA/NEFSC [State of the Ecosystem Reports](#) for the Northeast U.S. Shelf

* The NEFSC [Stock Assessment Support Information](#) portal includes reports, presentations, and supporting materials for all NEFSC stock assessments. Use the drop-down menus to access information.