



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEETING SUMMARY

Atlantic Herring Committee and Advisory Panel Webinar

August 18, 2026

The Atlantic Herring Committee (Committee) and Advisory Panel (AP) met jointly on August 18, 2026, starting at 1:30 pm via webinar to discuss: the 2027-2031 Atlantic herring specifications action; recommendations to the Committee or Council, as appropriate; and other business, as necessary.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Peter Whelan (Chair), Melanie Griffin (Vice-Chair), Terry Alexander, Douglas Christel (GARFO), Raymond Kane (ASMFC), Bill Lucey, Scott Olszewski, Geoff Smith, Melissa Smith (Committee members); Zack Klyver (AP Vice-Chair), Donald Lyons, Jeff Kaelin, Gerry O'Neill, Suzannah Raber, Dr. Tammy Silva, Mary Beth Tooley (Advisory Panel members); Daniel Salerno (Council Chair); Dr. Jamie Cournane, Emily Bodell, David McCarron, Dr. Cate O'Keefe, Jonathon Peros (NEFMC Staff); Jason Didden (MAFMC Staff); Emilie Franke, Toni Kerns (ASMFC Staff); Alli Murphy, Carrie Nordeen, Ashley Trudeau (NMFS GARFO Staff); Mitch MacDonald, Scott Sakowski (NOAA GC). In addition, about 13 other people attended.

KEY OUTCOMES

- The AP and Committee added two alternatives for analysis by the Plan Development Team (PDT) regarding the average Canadian catch (5-year average and 10-year average).
- The Committee tasked the PDT to investigate the timing of herring and mackerel catches in Herring Management Areas 2 and 3.

The Committee Chair opened the meeting at 1:30 pm. There were no changes to the agenda.

AGENDA ITEM #1: MANAGEMENT UPDATES

ASMFC staff provided management updates. The Area 1A fishery is currently open, with days out beginning on July 19. Catch has been relatively slow so far. The eastern Maine spawning closure will begin on August 28. The Commission will consider the Council's recommendations on Atlantic herring specifications at their annual meeting in November. GARFO staff had no new management updates but noted that only Area 1B is under a 2,000 lb possession limit.

AGENDA ITEMS #2 AND 3: SPECIFICATIONS FOR 2027-2031; DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS TO COMMITTEE/COUNCIL

Council staff provided an overview of the 2027-2031 specifications action, including the SSC recommendations for overfishing limits and acceptable biological catches, potential management area sub-ACLs, and options for the Canadian New Brunswick weir fishery catch assumptions.

A Committee member asked staff to elaborate on PDT and any SSC discussion regarding the 5-year versus 10-year Canadian catch average. Staff explained that the PDT completed an analysis of the Area

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1A transfers over the last 10 years, noting that catch can be variable. The SSC did not weigh in on the Canadian catch average. There was also a question about the management response if Canadian catch is underestimated. GARFO staff stated that there are no automatic deductions for going over the ABC, and Canadian catch is not considered in evaluation of overfishing. A Committee member asked about the relatively high Canadian catch in 2018 – Council staff noted that Canadian catch has been relatively stable in recent years, and is becoming more similar to US catch proportionally, but can fluctuate.

A few Advisors shared some comments about using the 10-year versus 5-year Canadian catch average and were generally supportive of using the 5-year average. An Advisor noted that a 3-year average has been used in the past when the PDT felt that risk was low. Using the 5-year average in this case also would not be a large risk and would provide about 1,500 mt more at the start of the fishery. Another Advisor supported the 5-year average given the recent changes in the fishery but asked if using the 5-year average would prevent the 1,000 mt transfer in the fall. Council staff explained that as long as the New Brunswick weir catch does not exceed the threshold by October 1, the transfer will happen. While using the 5-year average would lower the transfer threshold, it would not remove the ability for the transfer to occur. GARFO staff noted that Canadian catch has been slightly higher than average for this time of year, though this is subject to change as more data becomes available. Two Advisors also supported a potential increase to the fixed gear set-aside, but one Advisor felt that the 45 mt value put forward at a prior meeting should be reconsidered given recent averages and the current circumstances. A Committee member asked about the repercussions if the Canadian catch was below the threshold at the time of transfer but higher at the end of the year. Council staff stated that it might give some caution for setting the buffer in future years, but noted that in recent years, even when catch exceeds the threshold, it has remained below the management uncertainty buffer. A Committee member asked if there is any information on Canadian catch mixing with US populations. Staff stated that there was a research recommendation from the management track assessment peer review to examine catch proportions for the different stock components.

JOINT ADVISORY PANEL/COMMITTEE CONSENSUS STATEMENT

To add two alternatives under specifications for analysis by the Plan Development Team, for the management uncertainty buffer to be set at either the ten-year average or five-year average Canadian catch.

Discussion:

A Committee member was supportive of analyzing both the 5-year and 10-year averages rather than selecting the 5-year average now. A few Advisors also expressed support for the consensus statement, and there was some discussion about the Canadian market for herring. An Advisor noted that the Canadian lobster fishery was not open earlier in the year, so there was more of a market for herring in the US than Canada. The Committee Chair also pointed out that Canadian herring may have filled some of the market before the menhaden fishery started for the year. Council staff noted that there were some slight differences between the quota monitoring catch and catch in the assessment which the PDT will discuss.

The Committee and Advisory Panel then discussed reallocation of sub-ACLs between herring management areas. An Advisor was hesitant to support reallocating quota between areas until new information is available to replace the data that supported the initial allocations but felt that it would be helpful to discuss at a future meeting. They also pointed out that the mackerel fishery uses herring quota in Area 2 to operate in the winter. Another Advisor was supportive of discussing the topic, noting that relative to National Standard 1, the Council's priorities should be to end overfishing and achieve optimum yield (OY), and the fishery has struggled to achieve OY in recent years. The stock appears to be contracting to the north, so there may not be as many fish available to catch in Area 2. An Advisor

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suggested considering an in-season adjustment for Area 2 if the quota is not caught rather than permanently redistributing quota and noted concerns about impacts of offshore wind development in Area 2. Another Advisor supported investigating the topic but was hesitant about permanent reallocation, and echoed concerns about impacts to the mackerel fishery.

An Advisor asked if this analysis would slow down work on the river herring and shad (RH/S) action. Council staff did not think this analysis would impact the RH/S work and noted that there is an ongoing Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries project looking at stock composition in the different herring management areas. They also noted that carryover into 2027 could offer increased sub-ACLs for a few management areas. A Committee member was concerned that if this topic was included in the specifications action, it may no longer be “clean” specifications, which could take longer to evaluate. Another Committee member asked about the vehicles for reallocation, noting a potential similarity to the Area 1A transfer provision. Council staff explained that the sub-ACL percentages can be changed through a specifications action, framework, or amendment. While an in-season action can adjust any specifications, that may be limited to a single year or set of years. GARFO staff noted that the transfer aspect may require regulation changes. A Committee member was unsure if there would be enough time to implement this for next year but was supportive of completing an analysis. Staff reminded the AP and Committee of the ongoing action, including modifying carryover provisions. An Advisor pointed to the sablefish fishery in the North Pacific as an example of in-season transfers.

COMMITTEE CONSENSUS STATEMENT

To task the Plan Development Team to investigate the timing of herring and mackerel catches in Herring Management Areas 2 and 3.

Discussion: A Committee member supported considering an in-season adjustment rather than reallocation, noting some concerns about how Area 2 catch would be identified for a rollover since it is a winter fishery. Another Committee member preferred considering a reallocation when there is a more stable stock dynamic, and supported tasking the PDT to look at herring and mackerel catch in Area 2. This analysis would provide some information on where fishing has been occurring and where there might be an opportunity for temporary redistribution mid-season. Committee members suggested examining information from previous analyses, as well as expanding the evaluation to include Area 3.

With no other business, the Herring AP and Committee meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:20 pm.