New England Fishery Management Council
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MEETING SUMMARY

US Pre-Transboundary Management Guidance Committee

Industry Advisory Panel and Public Input Meeting

New Bedford, MA and by webinar

August 28, 2026

The United States delegation to the Transboundary Management Guidance Committee (TMGC) met on August 28, 2026, in New Bedford, MA, and via webinar to: 1) receive input from Industry Advisors and the public related to fishery performance for transboundary stocks, 2) consider information to develop the US position for the fall 2026 TMGC meeting, and 3) discuss other business, as necessary.

MEETING ATTENDANCE:

Industry Advisors: Vito Giacalone, Cassie Canastra Larsen, Dave Leveille, Drew Minkiewicz, George Oliviera, John Quinn, Maggie Raymond, Hank Soule, Mike Walsh, Tom Williams

TMGC members: Cate O'Keefe (NEFMC Executive Director); Eric Hansen, Jackie Odell, and Dan Salerno (Council members); Spencer Talmage (Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO)); and Jon Hare (Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC))

U.S TMGC support: Robin Frede (Council staff); Mike Simpkins, Andy Lipsky, and Sean McNally (NEFSC)

In addition, five others attended including: Mark Grant and Jonathon Peros (Council staff), Paul Nitschke (NEFSC), Corrin Flora (Maine DMR), and Kelly Whitmore (MA DMF).

The meeting began at approximately 9:30 am.

KEY OUTCOMES

- Industry advisors shared perspectives and observations on fishing for the transboundary stocks, both in the Eastern Georges Bank area and wider Georges Bank fishery.
- Industry advisors and TMGC members provided feedback on the types of fishery performance information to be shared with TMGC.

- Industry advisors shared input on potential TACs for cod and haddock that would support the US Georges Bank fishery, and for yellowtail flounder that would address bycatch levels and interactions with the scallop fishery, to consider in developing the US position for the TMGC negotiations.

AGENDA ITEM #1: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS AND MEETING PURPOSE

This meeting was the initial gathering of the US Transboundary Management Guidance Committee (TMGC) Industry Advisory Group, focused on discussing management of the shared Georges Bank stocks. The meeting purpose was to stand up the new Industry Advisory Group with the goal of providing industry input to the U.S. TMGC delegation to inform development of US negotiating positions. Dr. Cate O'Keefe, NEFMC executive director and TMGC Co-Chair, facilitated introductions around the table.

AGENDA ITEM #2: OVERVIEW OF U.S./CA TRANSBOUNDARY MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Dr. O'Keefe provided an overview of the US/CA transboundary management process, including a brief history, description of the new process and how it evolved from a joint science approach under the Transboundary Resources Assessment Committee (TRAC) to separate domestic science assessments through the Integration of Science Advice for Transboundary Stocks (ISATS) in 2024, and the timeline within overall Council groundfish management. Staff walked through the objectives and organization of the new Industry Advisory Group, with the intended role of the group to bring in more direct consideration of industry perspectives to support U.S. TMGC members in their negotiations for TAC advice. The Advisory Group includes groundfish and scallop fishing industry members, organization representatives, and sector managers.

Questions and Discussion on the Presentation:

An advisor asked if the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) is no longer part of the process for the transboundary stocks. Staff confirmed that this is a change for this year to not include the SSC, having confirmed in the regulations that TMGC is recognized as the body that provides catch advice directly to the Council for the transboundary managed stocks, which are exempt from the Council's groundfish ABC control rules. In the past this step with the SSC weighing in on total Georges Bank (GB) catch advice while TMGC set catch advice for the Eastern Georges Bank (EGB) portion created challenges with the potential for mismatch and layering on additional precaution.

An advisor asked for further explanation on why TRAC was dissolved, if ISATS is expected to continue, and whether the TMGC thinks this new process benefits fishermen. Staff explained that in 2023 a "TRAC Improvement" workshop was held, the result being the elimination of TRAC. At the workshop, members discussed what had been failing in the TRAC process, including challenges with the EGB assessments failing and not reflecting what was being seen on the water, changes in the US assessment approach with the transition to the research track and management track assessment process, the cod stock structure work indicating an updated understanding of the GB cod stock in US waters while Canada still defines an EGB stock, fundamental disagreements on the science, and overly heavy workloads. Now under the new process TMGC has separate domestic assessments for cod and haddock that are considered

equally. ISATS is expected to continue until otherwise changed. As to whether the new process benefits the fishing industry, staff noted that TMGC members and managers are tracking what has and has not been working, and emphasized today's meeting as an opportunity to hear from the advisors if they think this new process is working for industry.

Another advisor noted there have been occasions when the two countries do not agree and asked what happens in these instances. Staff provided 2024 as an example of a challenging year when the US and Canada did not agree on cod, despite a good faith effort to try to negotiate. Canada decided on a number higher than US legal requirements would allow. Last year (2025) was challenging for a different reason, when the US co-chair and steering committee chair were replaced at the last minute, the US delegation did not participate as a result, and the US was only represented by the NOAA appointee. Staff noted that the shared science did tend to lead to more consensus, and now with separate domestic assessments this creates more likelihood of differences in assessment outputs and potential for less agreement. If the assessments look similar and the results are close, it is much easier to reach agreement. A TMGC member pointed out that even with joint science in the past there were years without agreement.

The advisor asked what the benefits are of being involved in the transboundary management process, given the potential for disagreement. Staff acknowledged that many on the TMGC have asked the same question but still think there is benefit from a shared joint approach, especially if TMGC gets back to joint assessments. There is also a conservation benefit to both countries reaching agreement for joint stocks, otherwise there is a risk of overfishing. The current stocks managed under the transboundary agreement may not make sense at this stage or in the future; for example, GB yellowtail flounder given where the stock status is and how that has impacted its importance for the fishery, while in the future there may be a benefit to bringing in other stocks like redfish, herring, and pollock.

Another advisor asked what happens if the countries cannot agree on a stock, then how does the US move forward in setting catch advice. TMGC members explained that the U.S. must project what Canada is expected to catch. An industry advisor said there were instances without agreement in which the U.S. TMGC went back to the Council to try to negotiate a new potential TAC to bring back to Canada to continue negotiations, but this required review by the SSC. Eliminating the SSC step provides more flexibility. The advisor also commented that he sees the new process in which TMGC considers both countries' assessments equally as an improvement, in providing TMGC with greater flexibility.

An industry advisor asked what happens when an assessment might have incomplete data and how that is reconciled. Staff explained a domestic assessment would only be considered for setting TAC advice if it passed peer review, where it would then be brought into the process through ISATS. The two assessments are discussed and compared during the Technical Science Coordination meeting. TMGC also can consider other issues regarding the catch advice being brought to the table in trying to find common ground with Canada. This additional negotiating room has benefits.

A TMGC member emphasized the importance of understanding that the US has bank wide assessments for cod and haddock with a biomass distribution method necessary for determining the amount of the GB stock occurring in the EGB area in order to match the units between the US and Canadian assessments. There have been past concerns from industry about the sole use of survey biomass distribution to calculate the proportion of haddock and cod in the EGB area.

Getting industry advisor input on this part of the process will be helpful, given the broader implications that can affect the US GB fishery.

AGENDA ITEM #3: U.S. MANAGEMENT AND FISHERY PERFORMANCE UPDATES

Spencer Talmage presented information on US fishery performance, including preliminary FY2025 and in-season FY2026 catch and utilization of the transboundary stocks[1], effort in the EGB area, ACE transfers, East-West quota transfers, and observer coverage rates. This is the typical set of information that is provided at TMGC Intercessional and TMGC meetings to give context on US fishery catch, performance, and management considerations. The goal was to hear how the information compares to industry advisor observations.

Questions and Discussion on the Presentation:

An advisor asked if the revised cod stock structure changed the EGB management unit. Staff explained that while the GB cod stock unit changed with the revised stock structure, the EGB management unit did not. TMGC only sets TACs for the EGB area, and it has always been a management unit within the larger GB stock that is assessed by the US, though Canada does consider EGB as a separate stock.

An advisor asked whether the EGB trips were declared trips or were confirmed as having entered and fished there. He speculated these could be sub-trips. Another advisor shared that his vessels declare on all trips for flexibility, but do not always go into the EGB area. Following the meeting, staff confirmed that the presentation represented realized trips in the EGB area.

An advisor noted the 8,100 pounds transfer of GB yellowtail flounder ACE in FY2025 and explained that is because an entire permit transferred its ACE, not because the sector needed all that GB yellowtail flounder quota.

Advisors commented that preliminary in-season information may not be particularly helpful given it is likely to change and because the different fishing seasons between the countries make it difficult to interpret, but suggested general description of trends could be useful.

Several advisors and TMGC members agreed that seasonal/monthly catch and effort information is helpful for the discussion today but may not be as useful for the larger TMGC meeting. TMGC members noted the seasonal patterns show high utilization at the end of the fishing year, which is partly driven by availability of fish and partly driven by fishery needs within the fishing season. Advisors agreed that they see most of the EGB effort in spring months both at the beginning and end of the fishing year, with lower activity in the summer months, and this matches the patterns seen in recent years. TMGC members noted there are similar seasonal patterns in the Canadian spring fishery, but since the fishing years do not align, it is difficult to see this in fishery performance and utilization information.

The impact of regulatory timelines was also discussed, as EGB fishing occurring at the beginning of the fishing year can be disrupted by delayed rulemaking. A TMGC member pointed out that in recent years it has become the norm to begin the fishing year under default specifications which has resulted in artificial depression of springtime catch at the beginning of

[1] Incorrect values for percent utilization were noted; these will be corrected in an updated version of the presentation for the TMGC meeting.

the fishing year for EGB because the full quota was not available. FY2024 was the one recent year where the framework action was implemented on time for the start of the fishing year. A TMGC member noted the additional impact on EGB fishing beginning in FY2025 resulting from changes with the regulations and new cod stock structure, and advisors suggested it could be helpful to look to prior years for comparison.

A TMGC member commented that it is important context to show the high realized observer coverage rates of 84-86% in recent years for the sector groundfish fishery. Advisors also discussed observer coverage levels in the scallop fishery with respect to GB yellowtail flounder catches, noting that this information comes from calculated discard data.

Advisors shared perspectives on the scallop fishery interactions with GB yellowtail flounder, noting that bycatch is driven by access to Closed Area II (CAII), which is closed this year except for carryover trips. Preliminary scallop survey data suggests a recruitment pulse in CAII, which will likely keep the area closed to scallop fishing in the coming year.

AGENDA ITEM #4: OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENTS

Dr. Jon Hare provided a summary of the 2026 ISATS report including: the 2027 allocation shares for the EGB area, biomass distribution from GB to EGB using both survey-based methods and industry catch-based methods, and overview of the assessments for cod, haddock, and yellowtail flounder including comparison between the US and Canadian assessments for cod and haddock.

Questions and Discussion on the Presentation:

A TMGC member said he was surprised that the allocation numbers came out the same for both cod and haddock, as the percent distribution is the same while percent utilization is different. Staff explained this is the result of rounding and given the percent utilization contributes only 10% to the allocation shares. In response to a question, staff confirmed that the 2025 fall index was used in the allocation shares method, but not in the US GB haddock assessment. Staff also confirmed the allocation shares are calculated annually by applying a three-year smoother, so the shares change only slightly from year to year. An advisor asked to clarify that the quotas are up for negotiation by TMGC but not the allocation shares. Staff confirmed this and added that last year the US delegate tried to negotiate the allocation shares at the TMGC meeting and was informed that it was not the appropriate management body. Changes to the allocation shares formula would require Steering Committee input at a minimum and would also include wider Council and NOAA input. The allocation shares formula could be changed but requires a larger conversation.

An advisor asked about the biomass distribution and whether that includes statistical area 521 for cod with the updated cod stock structure. Staff confirmed that statistical area 521 is no longer included in the GB cod stock area and would need further investigation about the potential influence of biomass distribution but noted the higher haddock abundance than cod which likely mitigates any effect. Staff expect there to be an influence from the uncertainty around the biomass distribution estimate, which is higher for cod than haddock given the much lower abundance. Uncertainty around the survey-based distribution estimates is not currently being calculated but could be a TMGC request, which staff recommend as a future update.

An advisor commented on the fishery industry-based distribution results, noting the Canadian fishery CPUE is an order of magnitude higher than the US and suggested this may be influenced by cod avoidance on the US side since the Canadian fishery doesn't have the same restrictions and can fish with smaller mesh. Staff explained that this is why total weight was the preferred method for the catch-based distribution method for cod because of the mesh size regulation difference, but this is still not directly comparable and is a caveat to consider. TMGC members clarified that the Canadian fishery is required to use haddock separator trawls, and Canada has a targeted fixed gear fishery that has declined over time and as of this year that fishery is not allowed to target cod. A TMGC member said this highlights that even with avoidance behavior Canada is still seeing higher cod abundance than the US. TMGC members pointed out that Canada does have a seasonal spawning closure in the winter, which might explain the difference in CPUE between the two EGB statistical areas, and that statistical area 561 is where Canada is seeing more cod in the fishery catch but less so in their survey. An advisor asked if the Canadian fishery is an ITQ fishery, and staff confirmed that it is a quota-based fishery with a structure like an ITQ program. An advisor said it would be helpful to see the methodology for calculating the CPUE, especially given questions about the Canadian fishery CPUE for haddock relative to cod. Staff noted the methodology is described in the ISATS report and offered to walk through in greater detail with advisors offline.

An advisor asked about the Canadian groundfish fishery catch of yellowtail flounder. The Canadian fishery does catch yellowtail flounder, but it does not show up well in the reporting given there are no landings and the discards have lower observer coverage. The advisor asked if there was a change in the reference points for GB yellowtail flounder between the research track and management track assessment. Staff clarified that the models for all three yellowtail flounder assessments were changed during the research track peer review, and the final research track models can be found in the peer review report. There were minimal changes in the GB yellowtail flounder model between the research track and management track assessments.

AGENDA ITEM #5: INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES

Staff walked through discussion prompt questions covering topics on fishery performance and trends, fishing activity location and timing, regulatory constraints and barriers, and decision factors for fishing in the EGB area. These discussion questions were intended to spur input from advisors on fishing industry perspectives and observations on Georges Bank fishing, but all discussion and input was welcome.

Discussion:

An advisor shared observations from his sector members who participate in Georges Bank fishing, that some have dedicated EGB trips though most are a mix of EGB and WGB, and that most EGB trips occur in May-November which is a function of both fish and quota availability.

Advisors and TMGC members discussed the question about fishing along the boundary of the east/west line. Staff explained that this question is relevant to the Canadian EGB cod assessment in which the assessment model includes a "misallocated catch" fleet to reflect misallocated catch between the EGB and WGB areas. Misallocated catch refers to the haul back being reported in one area when the majority of the trip effort occurred in another area, with the understanding that this is not misreported or illegal but does impact the EGB assessment. This boundary crossing

seems to have decreased over time. Several advisors agreed that this was more of an issue in the past, and that now any boundary crossing reflects steaming back and forth during normal fishing operations rather than intentional behavior. An advisor said his boats often switch back and forth between EGB and WGB on a single trip, determined by whether they run into cod while fishing for haddock and need to leave the area. Advisors also noted that given the biomass distribution puts most fish in the EGB area, this removes any incentive or tendency for misallocated catch since quota can be transferred from east to west. The ability to transfer quota from east to west also explains the overall small number of vessels that fish the US/CA area in recent years, as vessels may choose to fish in areas with less travel time.

Staff brought up recent conversations on biological port sampling and how to address limitations of sampling multi-broad stock area (BSA) trips, including EGB and WGB trips. Cod and haddock are primary species of concern for multi-BSA and port sampling limitations, which has resulted in a lack of US ages in recent years and uncertainties with the assessment assuming ages from the Canadian fishery when there are differences in gear selectivity. Efforts are underway to see if observers can measure fish and calculate market category within their standard data collection duties. There have also been questions about what would happen if ASM coverage is lower in the future and considering reliance on NEFOP observers.

An advisor noted that ACE lease prices can be a regulatory barrier for his sector members. A TMGC member shared that his sector converts nearly all the quota from east to west and generally does not see issues with ACE availability or costs. Another advisor said he avoids leasing out cod quota to make sure his boats have enough quota to cover through the fishing year. An advisor noted that 2025 was the first time sectors saw an ACE lease price for GB haddock with the decline in quota resulting from the 2024 assessment.

An advisor commented that scallop vessels are not seeing many yellowtail flounder, emphasizing that when CAII is open the fishery does catch them. Given CAII is expected to be closed for several years, this is an issue to consider in the future. The advisor noted that recent 5-year Canadian catch of GB yellowtail flounder is only 4mt, far lower than the potential TAC based on the allocation shares and wondered if there was any reason to suggest their catch would be higher. The advisor asked questions about the process to set TACs if there is no agreement on GB yellowtail flounder. A TMGC member clarified how this was managed for cod when there was no agreement in 2024, noting that the US would need to make assumptions of Canadian catch based on TMGC input. The expectation is Canada would adopt the TAC resulting from the allocation shares. Staff shared that the US may propose having TMGC set two-year TACs for GB yellowtail flounder, given there will not be another US assessment during that time. Further, the US is considering the potential for ecosystem component designation for GB yellowtail flounder, which would eliminate the requirement for ACLs and AMs in the future, if approved. Advisors offered suggestions about the TMGC agenda order, which will be considered by TMGC members.

Staff encouraged advisors to share input on the potential TACs for the negotiations and think about the needs for US fisheries. For haddock, the EGB assessment output is much lower than the US total GB output, and consideration should be given to which assessment better reflects stock dynamics. Staff explained that flexibility within the negotiations can be influenced by factors like stock status, where both countries may be more limited in what TACs could be approved for cod given the poor stock status, while there may be greater flexibility with haddock. The assessments for both countries function as guardrails but there is flexibility to

consider strategy as the EGB proportion of haddock and cod represents a part of the whole GB stock.

Advisors suggested that an EGB TAC that results in at least 2,500 mt of haddock and ~150 mt of cod would sustain an economically viable fishery in FY2027. Staff noted that Canada has consistently requested direct input from industry members about TAC values that would sustain economically viable fisheries whereas the US has not, so the discussion today is seen as a significant improvement.

Staff requested feedback from advisors both to inform us about the review of the new TMGC process that will occur next year, and feedback on today's meeting. TMGC members said they found it highly valuable to have additional industry input from a wide variety of perspectives and thanked the advisors for their time.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:00 pm.