New England Fishery Management Council
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Daniel Salerno, *Chair* | Cate O'Keefe, PhD, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 17, 2025

TO: Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)

CC: Groundfish Committee

FROM: Cate O'Keefe, Executive Director and Council Staff

SUBJECT: **Overfishing limits (OFLs) and acceptable biological catches (ABCs) for U.S./Canada groundfish stocks for fishing year (FY) 2026**

The Transboundary Management Guidance Committee (TMGC) met on October 1, 2025 in Halifax, NS to negotiate Total Allowable Catches for Georges Bank (GB) cod, haddock, and yellowtail flounder in the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area. The Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT) met on October 7, 2025, by webinar to discuss outcomes from the TMGC meeting, and develop draft overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) proposals for the three U.S./Canada transboundary stocks. The TMGC's Draft 2026 Guidance Document was provided to the Council's Executive Director on October 16, 2025 and provides the basis for OFL and ABC recommendations.

The Scallop PDT provides information on the scallop fishery and bycatch of GB yellowtail flounder in Appendix 1. Both the Groundfish and Scallop PDTs refer the SSC to the 2019-2024 memos on this subject for additional background[1].

Background and Overview of U.S./Canada Transboundary Science and Management

Science advice on stock status and future projections of the three transboundary stocks was historically provided jointly by U.S. and Canadian scientists through the Transboundary Resources Assessment Committee (TRAC). A TRAC Improvement Workshop was held in March 2024 with participation by the TMGC industry and government co-chairs, TRAC co-chairs, and regional senior management staff from both the Canadian and U.S. science and resource management sectors. On April 10, 2024, a report was released that detailed the results of the workshop. In summary, a consensus was reached on a new approach for the provision of science advice to TMGC. Endorsed by TRAC, TMGC, and the U.S./Canada Steering Committee in May 2024, these strategies aim to enhance collaboration and streamline advice for assessments for the management process. The recommended changes to the process eliminated the annual TRAC meeting, and replaced it with a process that compiles, but does not seek to reconcile, domestic science advice products from each country.

[1] 2023 memo, doc 2biii: https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/jul-30-31-2024-ssc-meeting
2023 memo, doc 4: https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/sep-8-2023-ssc-meeting
2022 memo, doc 12: https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/aug-25-2022-ssc-committee
2021 memo, doc 5: https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/aug-24-2021-ssc-meeting
2020 memo, doc. 4: https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/aug-24-2020-ssc-webinar

In 2025, science advice used by the TMGC to develop the joint annual harvest recommendations for cod and haddock for 2026, was provided through the new approach called the Integration of Science Advice for Transboundary Stocks (ISATS) process. ISATS supports the decision-making process for the management of cod, haddock, and yellowtail flounder in the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area. This process includes a Technical Science Coordination (TSC) meeting of stock assessment leads where the outcomes from U.S. and Canadian domestic assessments are compiled into a joint document to provide scientific advice for the shared transboundary stocks. Domestic assessments from both countries are considered equally as the basis for informing catch advice. In 2025, the Georges Bank yellowtail flounder Management Track Assessment peer review was conducted after the ISATS process and results were considered directly by the TMGC.

The U.S. and Canada rotate to complete the Resource Allocation shares calculation to inform fishery negotiations year to year. Canada completed the calculation in 2025, informing the 2026 recommended shared Total Allowable Catches (TACs). The agreement is based on a combination of historical catches (10% weighting) and resource distribution from available trawl surveys (90% weighting).

The TSC meeting was held on July 16, 2025. The report from that meeting compiled the science advice for cod and haddock from each domestic stock assessment, and provided a summary of the assessments and key differences between the U.S. and Canadian approaches as highlighted by the scientists during the meeting. The report was presented and reviewed at an Informational Session for the TMGC held on July 23, 2025, after which management authorities in both countries completed their domestic consultation processes. The U.S. held a Pre-TMGC Public Listening Session on September 26, 2025 by webinar where the results from the ISATS process were presented.

The TMGC, established in 2000 as an advisory process to address how catches of transboundary stocks should be allocated to the U.S. and Canada within the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area, is comprised of U.S. fishing industry representatives from the New England Fishery Management Council, NOAA Fisheries officials, Canadian fishing industry representatives, and Canada Department of Fisheries and Oceanography (DFO) officials. The TMGC has typically negotiated the U.S./Canada allocations annually based on the historic proportions of fishery utilization and resource distribution in the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area. In 2025, the TMGC process included Andrew Lawler, NOAA's Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Fisheries, representing U.S. interests with Canadian fishing industry representatives and DFO officials. New England Council members on the TMGC were not included in negotiations but participated as observers.

The resulting guidance from the TMGC negotiated agreement requires confirmation from the New England SSC to integrate into the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The TMGC recommendations considered, but are not constrained by, the ABC control rules for the Northeast Multispecies FMP and the Council's Risk Policy. All TMGC recommendations considered stock status, resource conditions, and risk-averse management approaches.

Summary by Groundfish Stock

This memo provides a brief overview of the most recent assessment and catch advice considered by the TMGC, summarizes stock status and rebuilding plans, provides fishery performance and economic information, and provides FY2026 OFLs and ABCs for SSC confirmation.

1. Georges Bank Cod

Information Reviewed:

The TMGC, Groundfish PDT, and Council staff reviewed: the ISATS Compilation of Science Advice for Eastern Georges Bank Cod, which includes the 2024 U.S. Management Track Assessment and 2025 Canadian DFO Assessment, as well as SSC reports, PDT reports, catch information, and economic information.

Stock Status and Rebuilding Plan:

The U.S. 2024 GB Cod Management Track Assessment and Peer Review Panel concluded GB cod is overfished, and overfishing is not occurring. This was the first management track assessment for the new Georges Bank Atlantic cod stock unit following the 2023 Research Track process; official stock status was unknown prior to this assessment. This stock is not in a rebuilding plan, as it has not yet been incorporated in the Northeast Multispecies FMP.

The Canadian 2025 EGB Cod Assessment concluded that EGB cod is at 42% of the Limit Reference Point (LRP), placing the stock in the critical zone with very high probability (>98%). This was the first assessment for EGB cod following the 2025 Framework Assessment, similar is to the U.S. Research Track process. Catch advice corresponds to the maximum F associated with a very low probability (<5%) of preventable decline in two generations (2032).

Catch Advice for TMGC:

The Canadian assessment considers EGB cod as an individual stock, while the U.S. assessment includes a larger portion of Georges Bank. To address the spatial differences, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) developed a biomass apportionment method to determine the portion of GB cod biomass distributed within the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area.[2] Application of the apportionment method, previously reviewed by the SSC, indicated that 100% of GB cod biomass was distributed in the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area in 2026. The TMGC considered projections and catch advice from the U.S. GB cod and Canadian EGB cod assessments (Table 1).

Table 1- Short term projections and catch advice from Canadian EGB cod and U.S. GB cod assessments.

Model	Parameter	2024 Value	2025 Value	2026 Value
DFO EGB Cod Model Values (terminal year of data = 2024)	SSB (mt)	10,900	7,899	6,462
	F	*0.030*	*0.041*	0.052
	Catch (mt)	*378*	*452*	473
NMFS GB Cod 2024 Model Values (terminal year of data = 2023)	SSB (mt)	2,486 (929 – 6,653)	2,089 (499 – 8,739)	1,658 (277 – 9,937)
	F	*0.152*	0.233	0.233
	Catch (mt)	*417*	518	419
	Apportioned catch (mt) in EGB for 2026			419

All SSB values are estimated. Catch values in plain text are estimated and catch values in italics are fixed values based on realized catch. F values in plain text are fixed at F reference points, F values in italics are calculated based on the fixed values of realized catch.

[2] See "Integration of Science Advice for Transboundary Species (ISATS) Compilation of Scientific Advice for Eastern Georges Bank Cod and Haddock for Fishing Year 2026" for information on the apportionment methodology and results: https://d23h0vhsm26o6d.cloudfront.net/COMPILATION-OF-CAN-US-SCIENCE-ADVICE-ADVICE-FOR-FISHING-YEAR-2026.pdf

The TMGC recommended a shared TAC of 473 mt for GB cod in the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area. The TMGC agreed to use the 2025 Canadian EGB cod assessment as the basis for advice. During the U.S. Pre-TMGC meeting, it was noted that the fleet structure used in the Canadian assessment was more representative of fishing behavior and practices for the purposes of management advice. The TMGC noted that the Canadian assessment incorporates the latest data and applied a fishing mortality strategy defined as a very low risk of preventable decline, consistent with TMGC's historical approach of reducing fishing pressure when stock productivity is poor. The recommended TAC is the lowest ever for this stock, and the TMGC acknowledged that such a low TAC will continue to constrain other fisheries in FY2026.

Proposed OFL and ABC:
Based on the TMGC guidance, the proposed GB cod FY2026 OFL is 473 mt with an ABC set equal to the OFL (Table 2). Applying the U.S./Canada resource sharing agreement results in a U.S. ABC of 151 mt (32%) and a Canadian TAC of 322 mt (68%).

The TMGC recognized that both domestic models have been peer reviewed and deemed best available science. They noted that the Canadian assessment estimated very low fishing mortality (<0.05 since 2017), estimated spawning stock biomass fell within the confidence intervals from the U.S. assessment, and includes the most recent information available. It is expected that the TMGC will revisit this stock in 2026.

Table 2- Proposed OFLs and ABCs (mt) for FY2026 for GB cod.

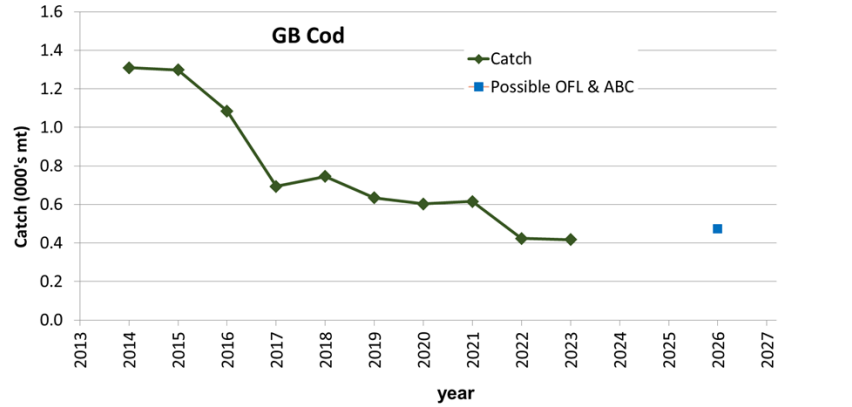
Fishing Year	Proposed OFL (mt)	Proposed ABC (mt)	U.S. ABC (mt)
2026	473	473	151

Catch Performance:
Table 3 and Figure 1 summarize historic catches of GB cod. As the 2024 assessment is the first Management Track Assessment for this stock under the new stock definition, there are no historic OFLs and ABCs to compare past catch performance. Note: catch has not been updated since the 2024 assessment.

Table 3- Historic catches (CY2014-CY2023), and proposed OFL and ABC for FY2026 for GB cod.

Year	Catch	Possible OFL & ABC
2014	1,310	
2015	1,298	
2016	1,085	
2017	693	
2018	745	
2019	634	
2020	603	
2021	615	
2022	423	
2023	417	
2024		
2025		
2026		473

Figure 1- Historic catches (CY2014-CY2023), and proposed OFL and ABC for FY2026 for GB cod.



Additional Fishery Information:

The new GB cod stock has not been incorporated in the Northeast Multispecies FMP. In FY2025, cod is being managed through emergency measures which maintain stock boundaries from the previous two stock management approach. Fishery information related to the new GB cod stock is currently unavailable; fishery information from the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area is presented.

Commercial Fishery – Figure 2 shows commercial groundfish (sector and common pool) catch of GB cod in the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area since FY2021 along with the FY2025 commercial annual catch limit (ACL). Utilization by the groundfish fishery for cod in the eastern area has been low. Catches exhibit seasonality, with increases during the final months of the fishing year (March-April).

Sectors – Table 4 compares the performance of the QCM since FY2012 to the realized outcomes for GB East cod. Performance of the QCM varies year to year but generally has overpredicted utilization trends in recent years where realized utilization has been low. Utilization rates for Georges Bank East cod have been below 40% since FY2019 and below 20% since FY2022. Figure 3 shows ACE lease prices for Georges Bank East cod by quarter from 2020-2024.

Figure 2- In-season utilization of EGB cod by the commercial (sectors and common pool) groundfish fishery.

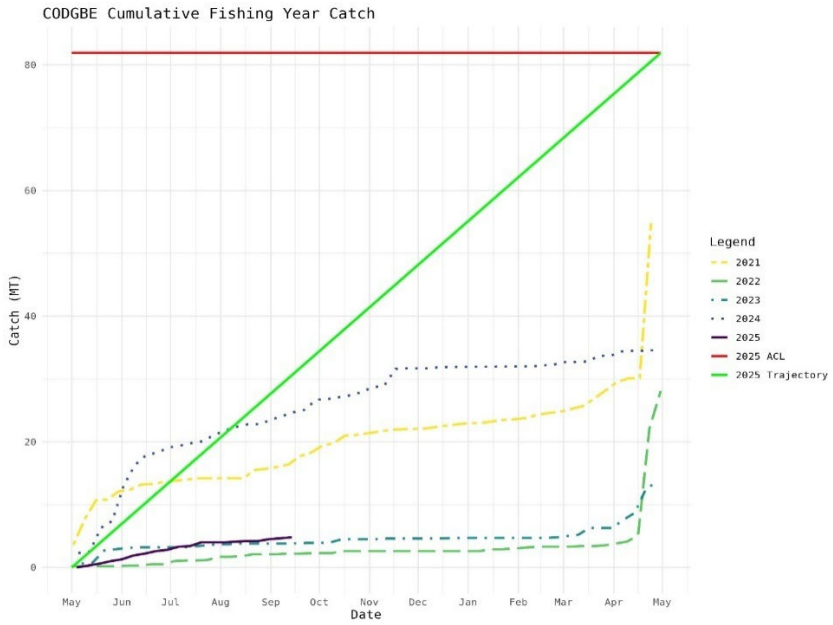
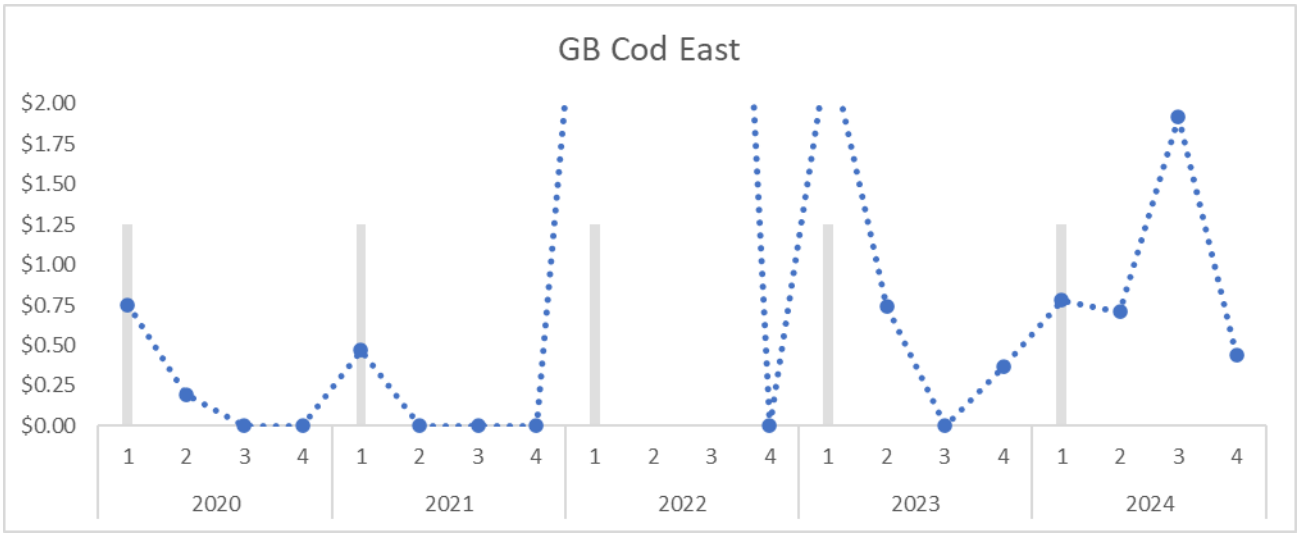


Table 4- GB East cod stock-level catch and revenue predictions from the Quota Change Model (QCM) for each fishing year between 2012 and 2024 compared to realized catch and revenue (in 2024$).

	FY	Sector sub-ACL	Catch (mt)		*Utilization (%)*		Gross Rev ($mil, 2024)	
			Realized	Predicted	*Realized*	*Predicted*	Realized	Predicted
GB Cod East	2012	159	67	N/A	*0.42*	*N/A*	0.3	N/A
	2013	90	33	71	*0.37*	*0.74*	0.1	0.3
	2014	145	69	67	*0.47*	*0.46*	0.4	0.3
	2015	121	82	30	*0.68*	*0.24*	0.4	0.1
	2016	135	82	35	*0.61*	*0.77*	0.5	0.1
	2017	143	44	52	*0.31*	*0.36*	0.3	0.3
	2018	252	106	89	*0.42*	*0.35*	0.6	0.5
	2019	183	66	59	*0.36*	*0.32*	0.4	0.4
	2020	183	57	132	*0.31*	*0.72*	0.2	0.7
	2021	182	56	40	*0.31*	*0.22*	0.2	0.2
	2022	156	28	24	*0.18*	*0.83*	0.2	0.1
	2023	131	13	23	*0.10*	*0.68*	<0.1	0.1
	2024	147	35	30	*0.24*	*0.58*	0.1	0.2

Figure 3- ACE lease prices estimated for GB cod east for fishing years 2020-2024 using a hedonic price model comprised of inter-sector ACE leases. First quarter (May-July) lease prices are indicated by the vertical gray bars.



2. *Georges Bank haddock*

Information Reviewed:

The TMGC, Groundfish PDT, and Council staff reviewed: the ISATS Compilation of Science Advice for Eastern Georges Bank Haddock, which includes the 2024 U.S. Management Track Assessment and 2025 Canadian DFO Assessment, as well as SSC reports, PDT reports, catch information, and economic information.

Stock Status:

The U.S. 2024 GB Haddock Management Track Assessment and Peer Review Panel concluded that GB haddock is not overfished, and overfishing is not occurring. This was an update from the previous assessment in 2022.

The Canadian 2025 EGB Haddock Assessment concluded that EGB haddock is above the Limit Reference Point (LRP) with a probability of 100% and above the Upper Stock Reference (USR) point with a probability of 70%, placing the stock in the healthy zone. This was an update from the previous assessment in 2024.

Catch Advice for TMGC:

The Canadian assessment considers EGB haddock as an individual stock, while the U.S. assessment includes a larger portion of Georges Bank. To address the spatial differences, the NEFSC developed a biomass apportionment method to determine the portion of GB haddock biomass distributed within the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area.[3] In 2025, the method for haddock was updated to include additional survey strata. Application of the apportionment method indicated that 75% of GB haddock biomass was distributed in the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area in 2026. The TMGC considered projections and catch advice from the U.S. GB haddock and Canadian EGB haddock assessments (Table 5).

Table 5- Short term projections and catch advice from Canadian EGB haddock and U.S. GB haddock assessments.

Model	Parameter	2024 Value	2025 Value	2026 Value
DFO EGB Haddock Model Values (terminal year of data = 2024)	SSB (mt)	27,342	23,713	15,180
	F	*0.311*	*0.534*	0.339
	Catch (mt)	*6,219*	*7,410*	2,480–3,850[1]
NMFS GB Haddock 2024 Model Values (terminal year of data = 2023)	SSB (mt)	34,180 (14,038 - 83,225)	34,516 (10,532 - 113,116)	36,029 (8,534 - 152,117)
	F_{5-7}	*0.316 (0.116 - 0.859)*	0.264	0.264
	Catch (mt)	*9,627*	8,034 (2,430 - 26,570)	8,177 (1,956 - 34,188)
	Apportioned catch (mt) in EGB for 2026			6,133

[1] *Catch range based on 25% to 75% risk of exceeding the Fref of 0.339.*
All SSB values are estimated. Catch values in plain text are estimated and catch values in italics are fixed values based on realized catch. F values in plain text are fixed at F reference points, F values in italics are calculated based on the fixed values of realized catch.

[3] See "Compilation of Scientific Advice for Eastern Georges Bank Cod and Haddock for Fishing Year 2026" for information on the apportionment methodology and results: https://d23h0vhsm26o6d.cloudfront.net/COMPILATION-OF-CAN-US-SCIENCE-ADVICE-ADVICE-FOR-FISHING-YEAR-2026.pdf

The TMGC recommended a shared TAC of 4,750 mt for GB haddock in the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area. The TMGC considered both haddock assessments, the biomass apportionment method, and catch advice that would sustain viable fisheries in each country. The agreed TAC is lower than the apportioned U.S. haddock biomass in the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area (6,133 mt), however it is above the range of the Canadian advice based on the EGB haddock assessment (2,480-3,850 mt). The TMGC noted that the stock is not overfished, overfishing is not occurring, and that it is considered to be in the healthy zone of the Canadian Precautionary Approach. The agreed TAC represents a 36% decrease from 2024 advice, which the TMGC considered to be a substantial one-year reduction.

Proposed OFL and ABC:
Based on the TMGC guidance, the proposed GB haddock FY2026 OFL is 8,177 mt with an ABC set equal to the OFL (Table 6). Applying the U.S./Canada resource sharing agreement results in a U.S. ABC of 4,425 mt (21% of shared TAC + portion of biomass distributed in Western GB (3,427 mt)) and a Canadian TAC of (3,752 mt (79% of shared TAC)).

The TMGC recognized that both domestic models have been peer reviewed and deemed best available science. They noted that the apportionment method is an informational tool to consider haddock distribution across the entirety of Georges Bank, which is not prescriptive of catch advice. They also noted that an EGB Haddock Framework is underway, which may develop different modeling approaches, and that a GB Haddock Management Track Assessment is scheduled for 2026. It is expected that the TMGC will revisit this stock in 2026.

Table 6- Proposed OFLs and ABCs (mt) for FY2026 for GB haddock.

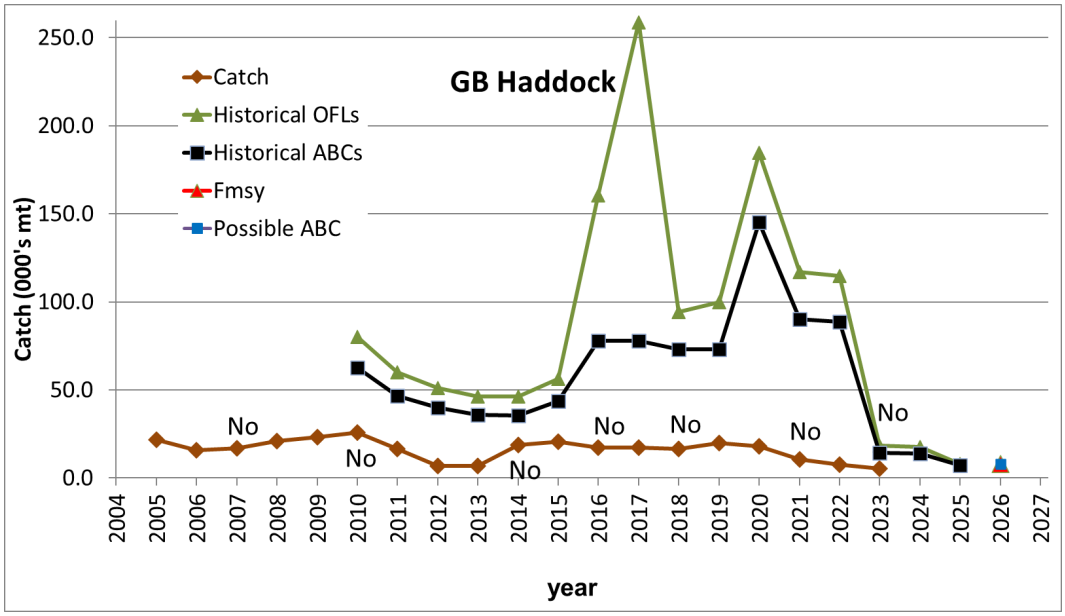
Fishing Year	Proposed OFL (mt)	Proposed ABC (mt)	U.S. ABC (mt)
2026	8,177	8,177	4,425

Catch Performance:
Table 7 and Figure 4 summarize catch performance and changes in overfishing status for GB haddock. Note: catch not updated since 2024 assessment.

Table 7- Catch performance (CY2010-CY2023), historical OFLs and ABCs (FY2010-FY2025), FMSY and proposed ABC for FY2026 for GB haddock.

Year	Catch	Historical OFLs	Historical ABCs	F_{MSY}	Possible ABC
2010	25,903	80,007	62,515		
2011	16,670	59,948	46,784		
2012	6,935	51,150	39,846		
2013	6,828	46,185	35,783		
2014	18,601	46,268	35,699		
2015	20,687	56,293	43,606		
2016	17,274	160,385	77,898		
2017	17,387	258,691	77,898		
2018	16,647	94,274	73,114		
2019	19,719	99,757	73,114		
2020	17,878	184,822	145,367		
2021	10,691	116,883	90,337		
2022	7,634	114,925	88,856		
2023	5,226	18,482	14,221		
2024		17,768	13,958		
2025		8,034	7,410		
2026				8,177	8,177

Figure 4- Catch performance for GB haddock including catches from CY2005-CY2023, historical OFLs and ABCs since FY2010, and FMSY and proposed ABC for FY2026. Overfishing status in the terminal year of the assessment indicated on the x-axis ("No" = not overfishing).



Additional Fishery Information:

Commercial Fishery – Figures 5 and 6 show commercial groundfish (sector and common pool) catch of total GB haddock and GB haddock in the eastern management area since FY2021 along with the FY2025 commercial annual catch limits (ACL). Utilization of GB haddock by the groundfish fishery had been very low prior to FY2025 when the ACL declined substantially. In-season catch rates in FY2025 are lower than in past years, likely in response to the large decline in ACL. Utilization of GB haddock in the eastern management area is generally low and has remained similar over time. Catches of GB haddock in the eastern management area exhibit seasonality, with increases during the final months of the fishing year (March-April).

Sectors – Tables 8 and 9 compare the performance of the QCM since FY2012 to the realized outcomes for haddock caught in the western portion of GB (GB West) and the eastern management area (GB East). ACE lease prices for GB West haddock and GB East haddock have been $0. However, given the large decline in ACL for GB haddock in FY2025, lease prices are expected to be greater than $0 this fishing year.

Figure 5- In-season utilization of GB haddock by the commercial (sectors and common pool) groundfish fishery.

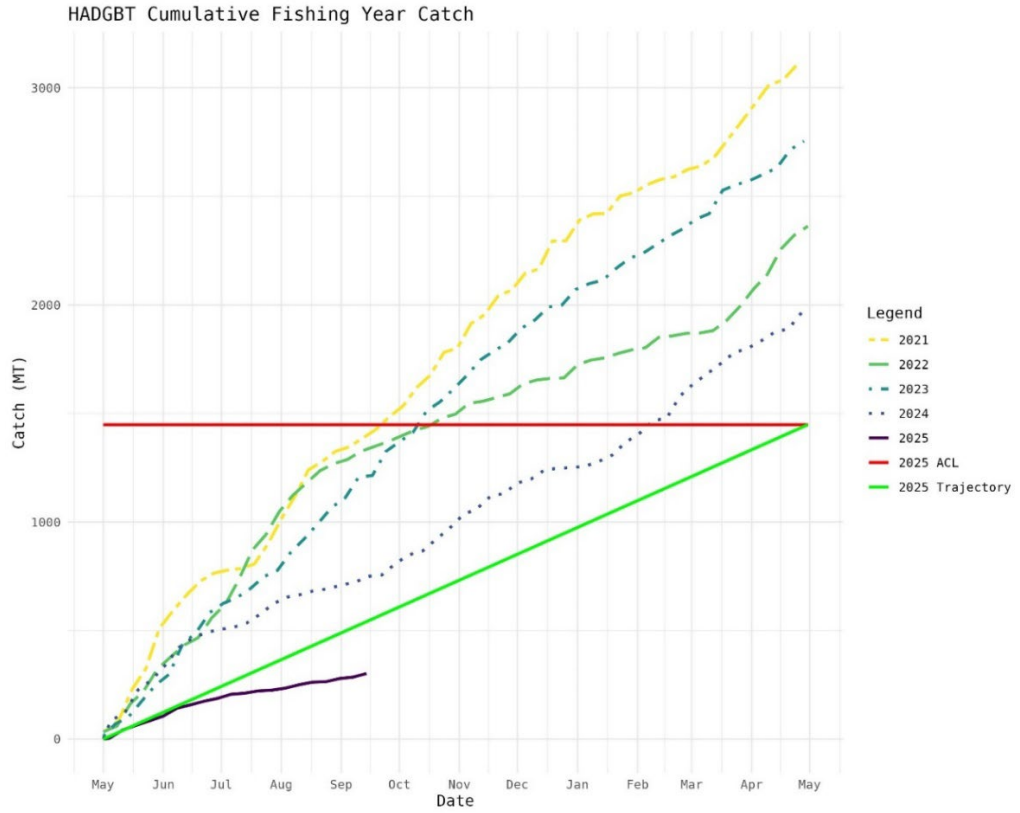


Figure 6- In-season utilization of EGB haddock by the commercial (sectors and common pool) groundfish fishery.

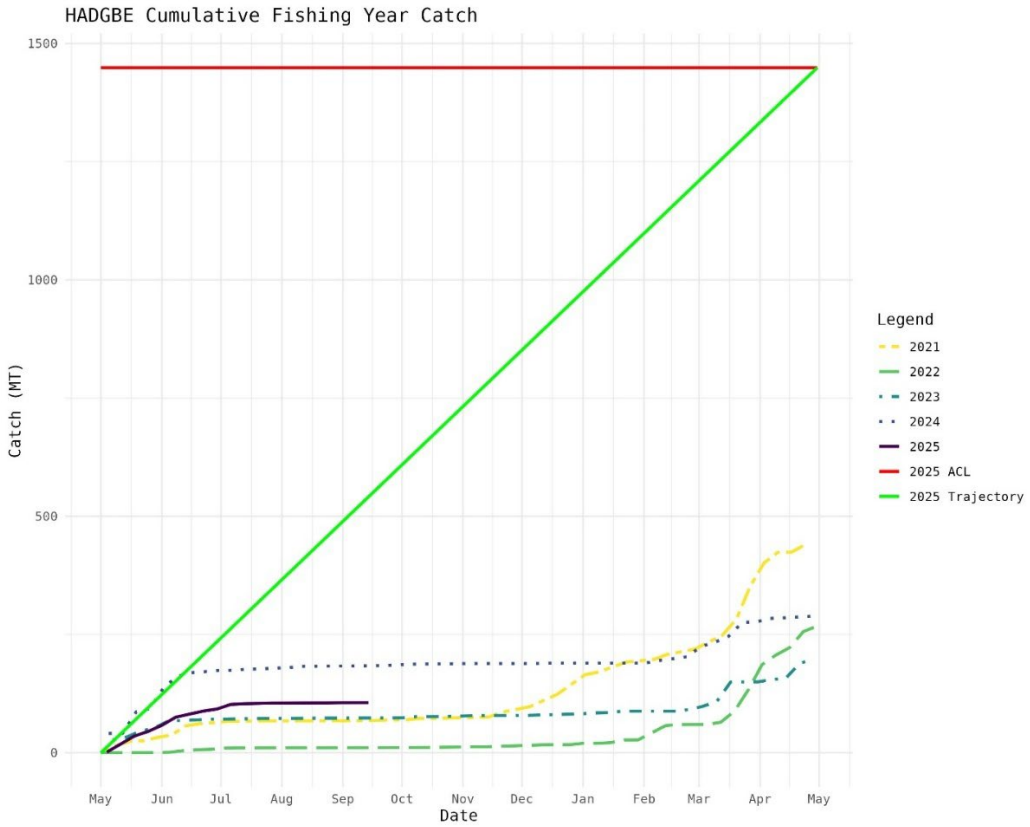


Table 8- GB West haddock stock-level catch and revenue predictions from the Quota Change Model (QCM) for each fishing year between 2012 and 2024 compared to realized catch and revenue (in 2024$).

		Sector sub-ACL	Catch (mt)		*Utilization (%)*		Gross Rev ($mil, 2024)	
	FY		Realized	Predicted	*Realized*	*Predicted*	Realized	Predicted
GB Haddock West	2012	19,251	626	N/A	*0.03*	*N/A*	3.8	N/A
	2013	24,908	2,167	1,185	*0.09*	*0.05*	7.7	5.7
	2014	18,666	3,523	793	*0.19*	*0.04*	11.2	3.6
	2015	16,206	3,293	4,495	*0.20*	*0.28*	10.1	14.7
	2016	34,156	3,006	4,511	*0.09*	*0.13*	9.3	12.3
	2017	22,968	3,208	4,787	*0.14*	*0.21*	7.8	12.4
	2018	28,857	4,135	3,628	*0.14*	*0.13*	9.4	9.0
	2019	38,003	4,368	4,160	*0.11*	*0.11*	11.1	8.6
	2020	103,849	5,783	4,426	*0.06*	*0.04*	15.0	9.0
	2021	67,829	3,116	4,425	*0.04*	*0.06*	8.7	10.2
	2022	67,837	2,099	3,001	*0.03*	*0.04*	7.7	8.2
	2023	9,354	2,554	3,120	*0.27*	*0.33*	6.9	11.1
	2024	3,897	1,677	2,406	*0.43*	*0.71*	5.4	7.6

Table 9- GB East haddock stock-level catch and revenue predictions from the Quota Change Model (QCM) for each fishing year between 2012 and 2024 compared to realized catch and revenue (in 2024$).

		Sector sub-ACL	Catch (mt)		*Utilization (%)*		Gross Rev ($mil, 2024)	
	FY		Realized	Predicted	*Realized*	*Predicted*	Realized	Predicted
GB Haddock East	2012	6,861	366	N/A	*0.05*	*N/A*	1.6	N/A
	2013	3,742	579	566	*0.16*	*0.14*	1.7	2.5
	2014	9,454	1,536	365	*0.16*	*0.04*	4.4	1.6
	2015	15,045	1,058	1,107	*0.07*	*0.20*	2.6	3.5
	2016	15,063	549	1,574	*0.04*	*0.09*	1.4	4.2
	2017	29,288	407	1,016	*0.01*	*0.03*	0.8	2.5
	2018	15,488	623	618	*0.04*	*0.04*	1.2	1.6
	2019	14,762	716	464	*0.05*	*0.03*	1.4	0.8
	2020	15,861	563	692	*0.04*	*0.04*	1.3	1.4
	2021	6,267	443	481	*0.07*	*0.08*	1.4	1.0
	2022	6,539	256	381	*0.04*	*0.06*	0.6	1.0
	2023	1,475	190	533	*0.13*	*0.36*	0.4	1.5
	2024	2,858	289	362	*0.10*	*0.12*	0.6	1.9

3. Georges Bank yellowtail flounder

Information Reviewed:
The TMGC, Groundfish PDT, and Council staff reviewed: the 2025 Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder Management Track Assessment, SSC reports, PDT reports, catch information, and economic information.

2025 Management Track Assessment:
The 2025 GB Yellowtail Flounder Management Track Assessment is the first management track assessment since the Yellowtail Flounder Research Track Assessment that concluded in 2024. The assessment applied the Woods Hole Assessment Model (WHAM) and updated data through 2024.

Prior to the WHAM model approach, GB yellowtail flounder was assessed with the empirical-based Limiter Approach. In addition to the transition to a state space model, other major changes are the inclusion of an environmental covariate (bottom water temperature) to inform recruitment. With an analytical assessment, the stock now has biological reference points. There were no major changes to the WHAM model between the 2024 Research Track Assessment and 2025 Management Track Assessment, other than an update to maturity which had a minimal effect.

Main sources of uncertainty:

- Low catch rates in the fishery-independent surveys make it difficult to track cohorts and to estimate changes in maturity and growth. There are limited demographic samples from commercial landings; however, landings remain low.
- Calibration factors are not available for the 2022 DFO survey.
- Missing 2023 spring NEFSC survey index (only sampled during daylight hours).

Stock Status and Rebuilding Status:
The 2025 GB Yellowtail Flounder Management Track Assessment and Peer Review Panel concluded that GB yellowtail is overfished, and overfishing is not occurring. This represents a change from the previous assessment when overfishing status was unknown (overfished status was determined by NOAA Fisheries). Official stock status determination from NOAA is pending. GB yellowtail flounder is in a rebuilding plan with a rebuild by date of 2032.

Catch Advice for TMGC:
Only a U.S. assessment is conducted for GB yellowtail flounder. TMGC considered projections and catch advice from the 2025 Management Track Assessment (Table 10).

Table 10- Short term projections of total fishery catch and spawning stock biomass for GB yellowtail flounder based on a harvest scenario of fishing at FMSY between 2026 and 2028. Catch in 2025 was assumed to be 22 (mt).

Year	Catch (mt)	SSB (mt)	F_{Full}
2025	22	655 (230 - 1,860)	0.034

Year	Catch (mt)	SSB (mt)	F_{Full}
2026	57	646 (190 - 2,198)	0.09
2027	57	654 (180 - 2,374)	0.09
2028	60	699 (181 - 2,707)	0.09

The TMGC recommended a shared TAC of 57 mt for GB yellowtail. The TMGC noted the stock is considered overfished by the U.S. and would be considered in the critical zone under the Canadian Precautionary Approach. They noted the most recent survey values and stock biomass remain low and productivity is poor. They also noted that recent fishery catches remain well below recent quotas and deemed catch advice of 57 mt appropriate as it represents a decrease from the recent quota of 200 mt.

Proposed OFL and ABC:
Based on the TMGC guidance, the proposed GB yellowtail flounder FY2026 OFL is 57 mt with an ABC set equal to the OFL (Table 11). Applying the U.S./Canada resource sharing agreement results in a U.S. ABC of 37 mt (54%) and a Canadian TAC of 26 mt (46%).

Canadian catches have been very low (below 10 mt since 2017) and are expected to remain well below the 2026 Canadian TAC (26 mt; Table 12). Additionally, catches of GB yellowtail flounder in the U.S. scallop fishery are anticipated to be low in 2026 due to changes in scallop access area allocations (see Appendix – Scallop PDT memo). It is expected that the TMGC will revisit this stock in 2026.

Table 11- Proposed OFLs and ABCs (mt) for FY2026 for GB yellowtail flounder.

Fishing Year	Proposed OFL (mt)	Proposed ABC (mt)	U.S. ABC (mt)
2026	57	57	31

Table 12- Canadian landings and discards (mt) of GB yellowtail flounder. (Source: 2025 Management Track Assessment)

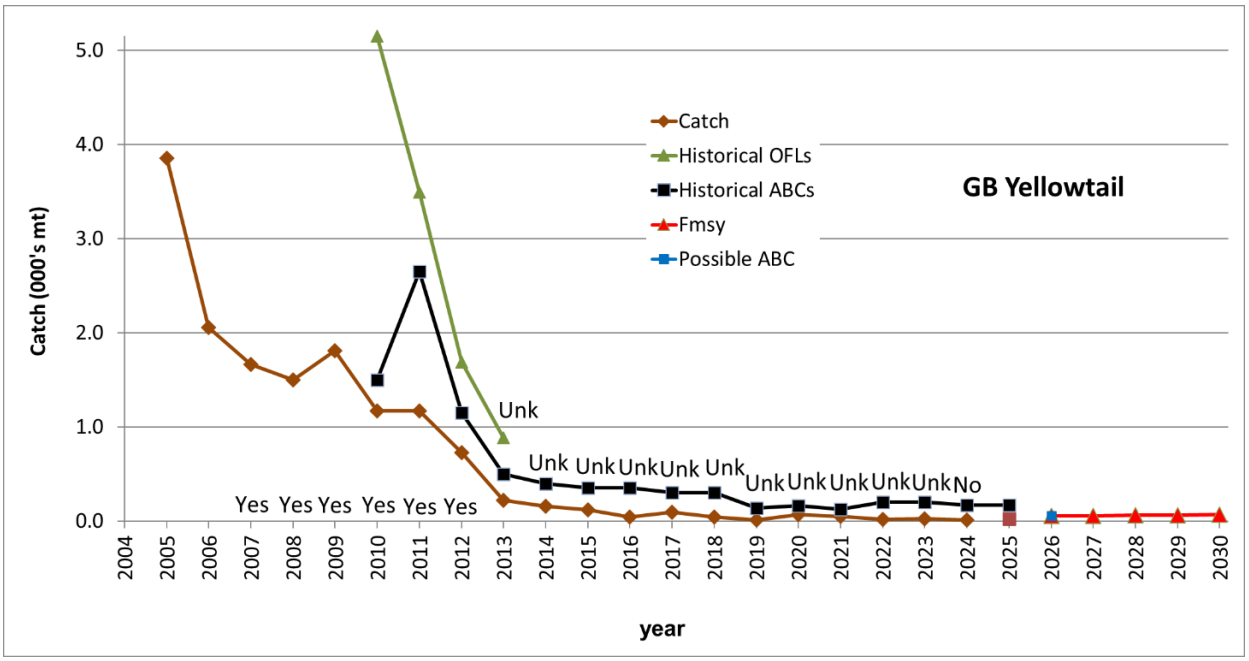
Calendar Year	Canadian Landings (mt)	Canadian Discards (mt)
2017	0	2
2018	0	3
2019	0	4
2020	0	6
2021	0	4
2022	1	3
2023	0	5
2024	0	5

Catch Performance:
Table 13 and Figure 7 summarize catch performance and changes in overfishing status for GB yellowtail flounder. FMSY estimates are provided for FY2026-FY2030 from the 2025 assessment.

Table 13- Total U.S. and Canada catch performance (CY2010-CY2024), historical OFLs and ABCs (FY2010-FY2025), FMSY estimates for FY2026-FY2030, and proposed ABC for FY2026 for GB yellowtail flounder.

Year	Catch	Historical OFLs	Historical ABCs	Catch Assumption	F_{MSY}	Possible ABC
2010	1,170	5,148	1,500			
2011	1,171	3,495	2,650			
2012	725	1,691	1,150			
2013	218	882	500			
2014	159	undefined	400			
2015	118	undefined	354			
2016	44	undefined	354			
2017	95	undefined	300			
2018	45	undefined	300			
2019	8	undefined	140			
2020	68	undefined	162			
2021	51	undefined	125			
2022	15	undefined	200			
2023	25	undefined	200			
2024	12	undefined	168			
2025		undefined	168	22		
2026					57	57
2027					57	
2028					60	
2029					64	
2030					69	

Figure 7- Total U.S. and Canada catch performance for GB yellowtail flounder including catches from CY2005-CY2024, historical OFLs and ABCs since FY2010, FMSY for FY2026-FY2030 and proposed ABC for FY2026. Overfishing status in the terminal year of the assessment indicated on the x-axis ("Yes" = overfishing, "No" = not overfishing, "Unk" = unknown overfishing status).



Additional Fishery Information:
In the U.S., three fisheries have sub-annual catch limits (sub-ACLs) for GB yellowtail flounder, including the commercial groundfish fishery (sectors and common pool), the Atlantic sea scallop fishery, and the small-mesh trawl fisheries (primarily for whiting and squid).

Commercial Groundfish Fishery –Figure 8 shows commercial groundfish (sector and common pool) catch of GB yellowtail flounder since FY2021 along with the FY2025 commercial annual catch limit (ACL). Utilization by the groundfish fishery has been very low.

Sectors – Table 14 compares the performance of the QCM since FY2012 to the realized outcomes for GB yellowtail flounder. Performance of the QCM varies year by year (in some years it underpredicts, while in others it overpredicts) but generally has accurately predicted utilization trends, particularly in recent years where utilization has been low as the sector sub-ACLs have declined. Utilization rates for GB yellowtail flounder have been below 20% since FY2015 and below or equal to 5% since FY2019.

Scallop Fishery – Information on catch performance and management in the U.S. scallop fishery is provided in Appendix #1.

Small Mesh Fisheries – The sub-ACL for GB yellowtail flounder in the small-mesh trawl fisheries was implemented in FY2013. Accountability Measures (AMs) for the small-mesh trawl fisheries include gear-restricted areas in the GB yellowtail flounder stock area in a year following an overage of the sub-ACL. Catches of GB yellowtail flounder in small-mesh fisheries have been low, and to date, small-mesh fisheries have not exceeded their sub-ACL (Table 15).

Figure 8- In-season utilization of GB yellowtail by the commercial (sectors and common pool) groundfish fishery.

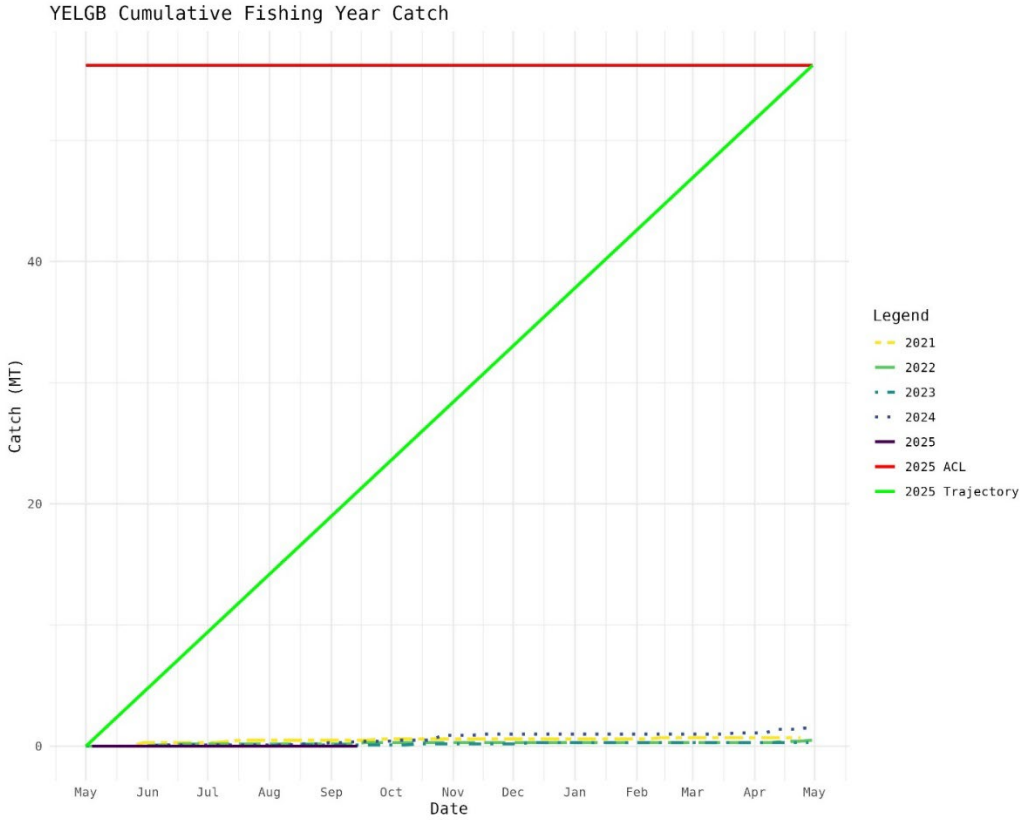


Table 14- GB yellowtail flounder stock-level catch and revenue predictions from the QCM for each fishing year between 2012 and 2024 compared to realized catch and revenue (in 2024$).

	FY	Sector sub-ACL	Catch (mt)		*Utilization (%)*		Gross Rev ($mil, 2024)	
			Realized	Predicted	*Realized*	*Predicted*	Realized	Predicted
GB Yellowtail Flounder	2012	364	201	180	*0.55*	*0.57*	0.7	N/A
	2013	100	46	340	*0.46*	*0.97*	0.3	1.3
	2014	252	54	167	*0.21*	*0.66*	0.3	0.8
	2015	192	36	55	*0.19*	*0.28*	0.1	0.3
	2016	207	23	22	*0.11*	*0.10*	0.1	0.1
	2017	160	31	18	*0.19*	*0.11*	0.1	0.1
	2018	167	27	37	*0.16*	*0.22*	0.1	0.2
	2019	83	3	37	*0.04*	*0.45*	<0.1	0.1
	2020	93	5	27	*0.05*	*0.29*	<0.1	0.1
	2021	59	1	2	*0.01*	*0.04*	<0.1	<0.1
	2022	94	1	1	*0.01*	*0.02*	<0.1	<0.1
	2023	80	<1	<1	*0.01*	*0.01*	<0.1	<0.1
	2024	55	2	<1	*0.03*	*0.01*	<0.1	<0.1

Table 15- Recent GB yellowtail flounder small-mesh fisheries sub-ACLs and catches. (Source: GARFO)

Fishing Year	Small-mesh fisheries sub-ACL (mt)	Small-mesh fisheries catch (mt)	Percent small-mesh fisheries caught (%)
2019	2.0	-	-
2020	2.0	1.8	82.2%
2021	1.5	0.8	53.5%
2022	2.3	0.1	5.2%
2023	2.0	-	-

Summary of Proposed OFLs and ABCs for FY2026

Stock	Fishing Year	Proposed OFL (mt)	Proposed ABC (mt)
Georges Bank Cod	2026	473	473
Georges Bank Haddock	2026	8,177	8,177
Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder	2026	57	57

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

MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 22, 2025

TO: Groundfish PDT

FROM: Scallop PDT

SUBJECT: **Scallop Fishery Activity in Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder Stock Area**

Preface

For several years, the Scallop Plan Development Team (PDT) has provided information to the Groundfish PDT for consideration during the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)'s deliberations of the Georges Bank yellowtail flounder (GB yellowtail) Total Allowable Catch (TAC). These memos outline recent management measures within the GB yellowtail stock area, catch estimates of GB yellowtail, scallop fishing effort within the GB yellowtail stock area, and information on GB yellowtail catch advice (see Appendix I). The Scallop PDT revisited discussion on these topics through correspondence. This document communicates recent information on scallop fishing in the GB yellowtail stock area as well as the outlook for the scallop fishery and GB yellowtail bycatch on eastern Georges Bank in fishing year (FY) 2026.

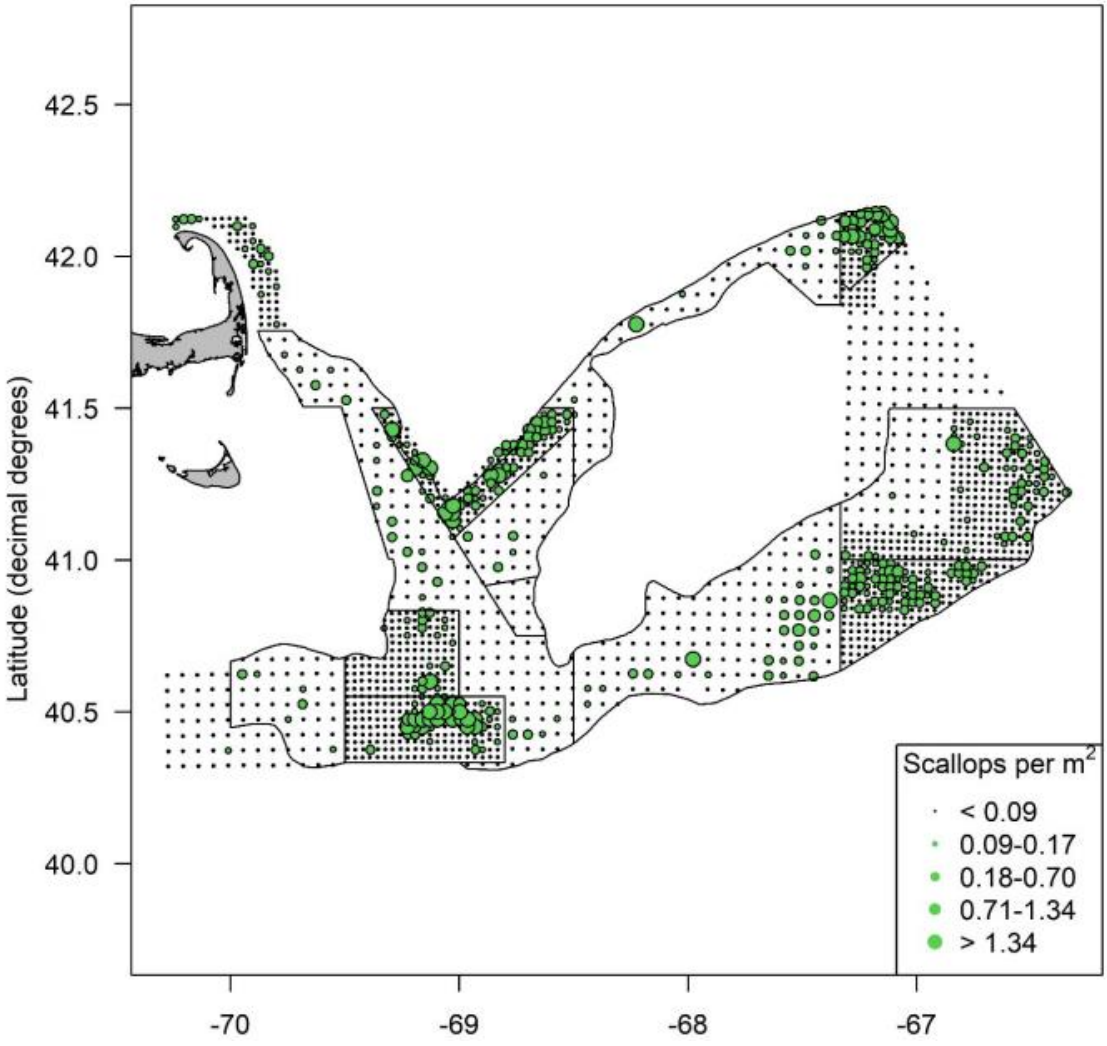
Scallop Fishery Outlook in Area II Access Area

- Based on the results of the 2024 surveys, full time limited access vessels were allocated two 12,000-pound trips: one to Area I Access Area (Area I) and one to Area II Access Area (Area II) for a total allocation of 24,000-pounds per vessel in FY2025. The configuration of Area II in FY2025 includes the traditional access area (CL2-Southeast & CL2-Southwest) combined with the CL2-Extension. Beginning in FY2025, Area II will be closed to directed scallop fishing from November 15 to May 15, 2025. This closure was implemented to minimize flatfish bycatch.
- There are three independent scallop surveys of Area II and surrounding open areas (dredge, drop camera, and HabCam) that occurred in 2025. The 2025 surveys of eastern Georges Bank indicate that it is unlikely that Area II could continue to support access area fishing in FY2026. If the Council chooses to close Area II in FY2026, the area would continue to support fishing of access area trips carried over from FY2025 from May 15, 2026 until July 14, 2026.
- Area II became available for RSA compensation fishing on April 1, 2025. In FY2025, RSA compensation fishing in both the Area I and Area II was capped at half of the total available RSA Set-Aside, or 625,000 lb. If the Council chooses to close Area II in FY2026, the

Council could still choose to allow RSA compensation fishing in Area II from May 15, 2026 to November 15. 2026.

- The 2025 surveys of eastern Georges Bank observed a decline in the amount of exploitable biomass in the eastern portion of Area II (Figure 1), and observed a moderate increase in exploitable biomass in the open bottom directly west of Area II in the Southern Flank (SF) Scallop Area Management Simulator (SAMS) area (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Mean recruited scallop density (scallops greater than 75 mm shell height per m^2) at each station from the 2025 School of Marine Science and Technology Drop Camera Survey on Georges Bank.

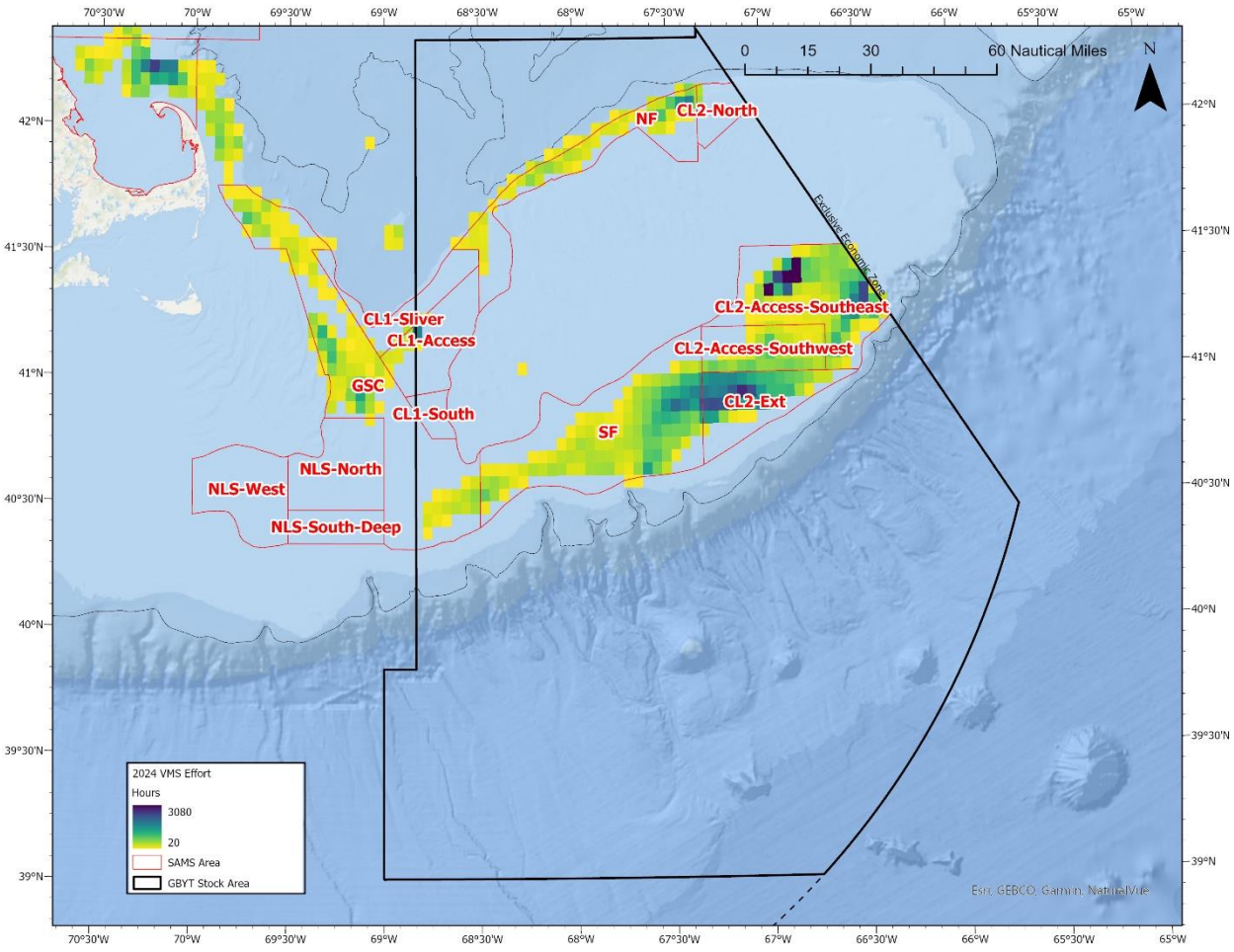


Recent Scallop Fishery VMS Effort

- Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data were used to estimate scallop fishery effort in FY2024 (Figure 2). These VMS data represent combined scallop fishery activity in terms of hours fished, aggregated at a resolution of 3 nautical mile squares with a minimum of 20 hours recorded per square. A speed filter of 2 to 5.5 kts was applied to remove vessel activity that was likely a result of transiting to and from fishing grounds.
- In FY2024, scallop effort in the GB yellowtail stock area occurred mostly in CL2-Southeast, CL2-Southwest, CL2-Ext, and in the open area directly west within the Southern Flank (SF) (Figure 2). Some open area effort was directed along the northern flank of Georges Bank in FY2024, but to a lesser extent than what was observed in the SF.

- As seen in FY2024 and in previous years, the PDT anticipates that substantial scallop fishery activity will continue in the open bottom directly west of Area II in the SF.

Figure 2. Scallop fishery effort in terms of Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) hours fished for FY2024 on Georges Bank relative to the Georges Bank yellowtail flounder stock area and Scallop Area Management Simulator (SAMS) area boundaries.



Scallop Fishery Bycatch of Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder

- The scallop fishery bycatch from FY2024 was estimated to be approximately 5 mt, which is 33.3% of the FY2024 sub-ACL (GARFO Quota Monitoring Scallop Bycatch Report). The Scallop PDT projected GB yellowtail bycatch to be about 4.6-6.7 mt for FY2025. In season bycatch estimates are typically based on area-specific (i.e., in access areas and open areas) observed discard rates. For the 2025 bycatch projection, the PDT used data from observed trips between October 2023 and October 2024.
- The Northeast Multispecies Framework 69 that would set the 2025 scallop sub-ACL has not been published, and the fishery is operating under catch limits set through an emergency action published May 2, 2025. The Northeast Multispecies Framework 69 would set the scallop fishery sub-ACL at 14.9 mt, however the fishery is currently operating under a sub-ACL of 11 mt. (see Framework 39). As of September 2025, GB yellowtail bycatch has been estimated to be 16 mt. This is 6.9% over the Framework 69 scallop fishery sub-ACL, 31.3% over the emergency action sub-ACL, and 139-248% over the projected bycatch amount. A

full description of the caveats and anticipated bycatch of GB yellowtail for FY2025 and FY2026 is contained in Section 6.3.3 of Framework 39.

- Due to an overage of the northern windowpane flounder sub-ACL in FY2023, the scallop fishery is subject to a reactive accountability measure (AM) for the duration of FY2025 (April 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026). The reactive AM requires use of a modified dredge (i.e., maximum 5-row apron with 1.5:1 hanging ratio) when fishing in Area II for the entirety of FY2025. Use of the modified dredge is anticipated to reduce bycatch of both GB yellowtail and northern windowpane flounder, although this reduction may be less than originally suggested (Scallop PDT Memo re Scallop Fishery AMs). The reactive AM triggers for Georges Bank yellowtail were temporarily modified in Northeast Multispecies Framework 66 so that the reactive AMs would only be implemented if the scallop fishery exceeded its sub-ACL for Georges Bank yellowtail and the overall George Bank yellowtail stock ACL was exceeded. This temporary modification would be limited to FY2025.
- Both the Georges Bank yellowtail and northern windowpane flounder AM triggers would be modified through Northeast Multispecies Framework 69 so that the scallop fishery would only trigger the implementation of the modified gear if both the scallop fishery sub-ACL and the stock ACL were both exceeded. In FY2024, scallop fishery bycatch for Northern windowpane flounder was estimated to be 43.1mt, which is 161.9% of the sub-ACL. However, bycatch for Georges Bank yellowtail was estimated to be approximately 5 mt, which is 33.3% of the FY2024 sub-ACL. Since the northern windowpane sub-ACL was exceeded by more than 150%, the PDT does anticipate that the AM would be in place again in FY2026, however the 2025 surveys of eastern Georges Bank do not suggest that Area II could sustain rotational fishing in FY2026, and the Council may choose to close this area to directed scallop fishing.

Table 1. Recent Georges Bank (GB) yellowtail Total Allowable Catch limits (TAC), scallop fishery sub-Annual Catch Limits (sub-ACL) and catches, by fishing year (FY). Values are shown in metric tons (mt).

FY	Total Shared TAC	US % Share	US TAC	% US TAC Caught	Scallop sub-ACL	Scallop catch	% Scallop sub-ACL Caught
FY2010	1,500	64%	1,200	68%	146	17.6	12%
FY2011	2,650	55%	1,458	76%	200.8	83.9	42%
FY2012	1,150	49%	564	68%	156.9	164.0	105%
FY2013	500	43%	215	43%	41.5	37.5	90%
FY2014*	400	82%	328	37%	50.9	59.0	116%
FY2015*	354	70%	248	28%	38	29.7	78%
FY2016*	354	76%	269	12%	42	2.1	5%
FY2017*	300	69%	207	44%	32	52.6	164%
FY2018*	300	71%	213	20%	33	12.7	38%
FY2019*	140	76%	106	5%	17	1.7	10%
FY2020*	162	74%	120	7%	19	1.5	8%
FY2021*	125	64%	80	39.3%	12	29.1	243%
FY2022*	200	61%	122	7.1%	18	7.8	40.8%
FY2023*	200	53%	106	19.4%	16.5	19.5	118.4%
FY2024*	168	42%	71		14.9	5	33.3%
FY2025	168	42%	71		11**	16.0	145.5%

* retention of GB yellowtail prohibited for scallop fishery
** Scallop fishery sub-ACL set in emergency action published May 2, 2025

Appendix I: Recent Memos from Scallop PDT to Groundfish PDT re: GB yellowtail

Table 2. Links to past memos from the Scallop PDT to the Groundfish PDT regarding GB yellowtail.

Date	Link
August 1, 2016	See page 14: https://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/B.2-160805-GF-PDT-memo-to-SSC-re-GB-yellowtail-flounder-with-attachments_corrected-081716.pdf
August 2, 2017	See page 7: https://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/A6_170804-GF-PDT-memo-to-SSC-re-GB-yellowtail-flounder-with-Scallop-PDT-memo-attached_170807_114738.pdf
July 27, 2018	See page 7: https://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/A6_180809-GF-PDT-memo-to-SSC-re-GB-yellowtail-flounder-with-Scallop-PDT-memo-attachment.pdf
August 13, 2019	https://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/Doc.9-190813_Scallop-PDT-memo-to-Groundfish-PDT-re-GB-yellowtail.pdf
August 12, 2020	See page 11: https://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/5a_200821-GF-PDT-memo-to-SSC-re-GB-yellowtail-flounder-with-Scallop-PDT-memo_200921_093835.pdf
August 9, 2021	https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/Doc.3e-210809-Scallop-PDT-memo-to-Groundfish-PDT-re-GB-yellowtail.pdf
August 11, 2022	https://d23h0vhsm26o6d.cloudfront.net/3E2_220816-GF-PDT-memo-to-SSC-re-GB-yellowtail-flounder-with-Scallop-PDT-memo_2022-09-08-143249_brbv.pdf
September 1, 2023	https://d23h0vhsm26o6d.cloudfront.net/4b_230901-GF-PDT-memo-to-SSC-re-GB-yellowtail-flounder-OFLs-and-ABCs-2024-2025-with-Scallop-PDT-memo.pdf
July 23, 2024	2.b.iii_240723-GF-PDT-memo-to-SSC-re-GB-yellowtail-flounder-OFLs-and-ABCs-2025-2026-with-Scallop-PDT-memo-r.pdf