

Status of Regional Science and Management

Risk Policy Working Group

November 14, 2025

Cate O'Keefe, Executive Director

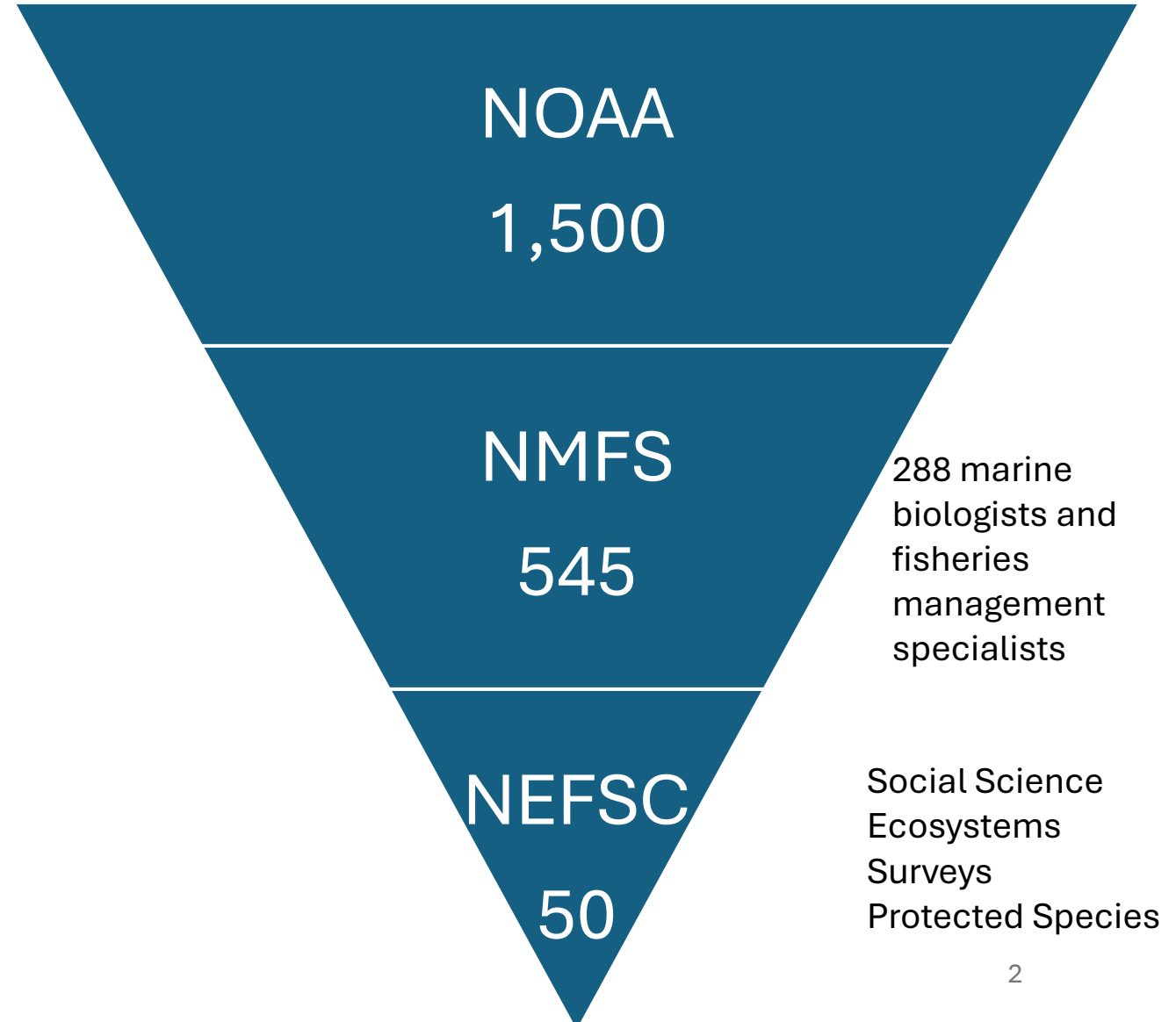


New England
Fishery Management
Council

Changing Landscapes

- Environment and ecosystem
 - Resource distribution
 - Productivity
 - Governance and jurisdiction
- Staffing and budgets
 - Reductions in force
 - Programmatic restructuring
 - Reduced budgets
- National and regional priorities
 - Inflation Reduction Act initiatives
 - Executive Orders
 - Risk-value tradeoffs

2025 NOAA Agency Staff Reductions ([Seafood Source, 10/10/25](#))



Regional Science Capacity

- Data collection programs and systems
 - Fishery-independent surveys – programmatic changes to match priorities
 - Cancellation of 2025 Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Survey
 - Uncertain maintenance funding for *R/V Bigelow*
 - Fishery-dependent biological sampling
 - Port Biological Sampling Program – reductions since 2019
 - Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology – aligning priority monitoring with available funding
- Research opportunities
 - Stock assessment, stock structure, population dynamics
 - Emphasis on existing approaches with simplified processes
 - Research Track on indefinite pause
 - Socioeconomic information
 - Reduced support for Plan Development Teams
 - Focus on required information related to applicable laws with less capacity for research

Regional Science Capacity

2025 Stock Assessment Schedule – 9/17/2024

	Species/Topic	Stock Area	Management Organization(s)
March Research Track	Atlantic herring		NEFMC
	American lobster*		ASMFC
April Research Track	Sea scallop		NEFMC
June Management Track	Atlantic mackerel		MAFMC
	Black sea bass		MAFMC, ASMFC
	Bluefish		MAFMC, ASMFC
	Northern shortfin squid (<i>Illex</i>)		MAFMC
	Scup		MAFMC, ASMFC
	Summer flounder		MAFMC, ASMFC
September Management Track	Acadian redfish		NEFMC
	Atlantic wolffish		NEFMC
	Monkfish	Northern	NEFMC, MAFMC
	Monkfish	Southern	NEFMC, MAFMC
	Ocean pout		NEFMC
	Skate Complex (barndoor, clearnose, little, rosette, smooth, thorny, winter)		NEFMC
	White hake		NEFMC
	Windowpane flounder	Northern	NEFMC
	Windowpane flounder	Southern	NEFMC
	Winter flounder	Georges Bank	NEFMC
	Winter flounder	Gulf of Maine	NEFMC, ASMFC
	Winter flounder	Southern New England / Mid-Atlantic	NEFMC, ASMFC
	Yellowtail flounder	Cape Cod / Gulf of Maine	NEFMC
	Yellowtail flounder	Georges Bank	NEFMC
	Yellowtail flounder	Southern New England / Mid-Atlantic	NEFMC

2025 Stock Assessment Schedule – 5/8/2025

	Species/Topic	Management Organization(s)
Spring Research Track	Atlantic herring	NEFMC
	Sea scallop	NEFMC
	American lobster*	ASMFC
June Management Track	Black sea bass	MAFMC, ASMFC
	Bluefish	MAFMC, ASMFC
	Northern shortfin squid (<i>Illex</i>)	MAFMC
	Scup	MAFMC, ASMFC
	Summer flounder	MAFMC, ASMFC
September Management Track	Atlantic mackerel	MAFMC
	Acadian redfish	NEFMC
	White hake	NEFMC
	Winter flounder (Georges Bank)	NEFMC
	Winter flounder (Gulf of Maine)	NEFMC, ASMFC
	Winter flounder (Southern New England)	NEFMC, ASMFC
	Yellowtail flounder (Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine)	NEFMC
	Yellowtail flounder (Georges Bank)	NEFMC
	Yellowtail flounder (Southern New England)	NEFMC
Data Updates	Atlantic wolffish	NEFMC
	Monkfish (northern)	NEFMC, MAFMC
	Monkfish (southern)	NEFMC, MAFMC
	Ocean pout	NEFMC
	Skate Complex	NEFMC
	Windowpane flounder (northern)	NEFMC
	Windowpane flounder(southern)	NEFMC

Regional Science Capacity

2026 Stock Assessment Schedule – 9/17/2024

	Species/Topic	Stock Area	Management Organization(s)
February/March Research Track	Longfin inshore squid		MAFMC
June Management Track	Atlantic cod	Georges Bank	NEFMC
	Atlantic herring		NEFMC, ASMFC
	Butterfish		MAFMC
	Haddock	Georges Bank	NEFMC
	Longfin inshore squid		MAFMC
	Ocean quahog		MAFMC
	Striped bass*		ASMFC
September Management Track	American plaice		NEFMC
	Atlantic cod	Eastern Gulf of Maine	NEFMC
	Atlantic cod	Southern New England	NEFMC
	Atlantic cod	Western Gulf of Maine	NEFMC
	Atlantic halibut		NEFMC
	Haddock	Gulf of Maine	NEFMC
	Pollock		NEFMC
	Red hake	Northern	NEFMC
	Red hake	Southern	NEFMC
	Silver & Offshore hake	Southern	NEFMC
	Silver hake	Northern	NEFMC
	Witch flounder		NEFMC
November Research Track	Winter flounder	Georges Bank	NEFMC
		Gulf of Maine	NEFMC, ASMFC
		Southern New England / Mid-Atlantic	NEFMC, ASMFC

2026 Stock Assessment Schedule – 9/8/2025

	Stock	Management Organization
March Research Track	Longfin inshore squid	MAFMC
June Management Track	Atlantic herring	NEFMC
	Haddock (Georges Bank)	NEFMC
	Longfin inshore squid	MAFMC
September Management Track	American plaice	NEFMC
	Haddock (Gulf of Maine)	NEFMC

Additional 2026 Assessment Related Work

NEFSC will provide **data updates** for:

- Atlantic halibut
- Red hake (northern, southern)
- Silver hake (northern, southern/offshore)
- Witch flounder

NEFSC will provide **data updates** and **projections updates** for:

- Butterfish
- Ocean quahog
- Pollock

ASMFC will continue the research track assessment work for:

- Striped bass (peer review in spring 2027)

Regional Management Capacity

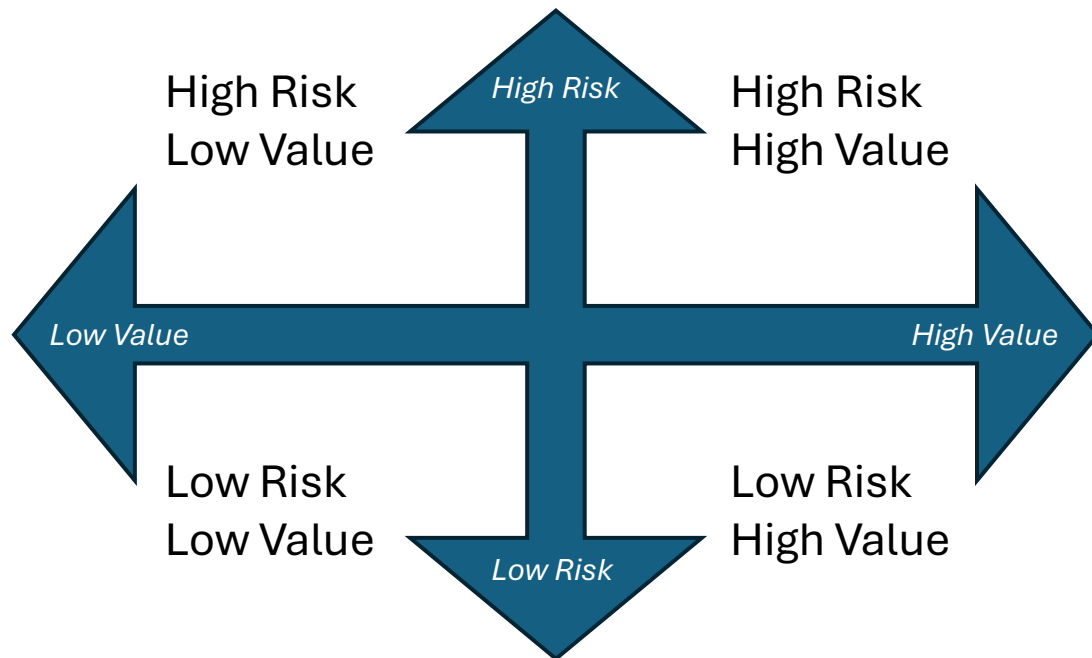
- Reductions in staffing at Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office
 - Sustainable Fisheries
 - Groundfish Sector program support
 - Impacts across resources
 - Protected Species, Habitat and Ecosystem Services, Energy and Offshore Development
 - Analysis and Program Support, Technology and Development
 - Budget and Grant Operations
- Focus on core functions and mission
 - Impacts to reviews and processes
 - Fewer resources to complete mandated activities
 - Reduction in service-oriented activities
 - Regional activities update in Commercial Fisheries News suspended
 - Ability to attend regional meetings – reduced travel support
- National NOAA Fisheries Impacts
 - Delayed reviews and implementation of actions

Regional Management Capacity

	Council Timeline		NMFS Timeline		Impacts	
Recent Actions	Final Meeting	Final Submission	Final Rule	Days post Final Action	FY Start	Days into FY
Herring Specs	Apr 2025	May 2025			1/1/2025	
Groundfish FW69	Dec 2024	Mar 2025			5/1/2025	
Scallops FW39	Dec 2024	Apr 2025	Apr 2025	137	4/1/2025	20
Dogfish Specs	Dec 2024	Mar 2025	May 2025	153	5/1/2025	11
Skates FW12	Dec 2023	May 2024	Jul 2024	224	5/1/2024	77
Whiting Specs	Dec 2023	Jul 2024	Aug 2024	267	5/1/2024	120
Monkfish FW13	Feb 2023	Apr 2023	Aug 2023	185	5/1/2023	102

NOAA Fisheries Priorities

- May 2025 Presentation - NOAA to Council Coordination Committee (CCC)
 - “We cannot continue to manage the 500+ stocks/stock complexes”
 - “We are likely going to need to take increased risk and strategically choose where we take that increased risk”
 - “Increased uncertainty should (can) not automatically equal decreases in harvest”



Value Categories

- Commercial fisheries
- Recreational fisheries
- Socioeconomic indicators

Risk Categories

- Ratio of catch to Annual Catch Limit
- Biomass and rebuilding status
- Ecosystem role
- Current and future ecosystem and socioeconomic conditions

Council Needs

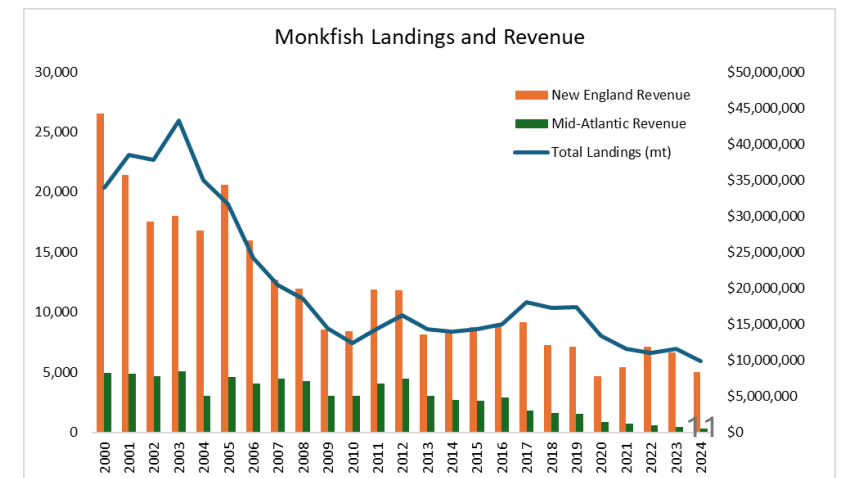
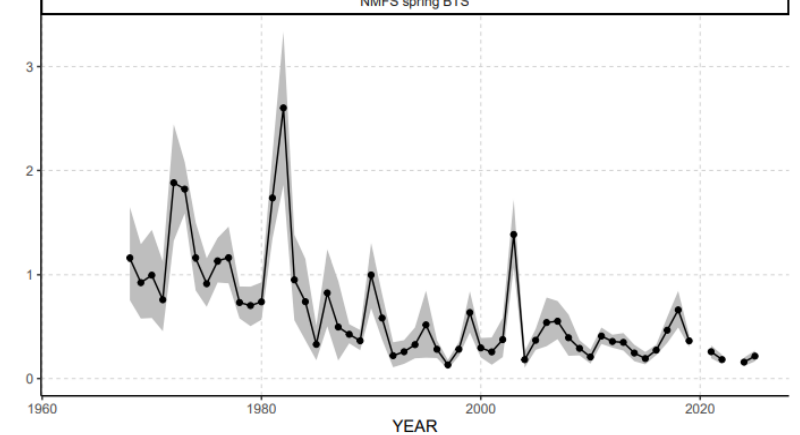
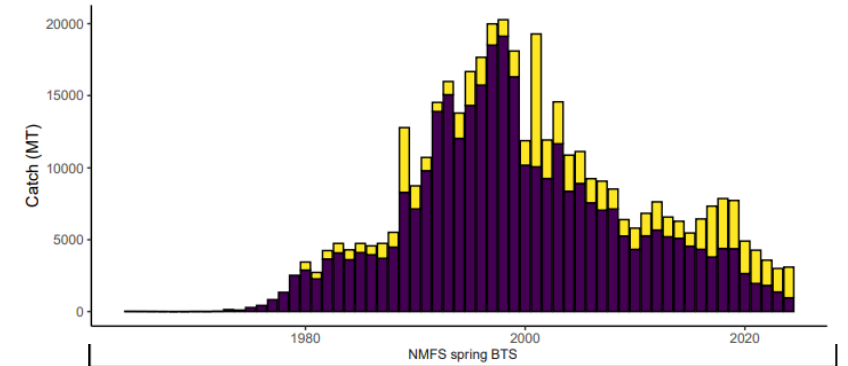
- Increased flexibility in management and regulatory processes
 - Changes in federal agency structure and staffing
 - Pauses in regulatory advancement of actions
 - New priorities for seafood competitiveness and deregulatory environment
- Evaluation of current practices and consideration of adaptive approaches
 - Specification setting frequency
 - In-season adjustments
- Develop new tools and methods to manage sustainably and iteratively
 - Data Updates and Fishery Performance Reports
 - Holistic Strategic Plan - consideration of governance and shared resources
 - Revised Risk Policy integrated harvest control rules

Management Flexibility Omnibus Amendment

- Specification frequency
 - Allows the Council to recommend specifications for one to up to five years
 - Greater flexibility in planning assessments/data updates and management actions
 - Spread specification-setting activities throughout the year, rather than time-constrained
- In-season adjustments
 - Allows the Council to consult with NOAA to adjust specifications and measures in-season
 - Provides flexibility to respond in a timely manner to updated scientific and fishery information
- Annual reports
 - Removes regulatory requirement for monkfish, skate, and whiting annual reports
 - Allows the Council more flexibility to choose the timing and content of reports
 - Minimizes duplicative work and provides opportunity to focus on most relevant information

Data Updates and Fishery Performance Reports

- Data Updates/Projection Updates
 - Overview of trends; can inform general status
 - Can be generated quickly through automated process
 - Tool to check on stocks more frequently than assessments and inform management needs
- Fishery Performance Reports
 - Input from SSC Social Science Subpanel
 - Economic data
 - Port/community indicators
 - Automated reports considering fishery information
 - Increase utility of catch accounting data
 - Pull in additional information streams
 - Market and lease prices, regional supply/demand, etc.



Holistic Strategic Plan

- Address ecosystem changes and management uncertainty
 - Near and long-term Council initiatives to support resilient and responsive approaches
 - Key drivers of successes and challenges to identify sustainable processes
- SWOT and PESTLE analysis frameworks
 - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
 - Trust deficit and stakeholder apathy
 - Species prioritization and resource allocation
 - Management lag and systemic inflexibility
 - Workforce capacity
 - Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental
 - Regulatory burden and inefficiency
 - Economic pressures and adaptive inflexibilities
 - Lack of trust in science
 - Uncertainty in management decisions

“The Council’s management system is plagued by instability and unpredictability due to shifting stocks and ecosystems, stock assessment fluctuations, profitability and budget cuts.”

“Industry members openly express distrust in the data collected and the application of science into sound management decision-making.”

Risk Policy and Harvest Control Rules

- Risk Policy
 - Specifically accounting for climate vulnerability, productivity, and fishery performance
 - Recognizes variable uncertainty across factors and can be applied at the stock level
- ABC Control Rules
 - Plan to revise harvest control rules to integrate Risk Policy
 - Increase consistency in how Council considers risk in management



Factor	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
SSB Stock Status	Well Above SSB Target		Rebuilt		≥75% but < 100%		< 75 but Above Threshold		Overfished
New Recruitment Factor	Multiple Large YCs		Recent Large YCs		Average, No trend		Recent Low Recruitment Or No Info		Persistent Low Recruitment
Assessment Type, Performance					Analytical	Analytical, Minor Retro	Analytical, Major Retro	Empirical	Empirical, Missing Data
Climate Vulnerability					Low	Moderate	Moderate, Negative Direction	High	High, Negative Direction
Fish Condition					Good	Above Average	Neutral	Below Average	Poor Condition
Commercial Fishery Characterization	Score 0 Positive Outlook		Score 1		Score 2		Score 3		Score 4, Negative Outlook
Recreational Fishery Characterization	Score 0 Positive Outlook		Score 1		Score 2, or No Rec Fishery		Score 3		Score 4, Negative Outlook

Relevance to the RPWG

- Evolving resources and approaches
 - Requests for recommendations for longer specification periods
 - Consideration of different information sources
 - Increased uncertainty in some scientific products
- Changing Expectations
 - We're not getting more scientific support in the near-term, it will be less
 - We cannot maintain status quo approaches for management
 - Uncertainty can be characterized and considered in the Council's risk approaches
 - Increased uncertainty should not automatically equal decreases in harvest
 - Adapting to change is both key for success and essential for survival, but implementing change is often met with resistance

November 14, 2025 RPWG Meeting

- Consider factors and data sources
 - Objective of each factor in meeting Council's risk goals
 - Frequency and reliability of information
 - Defining levels of uncertainty
 - Factors have inherent overlaps and dependencies
- Consider scoring complexity
 - Reliability of scores is directly related to the availability of data or a stock assessment
 - Capacity of staff and PDTs to complete scoring
- Consider pathways to implementation
 - Possibly start with a simpler version
 - Match the approach with available information and resources
 - Iterate and improve over time



Questions



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