JOINT MEETING OF THE GROUNDFISH COMMITTEE & GROUNDFISH ADVISORY PANEL

by Webinar

October 19, 2026

New England Fishery Management Council

Groundfish Outlook by Quarter in 2026, updated October 15, 2026, NEFMC Staff

Council Priority*	Jan – Mar	Apr - Jun	July - Sept	Oct - Dec
Amendment 25	Final Submission		GARFO implementation	
Recreational Measures	Develop recommendations for cod & haddock	GARFO implementation		Planning for development of FY2027 measures
Framework Adjustment 72	Preliminary & Final Submissions		GARFO implementation	
Amendment 23 Review	Conduct review analyses		Complete review	Consider recommendations for follow-up actions
Redfish Sector Exemption Review	Conduct review analyses	Complete review		Consider recommendations for follow-up actions
ABC Control Rules Framework (68)	Contract work conducted to evaluate integration of Council's new Risk Policy with revised ABC CRs			Develop revised ABC CRs from simulation testing; develop ABC stability tools
Framework Adjustment 74		Develop scope / Initiate action	Develop specifications & measures, conduct analysis	Final action
Atlantic Cod Management			Continue to develop transition plan; planning for IRA #2 groundfish management transition listening sessions (spring 2027)	
White Hake Rebuilding			Conduct rebuilding plan analyses & review biological reference points (align with 2027 MT assessment)	
Stock Assessments		MT- GB haddock (Jun.)	Updates for transboundary mgmt. (cod, haddock, yellowtail flounder) (Jul.)	MT- GOM haddock, plaice Data updates- pollock, witch flounder, halibut (Sept.)

*Additional: Participate in TMGC, coordinate on EFH designation updates, and make recommendations for 2027 Council priorities

For Today

Framework 68 / Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) Control Rules

- Receive an update on the development of ABC Stability Tools.

Framework 74 / Specifications and Management Measures

- Receive a brief progress report on development of the action.

Draft 2027 Priorities

- Discuss draft proposed 2027 Council Priorities for Groundfish.
- Recommend prioritization of existing items and refine scope of potential priorities.

The Executive Committee recommended <u>not</u> soliciting additional 2027 topics.

- New ideas can be included for 2028 and beyond.

Framework 68

ABC CONTROL RULES AND ABC STABILITY TOOLS

FRAMEWORK 68: ABC CONTROL RULES – HISTORY & STATUS UPDATE

- The Council added development of revised groundfish ABC control rules (CRs) to its priorities in 2023. Framework 68 was initiated in June 2023.
- In August 2023, a facilitated meeting discussed draft goals and objectives.
    - Participants from the Groundfish Committee, the SSC, the Groundfish PDT, the GAP, the RAP, the Risk Policy Working Group, and the public.
- The Council paused development of ABC CRs / FW 68 to first revise its Risk Policy. The Council approved the revised Risk Policy Statement and Concept in September 2024 and finalized the Factors and their weights in June 2026.
- Ongoing simulation testing of potential ABC CRs for Groundfish through contract work under Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) initiative #1.
    - This work is a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) of possible new ABC CRs for groundfish that incorporate the Council's new Risk Policy.
    - This work may also inform future ABC CRs for other FMPs.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- The goal of FW68 is to **modify/replace the existing groundfish ABC CRs** to better address the goals and objectives of the FMP considering increasing uncertainty/ variability in stock assessments, changing environmental conditions, and National Standard Guidelines. The new CR should produce catch advice that prevents overfishing, rebuilds stocks, improves attainment of optimum yield, and seeks to minimize large changes in catch advice as appropriate.
- **Develop a tiered groundfish ABC control rule which considers**, but is not limited to, potential categories, including:

1) **Stock status**, including unknown and rebuilt;
2) Stock assessment **model type** and sources or level of **uncertainty**; and
3) **Productivity regime**.

The control rule should also consider **stability in the ABCs***, with decision rules for when to use **constant ABCs** and the ability to use **phased-in ABCs** consistent with National Standard 1 guidelines.

FW68 NEXT STEPS

- Draft alternatives for FW68 targeting final decision in April 2027.*
- Fall 2026, focus on alternatives for ABC Stability Tools:
    - Include new (2016) NS 1 Guidance (see technical memo):
        - Phased-in ABCs to foster industry stability (not to exceed 3 years),
        - Carryover to foster safety and market stability, and
    - Guidance for the use of constant ABCs.
- Winter 2026/2027:
    - Focus on alternatives for ABC CRs, developed through simulation work.
    - Bring to Committee.
- Spring 2027
    - Council final action on FW68 at April 2027 meeting.
    - Use in 2027 action for ABCs starting in FY2028.

PHASED-IN ABC

To help stabilize catch levels as stock assessments are updated, a Council may choose an ABC CR that phases in changes to ABC over time rather than making the full cut in 1 year.

- Cannot exceed 3 years.
- Overfishing must be prevented each year.
    - The phased-in ABC cannot exceed the OFL in any year.
- Council should evaluate the appropriateness of phasing in cuts for stocks that are overfished and/or rebuilding
    - The goal for such stocks remains to rebuild them in as short a time as possible.

PHASED-IN ABC: TECH MEMO EXAMPLE

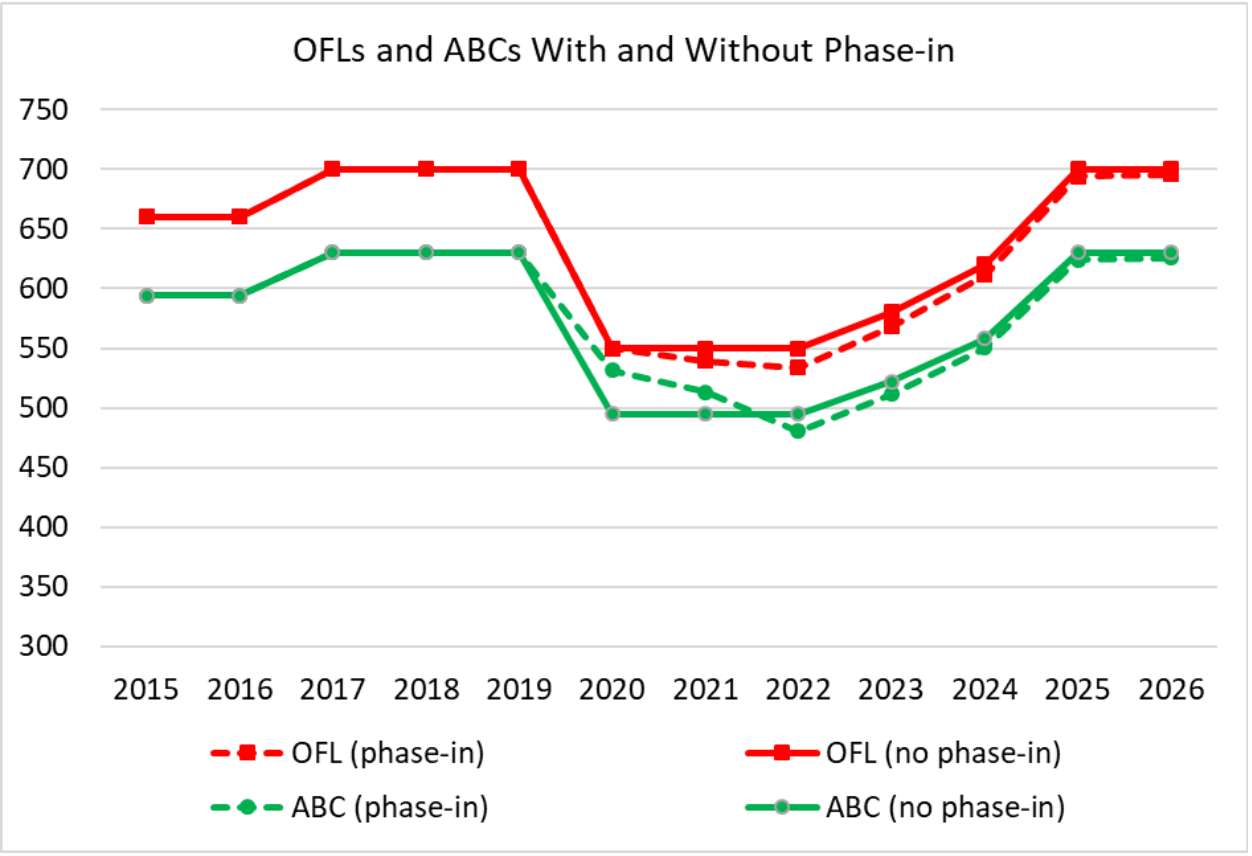


Figure 1: Hypothetical example of how changes in ABC could be phased in. In this example, a new assessment requires a reduction in the OFL and ABC in 2020. The Council has chosen to phase in the reduction in the ABC, but it must still be less than the new OFL. New projections are done to account for higher expected catch levels during phase-in, which adjust the new OFL trajectory down, which leads to a slightly lower ABC in the years following the phase-in.
Taken from Holland, et. al., 2020.

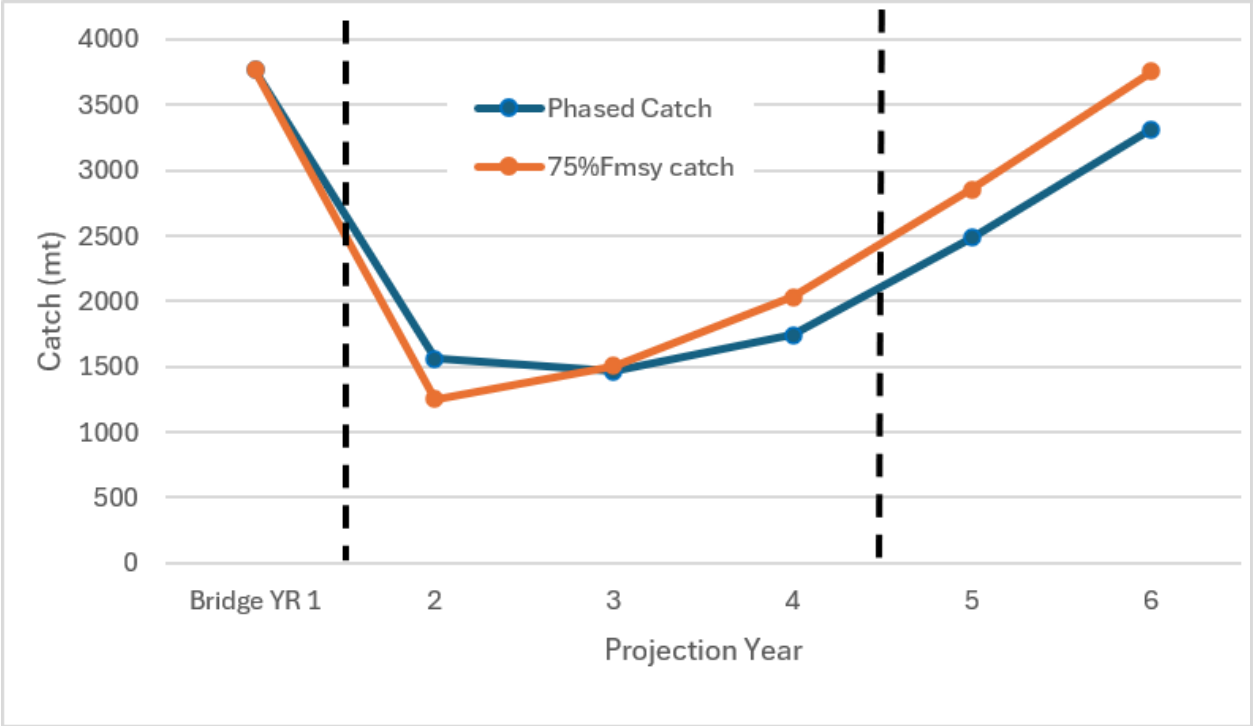
PHASED-IN ABC: GOM COD EXAMPLE

- Must ensure phased-in ABC does not allow overfishing ($F>F_{MSY}$).
- Less likely to occur using 3-year median ABC relative to the 3-year average ABC.
- Phased-in $\%F_{MSY}$ examples of 95%, 75% and 65%.
- Different percentages could be used.

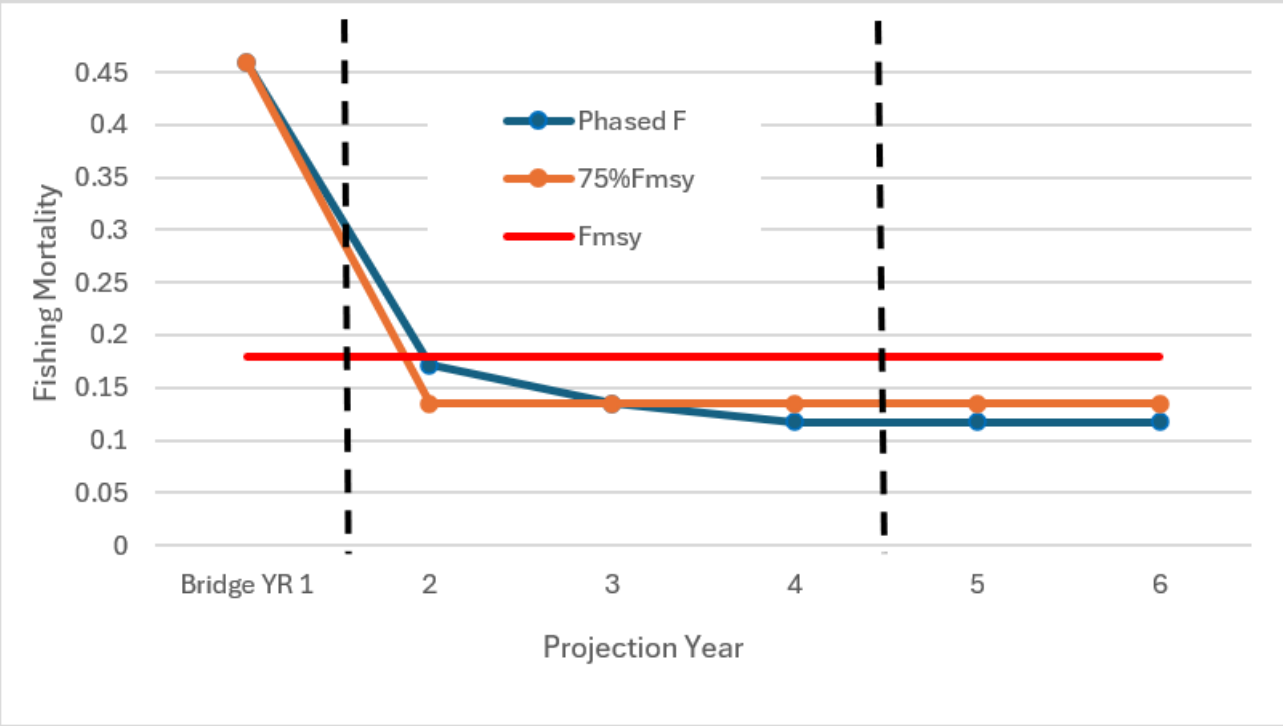
	$75\%F_{MSY}$		Phased Based on $\%F_{MSY}$			Phased Based on 3 yr avg			Phased Based on 3 yr median		
Year	F	catch	$\%F_{MSY}$	F	catch	$\%F_{MSY}$	F	catch	$\%F_{MSY}$	F	catch
Bridge yr 1	0.459	3,767	-	0.459	3,767	-	0.459	3,767	-	0.459	3,767
spec yr 2	0.135	1,249	95%	0.171	1,559	97%	0.175	1,594	91%	0.164	1,503
spec yr 3	0.135	1,503	75%	0.135	1,465	82%	0.148	1,594	77%	0.138	1,503
spec yr 4	0.135	2,030	65%	0.117	1,740	60%	0.108	1,594	56%	0.100	1,503
outyear 5	0.135	2,854	65%	0.117	2,487	41%	0.073	1,594	38%	0.068	1,503
outyear 6	0.135	3,752	65%	0.117	3,311	29%	0.053	1,594	27%	0.049	1,503

Table 1 ABC reduction (relative to the bridge year) with projection indicating rebuilding using GOM cod (F_{MSY} = 0.18) as an example.

PHASED-IN ABC: GOM COD EXAMPLE

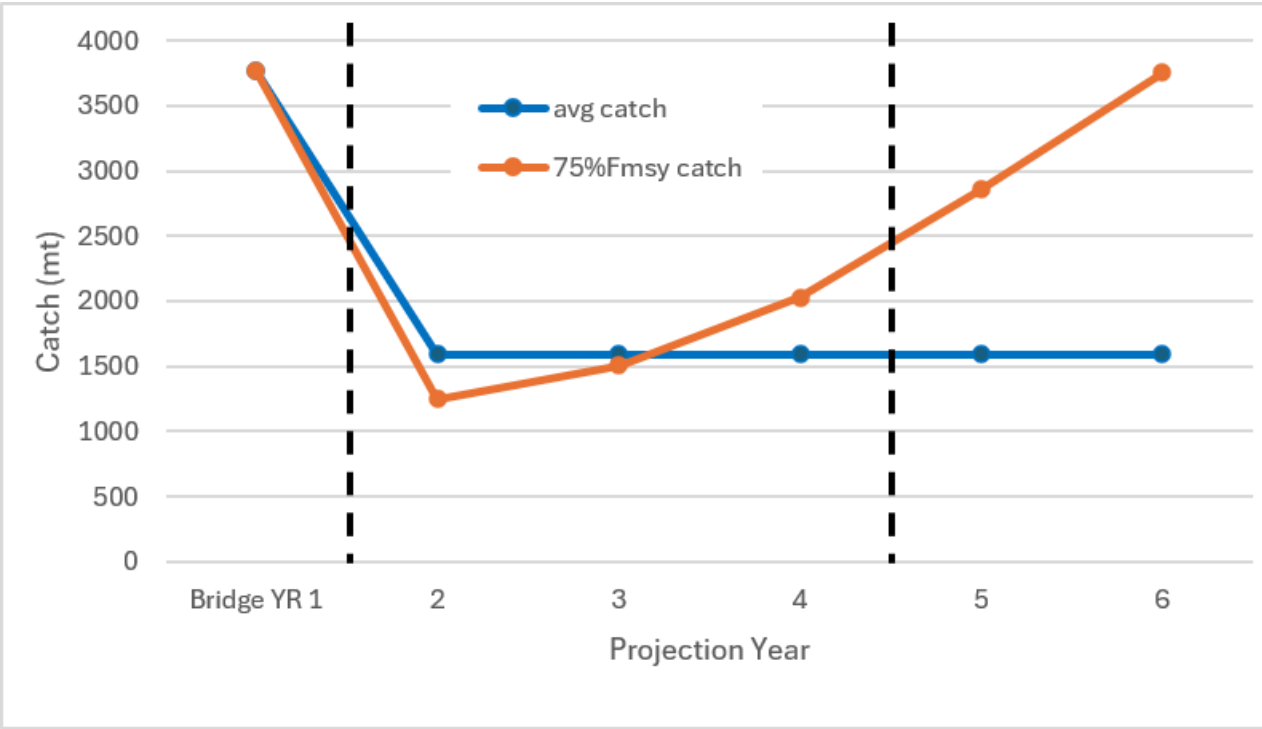


Phased-in catch based on $\%F_{MSY}$

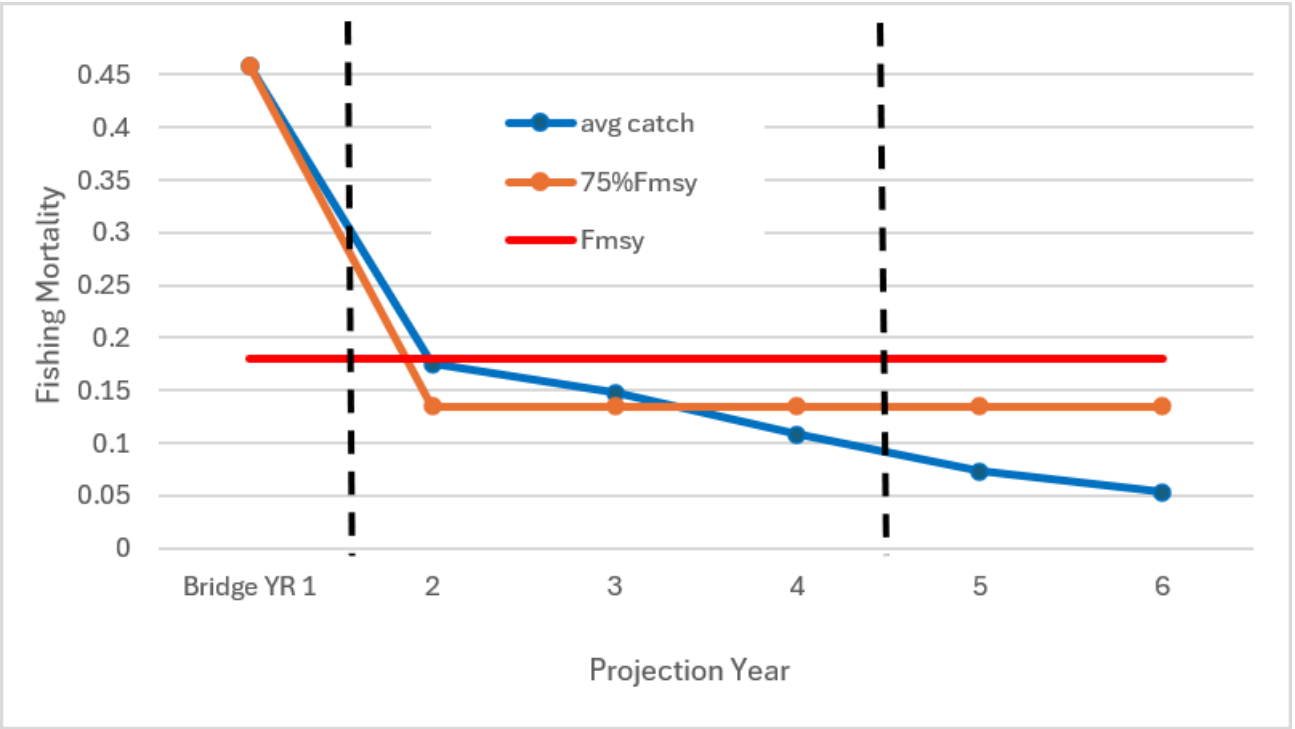


Phased-in Fishing mortality (F) based on $\%F_{MSY}$

PHASED-IN ABC: GOM COD EXAMPLE



Phased-in catch based on 3-year average ABC



Phased-in Fishing mortality (F) based on 3-year average ABC

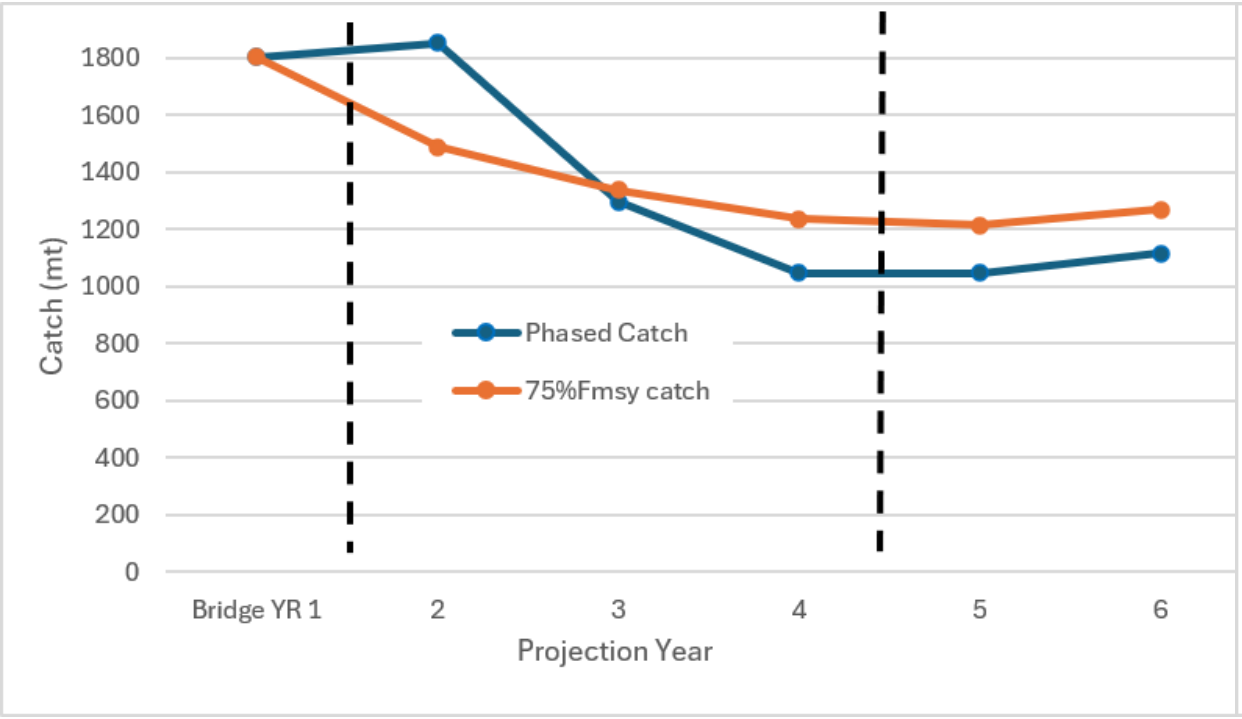
PHASED-IN ABC: WHITE HAKE EXAMPLE

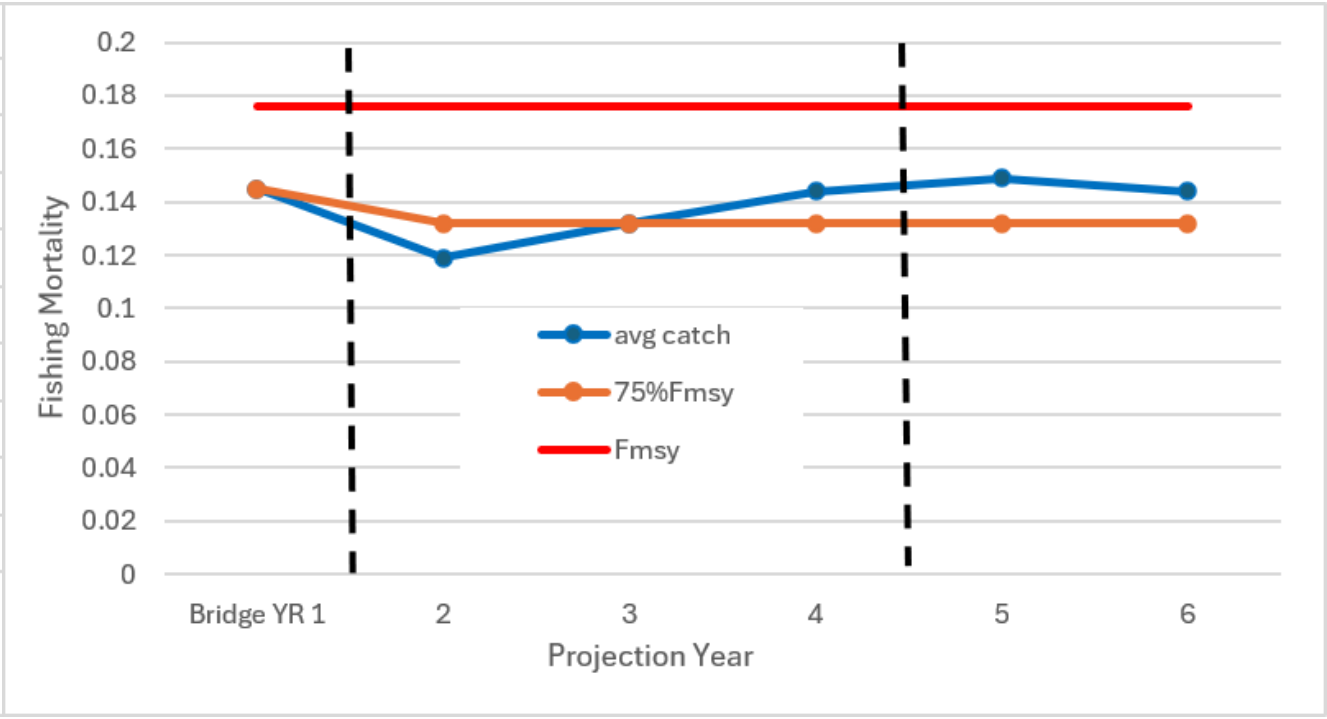
- Must ensure phased-in ABC does not allow overfishing ($F>F_{MSY}$).
- Projected reductions can occur if recruitment at the end of the time series is low
- and/or the stock is above SSB_{MSY} and fishing the stock down to the SSB_{MSY}
- Phasing in the reduction did not work well if projection showed a decline
  - Results in more variable catch advice or a larger reduction in first year

	75%F_{MSY}		Phased Based on %F_{MSY}			Phased Based on 3 yr avg		
Year	F	catch	%F_{MSY}	F	catch	%F_{MSY}	F	catch
Bridge yr 1	0.145	1,802	-	0.145	1,802	-	0.145	1,802
spec yr 2	0.132	1,488	95%	0.1672	1,853	68%	0.119	1,354
spec yr 3	0.132	1,337	75%	0.132	1,295	75%	0.132	1,354
spec yr 4	0.132	1,236	65%	0.1144	1,046	82%	0.144	1,354
outyear 5	0.132	1,213	65%	0.1144	1,046	85%	0.149	1,354
outyear 6	0.132	1,270	65%	0.1144	1,115	82%	0.144	1,354

Table 2 ABC reduction relative to the bridge year and within projection for white hake (F_{MSY} = 0.176) as an example.

PHASED-IN ABC: WHITE HAKE EXAMPLE

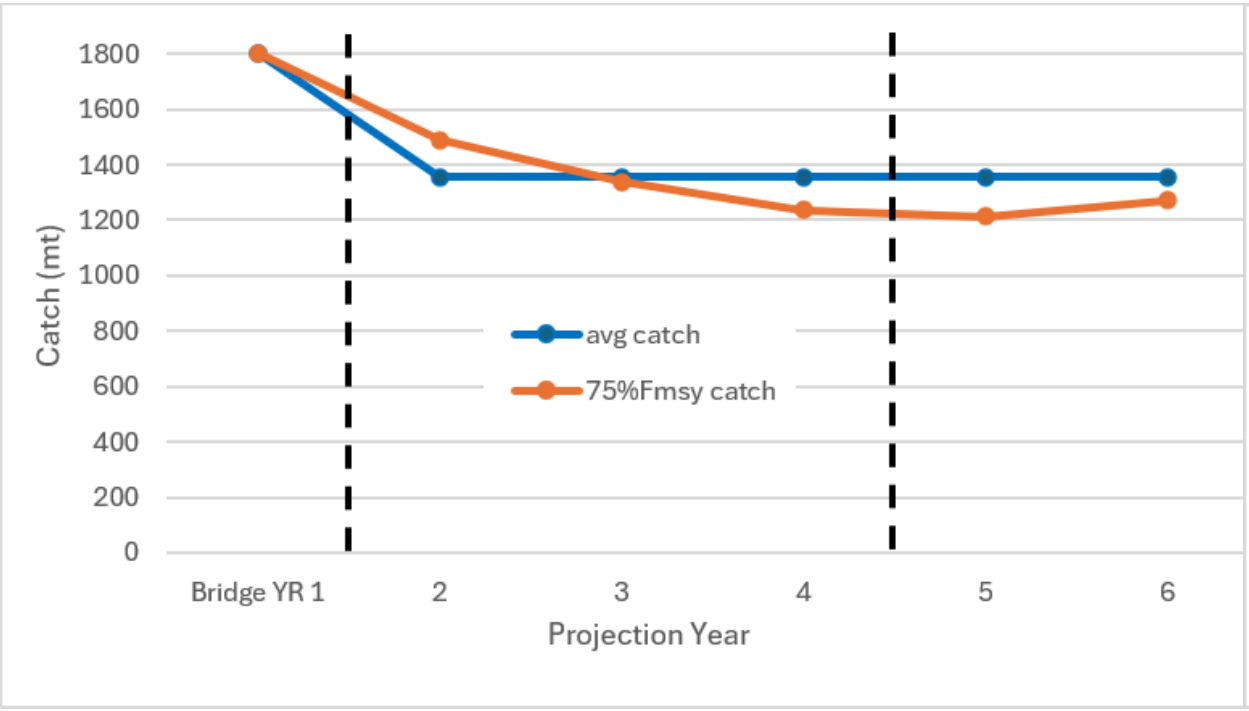




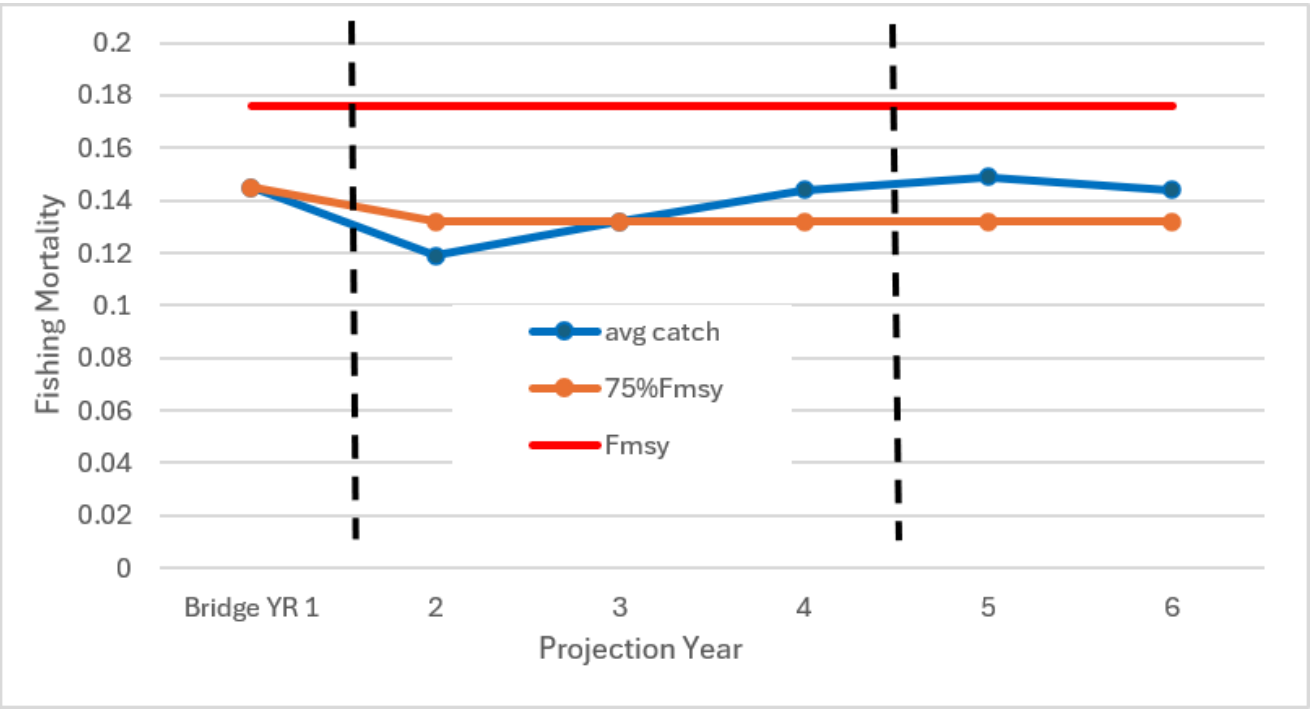
Phased-in catch based on $\%F_{MSY}$

Phased-in Fishing mortality (F) based on $\%F_{MSY}$

PHASED-IN ABC: WHITE HAKE EXAMPLE



Phased-in catch based on 3-year average ABC



Phased-in Fishing mortality (F) based on 3-year average ABC

PHASED-IN ABC: QUESTIONS FOR THE COMMITTEE

What should be the criteria for deciding when to phase in decreases in an ABC?

- Projections that continue to decline over multiple years vs short-term declining projections.
- Consider phase-in when the new ABC cut is 20%, 30%, or 40%?
- Limit phase-in to 2 years or 3 years?
- Allow phase-in if a stock is overfished and/or rebuilding?
    - Goal is to rebuild in shortest time possible.
- Include guidance in the FMP for phasing in ABC increases? *
    - When future years' biomass is heavily dependent on assumed recruitment?

ABC CARRYOVER

- A carry-over ABC control rule allows carryover of a portion of an ACL underage into the next year.
    - Increases the ABC based on the increased stock abundance that results from an ACL underage.
- The FMP must specify when a carry-over ABC control rule can and cannot be used and **how the control rule prevents overfishing**.
- The SSC must specify the new ABC.
    - Adjust carryover for natural mortality and growth.
- Alternative: Reduce the buffer between the ACL and ABC for carryover.
    - This is how sector ACE carryover works.

ABC CARRYOVER: QUESTIONS FOR THE COMMITTEE 1

What are the criteria for determining when a portion of the unharvested ACL may be carried over?

- Stock status is known, and the stock is neither overfished nor subject to overfishing?
- OFL is known?
- Biomass (B) exceeds the midpoint (i.e., 75%BMSY) between BMSY and the overfished threshold (50%BMSY)?
- 3-year average of catch less than 3-year average of ACLs?
- ABC decreases are not being phased in?

ABC CARRYOVER: QUESTIONS FOR THE COMMITTEE 2

Do we need a framework to implement carryover or can NMFS implement directly?

What would be the timing of carryover?

- Sector carryover occurs months into the following fishing year.

How much of the ACL may be carried over from one year to the next year's ABC?

- Sectors carry over up to 10% of unused ACE.

Should ABC carryover be consistent?

- The revised ABC cannot exceed OFL.
- Should some scientific uncertainty buffer be maintained or can ABC = OFL?
    - Maintain at least the buffer required by Council's Risk Policy?
    - Retain at least 50% of the original OFL-ABC buffer?

ABC CARRYOVER: QUESTIONS FOR THE COMMITTEE 3

Is carryover based on total ACL or individual sub-ACLs?

- Recreational catch data not as precise.
- PDT: ABC carryover should reflect the actual reduction in total removals; prevents sub-ACL carryover when total catch near or above ACL.

If sub-ACL carryover, how to prevent ABC > OFL?

- Sector ACE carryover cuts are applied equally.

How are natural mortality (M) and stock growth considered?

- Carryover = Uncaught ACL x M + growth
- Important for stocks with high M or short lifespans
- Updated projections will be necessary

CONSTANT ABC

Holding 1 year of the projected ABCs constant over the entire specification period, or later years of the specification period.

Draft list for when to consider constant ABCs:

- When a stock is in a rebuilding plan.
    - Particularly when near the end of its rebuilding plan.
- When a stock is approaching an overfished condition.
- When a high level of uncertainty in the projections is anticipated.
- When a stock is recently considered rebuilt.
    - To help to maintain that status in the specifications period.

CONSTANT ABC: QUESTIONS FOR THE COMMITTEE 1

When is it appropriate to use a constant ABC?

- Stock in a rebuilding plan?
- Stock approaching an overfished condition?
- High level of uncertainty in the projections?
- Stock recently considered rebuilt?

CONSTANT ABC: QUESTIONS FOR THE COMMITTEE 2

Which ABC should be held constant?

- Year 1 (least risky) or a later year or a mean of 2-3 years?
- 6-year projections to set specs for 5 years, have increased risk of paper fish
- First year of specs (most reliable) & relies less on projected recruitment
- The lowest ABC in projections?
- Average of the ABCs?

What about when the ABC is increasing, decreasing or both?

- Year 1 constant when ABC increases tied to recruitment?
- Later year constant when ABCs decreasing?
- Don’t recommend holding year 1 constant if the ABC decreases then increases.

QUESTIONS?

Framework 74 / Specifications and Management Measures



New England Fishery Management Council

DRAFT SCOPE

Fishing year (FY) 2027-2031 Specifications and Management Measures, to:

- Set FY2027 total allowable catches (TACs) for US/Canada management units of Eastern Georges Bank (GB) cod and Eastern GB haddock, and FY2027-FY2028 TACs for the GB yellowtail flounder stock,
- Set FY2027 specifications for GB cod, GB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder,
- Set FY2027-FY2031 specifications for Gulf of Maine (GOM) haddock, American plaice, witch flounder, pollock, northern windowpane flounder, and southern windowpane flounder,
- Set FY2027-FY2031 specifications for Atlantic halibut, exploring sources of best available science to support catch setting methods,
- Review sub-component analysis for stocks with revised specifications, others as time permits,
- Review GB haddock sub-ACL in the mid-water trawl/herring fishery, set the sub-ACL at a fixed percentage amount, and discontinue the review requirement,
- Simplify the criteria for reducing the size of the southern windowpane flounder accountability measures area, and
- Adjust administration of the B DAS Program and Closed Area II Yellowtail Flounder/Haddock Special Access Program to change the default status

DRAFT RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES

1. Specifications
    - FY2027 TACs for US/Canada management units of Eastern GB cod and Eastern GB haddock, and the GB yellowtail flounder stock,
    - FY2027 specifications for GB cod, GB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder,
    - FY2027-FY2031 specifications for GOM haddock, American plaice, witch flounder, pollock, northern windowpane flounder, and southern windowpane flounder,
    - Set FY2027-FY2031 specifications for Atlantic halibut, exploring sources of best available science to support catch setting methods,
    - Sub-component analysis for stocks with revised specifications, others as time permits,
    - Review of GB haddock sub-ACL in the mid-water trawl/herring fishery, set the sub-ACL at a fixed percentage amount, and discontinue the review requirement

DRAFT RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES

2. Fishery Program Administration

   Streamline administration of the **B DAS Program** and **Closed Area II Yellowtail Flounder/Haddock Special Access Program (SAP)**

   - Adjust administration of the B DAS Program so that the program is by **default closed**
   - Adjust administration of the Closed Area II Yellowtail Flounder/Haddock SAP so that **"open to target haddock"** is the **default status**

3. Commercial Fishery Management Measures - Southern Windowpane Flounder Accountability Measures

   - **Simplify** the criteria to **reduce the size of the AM area** so that if the Large AM Area has been triggered and the **stock is rebuilt, only the Small AM Area** is implemented – for the **Groundfish Fishery** and **Large-Mesh Non-Groundfish Trawl Fisheries**

DRAFT TIMELINE

2026	
MAY-JUN	Committee/AP/PDT preliminary discussion
JUN 23-25	**Council initiates framework**
JUN 29	Peer Review – Management Track Assessment for GB haddock
JUL-SEP	Committee/AP/PDT develop draft alternatives
SEP 22-23	Peer review – Management Track Assessments for GOM haddock and American plaice
OCT 7	SSC recommends OFLs/ABCs for witch flounder* and windowpane flounder (northern and southern)*
OCT 14-16	TMGC/SC meets to recommend TACs for US/CA management units of EGB cod and EGB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder stock
OCT 27-28	SSC recommends OFLs/ABCs for GOM haddock, American plaice, pollock*, and Atlantic halibut*
OCT-NOV	Committee/AP/PDT continue developing draft alternatives and complete impact analysis
DEC 8-10	**Council receives draft alternatives and takes final action**
2027	
JAN	Preliminary submission of framework document to NMFS
FEB	Final submission of framework document to NMFS
MAR	NMFS publishes proposed rule
MAY 1	Target Implementation

*Data update

ATLANTIC HALIBUT – WORK PLAN



Set FY2027-FY2031 specifications for Atlantic halibut, *exploring sources of best available science to support catch setting methods*

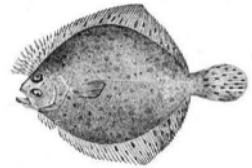
Committee tasking motion – August 25th:

Task the PDT to review sources of best available science for Atlantic halibut and develop alternative methods for setting halibut catch advice, working with DMR staff who have expertise in halibut tagging data, halibut biology, and associated state regulations.

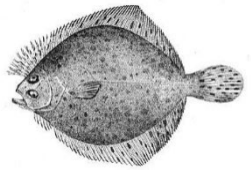
Will be a TOR for October 27-28th SSC meeting – consider additional information as best available science for setting catch advice

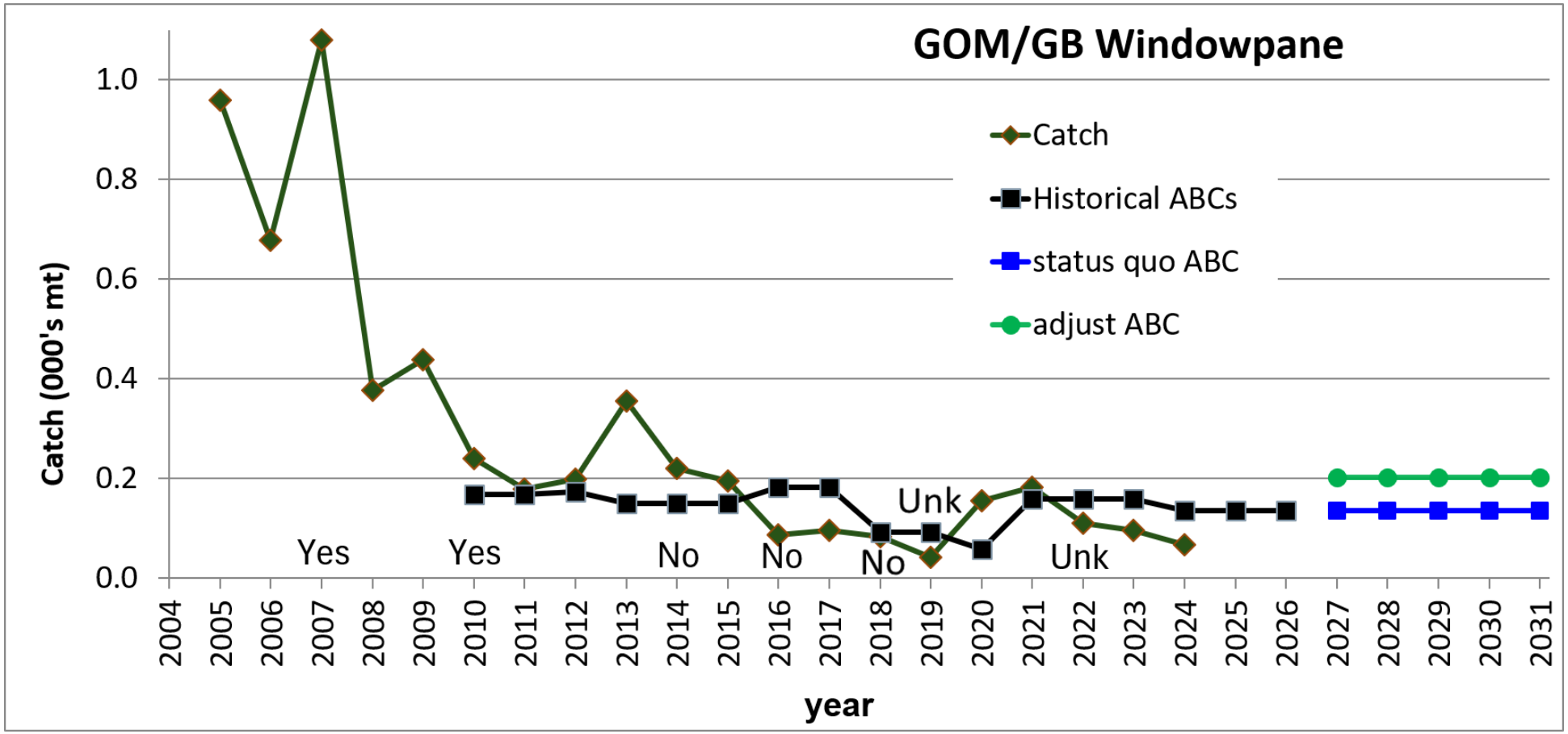
NORTHERN WINDOWPANE FLOUNDER

MODEL	Empirical area swept (2023 MT assessment), Data update (2025)
STOCK STATUS	Unknown (Official NOAA stock status: Overfished, Overfishing is not occurring)
REBUILDING	2029 (70%F_{MSY} Frebuild, no projection)
UNCERTAINTIES	Data limited assessment. Potential unexplained mortality, with a lack of response seen in the survey biomass index despite apparently low exploitation rates. Inability to generate biological reference points (BRPs). Uncertainty in catch input because the catch is almost entirely comprised of discards (zero possession).



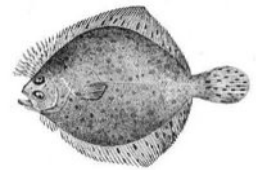
CATCH PERFORMANCE





Overfishing status in the terminal year of the assessment indicated on the x-axis ("Yes" = overfishing; "No" = not overfishing; "Unk" = unknown).

Council Staff's Preliminary Summary of the 10/7/26 SSC Meeting – Northern Windowpane Flounder

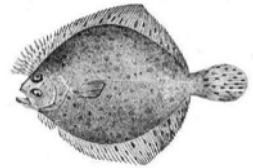


Alternative Survey-Adjusted Option

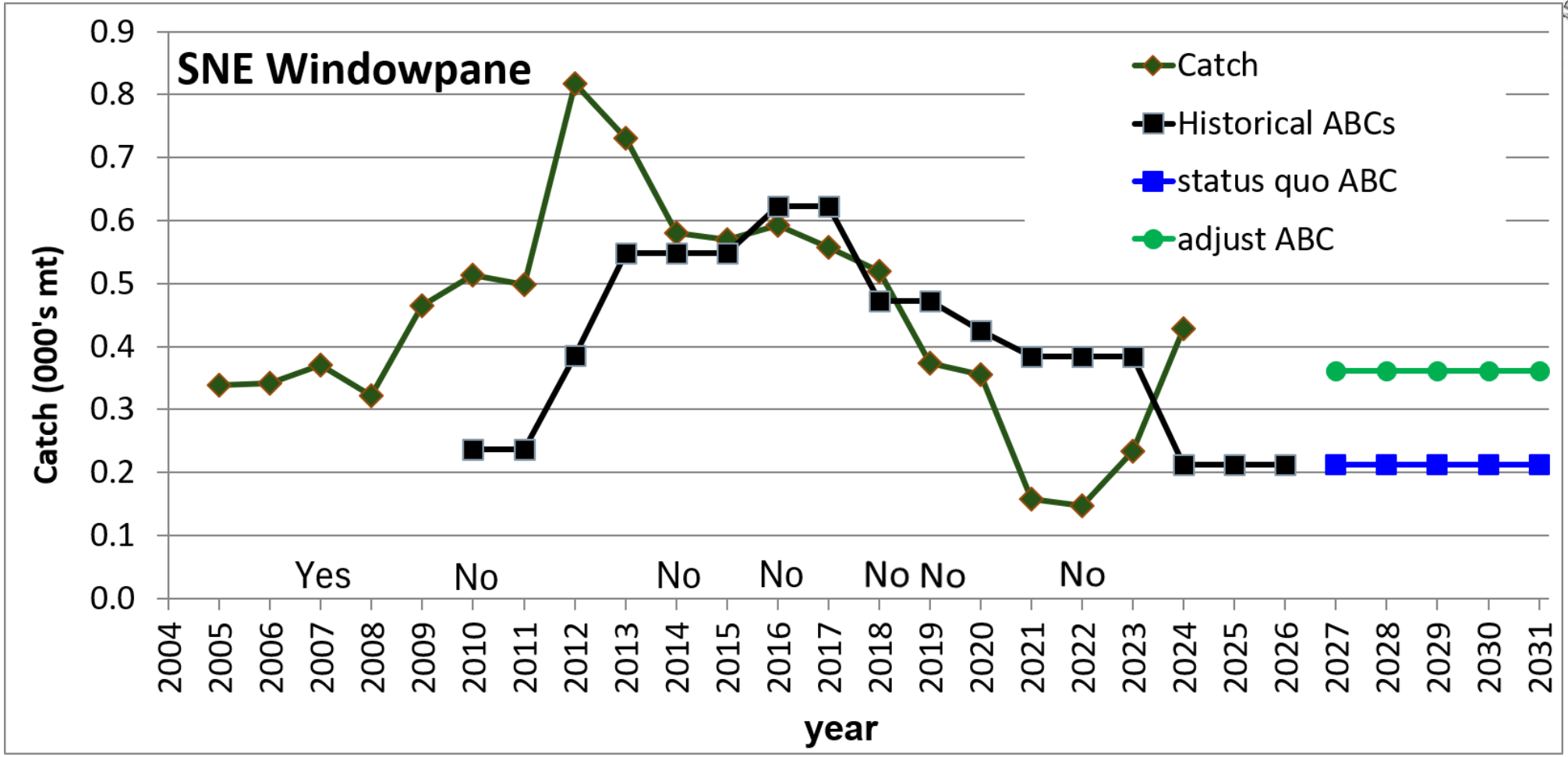
Fishing Year	OFL (mt)	ABC (mt)
2026	Unknown	136
2027	Unknown	202
2028	Unknown	202
2029	Unknown	202
2030	Unknown	202
2031	Unknown	202

SOUTHERN WINDOWPANE FLOUNDER

MODEL	Empirical AIM (2023 MT assessment), Data update (2025)
STOCK STATUS	Not overfished, Overfishing is not occurring
REBUILDING	Rebuilt
UNCERTAINTIES	Data limited assessment. Uncertainty in catch input because the catch is almost entirely comprised of discards (zero possession).

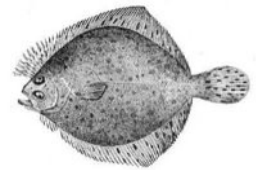


CATCH PERFORMANCE



Overfishing status in the terminal year of the assessment indicated on the x-axis ("Yes" = overfishing; "No" = not overfishing).

Council Staff's Preliminary Summary of the 10/7/26 SSC Meeting – Southern Windowpane Flounder

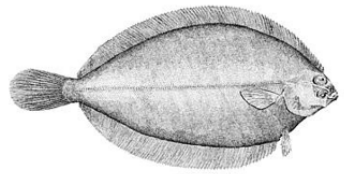


Alternative Survey-Adjusted Option

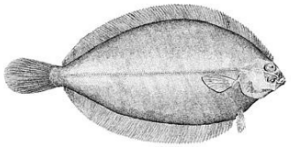
Fishing Year	OFL (mt)	ABC (mt)
2026	284	213
2027	481	361
2028	481	361
2029	481	361
2030	481	361
2031	481	361

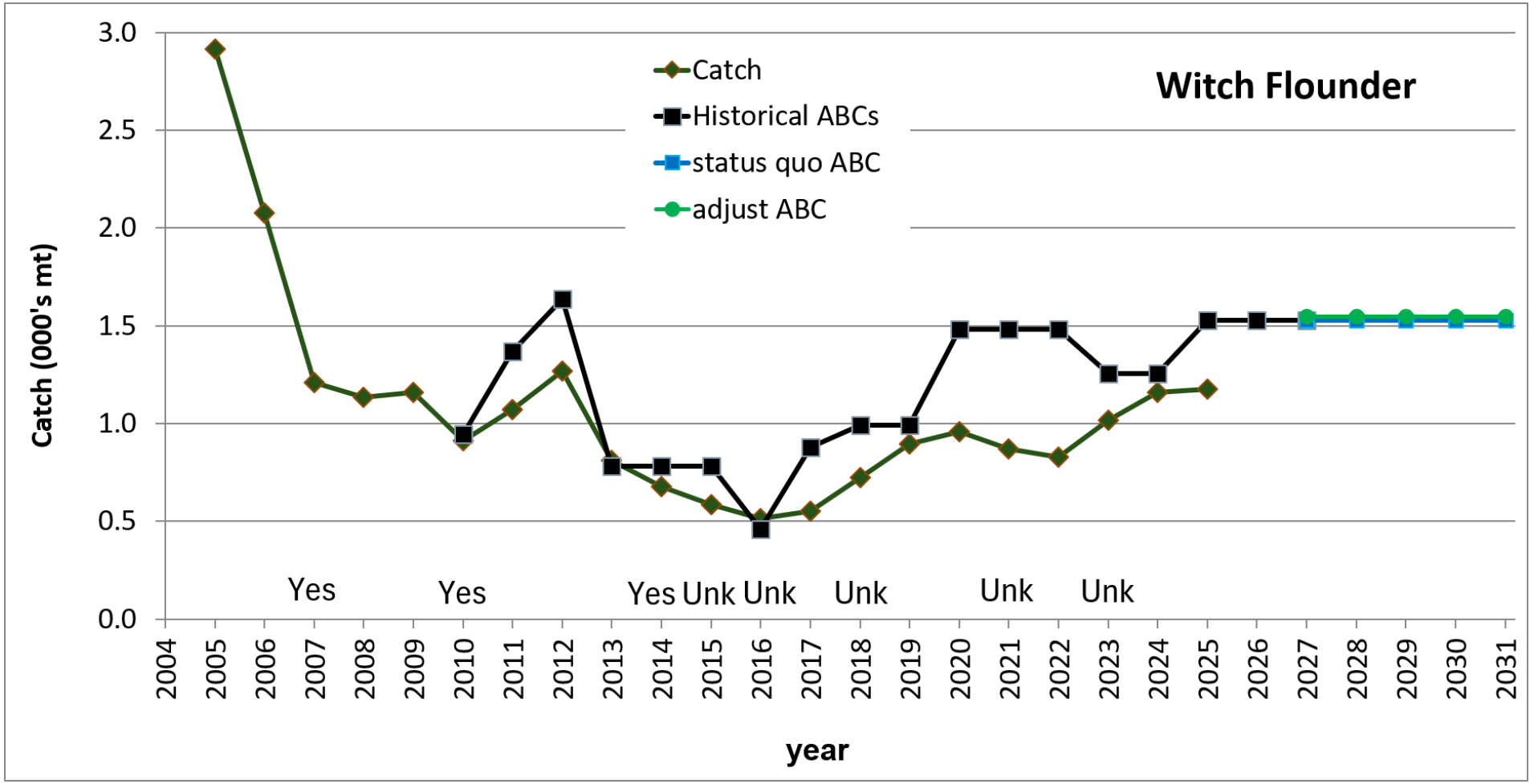
WITCH FLOUNDER

MODEL	Empirical area swept (2024 MT assessment), Data update (2026)
STOCK STATUS	Overfished, Overfishing is unknown
REBUILDING	2043 (Frebuild based on the 2007-2015 exploitation rate), no projection)
UNCERTAINTIES	Uncertainty in catch data due to criminal misreporting case; inability to incorporate age structure data into the current empirical assessment.



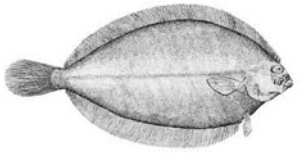
CATCH PERFORMANCE





Overfishing status in the terminal year of the assessment indicated on the x-axis ("Yes" = overfishing; "Unk" = unknown).

Council Staff's Preliminary Summary of the 10/7/26 SSC Meeting – Witch Flounder



Status Quo Catch Advice

Fishing Year	OFL (mt)	ABC (mt)
2026	Unknown	1,526
2027	Unknown	1,526
2028	Unknown	1,526
2029	Unknown	1,526
2030	Unknown	1,526
2031	Unknown	1,526

For Today

Framework 74 / Specifications and Management Measures

- Receive a brief progress report on development of the action.

Draft 2027 Council Priorities for Groundfish

Draft Proposed 2027 Council Groundfish Priorities

DRAFT PROPOSED: 2027 New England Fishery Management Council Priority List							
Ref #	**Plan/Topic**	**Category**	**Type**	**Priority/Task**	**Estimated Timing**	**Coordination**	**Staff Months**
G1	Groundfish	Required	Staff Task	Complete and submit FW74	Complete early 2027		2
G2	Groundfish	Required	Action	Action to set ABC/ACL for groundfish stocks for FY2028-FY2032; US/CA stocks for FY2028 - Including rebuilding plans for four cod stocks and white hake - MRIP recalibrated data and commercial/recreational sub-allocations of cod	2027		10
G3	Groundfish	Required	Support	Groundfish Management Track Assessments (June - GB cod; Sept - EGOM, WGOM, SNE Gulf of Maine cod, white hake, witch flounder)	2027		1
G4	Groundfish	Required	Action	FW68 to revise ABC Control Rules	2027	IRA1	6
G5	Groundfish	Paused	Contract/Project	Groundfish Management Transitioning - Listening Sessions	2027	IRA2	Coordinated with IRA2
G6	Groundfish	New	Action	Revisions to redfish sector exemption program	Single Year		4
G7	Groundfish	New	Action	Revisions to Amendment 23 monitoring system	Multi-Year		1 to 12
G8	Groundfish	New	Action	Define Ecosystem Component status for several groundfish stocks	Multi-Year	IRA3	12

Draft Proposed 2027 Priorities - Related IRA Initiatives and Cross-FMP Priorities Under EO 14276

DRAFT PROPOSED: 2027 New England Fishery Management Council Priority List							
Ref #	**Plan/Topic**	**Category**	**Type**	**Priority/Task**	**Estimated Timing**	**Coordination**	**Staff Months**
IRA1	IRA	Required	Contract/Project	Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) Control Rules for Northeast Multispecies - UMaine contract - staff admin	Multiyear, completion 2027	G5	2
IRA2	IRA	Required	Contract/Project	Groundfish management transition - Contracted facilitator - staff admin	Multiyear, completion 2027	G6	1
IRA3	IRA	Required	Contract/Project	Operationalizing ecosystem approaches in NE fisheries management - UMass contract - staff admin; Compilation of information and report to Council - Maris contract - EC Species Guidance	Multiyear, completion 2027	G8	4
EO9	EO14274-NEFMC	Ongoing	Reiew or Action	Revisions to Accountability Measures - Holistic review and action identification with follow-on Omnibus - FMP-based multiple actions as time allows	Multi-Year	Cross-FMP	2 to 12
EO10	EO14274-NEFMC	Ongoing	Action	Fishery Management Plan revisions - FMP-based multiple actions as time allows	Multi-Year	Cross-FMP	2
EO11	EO14276-NEFMC	Ongoing	Review or Action	Revise exemption areas (e.g., seasons, boundaries, gear-specific) - Holistic review and action identification with follow-on Omnibus (Habitat, etc.) - FMP-based multiple actions as time allows	Multi-Year	Cross-FMP	6 to 18

For Today

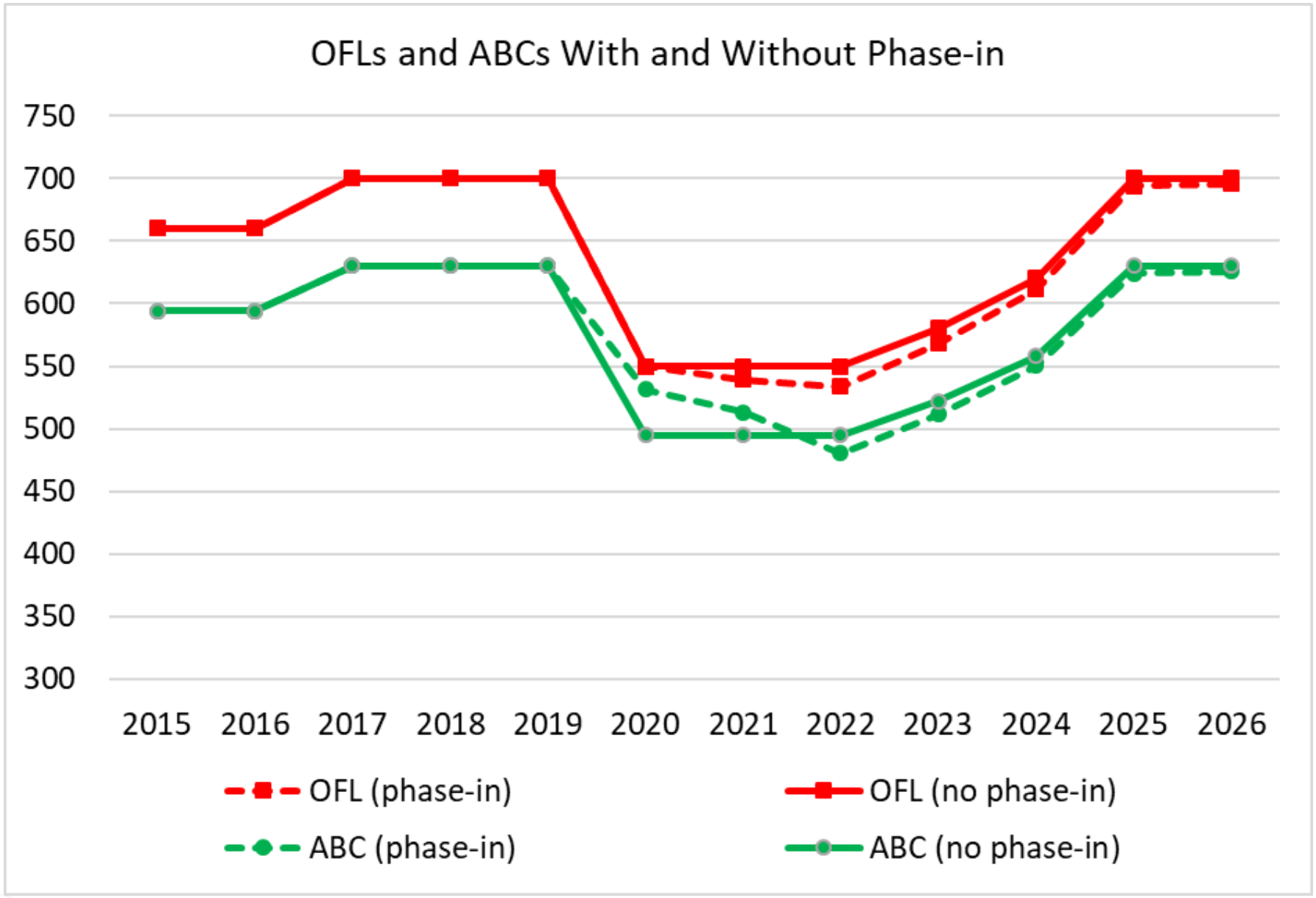
Draft 2027 Priorities

- Discuss draft proposed 2027 Council Priorities for Groundfish.
- Recommend prioritization of existing items and refine scope of potential priorities.

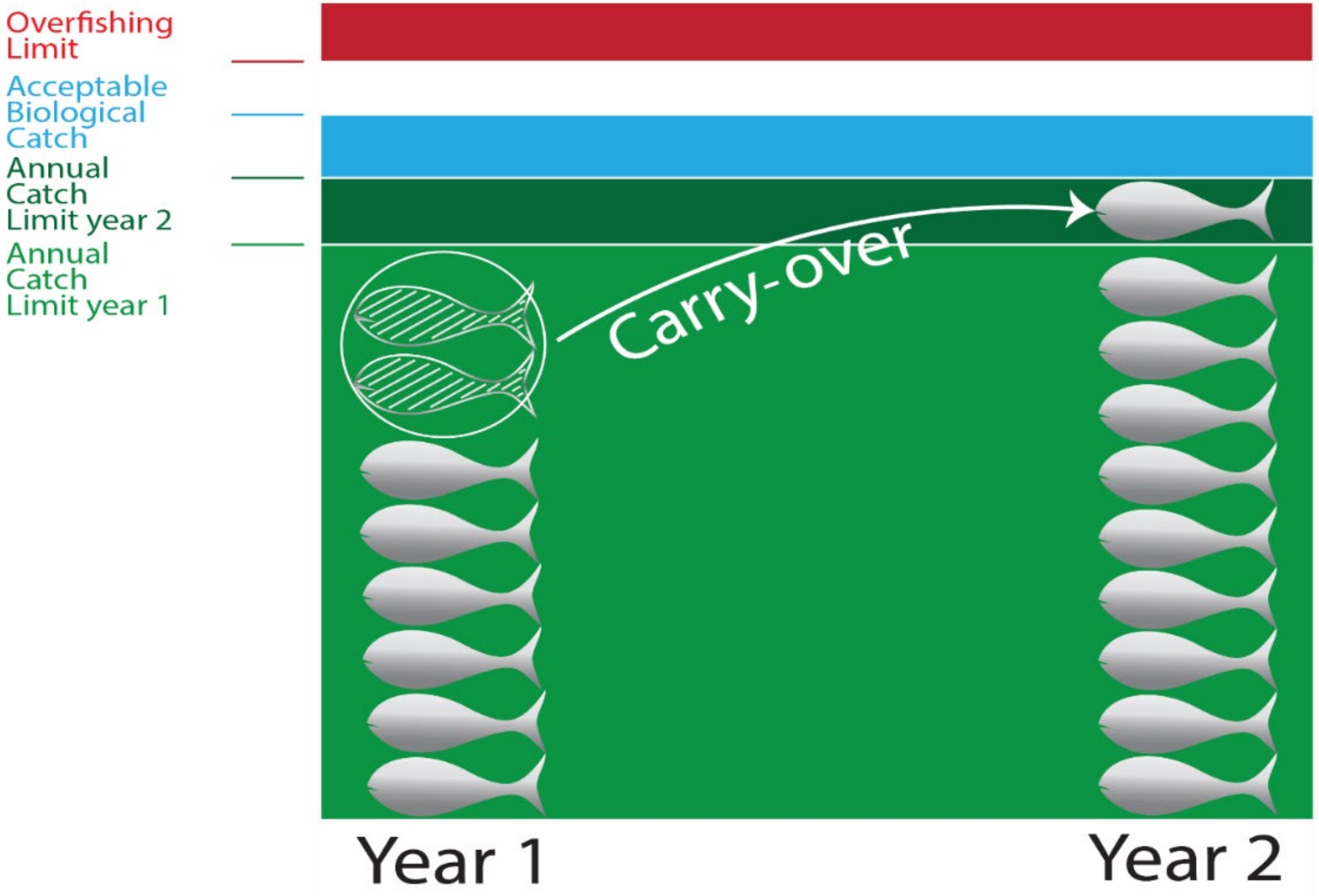
The Executive Committee recommended <u>not</u> soliciting additional 2027 topics.

- New ideas can be included for 2028 and beyond.

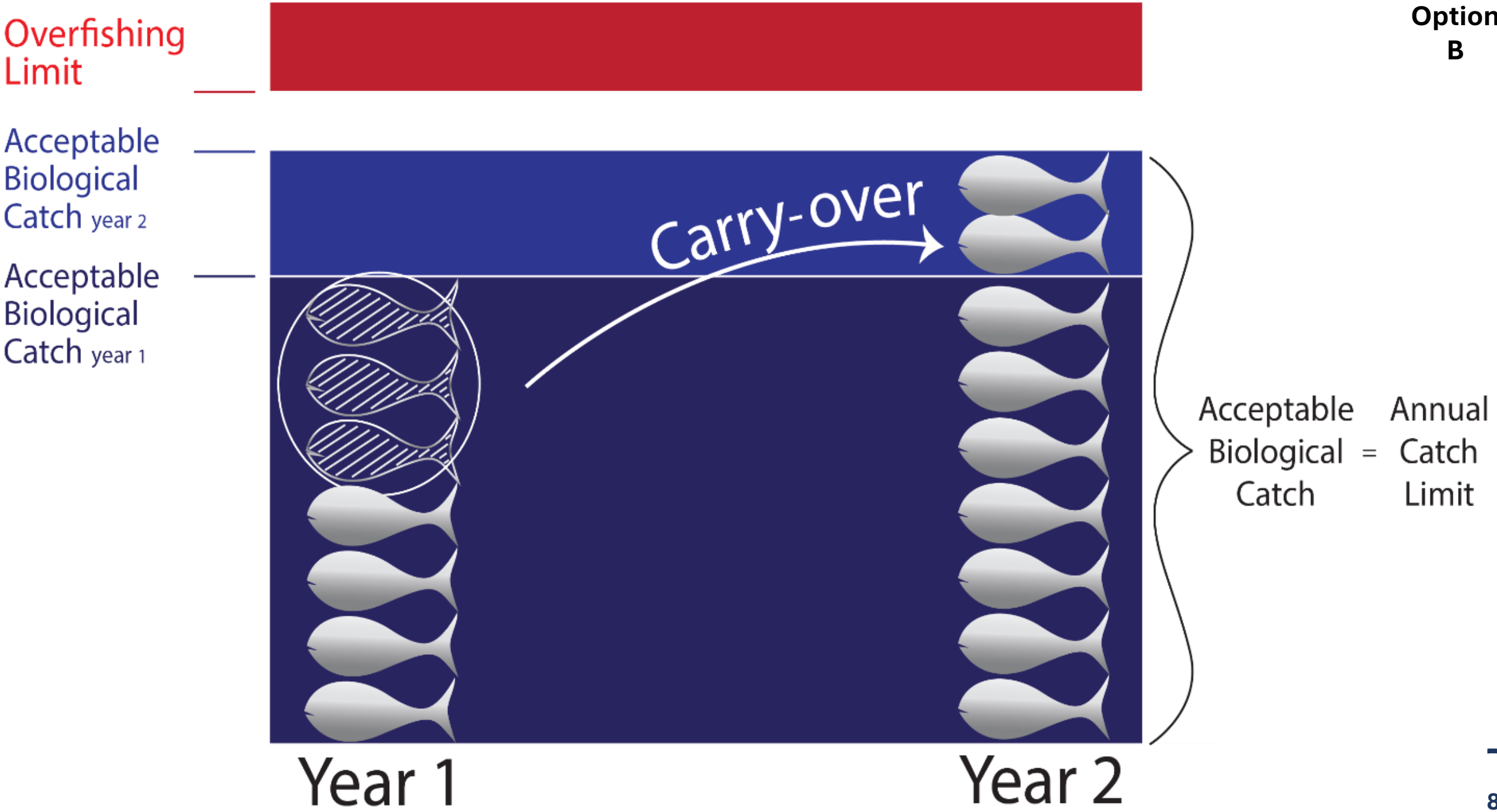
EXTRA SLIDES


OFLs and ABCs With and Without Phase-in
750
700
650
600
550
500
450
400
350
300
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022
2023
2024
2025
2026
OFL (phase-in)
OFL (no phase-in)
ABC (phase-in)
ABC (no phase-in)

Option A


Overfishing Limit
Acceptable Biological Catch
Annual Catch Limit year 2
Annual Catch Limit year 1
Carry-over
Year 1
Year 2

Option B


Overfishing Limit
Acceptable Biological Catch year 2
Acceptable Biological Catch year 1
Carry-over
Acceptable Biological Catch = Annual Catch Limit
Year 1
Year 2