

Monkfish and Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plans

SCOPING DOCUMENT For Individual Fishing Quota Program



Prepared by the

New England Fishery Management Council

DRAFT

*For consideration by the
New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils
April 2026*

Schedule of Monkfish and/or Skate Wing Individual Fishing Quotas (IFQ) Scoping Meetings

The Council is hosting five scoping meetings in the following locations. Meeting dates and locations are also announced in the *Federal Register* and on the Council’s website at this link: <https://www.nefmc.org/library/scoping-for-monkfish-and-or-skate-wing-individual-fishing-quota-ifq-program>.

Note: Each of the scoping meetings will start at 4:00 pm and last about 2 hours but may conclude earlier or later depending on attendance.

<u>Date and Time</u>	<u>Location</u>
Monday, April 27 4:00 - 6:30 PM	The Westin Portland Harborview Hotel 157 High Street, Portland, ME 04101 Telephone: (207) 775-5411
Wednesday, April 29 4:00 - 6:30 PM	Fairfield Inn & Suites 185 MacArthur Drive, New Bedford, MA 02740 Telephone: (774) 634-2000
Thursday, April 30 4:00 - 6:30 PM	Cornell Cooperative Extension Suffolk County The meeting is held in the 1 st floor conference room 423 Griffing Avenue, Riverhead, NY 11901 Telephone: (631) 727-7850
Tuesday, May 5 4:00 - 6:30 PM	Stafford Township The meeting is held in the Council Room 260 East Bay Avenue, Manahawkin, NJ 08050 Telephone: (609) 597-1000
Monday, May 11 4:00 - 6:30 PM	https://nefmc-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/CjSy3wZ4SfSBSOgc87uRiQ After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

Directions to these meetings are available by contacting the Council office.

At each meeting, Council staff will brief the public on the scoping document before receiving comments.

Written comments will be accepted from **Monday, April 20 through Monday, May 18, 2026**. Comments should be addressed to Cate O’Keefe, PhD, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council, 50 Water Street, Mill #2, Newburyport, MA 01950; and sent by postal mail or by email to: comments@nefmc.org. Please note on your correspondence: “Monkfish and/or Skate Wing IFQ Program Scoping Comments.”

Note: The New England Fishery Management Council has the lead for the Monkfish Fishery Management Plan, which is managed jointly with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. The scoping plan was approved by staff leadership at both Councils, the scoping document was approved by both Councils, and the scoping results will inform potential action at both Councils.



NEW ENGLAND FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
SEEKS YOUR COMMENTS ON THE MANAGEMENT OF THE
MONKFISH AND NORTHEAST SKATE COMPLEX FISHERIES

<p><i>Your comments are invited</i></p>	<p>The New England Fishery Management Council (Council) is conducting scoping to consider catch share management, specifically for an Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) program for the monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries. The Council seeks comments on: 1) the need for an IFQ program, 2) what elements the program should include, and 3) how could an IFQ program be reasonably calculated to promote conservation. In June of 2026, the Council will consider comments received during scoping and decide whether to initiate an amendment to the Monkfish and/or the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plans (FMP) that may create an IFQ program for the monkfish fishery and/or the skate wing fishery.</p>
<p><i>Why is the Council conducting scoping?</i></p>	<p>Catch share management can improve the performance of a fishery by increasing flexibility, reducing discards, achieving optimum yield, promoting safety, and by reducing costs, latent effort, and regulatory burdens on fishery participants. Before committing to initiating an amendment, the Council is conducting scoping to gather input from the public on the potential for an IFQ program to improve the management of the monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries.</p> <p>This scoping process was prioritized by the Council in December 2025. The Council noted that there has been support from both southern New England and Mid-Atlantic fishermen in recent years to consider an IFQ program, and it could offer a comprehensive solution for managing the monkfish and skate wing fisheries efficiently.</p> <p>After considering the public input gathered during the scoping process, the Council will decide whether to initiate an amendment that would develop an IFQ program for the monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries. The information gathered in the scoping process will also be used to inform the scope of the action and the range of alternatives that are developed. The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council will consider just the monkfish-specific aspects of scoping and potential amendment development for the monkfish fishery.</p> <p>Note: the monkfish and skate fisheries are still managed under separate fishery management plans and this scoping is intended to evaluate whether an IFQ program is desired for the monkfish and / or skate wing fisheries (i.e., via separate or combined IFQ program).</p>

<p><i>What is the Council considering?</i></p>	<p>NOAA defines a “Catch Share” as a generic term for a fishery management program that allocates a specific portion of a total fishery catch to individuals, communities, or cooperatives (including sectors). In general, quota shares can be allocated to an individual or group and can be area- or catch-based. Importantly, catch shares are not a property right but rather a harvesting privilege.</p> <p>The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act has several provisions for Limited Access Privilege Programs (LAPP), a type of catch share, which issue federal permits to harvest a unit of fish expressed as a portion of the total allowable catch that may be held by a group or by an individual for their exclusive use. LAPP permits may not be issued for more than 10 years with a formal detailed review occurring 5 years after implementation and every 7 years thereafter. A LAPP does not confer any compensation if it is revoked or limited at any time. An Individual Fishing Quota program (IFQ) is a type of LAPP where quota shares are allocated to individuals or businesses and may or may not be transferable.</p>
<p><i>Why should I comment?</i></p>	<p>This is one of the best opportunities to share your perspective on an IFQ program for monkfish and/or skate wings. The Council will consider your feedback as it considers if and how to move forward with an action to develop an IFQ program for either or both fisheries. If the Council decides to initiate an amendment, this scoping process is needed to comply with aspects of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). The Council can use the comments received in developing the range of alternatives for an amendment.</p>
<p><i>What should my comments address?</i></p>	<p>During this scoping process, the Council is seeking comments on a monkfish and/or skate wing IFQ program. While your comments may address any aspect of the specific issues identified during scoping, the Council is seeking your input on the following questions.</p> <p><i>In your opinion...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the current problems in managing the monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries? • Can a catch share program, and specifically an IFQ program, address those problems? Why or why not? If not, what other approaches should be considered? • Should an IFQ program be developed for the monkfish and skate wing fisheries or just one of these fisheries? • What would be the benefits and/or drawbacks of managing these fisheries with an IFQ program?

	<p><i>If a fishing quota program were developed...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What should the goals and objectives of the program be? • What should be the basis or criteria of allocating quota (e.g., fishing history, active permits versus lease-only permits)? • How should the program be designed to avoid excessive shares of quota? • Should leasing and/or transfer of quota be allowed? • Should the IFQ program apply across the full range of the monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries or should it be limited to specific components (e.g. by area or gear type)? • How should an IFQ program intersect with other fisheries that vessels participate in?
<p><i>What is the process?</i></p>	<p>The Council is considering an IFQ program in a multi-step process. The publication of this scoping document on the Council’s website, and announcements of scoping meetings in the <i>Federal Register</i> (FR) notify the public that it is soliciting feedback. Public comment will be accepted through May 18, 2026. Scoping meetings will be held to provide additional opportunities for public input. See meeting dates and locations on page two above.</p> <p>The Council would take several steps in potentially developing an IFQ program:</p> <p><i>Step 1:</i> Public input will be gathered through the scoping process.</p> <p><i>Step 2:</i> The public input will be summarized, and the Council will decide whether to initiate an amendment to develop measures that would create an IFQ program for the monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries. The Council will make this decision at its June 2026 Council meeting with input from the Monkfish and Skate Committees, Advisory Panels, and Plan Development Teams. Given monkfish is jointly managed with the Mid-Atlantic Council, during its August 2026 meeting, the Mid-Atlantic Council will receive the same scoping summary and an update on any outcomes of the June 2026 New England Council meeting. If the Councils vote to initiate an amendment, it would be developed over a multiyear timeline.</p> <p><i>Step 3:</i> If an amendment is initiated, information gathered through this scoping process would be used to inform the development of a problem statement and/or goals and objectives and a range of alternatives. The Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee may also review scientific aspects of the action after goals, objectives, and alternatives are developed. The Council, in coordination with the Mid-Atlantic Council and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), would publish a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the <i>Federal Register</i> to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the amendment if it is determined that an EIS is the necessary analysis to satisfy NEPA. If so, the scoping comments</p>

	<p>provided through this process would be considered as scoping for the NOI under current NEPA requirements.</p> <p><i>Step 4:</i> If an amendment is initiated, and once a range of alternatives with the impacts of those alternatives are analyzed, the draft NEPA document would then be published for public review and comment. At that time, the public will have more specific alternatives and analyses on which to comment (this would involve a second public comment period). Following a review of comments received, the Councils would choose final management measures to recommend to the Secretary of Commerce for implementation. For an amendment to the Monkfish FMP, both Councils need to approve any proposed actions. Per current law for New England managed fisheries, fishery participants would need to approve the IFQ program via a referendum (50 CFR 600.1310), and the Councils would develop eligibility criteria for participating in the referendum.</p> <p><i>Step 5:</i> The Council would request that the Secretary of Commerce initiate a referendum, including in its request a recommendation on voter eligibility, a recommendation on whether votes should be weighted (i.e., counted differently) based on certain criteria, and accompanying rationale. If the Secretary of Commerce determines that the Council-recommended criteria would provide for a fair and equitable referendum, the Secretary would then conduct a referendum of eligible voters based on NOAA Fisheries guidelines. Criteria for eligibility must include criteria for permit holders, crew, and “other fishery participants”, which could include organizations that may end up with allocations under certain types of IFQ programs that allow “Fishing Communities” and/or “Regional Fishery Associations” to receive harvesting privileges. Part of this referendum process would include a proposed and final rulemaking that would seek comment on the referendum (schedule, procedures, and other requirements before implementation). The Councils cannot submit an amendment that creates a monkfish and/or skate IFQ program unless the IFQ system has been approved by greater than 2/3 vote. If the system is disapproved via the referendum, the Councils may develop revisions to the program and hold one or more additional referendums.</p> <p><i>Step 6:</i> Councils submit the action under MSA to the Secretary for rulemaking and implementation.</p>
<p><i>How do I comment?</i></p>	<p>The Council has scheduled five meetings, including in-person and remote participation options, for this scoping process. You may attend any of the scoping meetings to provide oral comments, or you may submit written comments by:</p> <p>Email: comments@nefmc.org or Mail: at the address below.</p> <p>Cate O’Keefe, PhD, Executive Director New England Fishery Management Council 50 Water Street, Mill #2 Newburyport, MA 01950</p>

	<p>Please provide your name and affiliation and note on your correspondence: “Monkfish and/or Skate Wing IFQ Program Scoping Comments.” The deadline for written comments is Monday, May 18th.</p> <p>If you wish to be on the email list to receive information about future meetings of the Monkfish or Skate Committees, please visit the Council’s “Subscribe” webpage and (1) fill in your email address; (2) check the “Monkfish” and/or “Northeast Skate Complex” boxes under management plans; and (3) click on “Subscribe” at the bottom.</p>
<p>Background Information</p>	<p><u>Monkfish Fishery</u></p> <p>The monkfish fishery occurs along the east coast from Maine to North Carolina and is comprised of two stocks: Gulf of Maine/Northern Georges Bank and Southern Georges Bank/Mid-Atlantic. Recent genetic analyses have questioned the current stock delineation and it will likely be a topic reviewed at the next major assessment (this was supposed to start in 2025 as part of the 2027 Research Track Assessment but this assessment has been paused indefinitely). An index-based method is used to adjust catch limits because there is not an analytical assessment for monkfish and no stock status determinations, thus, the stock status is unknown.</p> <p>Separate monkfish annual catch limits and total allowable landings are set for the northern and southern management areas, and effort is controlled through allocations of Days-At-Sea (DAS) and daily possession limits. The Monkfish FMP has seven types of federal permits: six categories of limited access permits (A-D, F, H) and one open access permit (E). Permit category C and D vessels (DAS permit that also has a groundfish or scallop limited access permit) consistently accounted for the greatest portion of vessels landing monkfish. Possession limits vary with permit type.</p> <p><u>Skate Fishery</u></p> <p>The Northeast skate wing fishery is primarily comprised of winter skates and targeted on Georges Bank, the Great South Channel, and west of the Nantucket Lightship area in Southern New England. Winter skate is one of seven skate species in the Northeast Skate Complex and were last assessed in a management track assessment in fall 2023. Overfishing is not occurring for any of the seven skate species, and only thorny skate is overfished.</p> <p>Skates are managed with a combined annual catch limit and total allowable landings for the wing and bait fisheries, and effort is controlled through trip possession limits that vary by fishery, season, and trip declaration. The federal skate permit is open access and can be added and dropped throughout the fishing year.* To land more than incidental levels of skate wings, vessels need to have a limited access groundfish, monkfish, or scallop permit and declare a DAS in one of those fisheries.</p>

**Having a limited access permit is not a requirement of catch share programs. The federal surfclam permit is open access, though the allocation is made through a limited access endorsement.*

Recent Fishery Performance

For the monkfish fishery, the number of fishing vessels with limited access monkfish permits has decreased over the past decade, from about 650 to 525 in FY 2023. Of those vessels, about 35-45% landed over 1 lb of monkfish each year and about 10-20% landed $\geq 10,000$ lb of monkfish.

For the skate fishery, the number of vessels landing skate has declined since FY 2012 (528) to 243 in FY 2024. In FY 2024, 87% of vessels landed only skate wings, 5% only skate bait, and 7% skate wings and bait. In FY 2020-2024, 42-77% of the wing total allowable landings were used and 45-64% of the bait total allowable landings were used.

Some vessels participate in both the monkfish and skate fisheries, primarily in the Southern monkfish management area. There, skate wing landings are primarily from monkfish-only declared trips and monkfish sector trips. Skate possession limits may have constrained monkfish landings for a subset of recent monkfish trips. For monkfish DAS trips in that area from FY 2018-2024 (excluding FY 2020), 26% of trips landed 75-100% of the skate wing possession limits. On the trips that neared the skate possession limit, the average and median percentage of monkfish possession limits landed ranged substantially across monkfish permit categories and months, signaling that factors beyond skate possession limits constrain the fishery (e.g., market demand, fish availability).

In the Northern monkfish management area, skate wing landings have primarily been from multispecies sector trips, with minor amounts from the monkfish-only trips and monkfish sector vessel trips. Additionally, the skate bait fishery has little overlap with the monkfish fishery.

Details about fishery performance are provided in Joint Monkfish and Skate Plan Development Team memos dated [March 12, 2025](#) and [September 9, 2025](#), the [FY 2026-2028 Skate Specifications](#), and [Monkfish Framework 17](#).

Related Prior Actions

[Monkfish Amendment 6](#): the Councils conducted public scoping in 2010-2011 for developing a monkfish fishery catch share program and modifications to the day-at-sea program. Over the next few years, the Councils initiated Amendment 6, and developed goals, objectives, a control date, and alternatives for this action. Progress on this action stalled over 2014-2016 due to disagreements on the range of alternatives and a need to prioritize work on specifications and other near-term actions. Over the course of developing Amendment 6, the Councils considered measures including modifications to DAS allocations and landing limits to address latent effort, allowance for monkfish DAS leasing, changes to the research set-aside

approach, integration of monkfish into groundfish sectors, and creation of a monkfish ITQ program. Ultimately, in the summer of 2016, the Councils decided to stop working on Amendment 6. At that time, the Councils felt that catch shares were not the best form of management for the monkfish fishery and that other approaches were or could be developed to improve management.

Skate Amendment 5: The NEFMC considered establishing limited access through Amendment 5 in the skate wing and/or bait fisheries and other measures that may prevent the triggering of incidental skate possession limits, improve the precision and accuracy of catch data, and better define skate fishery participants. This action was initiated in 2016 and involved two scoping periods in 2017 and 2021. In April 2021, after reviewing scoping comments, the Council decided against including alternatives for developing a limited access program. The Council felt that concerns about triggering incidental limits and the potential for increasing effort could be addressed by other measures. By November 2021, there were no alternatives in Amendment 5 that required an amendment, so the Council withdrew this action.

Relevant Literature

Catch share programs, and IFQs specifically, have been implemented in many fisheries in the U.S. and globally. Should the Council decide to develop an IFQ program, a thorough literature review will be done to guide the development of program objectives and management alternatives. A few references are provided here.

Anderson, L.G. and M.C. Holliday, 2007. *The Design and Use of Limited Access Privilege Programs*. NOAA Tech Memo NMFS-F/SPO-86, 165p.

Colburn, L.L., M. Jepson, A. Himes-Cornell, S. Kasperski, K. Norman, C. Weng and P.M. Clay, 2017. *Community Participation in U.S. Catch Share Programs*. NOAA Tech Memo NMFS-F/SPO-179, 136 p.

NOAA Fisheries Catch Shares webpage, with several resources thereon:
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/insight/catch-shares>.