Small-Mesh Multispecies (Whiting)

COMMITTEE AND ADVISORY PANEL
MAY 19, 2026 | WARWICK, RI AND WEBINAR

New England Fishery Management Council

2026 Small-mesh Multispecies Work Plan Review

New England Fishery Management Council

Small Mesh Multispecies (Whiting)

Council Priority	Jan – Mar	Apr - Jun	July - Sept	Oct - Dec
Whiting specifications 2027-2031, other management measures	Develop scope	Develop specifications and alternatives, conduct analysis, prepare document Council: initiate action if needed	Council: update on action	SSC: OFL/ABC Council: final action
Exemption areas review and evaluation	Review prior research; evaluate use of LOA; summarize existing measures	PDT/AP Data Workshop		
Risk Policy application	Risk Policy factor development	Risk Policy matrix and identification of data needs	Risk Policy factor scoring	

Updated April 6, 2026, NEFMC Staff

Additional: EFH designation updates and 2027 Council priorities

Risk Policy Workplan Details (Beta Phase)

	January	February	March	April	May	June
Meetings – Input - Decisions						
RPWG: Confirm Factors w/ goal/intent	Jan 23rd					
NEFMC January	Update					
RPWG: Refining Concept			March 9th			
SSC: Check-in			30th			
NEFMC: Check-in, feedback						
RPWG: Refining Concept, Prepare June					TBD	
NEFMC June: Approval, weightings						Decision
Work – Refinement – Implementation						
Support Factor Development • Scoring and Data • Accessibility • Process		**RPWG members and Implementation Team:** Applegate, Miller, Garrison, Peros, O'Keefe oversight				Approval of Concept document
Refine Risk Policy Mechanics • Shape of Curve • Range of Scores • Scaling		**Risk Policy Mechanics sub-group:** Kerr, McNamee, Lawson, Peros, Ware, Brothers, O'Keefe, Miller				Approval of Concept document
Prepare for Weightings exercise						Weightings

2026 Risk Policy - FMP Implementation

Some standardization, but will not be the same for all FMPs/Actions

- **Groundfish Specifications.** Risk Policy integration with revised ABC CRs (FW68) for specs.
  - Supported by IRA #1, UMaine.
- **Small Mesh Specifications.** Risk Policy integration with current ABC CR (p*) for specs.
  - Supported by Mr. Andy Applegate, small-mesh PDT.
- **Scallop Specifications (OFL / ABC).** Potential for Risk Policy integration with current ABC CR (focus on legal limits, p*). Risk Policy scoring / weighting / Z-score to inform approach to rotational management, rationale for decision making.
- **Herring Specifications.** Continue to use the current ABC CR – Risk Policy not expected have a direct quantitative application to catch setting. (i.e. will not be linked to ABC CR).
- **Other applications.** Potential to support the Risk / Value assessment discussions for other FMPs.

Scope 2026 management action

PURPOSE OF MEETING

- Identify and recommend measures for the 2026 management action or potential 2027 management priorities
  - 2027 – 2031 catch specifications
    - Assessment data update, risk policy factor scoring
  - Red hake possession limit adjustments
  - Exemption area adjustments
    - Standardization of bycatch allowances
    - Letter of Authorization requirements
    - Exemption area seasons
    - Exemption area boundaries

SPECIFICATIONS

- **Current cycle: 2024-2026 fishing years**
  - Whiting – empirical assessment, catch at F associated with P*=25%
  - Northern red hake – ad hoc catch specifications based on trends
  - Southern red hake – 75% of catch specification to promote rebuilding
- **Update: 2027 up to 2031**
  - Data updates: catch and survey biomass, abundance at age/size
  - Ad hoc approach based on trends
  - Scientific uncertainty not estimated

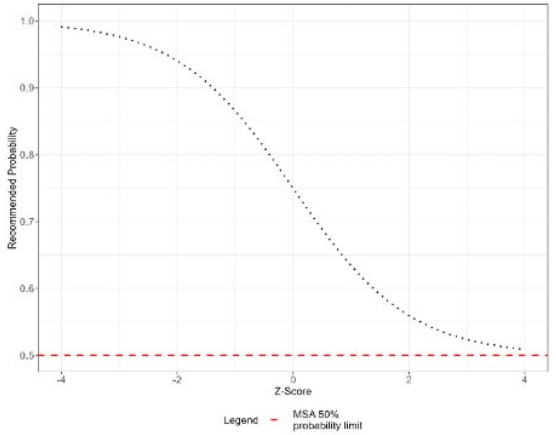
OVERVIEW OF DATA UPDATES

- Why data updates?
  - Adapting to capacity constraints across the region
  - Faster incorporation of new survey & catch data
- Data Updates →
  - Update key inputs without rebuilding full models
  - Refresh advice using new survey and catch data
  - Improve efficiency and timeliness
  - August 3, 2026 deadline for NEFSC to produce report for PDT use

Mechanics of Risk Policy & Implications

- To be proposed: Revised Z-score logistic curve and scoring rubric

Shape of the Curve



Z-Score Scaling

$$p(Z) = \frac{0.5}{1 + e^{Z}} + 0.5$$

$$Z = \sum (w_i s_i)$$

Range of Scores

- The shape of the curve, and scaling of scores, are interrelated concepts that impact the outcomes of the Risk Policy, and how it integrates with ABC CRs.

Scoring Factors – What to Expect, Guidance

- **SSB / Stock Status:** Guidance for analytical assessments is not expected to change, some recommendations from UMaine team for model-free approaches that will be considered.
- **Recruitment:** Quantile approach is being documented, will supply PDTs with Excel sheet.
- **Climate Vulnerability:** The scoring guidelines will provide PDTs with climate vulnerability scores.
- **Commercial Fishery Characterization:** Considering changes to questions and data.
- **Recreational Fishery Characterization:** Considering changes to questions and data.
- ***June 3rd RPWG meeting: Scoring and scoring guidelines currently under development***

New rubric: Five Factor Approach for 2026

Lower Risk Tolerance ← → Higher Risk Tolerance

FACTOR	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
SSB / Stock Status	Below threshold		<75% but above Threshold		Neutral		Rebuilt		Well Above Target
Recruitment	Persistent Low Recruitment		Recent Low Recruitment		Average, No Trend		Recent Large Year Classes		Multiple Large Year Classes
Climate Vulnerability	High Negative Direction	High	Moderate, Negative Direction	Moderate	Low				
Commercial Fishery Characterization					Minimal stress	Low stress	Moderate stress	Elevated stress	High stress
Recreational Fishery Characterization					Minimal stress	Low stress	Moderate stress	Elevated stress	High stress

Domestic Whiting Prices and Imports

KEY CONCLUSIONS

- An inverse and statistically significant negative relationship exists between silver hake prices and domestic landings, total whiting supply, and whiting imports
- Imports from South America (mainly Argentina) are a major driver of recent silver hake price declines.
- Import prices are less volatile, amplifying downward pressure on prices when volumes increase.
- Fuel prices, inflation, and broader macroeconomic factors also influence prices.
- Price movements across fish markets suggest possible cointegration.
- The sharp decline in U.S. silver hake prices after 2022 is best explained by a surge in relatively low-priced whiting imports interacting with stable domestic landings, broader fish market trends, and macroeconomic forces.

Interpreting Price Signals

- Recent price declines appear driven primarily by external supply forces (imports) rather than domestic harvest levels
- Low prices do not imply overfishing or excessive domestic catch in the silver hake fishery
- Price signals may therefore be weak indicators of biological or management performance specific to this fishery

Revenue and Fishery Performance

- Increased imports can reduce ex-vessel revenues even when quotas, effort, and biomass are stable
- Revenue volatility may affect fleet profitability, crew incomes, or port-level economic outcomes

Trade and Market Exposure

- US silver hake prices are exposed to global whiting markets, particularly South American supply
- Import prices are less volatile, limiting domestic price recovery when supply demands
- Market outcomes increasingly depend on trade dynamics outside fishery management control
- Economic outcomes and biological outcomes may move independently under globalized markets

Key Takeaway:
Silver hake price dynamics in recent years reflect global supply conditions more than domestic fishery activity, underscoring the importance of interpreting economic signals within a broader trade and market context.

Advisory Panel Report

FISHERY PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

What factors have influenced recent fishing activity and how?

- **Offshore wind development:** traditional fishing grounds; may be impacts when operational
- **Markets:** number of boats fishing, other fisheries, imports can drive price; frozen market in southern New England (stabilized prices, but not economical for northern ports to ship product); Long Island vessels supply fresh market in NY
- **Whiting availability:** have seen more whiting in some SNE areas
- **Other fisheries:** Scup fishery closed early, some vessels switching to small mesh, expecting price decrease as effort shifts from scup/fluke
- **Skate bycatch:** gear-dependent

How might these factors change in the near future? How do you anticipate that the fishery will adjust to these changes? How is the industry adjusting to changes in fish distribution?

- **Changes in timing:** fish arriving and leaving later; different timing in GOM this year due to colder water temperatures
- **Fish distribution:** fewer large fish in Ipswich Bay; lots of large whiting in Area II, but fishery was short

FISHERY PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

Have any recent regulatory changes in related fisheries affected your small-mesh multispecies fishing and how?

- Increased possession limit for <3” mesh led to more whiting landings, lowered price
- More targeting from other small-mesh fisheries lowers price; quality difference

Are the current small-mesh fishery regulations appropriate? How could they be improved and how would they affect the small-mesh multispecies fishery?

- Whiting possession limits fine; could adjust PLs for non-targeted trips
- Some interest in increasing northern red hake possession limit
- Exemption area changes – timing/expansions to increase seasonal flexibility

What other factors may affect the small-mesh multispecies fishery going forward?

- **Offshore development:** offshore wind, aquaculture, marine carbon dioxide removal
- **Climate change:** shifts in fish distribution/timing
- **Other fisheries:** more participation in whiting fishery if other fisheries are less profitable

Are there any recreational fishing issues that should be considered?

- None raised

AP MEETING DISCUSSION

Note: there were no motions or consensus statements from the Advisory Panel. Topics listed below were raised throughout the April 1 meeting.

- Adjust possession limits so directed fishery is still 15,000 lb but non-target fisheries are lower
- Increase northern red hake possession limit
- Exemption area changes
    - Would increase flexibility and opportunities for the fishery
    - Flagged Cultivator Shoal, Small-Mesh Area II for further review in bycatch ratio analysis
    - Increased lobster possession limit in Cultivator Shoal area?

Red Hake Landings and Discards on Observed Trips

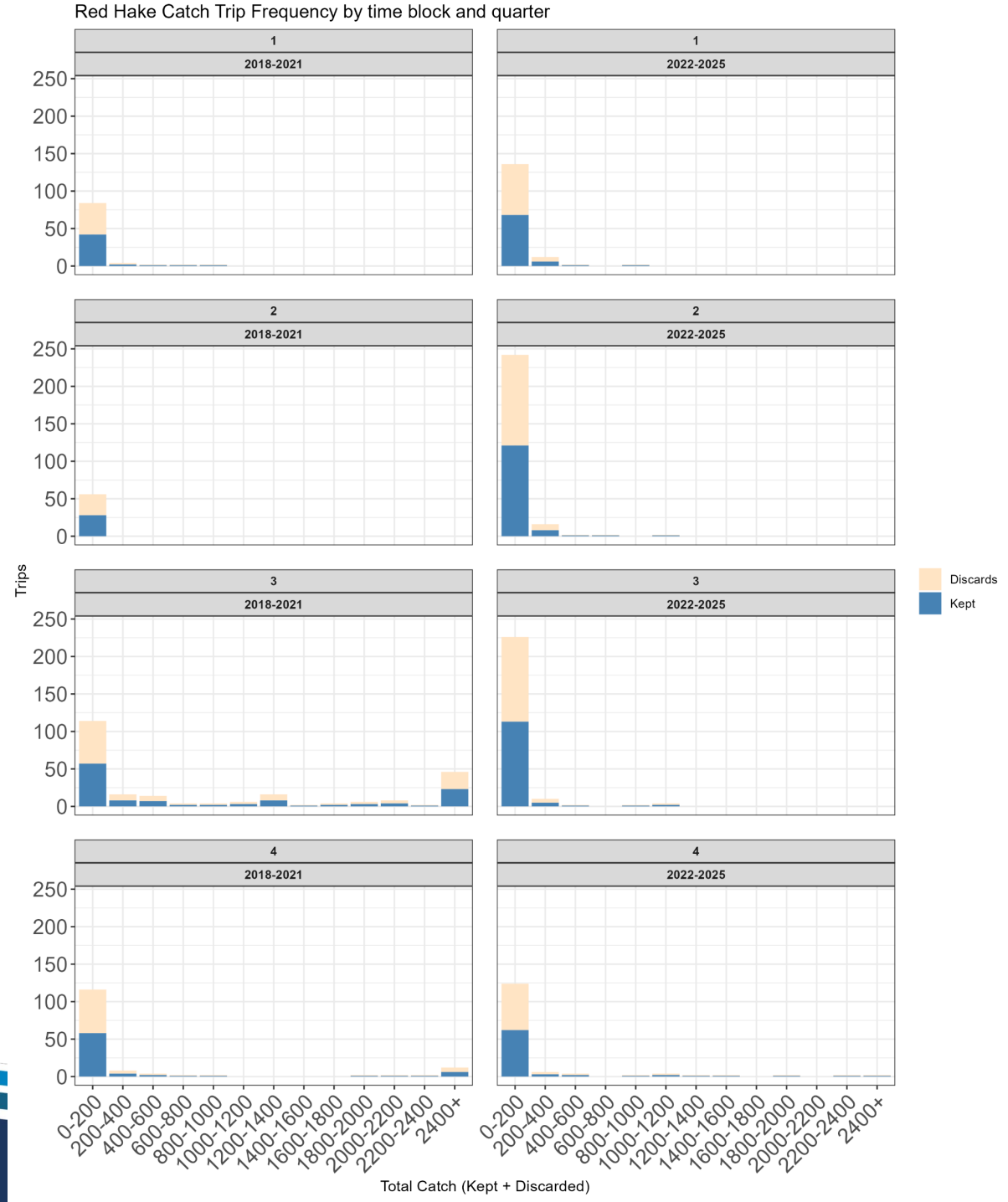
MONTHLY RED HAKE LANDINGS AND DISCARDS BY TRIP

MESH_GROUP	< 5.5 in
AREA	(All)
EXEMPTION_AREA_APPROX	(Multiple Items)

Row Labels	Total red hake landings	Total SMS discards	Ave red hake landings per trip	Ave SMS discards per trip	Vesseks
1994-2021	**522,983**	**766,847**	**338.1**	**495.7**	**555**
1	375	793	5.1	10.9	5
2	0	1,454	0.0	55.9	6
6	1,360	1,828	17.0	22.9	7
7	195,948	130,600	707.4	471.5	139
8	206,825	178,712	506.9	438.0	189
9	60,779	288,565	235.6	1,118.5	87
10	46,917	137,993	222.4	654.0	79
11	8,829	24,459	61.3	169.9	25
12	1,949	2,444	27.8	34.9	18
2022-2025	**6,676**	**57,916**	**96.8**	**839.4**	**63**
1	0	281	0.0	70.1	4
3	0	107	0.0	35.5	3
5	0	155	0.0	25.9	5
6	960	562	120.0	70.2	7
7	653	13,694	65.3	1,369.4	10
8	91	3,879	18.2	775.9	5
9	321	5,689	35.7	632.1	9
10	1,000	20,460	333.3	6,819.8	3
11	2,390	11,487	170.7	820.5	12
12	1,260	1,604	180.0	229.1	5
Grand Total	**529,659**	**824,763**	**327.8**	**510.4**	**618**

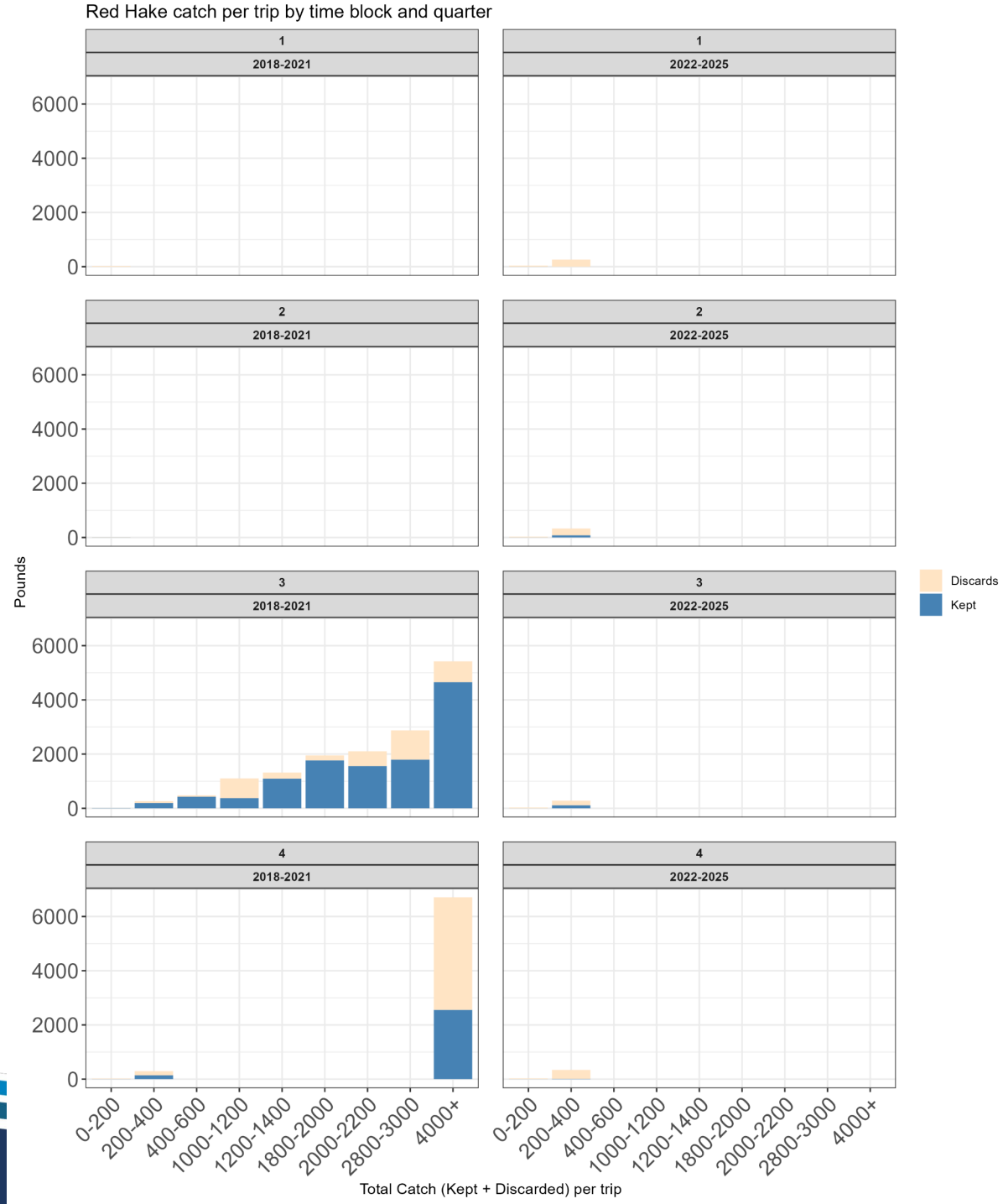
Northern red hake small-mesh observed trips:

Number of observed trips in 2018-2021 and 2022-2025: Catch of northern red hake, discards vs kept



New England Fishery Management Council

Catch of northern red hake on observed small-mesh trips in 2018-2021 and 2022-2025 by category, discards vs kept



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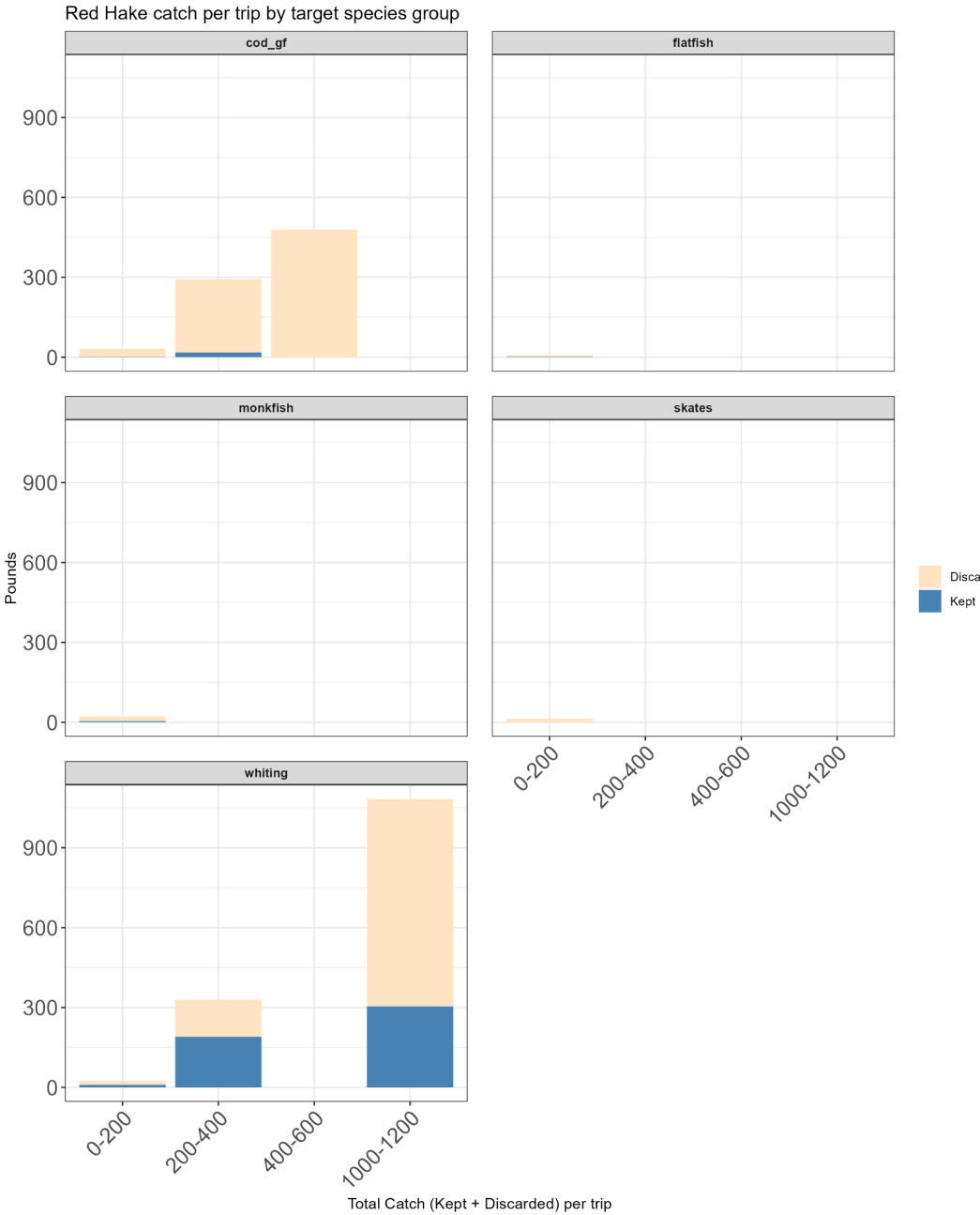
By trawl type

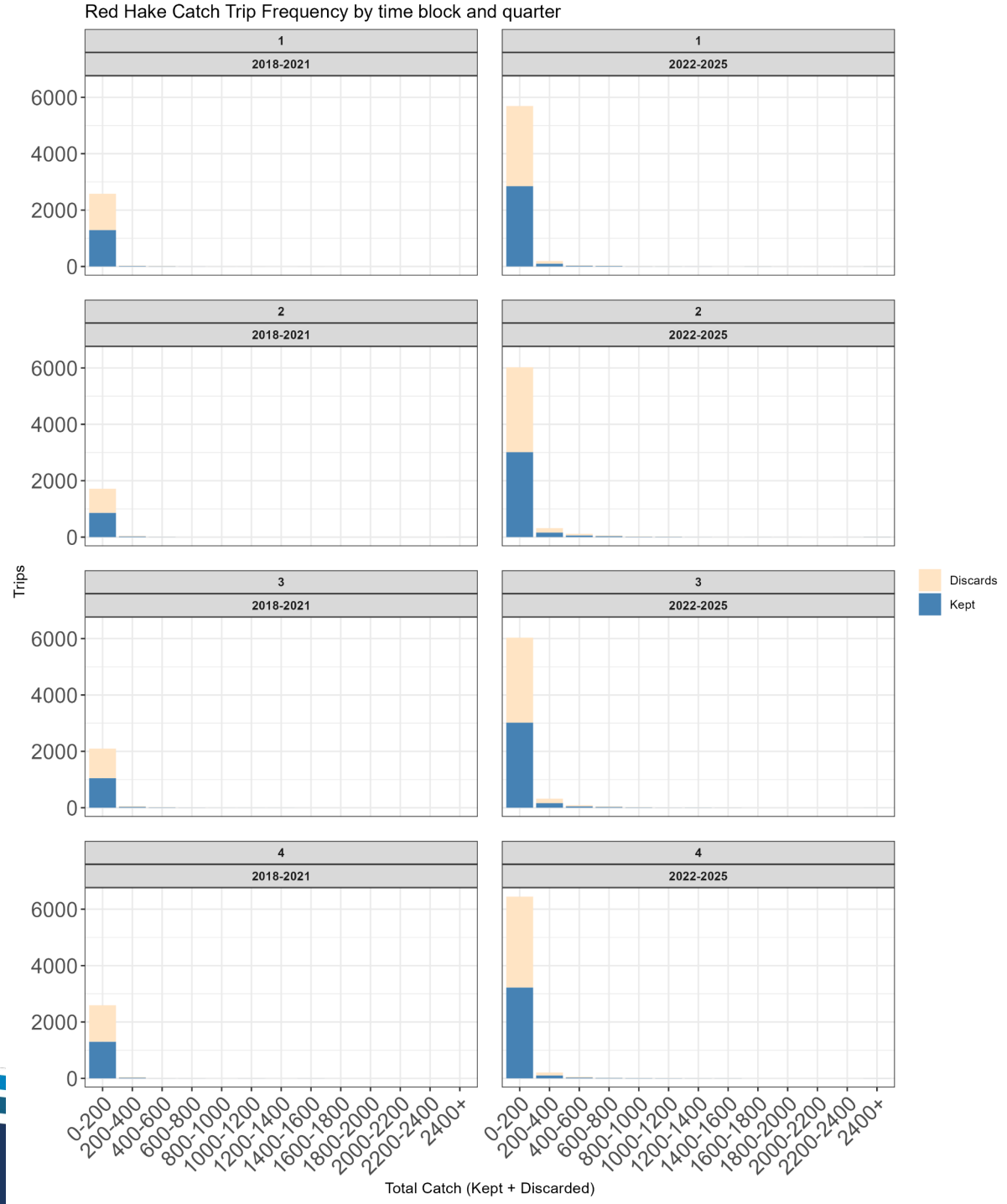
By target species group



Northern red hake on observed small-mesh trips by statistical area

Northern red hake large mesh trips:

Number of observed trips in 2018-2021 and 2022-2025: Catch of northern red hake, discards vs kept



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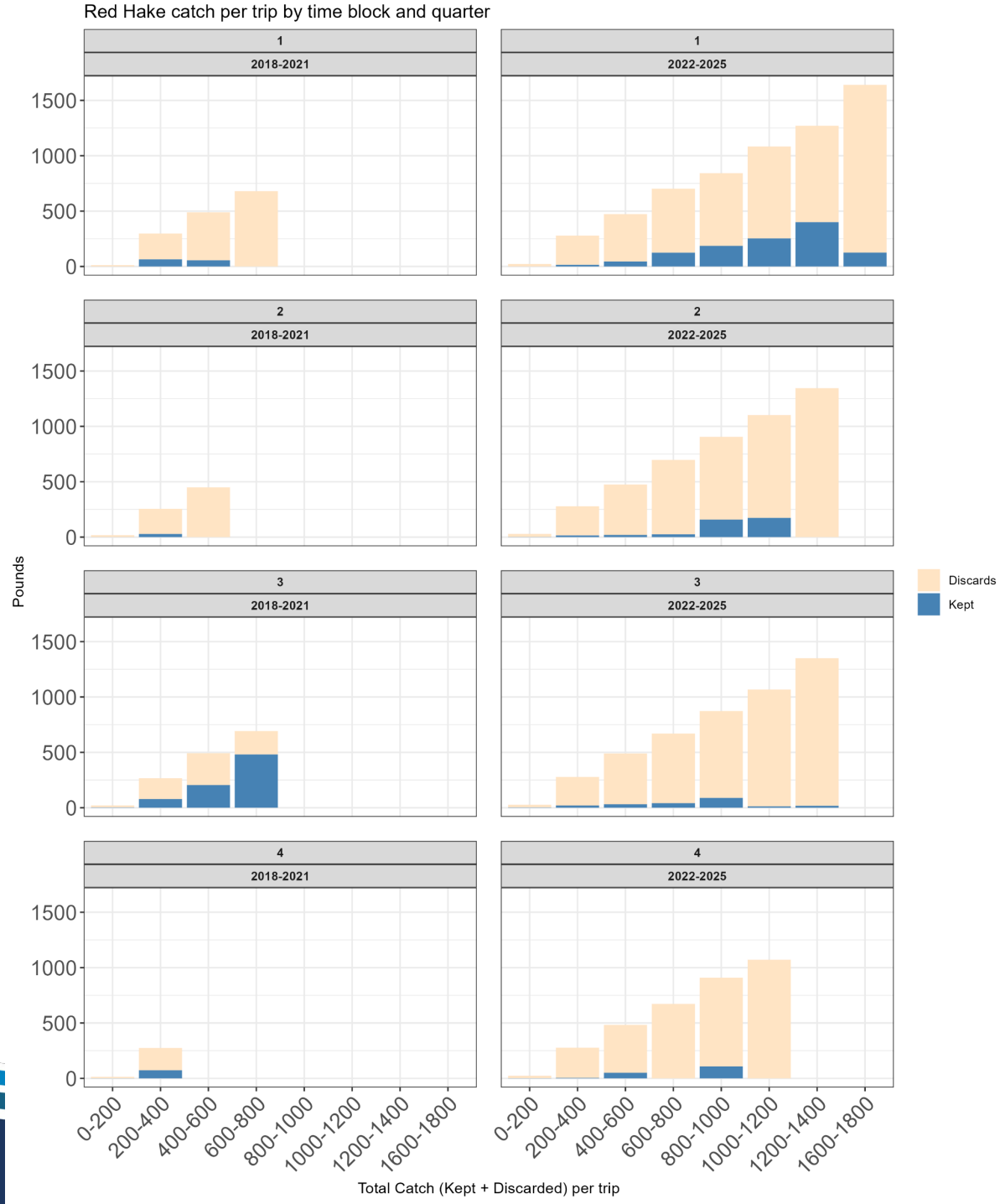

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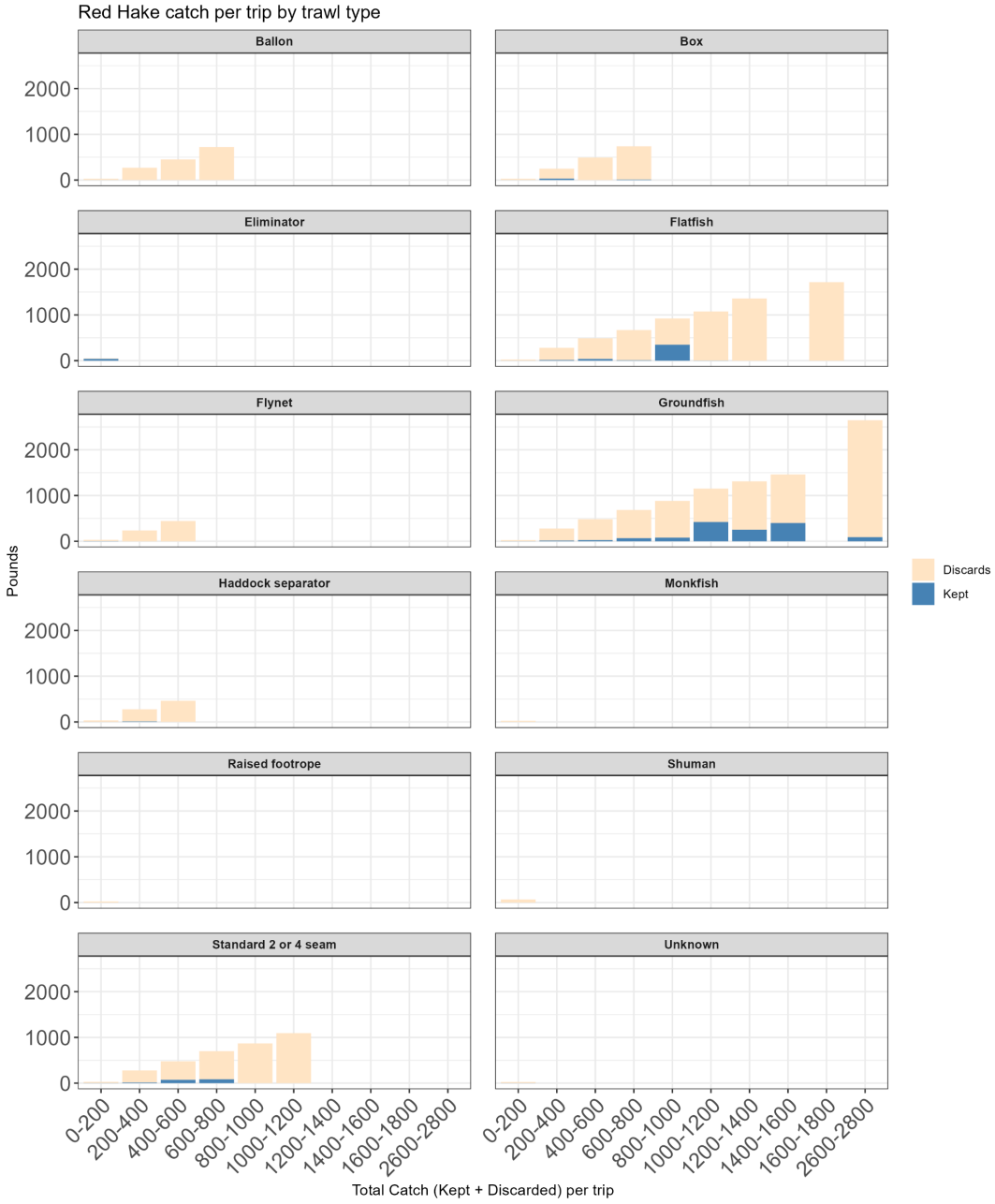
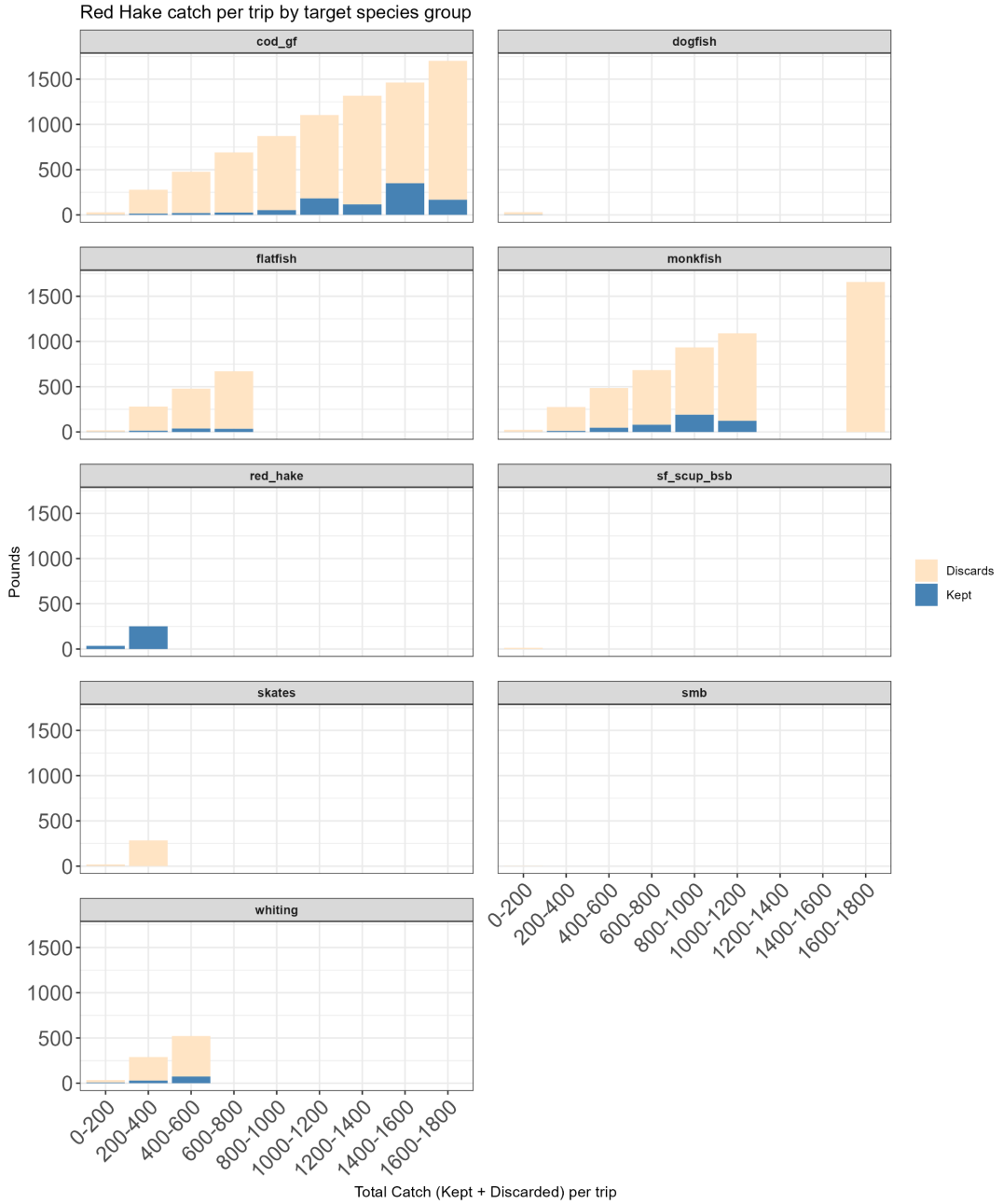


By target species group



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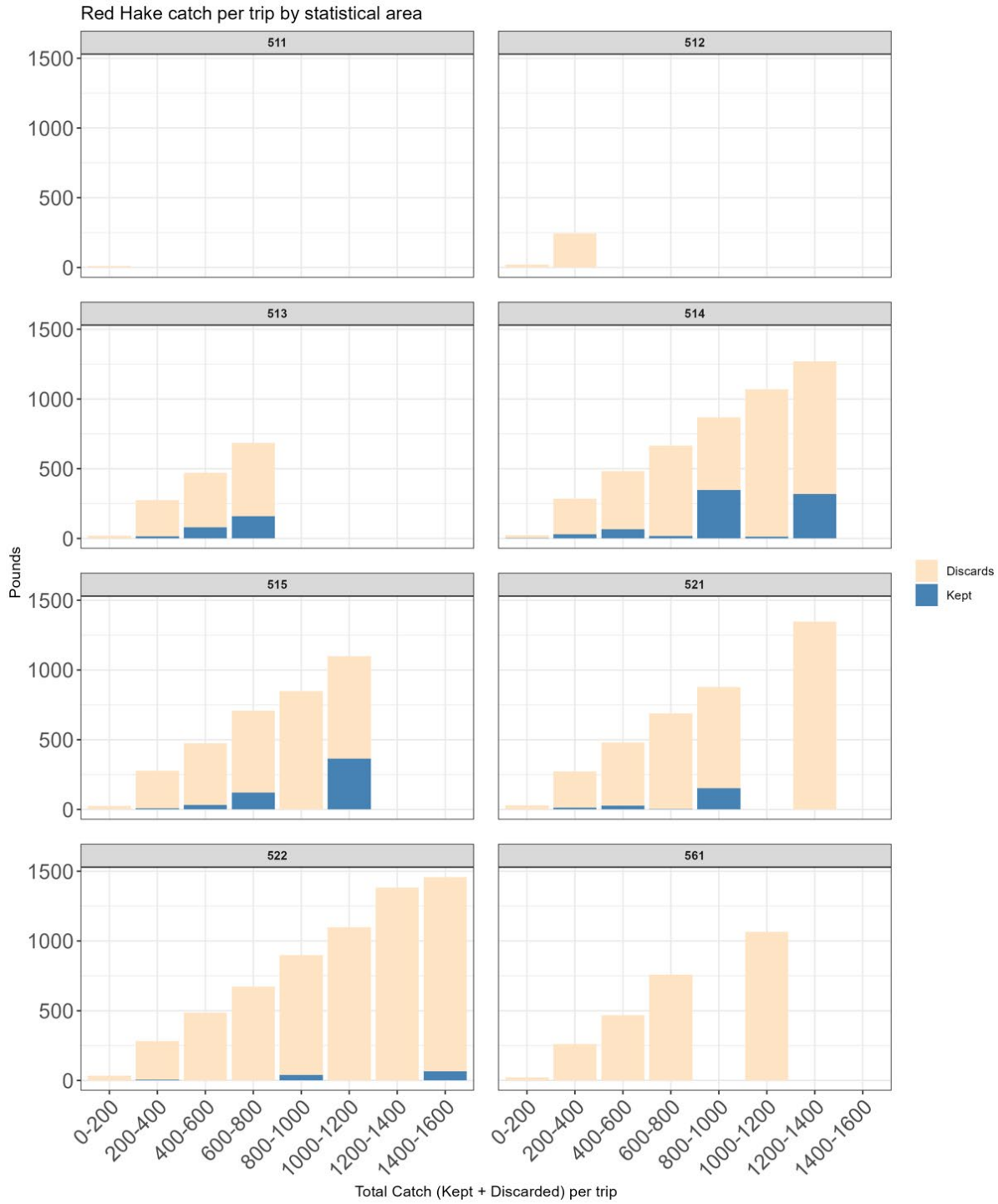
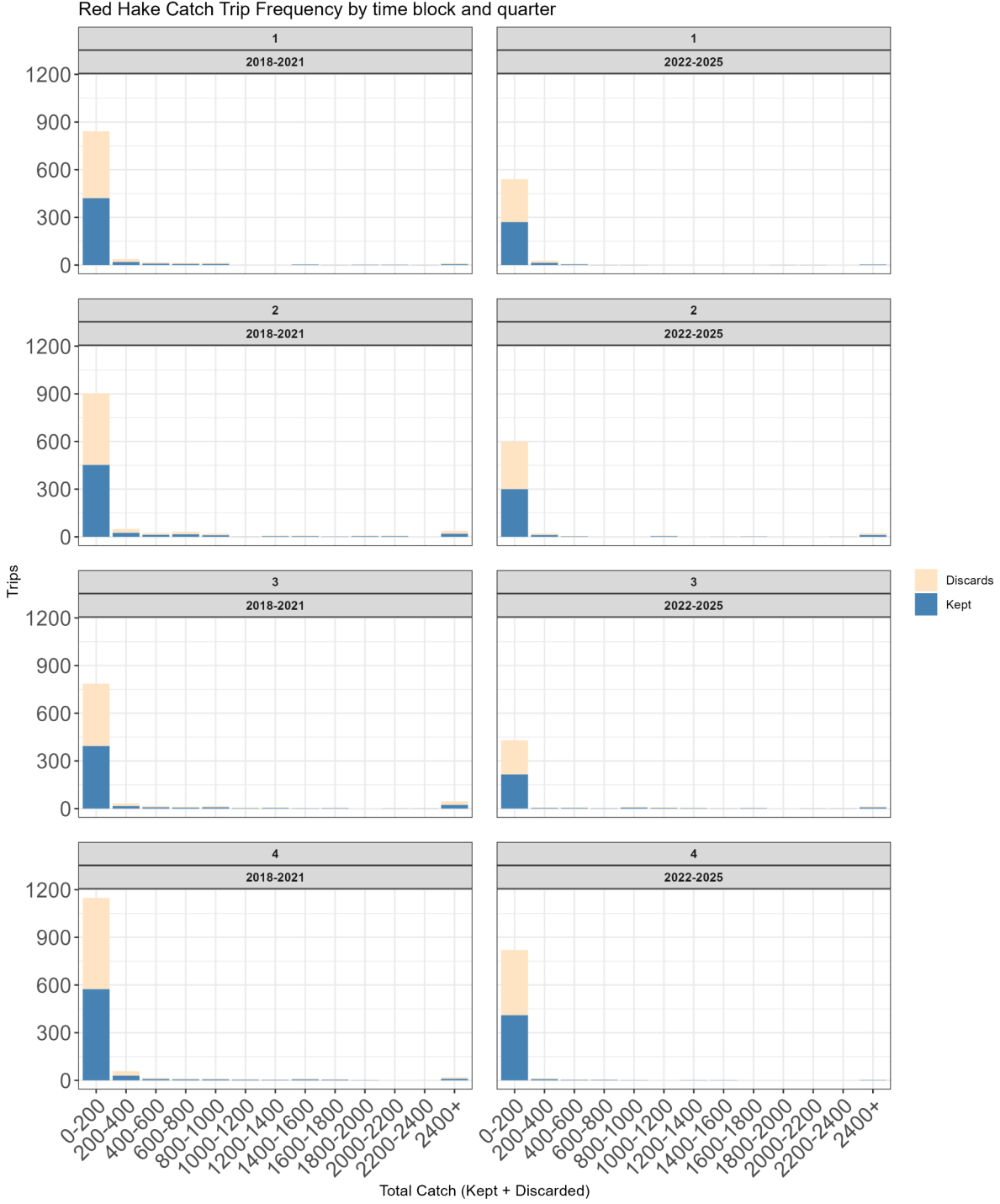
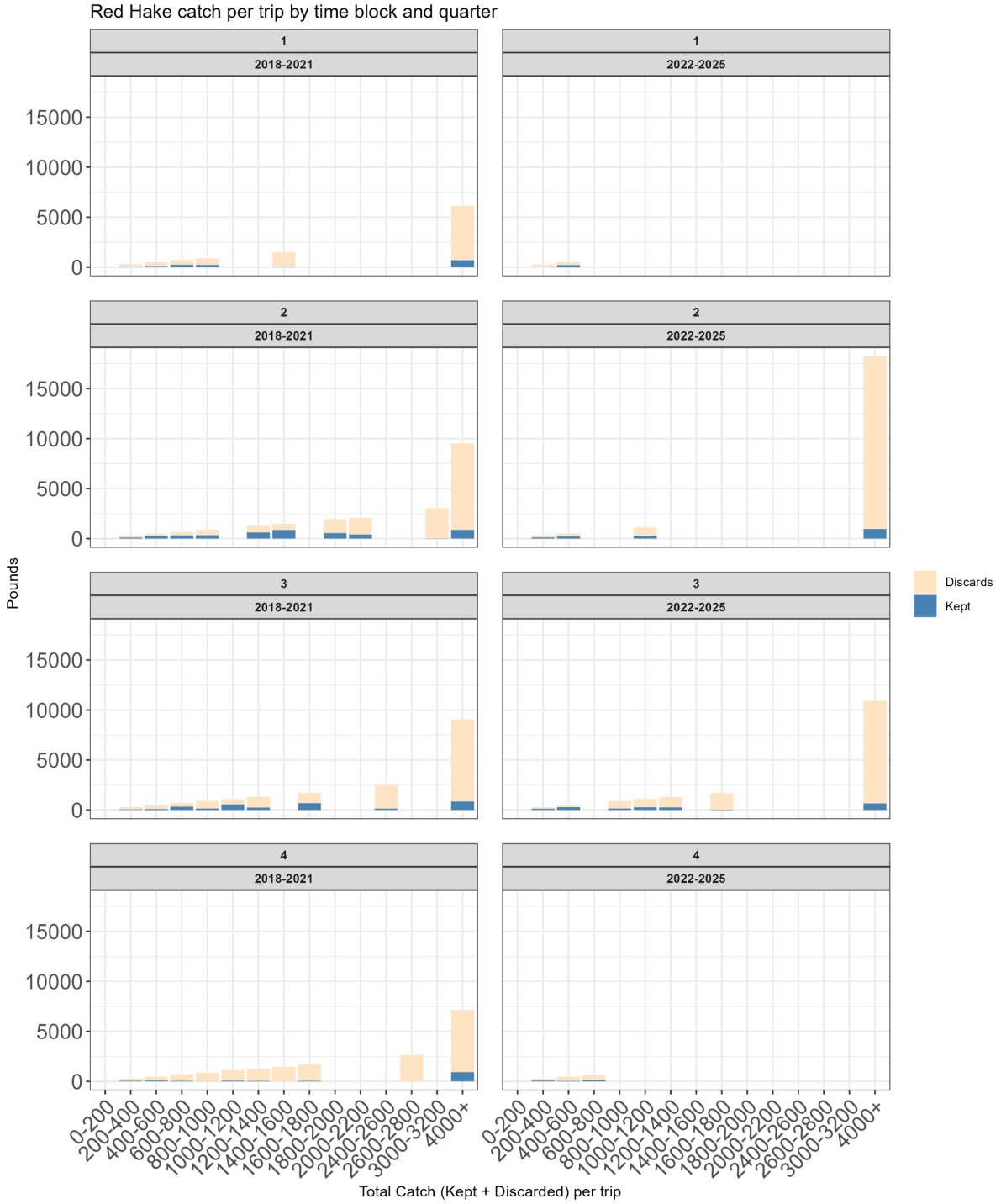


Southern red hake small-mesh trips:

Number of observed trips in 2018-2021 and 2022-2025: Catch of southern red hake, discards vs kept



Catch of southern red hake on observed small mesh trips in 2018-2021 and 2022-2025 by category, discards vs kept



By trawl type

By target species group

Southern red hake on observed small-mesh trips by statistical area

Southern red hake large-mesh trips:

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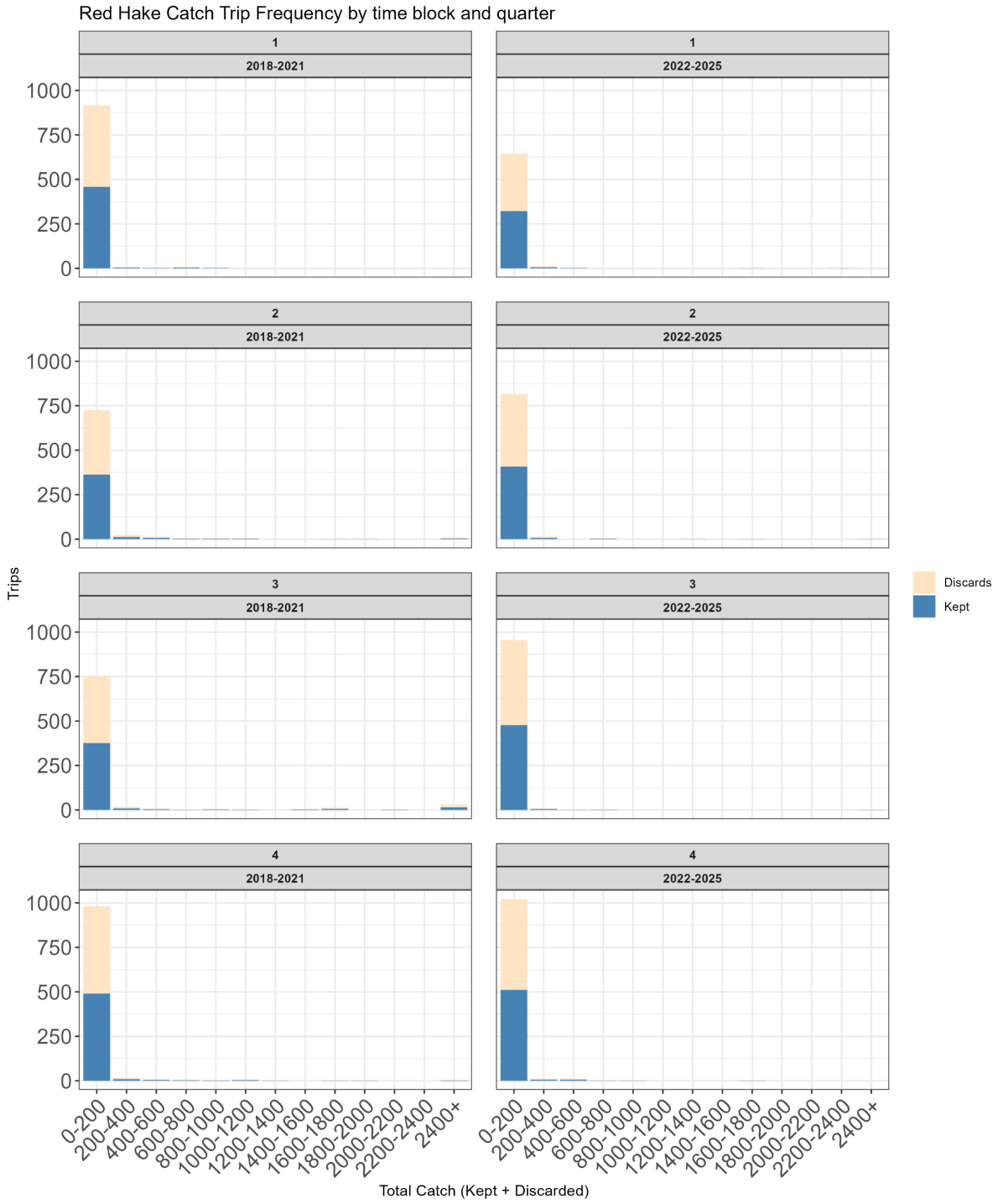

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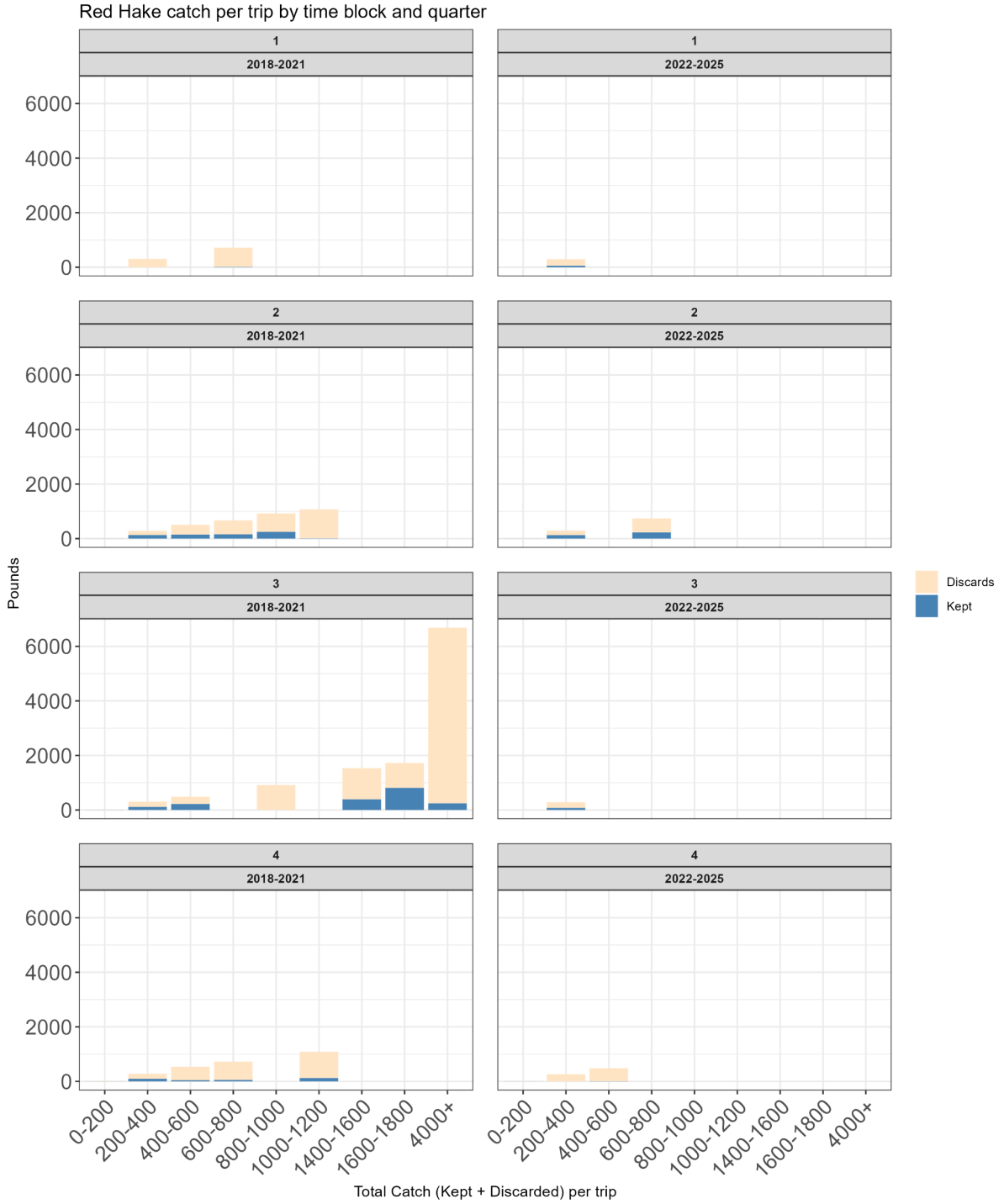

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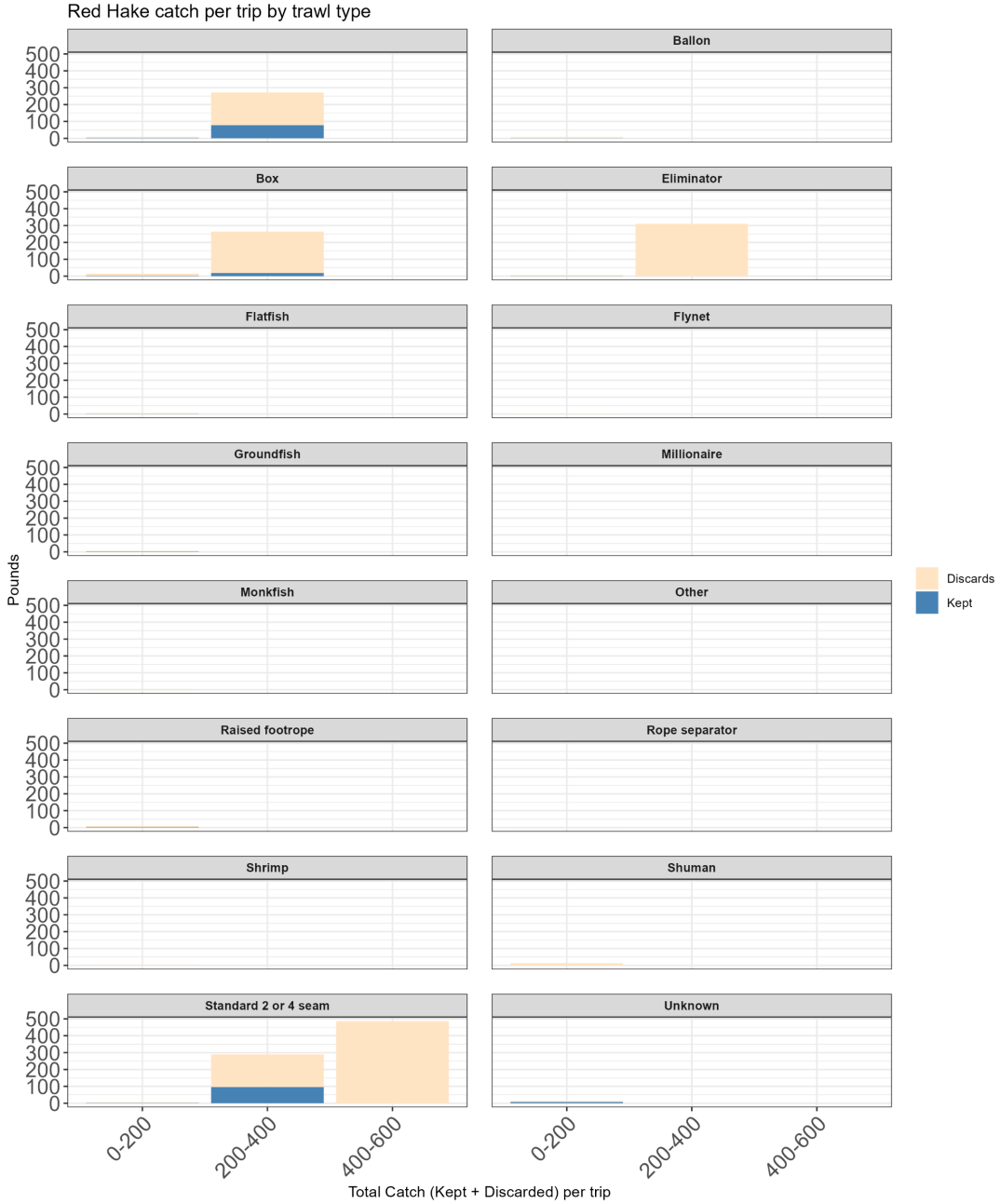

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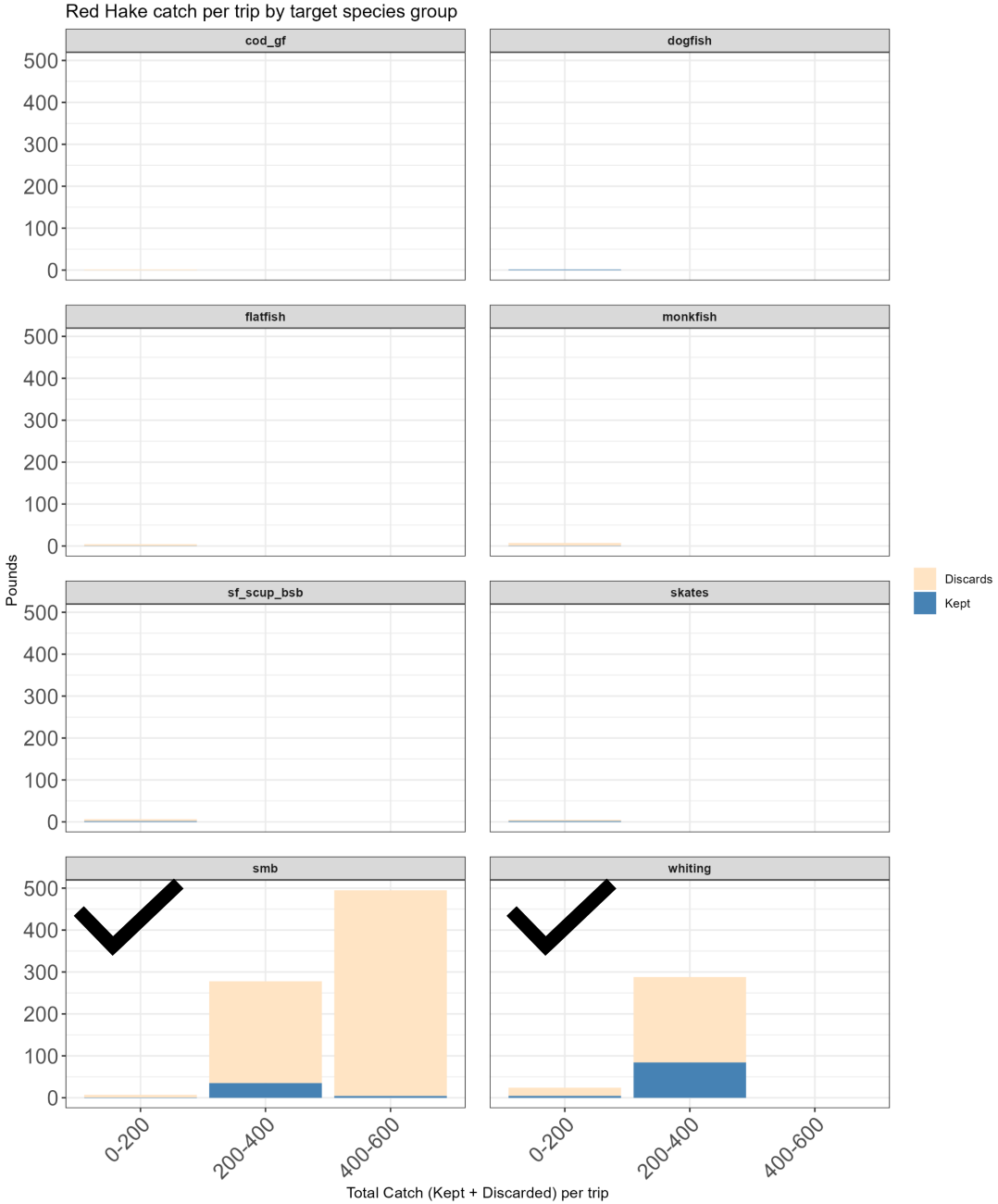

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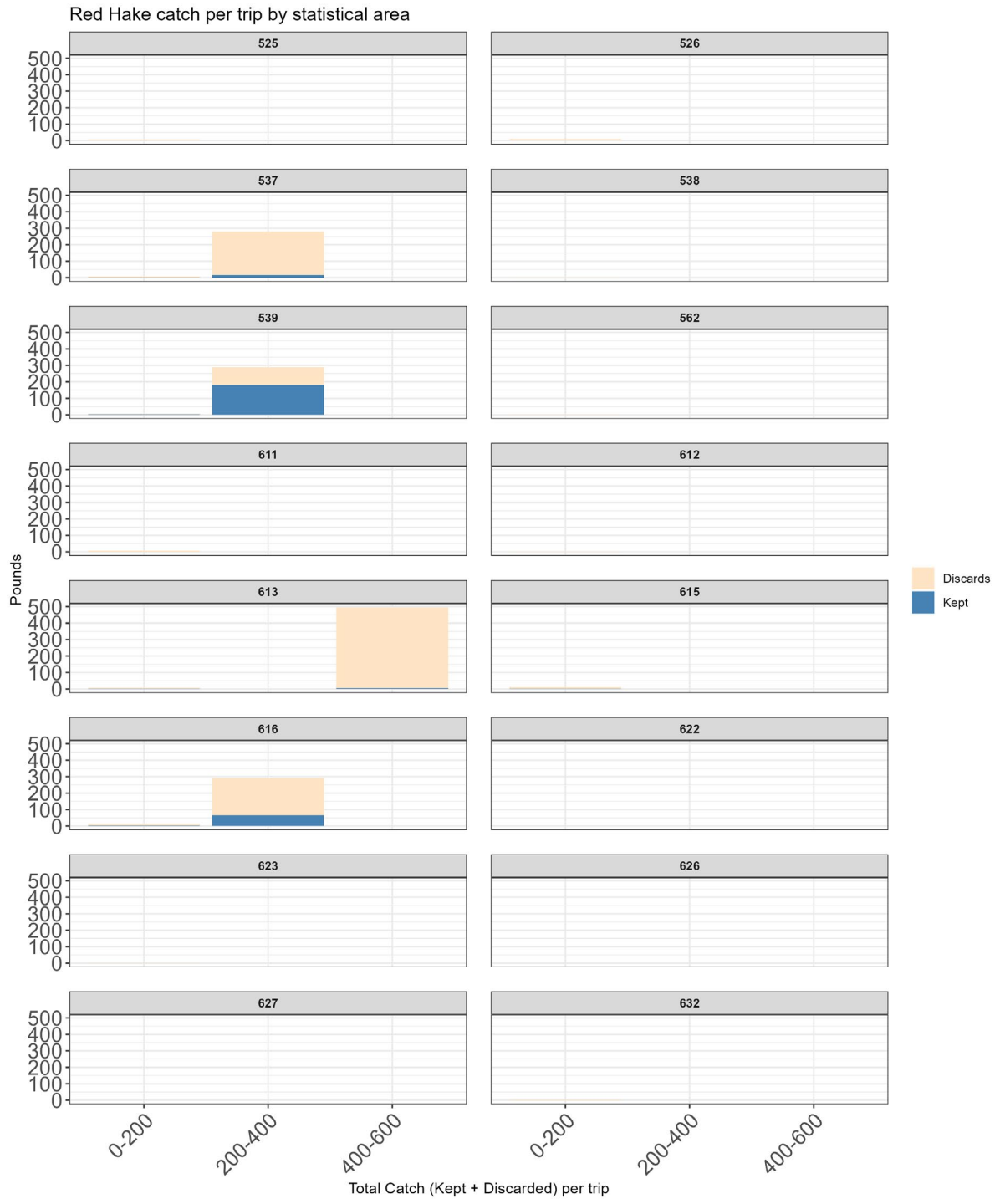


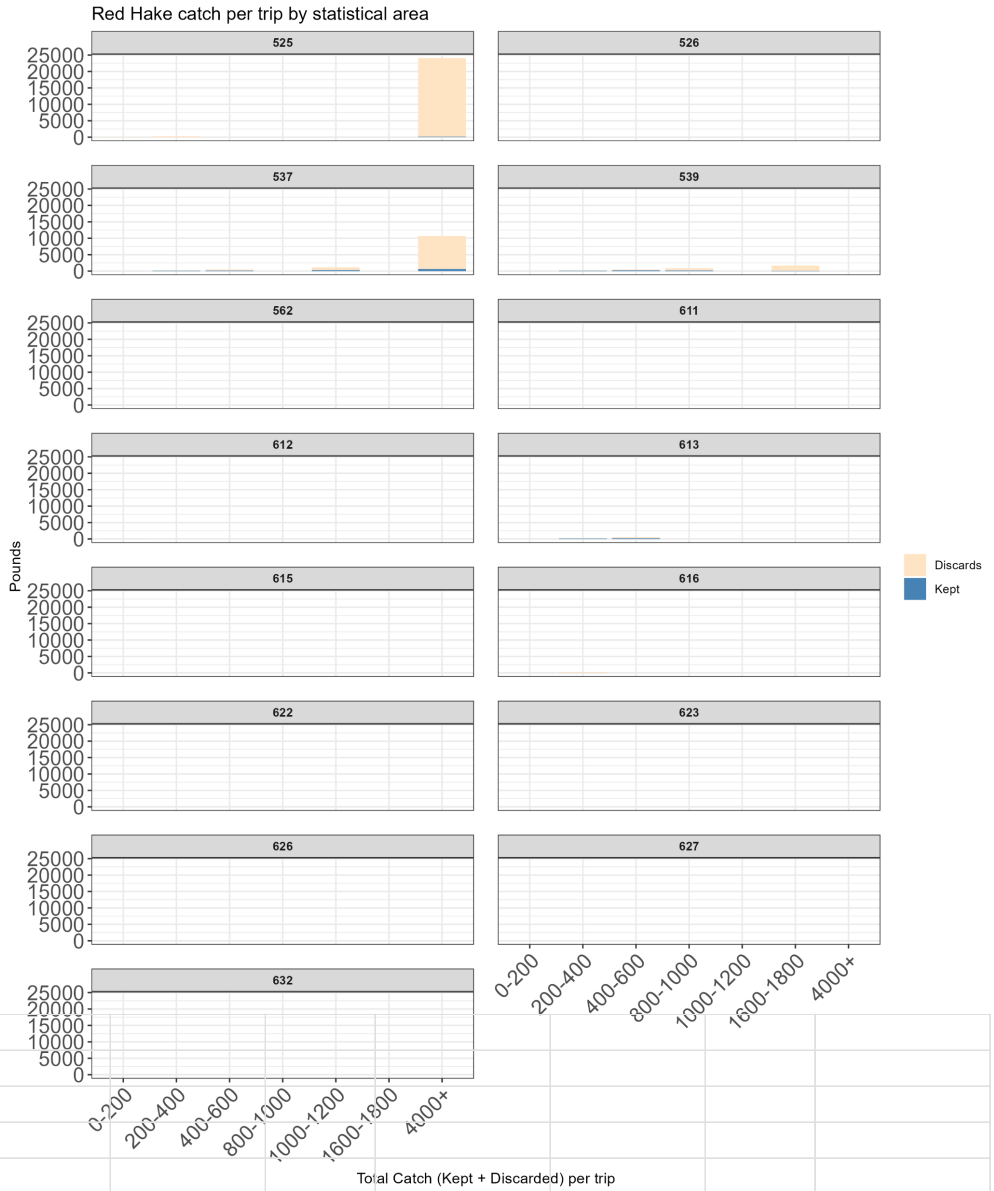
YEAR	(Multiple Items)							
SAMP_PROG	(All)							
NEGEAR	(All)							
	Column Labels							
	2018-2021				**2022-2025**			
Row Labels	**Discards, lbs**	**Percent**	**Observed trips**	**Observed hau**	**Discards, Percent**		**Observed trip**	**Observed**
Discarded, oth	870	0.12%	8	11	2,859	0.26%	64	141
No market	713,927	97.23%	5020	27663	964,379	86.83%	9310	49065
Poor quality	845	0.12%	55	74	1,957	0.18%	131	184
Regulations	18,613	2.53%	176	541	141,406	12.73%	451	2159
Grand Total	**734,254**	**100.00%**	**5259**	**28289**	**#######**	**100.00%**	**9956**	**51549**

87% of red hake discards on observed trips in 2022-2025 were discarded because of having “no market”

YEAR	(Multiple Items)												
SAMP_PROG	(All)												
NEGEAR	(All)												
	Column Labels												
	Quarter 1			**Quarter 2**				**Quarter 3**				**Quarter 4**	
Row Labels	**Discards, lbs**	**Percent**	**Observed trips**	**Discards, lbs**	**Percent**	**Observed trips**	**Discards, lbs**	**Percent**	**Observed trips**	**Discards, lbs**	**Percent**	**Observed trips**	
Discarded, oth	294	0.16%	12	350	0.08%	14	1,592	0.53%	16	623	0.33%	22	
No market	171,744	91.36%	1799	330,246	76.64%	2521	278,062	92.60%	2622	184,327	96.29%	2368	
Poor quality	77	0.04%	13	426	0.10%	41	1,282	0.43%	58	173	0.09%	19	
Regulations	15,865	8.44%	68	99,894	23.18%	196	19,335	6.44%	116	6,312	3.30%	71	
Grand Total	**187,979**	**100.00%**	**1892**	**430,915**	**100.00%**	**2772**	**300,271**	**100.00%**	**2812**	**191,436**	**100.00%**	**2480**	

Regulations cited more often as a reason for discarding in quarter 2 (April to June)

Particularly in statistical area 525



YEAR	(Multiple Items)
SAMP_PROG	(All)
NEGEAR	(All)
MONTH2	Quarter 2

	Column Labels	525			522			521			515			514		
Row Labels	Discards, lbs	Percent	Observed trips	Discards, lbs	Percent	Observed trips	Discards, lbs	Percent	Observed trips	Discards, lbs	Percent	Observed trips	Discards, lbs	Percent	Observed trips	
No market	73,447	51.40%	108	63,455	96.53%	266	60,507	95.03%	379	33,967	94.96%	303	31,217	94.62%	634	
Regulations	69,456	48.60%	4	2,278	3.47%	28	3,167	4.97%	38	1,804	5.04%	22	1,776	5.38%	58	
Grand Total	**142,903**	**100.00%**	**112**	**65,733**	**100.00%**	**294**	**63,674**	**100.00%**	**417**	**35,771**	**100.00%**	**325**	**32,992**	**100.00%**	**692**	

YEAR	(Multiple Items)								
SAMP_PROG	(All)								
MONTH2	Quarter 2								
	Column Labels								
	Bottom trawl			**Scallop dredge**			**Haddock separator**		
Row Labels	**Discards, lbs**	**Percent**	**Observed trips**	**Discards, lbs**	**Percent**	**Observed trips**	**Discards, lbs**	**Percent**	**Observed trips**
No market	281,808	74.21%	2016	34,305	96.23%	363	13,397	96.06%	58
Regulations	97,913	25.79%	151	1,344	3.77%	31	549	3.94%	9
Grand Total	**379,721**	**100.00%**	**2167**	**35,649**	**100.00%**	**394**	**13,946**	**100.00%**	**67**

By vessels using bottom trawls

LESSONS LEARNED

- Few, if any, observed trips have red hake catches exceeding the possession limits
- A high proportion of red hake catches are discarded regardless of how much is caught
- Some observed whiting trips in the southern management area have red hake catches above 4000 lbs. – seems isolated to SA 525 (SE Georges Bank)
- Intent of the southern red hake rebuilding measures (possession limits: 600 lbs. or 1000 lbs. for selective and large-mesh trawls) was meant to cause fishermen to avoid areas with high red hake catches.
- 3,000 lbs. possession limit in the northern management area might be raised to 5,000 lbs. for vessels with an active Letter of Authorization.

Exemption Area History and Management Overview

REVIEW OF SPECIFICATION AND FRAMEWORK ACTIONS IN THE SMALL-MESH FMP

- Small-mesh multispecies specifications package:
  - Sets OFL, ABC, ACL, and TAL for each stock for at least 3 years
  - Can include modifications to specifications values, possession limits, and in-season possession limit adjustment triggers
  - May also include measures to ensure specifications are not exceeded (monitoring/data collection; stock status determination criteria)
- Framework adjustment:
  - Covers changes to existing elements of the FMP
  - Required for changes to the existing exemption areas

Boundaries and Seasons
Exploration Of SMS To GFLM Catches

Prior research

- Initial experimental fisheries – 1990s
- MA DMF experimental fishery
  - Data from small-mesh area I
  - 2 years
  - Changes in SMS to groundfish catch ratios were insignificant
- PDT analysis of raised footrope trawl was inconclusive
  - No valid comparison in the same areas and seasons

RECENT EXEMPTION AREA RESEARCH

2016-2017: MA DMF conducted an experimental fishery in Small-Mesh Area 1, Raised Footrope Trawl Exemption Area (western portion)

- Wanted to explore opening exemption areas earlier

Main discards were haddock, lobster, plaice, spiny dogfish; accumulated to slightly more than 5% of kept catch (lots of haddock at the time)

No strong recommendations for spatial/temporal changes in exemption areas

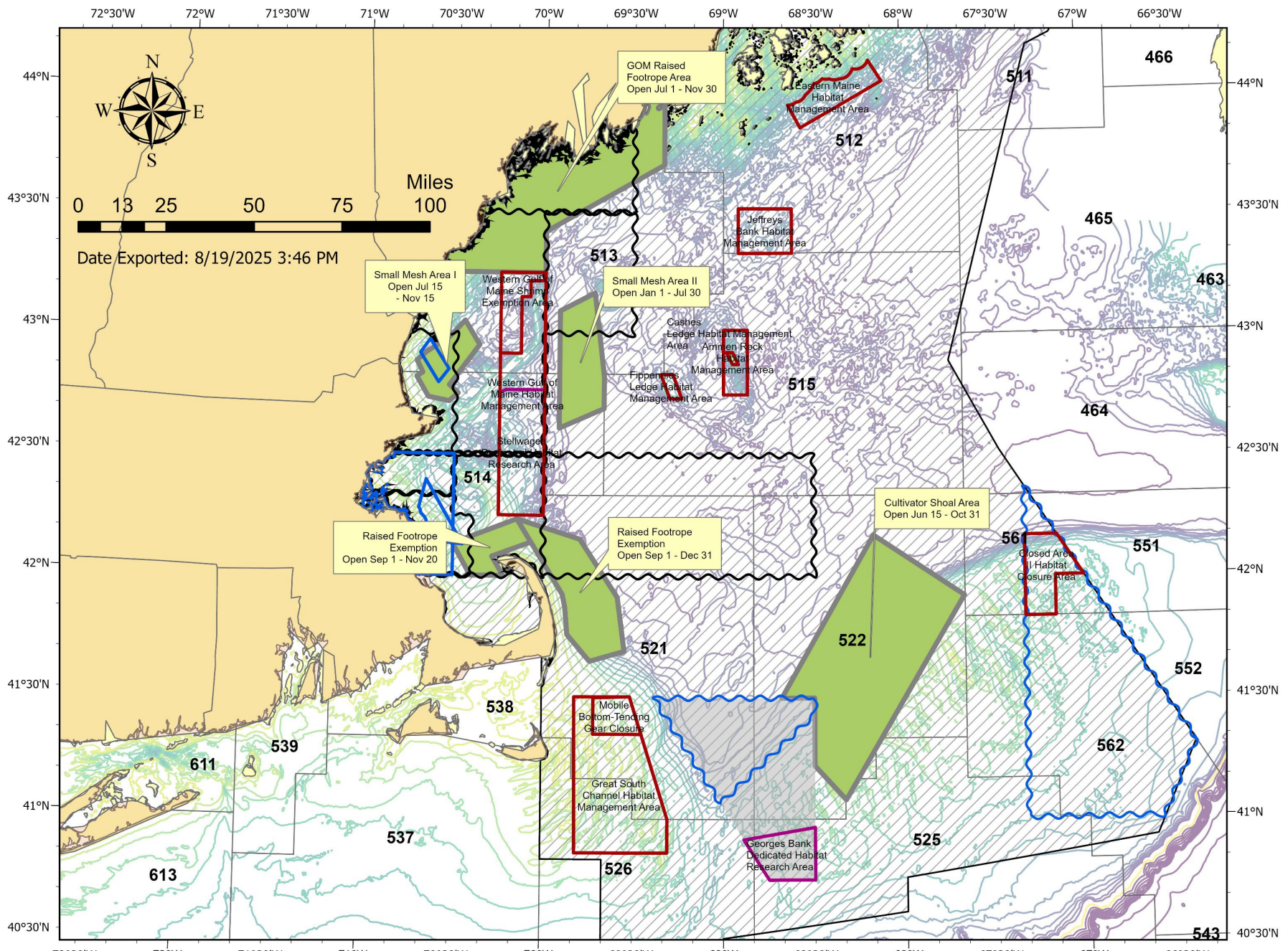
PRIOR AP/COMMITTEE DISCUSSION RE: EXEMPTION AREAS

November 2023 AP/Cte meeting:

- Some discussion around changing exemption area seasons/boundaries; forwarded a recommendation to the Council, but was not included in IRA project proposal

November 2025 AP/Cte meeting:

- Suggestion to reexamine Small Mesh Area 2 and Cultivator Shoals Area (alignment with new habitat and groundfish management areas, adjusting dates of opening)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68°W
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43°30'N
43°N
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42°N
41°30'N
41°N
40°30'N
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W
E
S
Miles
0 13 25 50 75 100
Date Exported: 8/19/2025 3:46 PM
GOM Raised Footrope Area Open Jul 1 - Nov 30
Eastern Maine Habitat Management Area
Jeffreys Bank Habitat Management Area
Small Mesh Area I Open Jul 15 - Nov 15
Western Gulf of Maine Shrimp Exemption Area
Small Mesh Area II Open Jan 1 - Jul 30
Cashes Ledge Habitat Management Area
Ammen Rock Habitat Management Area
Fippennies Ledge Habitat Management Area
Western Gulf of Maine Habitat Management Area
Stellwagen Habitat Research Area
Raised Footrope Exemption Open Sep 1 - Nov 20
Raised Footrope Exemption Open Sep 1 - Dec 31
Cultivator Shoal Area Open Jun 15 - Oct 31
Closed Area II Habitat Closure Area
Mobile Bottom-Tending Gear Closure
Great South Channel Habitat Management Area
Georges Bank Dedicated Habitat Research Area
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1991

Cultivator Shoal, Southern New England exemption areas open

1995

Small Mesh Areas 1 & 2 open

1996

Mid-Atlantic Exemption Area redefined

2000

Raised Footrope Trawl (Cape Cod) Area opened

2003

Inshore Gulf of Maine Raised Footrope Trawl Area opened

Exemption Area		Gulf of Maine Grate Raised Footrope Trawl	Cultivator Shoal	Small Mesh Area 1	Small Mesh Area 2	Raised Footrope Trawl Areas (Cape Cod)	Southern New England	Mid-Atlantic
Season		July 1-Nov 30	June 15-Oct 31	July 15-Nov 15	Jan 1 – June 30	Sept 1- Nov 20/Dec 31 (eastern portion)	Year round	Year round
Gear Requirements	**Mesh size**	Minimum 2.5” square or diamond	Minimum 3” square or diamond			Minimum 2.5” square or diamond	Can only land small-mesh species with trawl gear; minimum 6” diamond or 6.5” square mesh (vessels fishing under NE mult DAS or sector trip).	Trawl: may use <6.5” mesh if participating in exempted fishery
	Other	Raised footrope trawl with excluder grate; no sweep	N/A	Raised footrope trawl		Raised footrope trawl		Gillnet exempted fishery: only gillnet gear, minimum 5” mesh. Limited to 50 gillnets
Possession Limit	**Red Hake**	Northern: 3,000 lb	Northern: 3,000 lb	Northern: 3,000 lb		Northern: 3,000 lb	Southern: <5.5” mesh: 600 lb ≥5.5” mesh using small-mesh selective trawls: 1,000 lb	Southern: <5.5” mesh: 600 lb ≥5.5” mesh using small-mesh selective trawls: 1,000 lb
	Whiting (Silver/ Offshore Hake)	7,500 lb	30,000 lb	<3” mesh: 15,000 lb ≥3” mesh: 30,000 lb		<3” mesh: 15,000 lb ≥3” mesh: 30,000 lb	<3” mesh: 15,000 lb ≥3” mesh: 40,000 lb	<3” mesh: 15,000 lb ≥3” mesh: 40,000 lb
Incidental Species allowed		Atlantic herring; Atlantic mackerel; Alewife; Butterfish; Squid	Atlantic herring; Atlantic mackerel; Butterfish; Squid; Longhorn sculpin; Spiny dogfish; Monkfish & monkfish parts; American lobster	Atlantic herring; Atlantic mackerel; Butterfish; Squid; Scup; Spiny dogfish		Atlantic herring; Atlantic mackerel; Butterfish; Squid; Scup; Spiny dogfish	Atlantic herring; Atlantic mackerel; Butterfish; Squid; Scup; Spiny dogfish	
LOA Required?		No	Yes	No		Yes	No	No

NOAA Fisheries: https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/silver-hake/exempted-fishing; Regulations: https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/section-648.80

Letters of Authorization

Letters of Authorization (LOAs) for Small-Mesh Exemption Areas

- Outline the terms and conditions for fishing in a particular exemption area: area, season, gear type, possession limits, bycatch limits
- LOAs required for Cultivator Shoal and Raised Footrope Trawl exemption areas; formerly required for SNE/Small Mesh 1 & 2/ Mid-Atlantic (requirement removed in 2000)

Fishing Year	Cultivator Shoal			Raised Footrope Trawl		
	# Permits	# Active Permits	# Trips	# Permits	# Active Permits	# Trips
2020	6	C	C	7	C	C
2021	4	4	68	5	4	43
2022	11	5	79	6	3	41
2023	9	5	51	8	5	39
2024	10	5	29	7	C	C
2025	3	C	C	5	C	C

Source: NOAA/GARFO. Retrieved 2/18/2026 by K. Winiarski
Confidential data is indicated by a "C".

LOA USES

- ***Enforcement:*** used during enforcement operations to determine compliance with regulations; provide clarity for vessel operators
- ***Observer Coverage:*** Not used to assign observer coverage
- ***Management:*** One initial objective of LOAs was to allow NMFS to identify vessels participating in the fishery → simplified monitoring; some data analysis applications
- ***AP Discussion:*** Use LOAs as a reference when needed, present for enforcement purposes.

Bycatch Allowances

BYCATCH LIMITS

- ***Small Mesh (<5.5 in) Prohibited*** by initial FMP (1985) to prevent bycatch of regulated species.
- ***Exemption Program Established*** that allows RA to exempt a fishery from minimum mesh size if bycatch of groundfish is less than 5%.
- ***Several whiting fishery exemptions*** have been approved in Gulf of Maine, Southern New England, and the Mid-Atlantic.
- ***Allowed bycatch species and limits*** vary between programs.
    - The GOM Grate Raised Footrope is the most restrictive.
    - The SNE exemption area allows possession of the most species.
    - Mid-Atlantic exemption area does not have bycatch limits.

Species	GOM Grate Raised Footrope Trawl	Cultivator Shoal	Small Mesh Areas 1 & 2	Raised Footrope Trawl (Cape Cod)	SNE*
Atlantic herring	x	x	x	x	x
Atlantic mackerel	x	x	x	x	x
Alewife	x				x
Butterfish	x	x	x	x	x
Loligo squid	x	x	x	x	x
Illex squid	x	x	x	x	x
Scup	x		x	x	x
Longhorn sculpin		x			x
Spiny dogfish		x	x	x	x
Monkfish		x			x
American lobster		x			x

The SNE Exemption Area also allows small-mesh vessels to possess the following additional species:

Swordfish	American shad	Bluefish	Shrimp	Blowfish
Spot	Hickory shad	Skate	Summer flounder	Tautog
Atlantic croaker	Alewife	Mullet	Weakfish	Cunner
Sea ravens	Four spot flounder	John Dory	Conger eel	Atlantic chub mackerel
Blueback herring	Tilefish	Ocean pout	Black sea bass	Sea robin

BYCATCH LIMITS

- ***Cultivator Shoal:*** Created by A4 with a 1% bycatch limit of regulated species based on experimental fishery data. Revised by A5, FW3, FW6, and FW9.
- ***Small Mesh Areas I and II:*** Created by FW 9 exemption supplement.
- ***Raised Footrope Trawl:*** Created by FW35. FW35 also prohibited possession of bottom-dwelling species, such as lobster and monkfish, to discourage vessels from rigging their gear improperly. Also applied to Small Mesh Areas I and II.
- ***FW37:*** Limited all GOM raised footrope trawl areas to possession of: Red hake, squid, butterfish, mackerel, dogfish, herring, and scup.

BYCATCH LIMITS

GOM Grate Raised Footrope: Created by FW38.

Incidental catch set the same as for the Cape Cod Bay raised footrope trawl, with one exception that possession of dogfish was prohibited.

FW38 prohibited the possession of monkfish, lobsters, and skates to ensure that the net is rigged correctly, such that the footrope is not in contact with the bottom, and thus much less likely to catch those species.

Possession of crabs, longhorn sculpin, sea raven, and dogfish was prohibited to reduce damage to whiting and to encourage fishing the net with the footrope off the bottom.

Whiting and Large-mesh Groundfish Catch Ratios

BOUNDARIES AND SEASONS: EXPLORATION OF SMS TO GFLM CATCHES

- PDT has begun exploring catch and survey data by ten-minute square
- CAMS data (2018-2025) showed little indication of elevated SMS catches outside the EA boundaries. Data may be insufficiently granular.
  - Average catch ratio for trip reported as one lat/lon pair on a trip
- Survey data insufficiently granular over time
- Observed haul data (2021-2025)
    - Large mesh trips occur adjacent to exemption areas and seasons
    - Catch ratio as an indicator of potential small-mesh multispecies to groundfish catches
    - Species and size selectivity differences

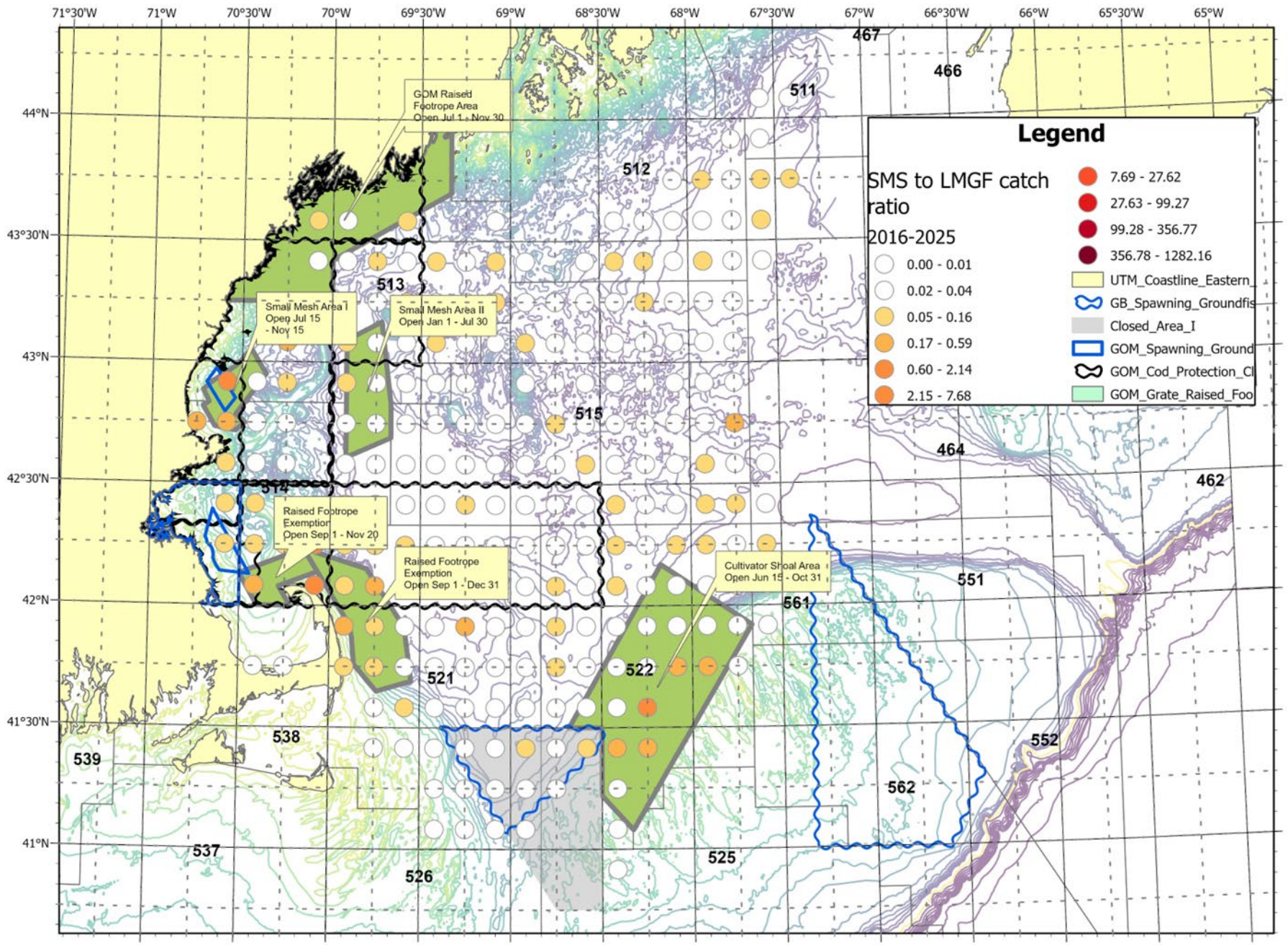
BOUNDARIES AND SEASONS: EXPLORATION OF SMS TO GFLM CATCHES

- Observed haul data (2021-2025) – more promising.
  - Hotspots for trips using large mesh can be identified in time and space
  - Are there months and places where the SMS catch is relatively high, compared with large-mesh groundfish catch?
  - Considerations
    - Threshold? Minimum number of observed hauls/trips?
    - Consistency? Catch variation?
    - Selectivity? Different threshold for large vs. small mesh?

AP & PDT DISCUSSION

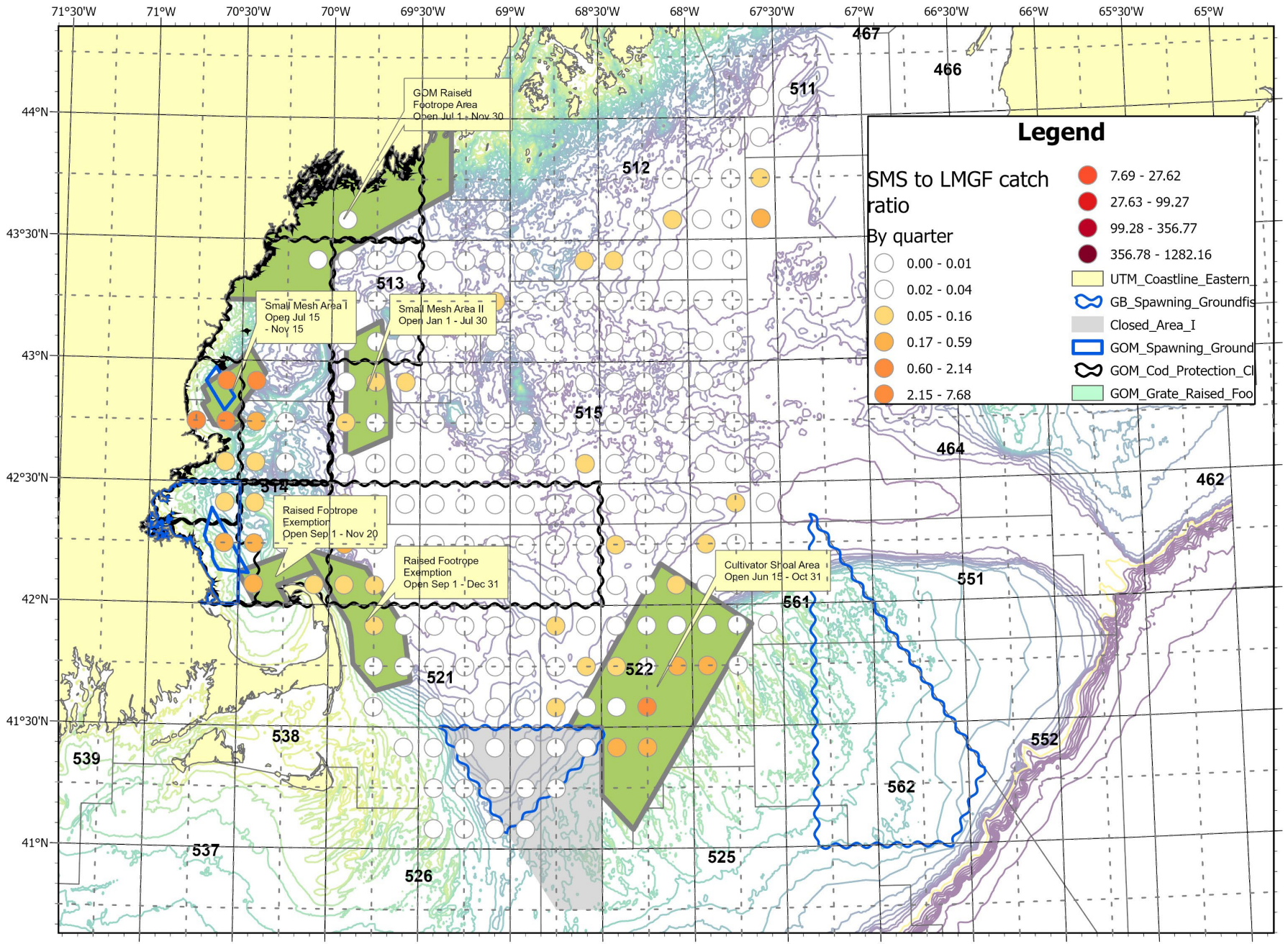
- Focus analysis on expanding existing exemption areas rather than creating new areas
- Align with updated management areas (ex. Small-Mesh Area II western boundary and WGOM closed area)
- Interest in southern portion of Cultivator Shoal (former Closed Area I cutout), Small-Mesh Area II
    - Small-Mesh Area I more challenging – lobster gear, hard bottom, groundfish species

Small-mesh multispecies to large-mesh groundfish catch, 2016-2025 by large mesh trawls on observed trips



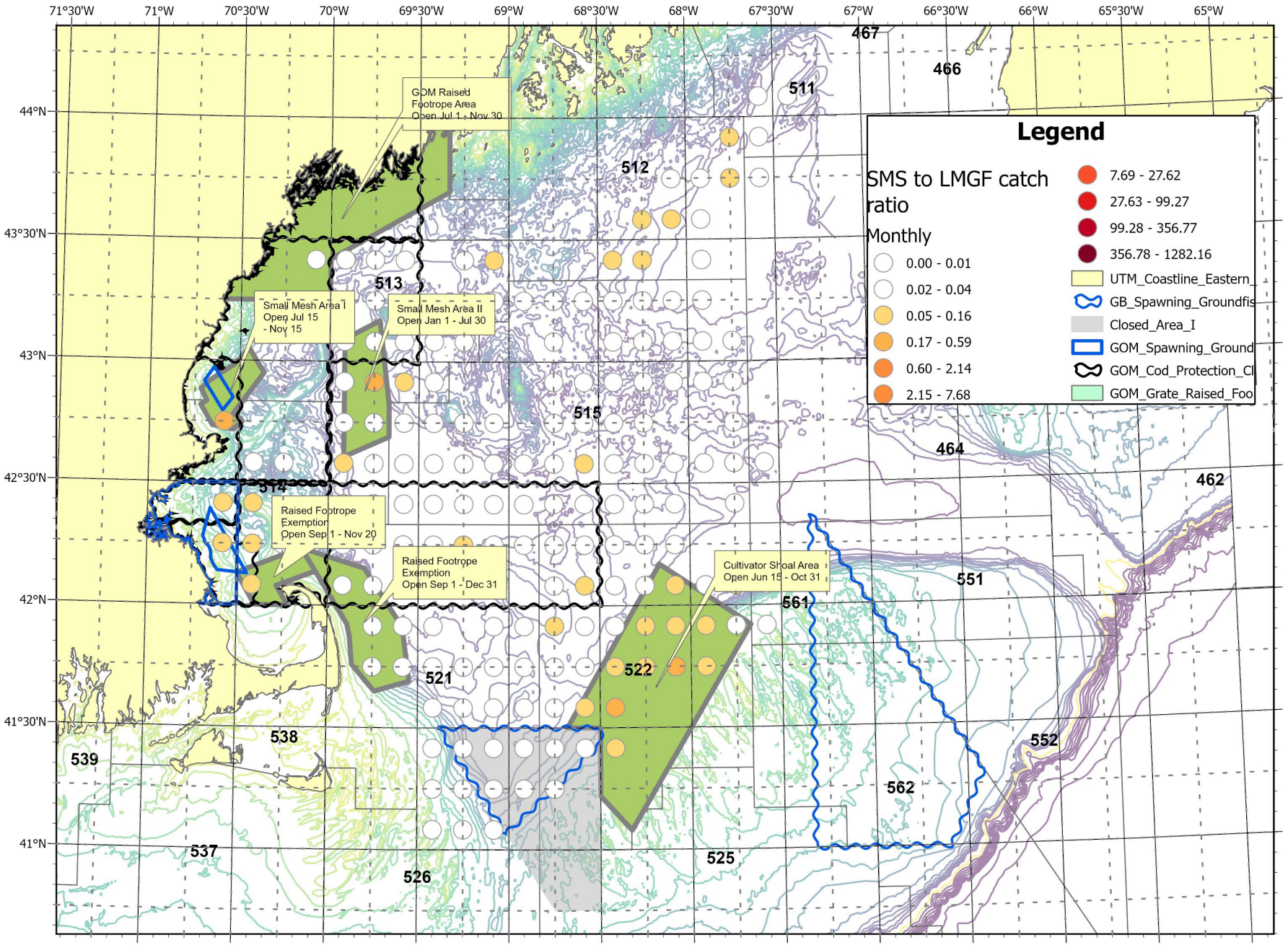
New England Management

Quarter 3: Small-mesh multispecies to large-mesh groundfish catch, 2016-2025 by large mesh trawls on observed trips



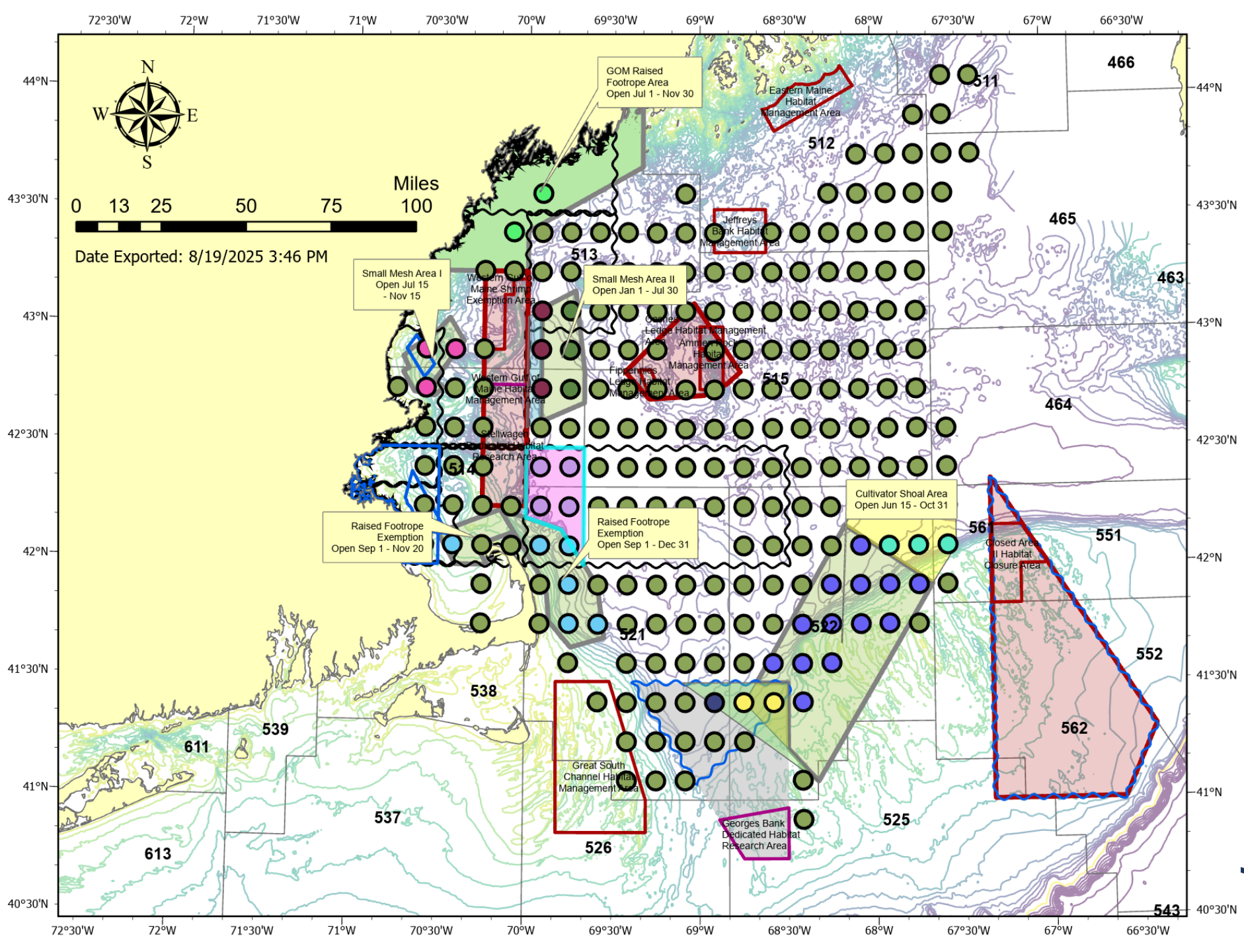
New England Management

September: Small-mesh multispecies to large-mesh groundfish catch, 2016-2025 by large mesh trawls on observed trips



New England Management

Data assignment to exemption areas and alternatives



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Average catch ratio and variance by area & month

Green = existing seasons; purple=ratio > average; orange = potential alternatives

GEAR_TYPE	(All)
MESH_GROUP	> 5.5 in

			MONTH											
Exemption area	Alternative	Values	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Grand Total
Cultivator Shoal Area	NULL	SMS_GF_CATCH_RATIO.	0.062	0.059	0.020	0.072	0.118	0.097	0.247	0.084	0.114	0.164	0.097	0.057	0.098
		Variance	0.002	0.001	0.001	0.005	0.011	0.004	0.118	0.008	0.005	0.043	0.015	0.003	0.019
GOM Raised Footrope Are	NULL	SMS_GF_CATCH_RATIO.							0.037	0.027	0.003	0.036	0.078		0.035
		Variance								0.000					0.001
Raised Footrope Exemptic	NULL	SMS_GF_CATCH_RATIO.	0.058	0.106	0.170	0.257	0.113	0.106	0.074	0.050	0.033	0.080	0.190	0.102	0.107
		Variance	0.002	0.008	0.017	0.016	0.003	0.002	0.006	0.001	0.002	0.008	0.023	0.009	0.010
Small Mesh Area I	NULL	SMS_GF_CATCH_RATIO.		0.006	0.003	0.003		0.102	1.887	34.672	2.798	0.604	0.252	1.234	5.612
		Variance		0.000	0.000	0.000		0.004	3.360	2263.977	18.493	0.589	0.054	0.862	413.599
Small Mesh Area II	NULL	SMS_GF_CATCH_RATIO.	0.040	0.029	0.025	0.035	0.055	0.044	0.028	0.014	0.071	0.048	0.038	0.093	0.044
		Variance	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.006	0.001	0.001	0.008	0.002
NULL	CSA cut out	SMS_GF_CATCH_RATIO.					0.066	0.116	0.029	0.015	0.018	0.008			0.045
		Variance					0.000	0.023	0.002	0.000	0.000	0.000			0.006
	SW of CSA.	SMS_GF_CATCH_RATIO.					0.063	0.059	0.006	0.002	0.002	0.000	0.011	0.021	0.030
		Variance					0.004	0.000	0.000		0.000				0.002
	NE of CSA.	SMS_GF_CATCH_RATIO.	0.093	0.065	0.051	0.146	0.140	0.086	0.131	0.048	0.056	0.075	0.127	0.081	0.092
		Variance	0.012	0.008	0.003	0.029	0.003	0.003	0.007	0.002	0.005	0.007	0.009	0.004	0.009
	W of SMA2	SMS_GF_CATCH_RATIO.	0.085	0.034	0.035	0.051	0.053	0.053	0.021	0.011	0.029	0.033	0.026	0.071	0.043
		Variance	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.002	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.002	0.001
	N of RFA2	SMS_GF_CATCH_RATIO.	0.096	0.077	0.042	0.053	0.084	0.107	0.032	0.064	0.037	0.035	0.048	0.042	0.059
		Variance	0.005	0.001	0.001	0.002	0.002	0.003	0.000	0.004	0.001	0.002	0.000	0.002	0.002
	NULL	SMS_GF_CATCH_RATIO.	0.031	0.045	0.036	0.041	0.043	0.037	0.027	0.026	0.023	0.029	0.051	0.043	0.035
		Variance	0.001	0.003	0.006	0.002	0.004	0.002	0.002	0.004	0.001	0.001	0.010	0.005	0.003
Total SMS_GF_CATCH_RATIO.			**0.044**	**0.049**	**0.038**	**0.052**	**0.055**	**0.049**	**0.087**	**0.744**	**0.067**	**0.044**	**0.061**	**0.064**	**0.126**
Total Variance			**0.002**	**0.003**	**0.005**	**0.005**	**0.005**	**0.003**	**0.157**	**61.707**	**0.267**	**0.012**	**0.011**	**0.025**	**6.384**

Possible Management Measures for 2026 and Future Actions

Specifications	Framework adjustment	Amendment
Status determination criteria and thresholds	Overfishing definitions and mortality targets (P* vs Z-score)	Limited access
OFL, ABC, ACL, and TAL specifications	Quotas, seasonal adjustments, participation requirements, & additions/deletions for experimental or exempted fisheries	Harvest control rules
Possession limits	Stock boundaries	
In-season possession limit triggers (TAL trigger)	Catch limit allocations, including seasonal and area limits	
	Biological reference points, including reference time series	
	SBRM provisions	
	Whiting DAS effort reduction	
	Any other existing FMP measures	

PURPOSE OF MEETING

- Identify and recommend measures for the 2026 management action or potential 2027 management priorities
  - 2027 – 2031 catch specifications
    - Assessment data update, risk policy factor scoring
  - Red hake possession limit adjustments
  - Exemption area adjustments
    - Standardization of bycatch allowances
    - Letter of Authorization requirements
    - Exemption area seasons
    - Exemption area boundaries

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS OR MOTIONS

- *The Whiting Committee recommends to the Council that the 2026 small mesh whiting action include measures that would 1) set specifications for up to five years, 2027-2031 2) consider application of risk policy in catch setting process 3) consider a modification to red hake possession limit and AM trigger and 4) make various adjustments to Exemption Areas (boundaries, seasons, and consistency with bycatch thresholds) based upon analysis of large mesh-fishery catch ratios and other data*.
- Measures to be considered are specifications that are adjusted for risk factors that the Council has identified, adjusting the northern red hake possession limit from 3,000 to 5,000 lbs due to improved resource conditions, adjusting the southern red hake possession limit 600 to 1,000 lbs, adjusting the monkfish and lobster allowances for exemption area trips to be consistent with existing limits in other fisheries, consideration of exemption area expansion to the SW of the Cultivator Shoals Area and to the W of Small-Mesh Area II, and an extension of the raised footrope season to include January and February.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS OR MOTIONS

Other Business