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New England Fishery Management Council

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Daniel Salerno, *Chair* | Cate O'Keefe, PhD, *Executive Director*

MEETING SUMMARY

Atlantic Herring Advisory Panel

via Webinar

March 23, 2026

The Atlantic Herring Advisory Panel (AP) met on March 23, 2026, via webinar to discuss: the Council's priorities for Atlantic herring; a 2026 action to include Atlantic herring specifications for 2027-2031, river herring and shad management measures, and other measures; make recommendations to the Atlantic Herring Committee as appropriate; and other business as necessary.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Meghan Lapp (Herring AP Chair), Zack Klyver (AP Vice Chair), Patrick Feeney*, Jeff Kaelin, Donald Lyons, Jaclyn Lunaas, David Mussina, Gerry O'Neill, Suzannah Raber, Dr. Tammy Silva, Mary Beth Tooley, and William Vanderhoop (AP members present); Peter Whelan (Herring Committee Chair); Dr. Jamie Cournane (Herring FMP Coordinator), Emily Bodell, and Dr. Cate O'Keefe (NEFMC Staff); Carrie Nordeen, Ashley Trudeau (NMFS staff); Emilie Franke (ASMFC staff). In addition, about 22 members of the public attended.

**Patrick Feeney was in attendance and listening-in but was unable to participate due to technical difficulties.*

KEY OUTCOMES:

- The AP reviewed the Council's Advisory Panel policies.
- The AP received an overview of the Council's 2026 priorities for Atlantic herring, and discussed the 2026 action, providing feedback on the work so far and possible paths forward.

The Herring AP and Committee Chairs opened the meeting at 3:00 pm with a round of introductions for the AP. There were no changes to the agenda.

AGENDA ITEM #1: OPENING REMARKS, MEETING NORMS AND POLICIES

Council staff reviewed the Council's Advisory Panel policies for the 2026-2028 term. There were no questions or comments from the AP.

AGENDA ITEM #2: MANAGEMENT UPDATES

GARFO staff provided a management update. On December 11, 2025, NMFS published a final rule setting the 2025 Atlantic herring specifications and projecting specifications for 2026 and 2027, including river herring and shad catch caps. This action also revised the Atlantic herring

rebuilding date from 2028 to 2031. On December 23, 2025, a final rule was published setting the 2026 specifications. All specifications are consistent with the Council's recommendations. On January 9th, 2026, a 2,000 lb possession limit was implemented in Area 1B for the remainder of the year. Council staff also briefly reviewed the Atlantic herring quota monitoring data to date, as well as the river herring and shad, Georges Bank haddock, and Gulf of Maine haddock catch caps.

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) staff also provided an update. The Atlantic Herring Management Board approved an Area 1A seasonal distribution of quota of 72.8% for Season 1 and 27.2% for Season 2, the same distribution as the past several years. The Board will meet in late April to discuss effort controls for Season 1 in Area 1A.

AGENDA ITEM #3: OVERVIEW OF 2026 COUNCIL PRIORITIES FOR ATLANTIC HERRING (DR. COURNANE, NEFMC)

Council staff reviewed the Council's 2026 priorities for Atlantic herring: a 2026 management action including 2027-2031 specifications, river herring and shad measures, and other management measures; the management track stock assessment; developing 2027 Council priorities; and ongoing coordination with the Mid-Atlantic Council and ASMFC on herring, mackerel, and river herring/shad issues. An Advisor asked some questions about the timing and content of the 2026 management action, which Council staff answered later in the presentation.

AGENDA ITEM #4: UPDATE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A 2026 MANAGEMENT ACTION (DR. COURNANE, NEFMC)

Council staff provided an overview of the 2026 management action, including a draft outline, timeline, and an update on river herring and shad tasking to the PDT. Council staff also summarized discussion from the PDT regarding the list of specifications items and asked the Advisory Panel for some feedback.

An Advisor asked whether Council staff plans to bring PDT analyses to the Council in April. Council staff explained that the presentation would be similar to that received by the AP today and would not include any PDT analyses. The Advisor stated that the timeline for developing specifications packages is very tight, and they felt it was unlikely that the specifications would be implemented January 1st even if the Council takes final action in September. Council staff stated that a new stock assessment model will be used this year to develop specifications and there are currently 2027 specifications in place. Staff will have a better idea of possible adjustments to the timeline in June, but the PDT is currently working under the Council's September final action timeline. The Advisor noted that there is significant economic stress on the fishery – their vessels did not fish last year and are not currently fishing. They understood the interest in various management measures but felt that it was important to prioritize using new information from the stock assessment to update the 2027 specifications.

An Advisor stated that management in the Gulf of Maine has been successful and asked about implementing similar measures in southern New England. Council staff noted that the PDT is planning to look at overlaps between river herring and shad and the Atlantic herring fishery in Areas 2 and 3. The AP Chair asked how the MAFMC's Inflation Reduction Act project (modeling river herring presence for avoidance) may be incorporated into analysis, if at all,

noting that the model does not seem to be very accurate. New England Council staff are on the oversight team for the project, but the IRA project and PDT work are two separate efforts. The PDT is looking to model presence and abundance in a species distribution model, taking a slightly different approach from the IRA project work. The Chair asked about the time series and type of data used for the PDT work, and Council staff explained that the model will use survey and fishery dependent data through 2024 but could be updated through 2025 in the future. Another Advisor asked whether the model incorporated river herring tagging data, noting that the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary started to acquire some acoustic telemetry data that may be relevant. An Advisor suggested including data prior to 2019, noting that if the model only included recent data during periods of low fishing effort, it would not be representative. The AP Chair also suggested including data from before and after river herring and shad catch caps were implemented in 2014 to identify any impacts of the caps.

The AP offered some comments regarding US at-sea processing, which the PDT flagged as a possible item to remove from the specifications list given it has not been set above zero in a number of years. An Advisor felt that given the current status of the fishery and the reduction of shoreside infrastructure, there may not be much interest in at-sea processing, but asked if it required much staff time, pointing to the PDT discussion about research set-aside and the logistics around removing and re-instituting a specification item. Council staff noted that while it does not take much staff time to set specifications to zero, this could be an opportunity to refine and clarify the regulations. Another Advisor suggested leaving the item on the list and wondered if it was connected to the allocation language in the Magnuson-Stevens Act. They also had concerns about potentially setting 5-year specifications. Regarding the research set-aside program, there is not currently a large fishery, and even when quotas were high it was expensive to conduct research. With so few people left in the fishery, there are other things to address. Another Advisor supported leaving the at-sea processing specification for now.

An Advisor followed up on setting 5-year specifications. Council staff explained that PDTs and the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) were asked to develop 5 years of recommendations in anticipation of the Council's omnibus management flexibility amendment being approved, though the Council can opt to set specifications for 1 to 5 years. This is intended to increase flexibility in the process and adapt to changing resources. The Advisor felt that 5 years was a long time to set specifications given the current status of the fishery. Another Advisor suggested leaving the border transfer specification on the list as it may be of interest to Maine seiners if the sardine market comes back and it is more economical to ship via boats. They were hesitant to remove any opportunities for the herring fishery, and supported leaving the specifications list unchanged, noting that it may be hard to re-establish removed specifications. They also recommended that herring specifications continue to be set on a 3-year cycle, particularly as the stock rebuilds. An Advisor presented a motion for consideration.

1. MOTION: MUSSINA/VANDERHOOP

To recommend to the Committee to task the Herring Plan Development Team following the River Herring Avoidance Program Forecast introduced at their recent meeting (March 2, 2026) to make spatial-temporal recommendations for midwater trawling restrictions for the southern New England coastal waters during the winter and early spring months.

Rationale: The Hasselman study (2016) found that the highest proportion of marine bycatch originated from the most depressed genetic stocks, which included southern New England for alewife herring. The study by Reid (2023) found that, within sampled bycatch events, the highest proportion of alewife taken were from Block Island (34%) during the winter months. The River Herring Avoidance Forecast uses historical data to recommend midwater trawling restrictions during the southern New England winter months.

Discussion on the Motion: Council staff clarified that the task in the motion is largely covered by existing PDT tasking from the Council. The maker of the motion offered additional context, noting that the data used to inform the River Herring Avoidance Program model is a great tool to inform possible spatial-temporal restrictions. Advisors voiced their opposition to the motion. One Advisor stated that the work will be completed by the PDT under existing tasking and did not want to make a recommendation to rely on the model. Other Advisors felt that the motion presupposes an outcome and singles out a specific gear type. Another Advisor supported using recent data to make recommendations but was not familiar with the tool and wanted to review the PDT analysis before making a decision. An Advisor was not in support because there has been very little fishing activity to provide feedback on the accuracy of the model. The maker of the motion withdrew the motion. Council staff noted that the modeling work is preliminary, and that they would share AP feedback with Mid-Atlantic Council staff.

MOTION #1 WAS WITHDRAWN BY THE MAKER, WITH NO OBJECTION BY SECONDER.

2. MOTION: MUSSINA/VANDERHOOP

The river herring bycatch should be an established percentage of the Atlantic Herring allowable catch. The river herring bycatch was first established by the previous year's Atlantic herring catch. That percentage should establish our river herring bycatch.

Rationale: As the Atlantic herring population has declined and fewer Atlantic herring are permitted to be caught, the river herring bycatch proportionately has risen sharply. Our agenda is to protect both species, Atlantic and river herring. The river herring bycatch should be a percentage of the allowable Atlantic herring catch.

Discussion on the Motion: An Advisor was not supportive of the motion and felt that it was deciding an outcome before data and analyses were available to support recommendations. Other Advisors agreed, noting that there is not enough information to put the motion forward at this time, and that it is premature. Another Advisor felt that the motion was presenting an option for discussion and is far from being implemented. Council staff stated that this would also likely be included under the existing tasking, which will be presented at future meetings. The Chair and Council staff suggested some edits to the motion language to clarify intent.

2a. MOTION AS FRIENDLY AMENDED: MUSSINA/VANDERHOOP

To recommend to the Committee that an option be developed for the river herring and shad catch caps that is based on an established percentage of the Atlantic Herring allowable catch.

Discussion on the Motion: An Advisor suggested that the PDT present percentage of bycatch in the Atlantic herring fishery, stating that it is very low. Another Advisor still opposed the motion since it presupposes information. Another Advisor did not support the motion because they felt the work was already tasked to the PDT and they did not want to prioritize one option over the other at this point.

Roll-Call Vote:

Yes: Klyver, Mussina, Vanderhoop

No: Kaelin, Lunaas, Lyons, O’Neill, Raber, Silva, Tooley

Abstain: None.

MOTION #2a FAILED 3/7/0.

AGENDA ITEM #5: OTHER BUSINESS (LAPP)

An Advisor asked for an update on the Atlantic herring rebuilding target, flagging this as a possible topic for a future meeting. Council staff noted that the December 2025 final rule included updated projections and a new rebuilding date of 2031. Updated projections will be provided over the summer prior to the SSC meeting to recommend specifications. Another Advisor shared that mackerel fishery participants have been contacted about gathering data and possible acoustic work, and they asked if the project would be expanded to herring. The Chair stated that the project only applied to mackerel.

The Committee and AP meeting adjourned at approximately 5:00 p.m.