



New England Fishery Management Council

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

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 18, 2026
TO: Executive Committee
FROM: Executive Director, Cate O’Keefe
SUBJECT: Executive Order 14276 – Additional Comments

BACKGROUND

NOAA Fisheries tasked the Council with providing recommendations on activities to meet [Executive Order \(EO\) 14276](#), *Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness* by September 30, 2025. At their September 2025 meeting, the Council finalized a [workplan](#) with recommended actions to “reduce regulatory burdens” and “increase production in domestic fisheries.” Due to the federal government shutdown in fall 2025, NOAA extended the public comment period for EO 14276 through December 15, 2025. NOAA provided the list of comments that were received after the Council’s workplan was finalized and requested that by April 30, 2026, the Council review the public comments and consider whether updates to the original work plan are needed. This memo and appendices provide information to support the Executive Committee’s recommendations for any revisions to the previously submitted workplan.

SUMMARY OF UPDATED COMMENTS

NOAA Fisheries provided a high-level overview of comments received in the extended public comment period (Appendix 1) and a summary of comments specific to each Council region. Council staff reviewed the comments for New England and categorized the comments by topic to determine if there were new or expanded suggestions that should be considered in an updated workplan (Appendix 2).

There were 34 comments given specifically to the New England Council, including 12 comments that referred to possible Council actions and 22 comments that referred to ongoing activities or topics outside of direct Council purview. The comments related to Council actions included scallop fishery access to the Northern Edge, industry-funded monitoring provisions, and revisions to the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area. Other comments were generally focused on fishery-dependent data and cooperative research, regulation reform, and use of technology.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Based on review of the additional public comments, Council discussions and decisions for 2026 work priorities, and ongoing regional activities, the Executive Director does not recommend changes to the Council’s September 30, 2025 identified activities and workplan for EO 14276.

This recommendation considers the following:

- Scallop fishery access to the Northern Edge:
 - The Council had a robust discussion about this topic at the December 2025 Council meeting under the Priority Setting agenda topic and did not recommend initiating action at this time.
- Rescinding Industry-Funded Monitoring:
 - The Council is currently conducting a review of Amendment 23 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan, including a range of performance metrics and coverage targets, which is expected to be reviewed by the Council in June 2026.
 - After the review is completed, the Council may consider changes to existing monitoring measures through the priority-setting process for future years. Future changes, if developed, may align with objectives of EO 14276.
- Modify the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area:
 - The Council included a work priority for 2026, “Evaluation of the Great South Channel Habitat management Area surfclam exemption areas.”
 - The Executive Committee recommended adding this priority noting high stakeholder interest in the topic. They referenced completion in March 2026 of multi-year research conducted under an EFP. Council staff have been actively following the research and have identified potential analysis to evaluate the existing management measures. The Committee emphasized that the 2026 priority would focus on an evaluation of existing and emerging information.
 - After the evaluation is completed, the Council may consider changes to existing habitat management measures through the priority-setting process for future years. Future changes, if developed, may align with objectives of EO 14276.
- Other topics:
 - Use of fishery-dependent data and cooperative research
 - The Council has continually supported the use of fishery-dependent data in management and science products, including stock assessments.
 - The Council’s updated response to NOAA will emphasize continued support for these topics.
 - Regulation reform
 - The Council’s workplan for EO 14276 includes implementation of the Omnibus Management Flexibility Amendment, evaluation of modifications to vessel baseline restrictions, and revisions to fishery management plans to minimize redundancy.
 - Use of technology
 - The Council is exploring the use of AI and automation, as well as new software to enhance user accessibility and decision-making processes. As these initiatives progress, the Council will consider alignment with EO 14276.

NEXT STEPS

The Executive Committee is requested to recommend maintaining or revising the Council’s September 30, 2025 [EO 14276 workplan](#). The Council will consider the Executive Committee’s recommendation at the April 2026 Council meeting and provide guidance for the Council’s response to NOAA Fisheries by April 30, 2026.

Appendix 1: NOAA Fisheries' Organization Summary of Public Comments on Seafood EO 14276 for Regional Fishery Management Councils

The purpose of this summary is to assist Regional Fishery Management Councils (Councils) in reviewing the public comments received on the Seafood EO 14276 Federal Register Notice, and subsequent updates to their work plans, **which are due by April 30, 2026**. The Office of Sustainable Fisheries sought to streamline the Council review process by identifying comments with specific, actionable recommendations relevant to Council responsibilities. The intent was to emphasize those individual comments most relevant to Council authority and existing work plans. These comments were then assigned to the appropriate Council(s), solely based on location information provided by the commenter.

While this sorting process required some interpretation and inference from individual comment letters, any risk of missing actionable recommendations is mitigated by the overlapping public solicitations inherent in the Council process itself. This effort is not meant to be exclusionary, but rather to streamline the review of a significant volume of public comments. Importantly, the full list of public comments remain available for full Council review and consideration. However, please be aware that we are unable to share individual comment letters due to the release of personally identifying information (PII).

Summary of Organized Comments

The first tab of the attached spreadsheet includes a list of all the public comments submitted to the agency on the Federal Register Notice. From the total submissions, **156 unique comments** were identified as directly relevant to specific Council work plans and have been organized by Council in the second tab of the attached spreadsheet. An additional **358 comments** focused primarily on Marine Protected Areas (e.g., Marine National Monuments and Sanctuaries) have been grouped in the third tab, given the Councils' unique consultative role regarding fishing regulations in these areas.

The comments regarding MPAs covered a range of perspectives. A significant number of commenters expressed a desire to maintain existing fishing prohibitions, focusing on long-term ecological health and sustainability concerns. Other commenters advocated for allowing fishing within monuments or sanctuaries or reducing current restrictions. Additionally, some commenters suggested that the development and implementation of regulations in these areas should more closely integrate fishing industry perspectives.

To further assist the Councils, we have summarized other comment themes that were broad in scope (e.g., national policy, NOAA's science enterprise, aquaculture) or directed at other federal agencies. While these are provided here for general awareness, the specific comments

generally fall outside the immediate scope of Council responsibilities and work plan updates:

- **International Trade, Imports & Tariffs:** Comments urging the Administration to address trade imbalances through tariffs, stricter health and safety inspections for imported seafood, and stronger enforcement against illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Many commenters specifically requested bans on seafood from nations with perceived lower environmental or labor standards to ensure fair competition.
- **Federal Marketing, Finance & Agriculture Parity:** Requests for the establishment of National Seafood Marketing and "agricultural parity" regarding federal financial support. Specific suggestions included loan forgiveness or low-interest refinancing options, crop insurance-style protections for fisheries, and robust national marketing campaigns to promote domestic seafood consumption.
- **Protected Species Mandates (ESA & MMPA):** Feedback focused on the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), calling for statutory amendments to modernize these acts. Comments often highlighted the need for faster permitting timelines, revised national policy guidance, and better alignment between protected species mandates and sustainable fisheries management goals.
- **Labor, Workforce & Education:** Concerns regarding the aging commercial fishing workforce and immediate crew shortages. Commenters advocated for visa reform (specifically regarding H-2B workers), federal support for workforce development and apprenticeship programs, and increased public outreach to attract new entrants to the industry.
- **General Support/Opposition & National Policy:** Broad, high-level input either supporting the EO's goal of deregulation to boost competitiveness or opposing it in support of general conservation and long-term sustainability. This category also includes calls for agency-wide data modernization, universal electronic monitoring standards, and general support for expanding aquaculture infrastructure.

Appendix 2: New England Fishery Management Council Comments

Affiliation	Fishery / Focus	Topic	Summary
New Bedford Port Authority	Groundfish / scallop	Northern Edge access	Regulatory reform; scallop access N Edge GB; ensure monument science; real-time data; marketing; support aquaculture; relocate GARFO.
Fisheries Survival Fund	Scallops	Northern Edge access	Open N Edge Georges Bank for scallops (rotational access); issue NOFO for 2026 Scallop Research Set-Aside.
Commercial fisherman	Scallop	Northern Edge access	Support opening N Edge GB; opposes permit stacking/leasing (disadvantages single-vessel owners, consolidation).
Sustainable Scallop Fund	Scallop	Northern Edge access	Expedited rulemaking for permit stacking; controlled access to N Edge HAPC.
Commercial fisherman	Scallop	Northern Edge access	Support petition for rotational access program for N Edge of Georges Bank.
Commercial fisherman	Scallop	Northern Edge access	Open N Edge/W side channel; use geo-fencing; permit stacking; assign quota to active permits only; no leasing.
Commercial fisherman	Scallop	Northern Edge access	Support reopening N Edge GB; oppose permit stacking/leasing (consolidation/cost concerns); focus on high grading.
Seafreeze Ltz	Multiple	Industry-Funded Monitoring	Eliminate industry-funded monitoring; moratorium on offshore wind; return SK funding; supports cooperative research.
NE Seafood Coalition	Groundfish	Industry-Funded Monitoring	Rescind industry-funded monitoring; reform US/Can biomass apportionment; reform closures; improve stock assessments; USDA purchasing.
NE Seafood Coalition	Groundfish	Industry-Funded Monitoring	Rescind industry-funded monitoring; reconsider scale in assessments; address NEFMC letter to NEFSC; reform US/Can sharing.
American Mussel Harvesters	Clam / Mussels	Great South Channel open	Rescind Great South Channel HMA to restore mussel/clam fisheries; establish clear/affordable aquaculture permit areas.
Nantucket Sound Seafood	Surfclam	Great South Channel open	Reopen Great South Channel HMA (economic impact, displacement, lower yield in state waters).
Stellwagen Bank Charter	Recreational	FDD/Coop Research	Prioritize science/monitoring; cooperative research; use local knowledge; electronic technology; bioeconomic models.
Maine DMR	Vessel baseline / Groundfish	FDD/Coop Research	Prioritize cooperative research; fishery-dependent data; evaluate vessel baseline restrictions; on-time specs; guidance on EU IUU regs.
NE Sector 12	Groundfish	FDD/Coop Research	Incorporate fishery-dependent info in assessments; conduct cost-benefit analysis of regs; expand USDA Section 32 purchasing.
Cape Cod Fish Alliance	Multiple	FDD/Coop Research	Modernize science (coop research/tech); real-time data systems; protect working waterfronts; strengthen domestic markets/traceability.
Young Fishermans Alliance	General	FDD/Coop Research	Allow direct sales permit; use industry data in assessments; infrastructure grants; national marketing; entry-level subsidies; retention rules.
Commercial fisherman	Groundfish	FDD/Coop Research	Use EM/observers on every trip; use CPUE for assessments; measure mesh on extension; notes survey/model inaccuracies.
GMRI	Multiple	FDD/Coop Research	Improve data (coop research/tech); improve management (incentivize EM, risk tolerance for EFPs); promote seafood (USDA).
Maine Lobstering Union	Lobster	Regulation reform	Modernize regs; strengthen trade policy; re-address country of origin labeling (processing loop); rectify unfair competition.
Boat Captain	Scallop	Regulation reform	Allow reg revisions as needed (not just annual); increase Bluefin share; include fishermen in scallop decisions; real-time app.
New Hampshire Comm Fish	Multiple	Regulation reform	MSA reform for adaptive management; increase cooperation; eliminate outdated regs; simplify data; ensure small boat voice.
US Representative	Multiple	Regulation reform	Equalize reg burdens with Canada (lobster); address Canadian subsidies/advantages; industry-led modeling; address lack of trust.
CLF	Multiple	Regulation reform	Adhere to MSA/rebuilding; oppose reg rollbacks; maintain habitat protections (Canyons/HMA); strengthen science/data; protect mammals.
Commercial fisherman	Scallop	Regulation reform	Revise federal/state rule conflicts; concerns on RSA funds; make rules with fishermen; simplify EFPs.
Commercial fisherman	Groundfish	Regulation reform	Increase small vessel size limit (40ft); allow DAS opt-in for dayboats; allow permit separation; cellular tracking; community quota program.
New England Aquarium	Multiple	Regulation reform	Maintain robust regs/science; address Shark Sales Elimination Act issues; support aquaculture framework; opposes opening Monuments.
NSPIRE / NERACOOS	General	Technical tools	Use NSPIRE for bait-to-plate innovation; requests role in achieving EO goals.
Commercial fisherman	Lobster	Technical tools	Use mobile apps for logs; integrate VMS/EM/sales data; shorten feedback loops; co-design surveys; transferability for ME lobster licenses.
Atl Offshore Lobsterman Assoc	Lobster	Technical tools	Expand outreach on whale entanglement; test alternative solutions (disentanglement training, GPS buoys, line cutters).
Commercial fisherman	General	Remove closed areas	Remove closed areas/EFH (quota management sufficient); stop imports; build lighthouse on Georges Shoal to move Hague line.
NAMA	Catch shares	Reform catch shares	Reform catch shares (owner-on-board); stop finfish aquaculture; rigorous import inspections (destroy tainted product).
Wild Fish LLC	General	General	100% quota harvest; rollover unused quota; subsidize inputs not outputs; infrastructure grants; seal management; simplify permits.
NE Fishermen's Stewardship	Multiple	General	American seafood brand; relief from wind/trade; oppose ropeless mandates; oppose scallop stacking; revise herring/menhaden/groundfish.