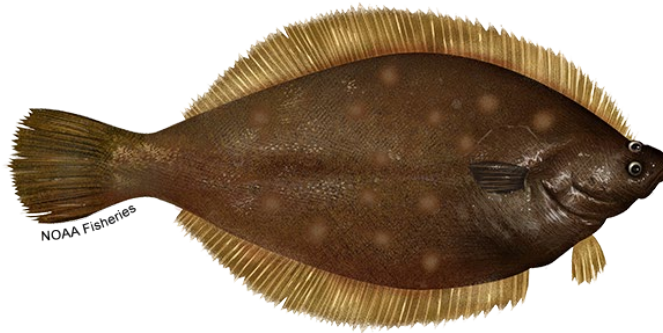


Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan

DRAFT Framework Adjustment 72

Including an Environmental Assessment,
Regulatory Flexibility Analysis, and
Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation



Framework Discussion Document

Committee Version

November 2025

Prepared by the
New England Fishery Management Council
In consultation with the
National Marine Fisheries Service and
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council



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NOAA Fisheries [<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/yellowtail-flounder>]



FRAMEWORK ADJUSTMENT 72
TO THE NORTHEAST MULTISPECIES FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Proposed Action: Propose specifications for groundfish stocks for fishing years 2026-2030.

Responsible Agencies: New England Fishery Management Council
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Abstract: The New England Fishery Management Council, in consultation with NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service, has prepared Framework Adjustment 72 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan, which includes a final environmental assessment that presents the range of alternatives to achieve the goals and objectives of the action. The proposed action focuses on setting specifications for certain groundfish stocks. The document describes the affected environment and valued ecosystem components and analyzes the impacts of the alternatives on both. It addresses the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the Regulatory Flexibility Act, and other applicable laws.

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To be completed later as Council develops this action.

3.0 BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

3.1 BACKGROUND

The Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery Management Plan (FMP) specifies the management measures for thirteen groundfish species, both target (cod, haddock, yellowtail flounder, pollock, American plaice, witch flounder, white hake, winter flounder, redfish and Atlantic halibut) and non-target (windowpane flounder, ocean pout, and Atlantic wolffish) species off the New England and Mid-Atlantic coasts. Some of these species (cod, haddock, yellowtail flounder, winter flounder, and windowpane flounder) are further sub-divided into individual stocks that are attributed to different geographic areas. Two stocks, Georges Bank (GB) cod and GB haddock, also have management units as a result of the U.S.-Canadian Transboundary Resource Sharing Agreement. The FMP therefore consists of 20 stocks and 2 management units. Commercial and recreational fisheries catch these species.

The New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC or Council) makes proposals, through various management actions, to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for the management of the fishery. As such, the FMP has been updated through a series of amendments and framework adjustments. Amendment 16, which became effective in 2010, adopted a broad suite of management measures to achieve the fishing mortality targets necessary to rebuild overfished stocks and meet other requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). Amendment 16 greatly expanded the sector management program and adopted a process for setting annual catch limits (ACLs) that requires catch levels to be set in biennial specifications packages. Amendment 17, effective in 2011, allows for NOAA-sponsored state-operated permit banks to function within the structure of A16. Amendment 18, effective in 2017, addresses fleet diversity and accumulation limits. Numerous framework adjustments have updated the measures in Amendment 16. Amendment 23, effective December 2022/January 2023, addressed improvements to monitoring in the commercial groundfish fishery. Amendment 25, which the Council approved in September 2025 for resubmission to NMFS, will revise the FMP to incorporate four stocks of Atlantic cod, based on the 2023 Atlantic Cod Research Track Stock Assessment.

Amendment 16 made major changes to the FMP. The management action adopted a system of ACLs and accountability measures (AMs) that are designed to ensure catches remain below desired targets for each stock in the management complex. AMs are management controls to prevent ACLs from being exceeded and to correct or mitigate overages of the ACL if they occur. AMs should address and minimize both the frequency and magnitude of overages and correct the problems that caused the overages in as short a time as possible. AMs can be either in season AMs or AMs for when the ACL is exceeded.

There is no requirement that AMs and ACLs be implemented as hard total allowable catches (TACs) or quotas, but conservation and management measures must prevent the ACL from being exceeded and AMs must apply if the ACL is exceeded (74 FR 3184). While many measures in the management program are intended to control fishing mortality and might be interpreted to be AMs since they are “management controls to prevent the ACL from being exceeded,” the term AM is usually applied to specific, automatic measures that are implemented either as an ACL is approached or after an ACL is exceeded.

3.2 PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of FW72 is to set status determination criteria (SDC) for GB yellowtail flounder, specifications for several groundfish stocks and management units, and recreational management measures. FW72 incorporates the results of new stock assessments. The need for this action is to prevent

overfishing, ensure rebuilding, and help achieve optimum yield in the commercial and recreational groundfish fisheries consistent with the status of stocks and the requirements of MSA.

This framework includes alternatives (Table 1) that would:

- Set status determination criteria (SDC) for GB yellowtail flounder,
- Set FY2026 total allowable catches (TACs) for U.S./Canada management units of Eastern GB cod, Eastern GB haddock and the GB yellowtail flounder stock,
- Set FY2026 specifications for GB cod, GB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder,
- Set FY2026-FY2030 specifications for Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine (CC/GOM) yellowtail flounder, Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) yellowtail flounder, GB winter flounder, GOM winter flounder, SNE/MA winter flounder, white hake, Acadian redfish, ocean pout, and Atlantic wolffish,
- Establish a regulatory process for the regional administrator to adjust recreational measures for cod and haddock.

Table 1 – Purpose and need for Framework 72.

Purpose	Need
Measures to adopt status determination criteria for Georges Bank yellowtail flounder	Ensure that groundfish stocks are managed consistently with the status of stocks and the requirements of the MSA. Help prevent overfishing and achieve optimum yield.
Measures to adopt ACLs, including relevant sub-ACLs and incidental catch TACs. Measure to adopt TACs for U.S./Canada area.	Ensure that groundfish stocks are managed consistently with the status of stocks and the requirements of the MSA. Ensure that levels of catch for fishing years 2026-2030 are consistent with recent assessments, the ABC control rule in the Northeast Multispecies FMP, the International Fisheries Agreement Clarification Act, and the most recent relevant law. Help prevent overfishing and achieve optimum yield.
Measures to manage the recreational fishery	Ensure that groundfish stocks are managed consistently with the status of stocks and the requirements of the MSA.

4.0 DRAFT ALTERNATIVES UNDER CONSIDERATION

Questions/Comments for the Committee:

- This section presents draft alternatives for this action along with a rationale for each alternative.
- Text boxes like this one provide questions or comments for the Committee, and analyses and discussion from the PDT.
- Please select a preferred alternative for each action in this section to recommend to the Council.

4.1 ACTION 1 – STATUS DETERMINATION CRITERIA

4.1.1 Alternative 1 - No Action

Under Alternative 1/No Action, there would be no status determination criteria (SDC) specified for Georges Bank (GB) yellowtail flounder. Framework Adjustment 53 previously changed the SDCs to unknown for GB yellowtail flounder because the accepted assessment was an empirical approach that could not provide numerical estimates. The stock would remain in a rebuilding plan with an end date of 2032.

Rationale: The No Action alternative would continue not to specify SDCs in the FMP. This alternative provides no measurable and objective SDCs by which to sufficiently monitor the status of each stock as required by National Standard (NS) 1 guidelines. The numerical estimates of SDCs in the 2025 assessment would not be used to evaluate progress toward the existing rebuilding target.

4.1.2 Alternative 2 – Updated Status Determination Criteria for Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder

Questions/Considerations for the Committee:

- Alternative 2 would adopt status determination criteria (SDC) from the new 2025 stock assessment.
- The National Standard 1 Guidelines require the FMP to specify SDCs for all managed stocks. SDCs are used to determine if overfishing has occurred, or if the stock or stock complex is overfished.
- Currently, the FMP does not have SDCs for this stock because the previous empirical assessment could not provide numerical estimates. This stock is in a rebuilding plan and SDCs will facilitate determining rebuilding progress.
- The new assessment is a WHAM assessment that provides SDCs and numerical estimates.
- Adopting these SDCs brings the FMP into compliance with the MSA requirements.

Alternative 2 would adopt new SDCs for GB yellowtail flounder (Table 2). The Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) conducted a stock assessment in 2025 for GB yellowtail flounder, producing new SDCs and numerical estimates of the SDCs based on peer review recommendations. Stock assessment results for the numerical values corresponding to the SDC definitions are provided in Table 3 and these numerical values would be updated in subsequent stock assessments.

Table 2 – Alternative 2 status determination criteria.

Stock	Biomass Target	Minimum Biomass Threshold	Maximum Fishing Mortality Threshold
Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder	SSB _{MSY} Proxy	$\frac{1}{2}$ SSB _{MSY} Proxy	F _{MSY}

Table 3– Alternative 2 numerical estimates of SDCs (based on the 2025 management track stock assessment).

Stock	Model/Approach	SSB _{MSY} (mt)	F _{MSY}	MSY (mt)
Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder	WHAM	7,072	0.09	597

Rationale: This option would set the SDCs for GB yellowtail flounder, consistent with NS1 guidelines. In 2024, the NEFSC conducted a research track assessment of GB yellowtail flounder that transitioned the assessment to a Woods Hole Assessment Model (WHAM). The WHAM model replaced the previous empirical approach that was unable to provide numerical estimates of SDCs. The 2025 management track assessment updated commercial fishery catch data, survey indices of abundance, and the analytical WHAM and reference points through 2024. A peer review of the management track assessment approved the outcomes for use in management, making it the best available scientific information available, consistent with NS 2. The new numerical estimates of SDCs in the 2025 assessment would be used to evaluate progress toward the existing rebuilding target.

4.2 ACTION 2 – REVISED SPECIFICATIONS

Questions for the Committee:

- Does the Committee support PDT recommendations for subcomponents and annual catch limits?
- Does the Committee support the Groundfish PDT recommendations for SNE/MA yellowtail flounder sub-ACL for the scallop fishery?

PDT analysis for Committee consideration:

Sub-components review:

The Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT) met on October 31, 2025*, by webinar to discuss the sub-component review for Framework Adjustment (FW) 72. The PDT then worked via correspondence to complete the review.

***Meeting Attendance:** Robin Frede (Chair), Matt Ayer, Tara Dolan, Mark Grant, Robyn Linner, and Angelia Miller. Due to the partial federal government shutdown, NOAA staff were on furlough and unable to attend the PDT meeting. This summary reflects the discussion and input from the PDT members listed above.

Summary of OFLs and ABCs by Stock

The following table summarizes the Scientific and Statistical Committee's (SSC) 2025 recommendations for FY2026-FY2030 for seven groundfish stocks and for only FY2026 for another three groundfish stocks.

The SSC has traditionally recommended groundfish specifications at three-year intervals, but recent reductions in federal agency resources have highlighted a potential need for increased flexibility in management and regulatory processes. Thus, rather than recommend specifications for FY2026-2028, the

SSC was asked to make recommendations for a five-year period, considering specifications for FY2029 and FY2030 should future gaps in federal resources prevent the provision of updated data.

For the three transboundary stocks (GB cod, GB haddock, GB yellowtail flounder), specifications are set annually through the Transboundary Management Guidance Committee (TMGC) process.

Table 4- Summary of OFLs and ABCs for FY2026-FY2030 based on SSC recommendations in 2025. Specifications for stocks in grey are unadjusted from specifications previously set.

Stock	<u>Fishing Year</u>									
	<u>2026</u>		<u>2027</u>		<u>2028</u>		<u>2029</u>		<u>2030</u>	
	OFL	ABC	OFL	ABC	OFL	ABC	OFL	ABC	OFL	ABC
Eastern Gulf of Maine cod	50	39	39	30						
Western Gulf of Maine cod	603	460	769	586						
Georges Bank cod	473	473								
Southern New England cod	47	36	65	36						
Georges Bank haddock	8,177	8,177								
Gulf of Maine haddock	4,709	3,634	4,700	3,631						
Georges Bank yellowtail flounder	57	57								
Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic yellowtail flounder	46	33	56	33	56*	33	56*	33	56*	33
Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine yellowtail flounder	2,224	1,736	2,638	2,062	2,984	2,335	3,225	2,335	3,225*	2,335
American plaice	8,866	6,979	7,368	5,791						
Witch flounder	unknown	1,526	unknown	1,526						
Georges Bank winter flounder	2,279	1,785	2,148	1,681	2,070	1,627	2,061	1,613	2,060	1,612

Stock	<u>Fishing Year</u>									
	<u>2026</u>		<u>2027</u>		<u>2028</u>		<u>2029</u>		<u>2030</u>	
	OFL	ABC	OFL	ABC	OFL	ABC	OFL	ABC	OFL	ABC
Gulf of Maine winter flounder	1,064	798	1,064	798	1,064	798	1,064	798	1,064	798
Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder	961	507	1,009	532	1,055	556	1,101	556	1,101*	556
Redfish	7,519	5,665	7,203	5,427	6,999	5,273	6,723	5,065	6,513	4,907
White hake	1,943	1,393	1,760	1,261	1,640	1,174	1,618	1,157	1,698	1,215
Pollock	14,583	11,170	13,383	10,252						
Northern windowpane flounder	unknown	136								
Southern windowpane flounder	284	213								
Ocean pout	125	87	125	87	125	87	125	87	125	87
Atlantic halibut	unknown	106	unknown	106						
Atlantic wolffish	124	93	124	93	124	93	124	93	124	93

*Recalculate OFL if possible

Canadian Catch Estimates

In addition to the US/CA stocks, three additional stock assessments include Canadian catches: Georges Bank (GB) winter flounder, white hake, and Atlantic halibut.

GB Winter Flounder: For GB winter flounder, the PDT used 3-year (2022, 2023, and 2024) calendar year average catch from the 2025 Management Track Assessment to determine a Canadian catch estimate (Table 5). This value (72 mt) is used to reduce the ABC to a US ABC, which reduces the US ABC in FY2026 to 1,713 mt for GB winter flounder

White Hake: For white hake, the PDT used 3-year (2022, 2023, and 2024) calendar year average landings from the 2025 Management Track Assessment to determine a Canadian catch estimate (Table 6). This value is 31 mt, which reduces the US ABC in FY2026 to 1,362 mt for white hake.

Atlantic Halibut: For Atlantic halibut, the PDT followed the alternate approach used in FW69 of using the most recent year of landings as the Canadian catch estimate (Table 7). This value is 71 mt, which reduces the US ABC to 35 mt.

The PDT contacted DFO on October 28, 2025, to request final 2024 and in-season 2025 Canadian landings of Atlantic halibut in 5Z and 5Y and information on management of the 2026 fishery for the Canadian stock of 3NOPs4VWX5Z. If the information is available in time, the PDT may update its Canadian catch estimate for 2026.

Table 5- Summary of recent Canadian catches (mt) of GB winter flounder in the 2025 stock assessment.

GB Winter Flounder - 2025 Assessment

Calendar Year	Canadian landings	Canadian scallop dredge discard	Total
2019	19	18	37
2020	21	49	70
2021	7	22	29
2022	3	42	45
2023	3	56	59
2024	27	86	113
3-Yr Avg			72

Table 6- Summary of recent Canadian landings (mt) of white hake in the 2025 stock assessment.

White Hake - 2025 Assessment

Calendar Year	Canadian landings
2019	24
2020	83
2021	48
2022	39
2023	25
2024	29
3-Yr Avg	31

Table 7- Summary of recent Canadian halibut landings (mt) in NAFO areas 5Y and 5Z.

Calendar Year	Canadian Landings in 5Z and 5Y
2019	54
2020	157
2021	119
2022	92
2023	71
2024 preliminary	70

PDT Recommendations for Sub-components: Annual Catch Limits

The PDT completed the sub-component review for stocks with revised specifications (except for GB cod) and Atlantic halibut. All other stocks' sub-components would remain unchanged. The PDT confirmed its approach of using the three-year recent average of year-end catch for determining state and other sub-components, in the absence of other information. The final year-end catch report for FY2024 is not yet available, given delays due to the partial federal government shutdown. The PDT used preliminary FY2024 catch data from GARFO in the calculations along with final year-end catch data from FY2022 and FY2023. Generally, the PDT compared the current other fisheries or state waters sub-component percentage (and associated value) to the updated three-year average catch (FY2022-FY2024) to develop recommendations, with some exceptions which are summarized in Table 8 and in the sections that follow.

Georges Bank Cod

Given uncertainty with Amendment 25 and the absence of a FY2024 catch estimate for the revised stock unit at this time, the PDT recommends maintaining the sub-component percentage from last year as included in Framework 69/revised Amendment 25.

Atlantic Halibut

In the absence of updated in-season 2025 Canadian landings information or any substantial change in Canadian landings, the PDT recommends not updating state and other sub-components for Atlantic halibut at this time.

Transboundary Stocks

The PDT notes that with the new TMGC process (see description below in Alternative 2, Section 4.2.2) there is greater potential for the ABCs for the three transboundary stocks of GB cod, GB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder to be revised each year (with TMGC recommending total shared TAC set equal to ABC). The Committee may wish to consider whether the PDT should evaluate the sub-components for these stocks annually under the new TMGC process, or whether evaluation of sub-components for the transboundary stocks is tied to some other trigger, for example, when there is a U.S. stock assessment.

Table 8 - Comparison by stock of the current sub-component values and the PDT's recommendation using the three-year (FY2022-FY2024) average or alternative approach and justification.

	Sub-Component – Percentage of ABC					
	State waters (%)			Other (%)		
Stock	FY25	Recommendation	Justification	FY25	Recommendation	Justification
GB cod	No state waters catch of this stock			NA	8% 12mt	Maintain 8% as recommended in FW69/revised A25.
GB haddock	0% 0mt	0% 0mt	Average catch is so low (0.5mt) that sub-component can remain at 0mt.	0.5% 7.8mt	0.5% 22mt	Maintain 0.5% to cover FY2022-FY2024 average catch of 12.2mt.
GB yellowtail flounder	No state waters catch of this stock			0% 0mt	0% 0mt	Maintain 0%, as there has been no catch of GB yellowtail flounder by other fisheries in recent years.
CC/GOM yellowtail flounder	3% 28mt	1% 17mt	Decrease by 2% to cover FY2022-FY2024 average catch of 14.4mt. Provides buffer for other fisheries catch.	4% 37mt	2% 35mt	Decrease by 2% to cover FY2022-FY2024 average catch of 38.9mt.
SNE/MA yellowtail flounder	0.5% 0.2mt	0.5% 0.2mt	Maintain 0.5% to cover FY2022-FY2024 average catch of 0mt.	5% 2mt	2% 0.7mt	Decrease to 2% to cover FY2022-FY2024 average catch of 0.6mt.
GB winter flounder	No state waters catch of this stock			1% 15mt	2.5% 43mt	Increase by 1.5% to cover the FY2022-FY2024 average catch of 41.3mt.
GOM winter flounder	19% 153mt	12% 96mt	Decrease by 7% to cover the FY2022-FY2024 average catch of 94.9mt. Provides buffer for other fishery catch.	1.5% 12mt	1% 8mt	Decrease by 0.5% to cover the FY2022-FY2024 average catch of 8.3mt.
SNE/MA winter flounder	3% 19mt	5% 25mt	Increase by 2% to cover the FY2022-FY2024 average catch of 25.5mt.	23% 144mt	16% 81mt	Decrease by 7% to cover the FY2022-FY2024 average catch of 79.3mt. Provides buffer for state catch.

Table 8 - Comparison by stock of the current sub-component values and the PDT's recommendation using the three-year (FY2022-FY2024) average or alternative approach and justification.

	Sub-Component – Percentage of ABC					
	State waters (%)			Other (%)		
Stock	FY25	Recommendation	Justification	FY25	Recommendation	Justification
White hake	0% 0mt	0% 0mt	Average catch is so low (0.9mt) that sub-component can remain at 0mt.	0.5% 10mt	0.5% 6.8mt	Maintain at 0.5% to cover the FY2022-FY2024 average catch of 6.1mt. Provides buffer for state catch.
Redfish	0% 0mt	0.5% 28mt	Increase by 0.5% to cover the FY2022-FY2024 average catch of 4mt. Provides buffer for other fishery catch.	0% 0mt	0% 0mt	Average catch is so low (3.7mt) that sub-component can remain at 0mt.
Ocean pout	1% 0.4mt	1% 0.9mt	Maintain at 1% to cover the FY2022-FY2024 average catch of 1.4mt.	39% 34mt	35% 31mt	Decrease by 4% to cover the FY2022-FY2024 average catch of 28.6mt. Provides buffer for state catch.
Atlantic halibut	26% 9.1mt	26% 9.1mt	Maintain 26% as recommended in FW69.	4.5% 1.6mt	4.5% 1.6mt	Maintain 4.5% as recommended in FW69.
Atlantic wolffish	0% 0mt	0% 0mt	Maintain 0%, as there has been no catch of Atlantic wolffish by state fisheries in recent years.	0% 0mt	0% 0mt	Maintain 0%, as there has been no catch of Atlantic wolffish by other fisheries in recent years.

PDT analysis for Committee consideration:

SNE/MA yellowtail flounder scallop fishery sub-ACL:

In recent years, the approach has been to set the scallop fishery sub-ACL for SNE/MA yellowtail flounder at 90% of the scallop fishery's projected catch. The Council could change this approach as it is not set by regulations, but this has been the preferred methodology since FY2011. In the past, the Council has stated this methodology will incentivize the scallop fishery to reduce catches of SNE/MA yellowtail flounder without overly constraining the fishery. The PDT typically reaffirms continuing to use this approach.

This year, the Scallop PDT is unable to conduct bycatch projections, since they do not have area-specific projections of scallop catch under each alternative, nor updated d/K ratios (ratio of discards to all kept catch) for each stock/projection area.

Possible alternative approaches:

1. Set sub-ACL based on updated fishery catches at 90% of average FY2023-FY2024 catch (2023 catch = 2.1 mt; 2024 catch 0.27 mt [590 lb]).
 - a. This would result in a sub-ACL of 1 mt that is 370% of the 2024 catch and 37% of the 2025 sub-ACL (2.7 mt set by emergency rule).
2. Set sub-ACL based on current allocation at 90% of FY2025 sub-ACL
 - a. This would result in a sub-ACL of 2.4 mt that is 907% of the 2024 catch.

Scallop PDT discussion:

At its October 30th meeting, the Scallop PDT discussed recent fishery catches of SNE/MA yellowtail flounder and effort in the SNE/MA yellowtail stock area with respect to the above options for setting the sub-ACL:

- The conditions that led to higher SNE/MA yellowtail flounder catches in-season FY2025 are not likely to occur in FY2026 - Nantucket Lightship West will be open but with low scallop biomass so expect lower effort there.
- Recognized uncertainty with the preliminary in-season catch estimate and that this will require further examination, especially given the majority of catch is from one month within one area.
- Likely to be increased open bottom fishing in FY2026 in the SNE/MA yellowtail flounder stock area.
- Suggest the Groundfish PDT consider setting the FY2026 sub-ACL at the current 2025 sub-ACL, or at 90% of this value, to balance keeping bycatch low without constraining the scallop fishery.
- Raised concern that the Mid-Atlantic AM area does not include the area where these FY2025 SNE/MA yellowtail flounder catches occurred. This mismatch warrants further discussion for future years (based on preliminary in-season FY2025 catch, expectation that AM will be in place for 2027).

Groundfish PDT discussion and recommendations:

- SNE/MA yellowtail flounder is overfished, overfishing is not occurring, and the stock is in a rebuilding plan with an end date of 2029.
- At its October 21-22, 2025 meeting, the SSC recognized this stock is at true bycatch levels and that it appears the environment is preventing rebuilding rather than fishing. An environmental

covariate is included in the WHAM model – Gulf Stream Index (GSI) which informs recruitment. The SSC discussed uncertainty with the projections, given the influence of the recent decrease in GSI and potential for projections to be overly optimistic, which was provided as rationale for recommending constant ABCs for all 5 years. The SSC discussed SNE/MA yellowtail flounder as a candidate stock for Ecosystem Component management evaluation.

The Groundfish PDT recommends setting the SNE/MA yellowtail flounder scallop fishery sub-ACL at 90% of the FY2025 sub-ACL, which would be 2.4 mt.

- This keeps consistency with the approach and with the intent of keeping bycatch low without constraining the scallop fishery.
- The PDT recommends setting the sub-ACL for all five years in the specifications cycle (FY2026-FY2030) and planning to revisit next year in 2026 with new data and updated bycatch projections.

4.2.1 Alternative 1 - No Action

Under Alternative 1/No Action, there would be no changes to the specifications for FY2026 and FY2027 (Table 9). Default specifications for GB haddock, Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine (CC/GOM) yellowtail flounder, Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) yellowtail flounder, GB winter flounder, GOM winter flounder, SNE/MA winter flounder, white hake, ocean pout, and Atlantic wolffish would be in effect from May 1, 2026 to October 31, 2026, and would equal 75% of the FY2025 catch limits, after which no specifications would be in place for these nine stocks. Table 9 includes specifications for the four Atlantic cod stocks (Eastern Gulf of Maine (EGOM), Western Gulf of Maine (WGOM), GB, and Southern New England (SNE)) that would be set by Amendment 25. The four Atlantic cod stocks do not have default specifications as these are new stock units in the FMP that would be incorporated through Amendment 25. As such, there would be no specifications in place in FY2026 for the four Atlantic cod stocks if Amendment 25 is not implemented by May 1, 2026. All other stocks have FY2026 specifications as set by previous frameworks, but specifications for GB yellowtail flounder and redfish would not reflect the results of the updated 2025 management track stock assessments. There would not be new FY2026 quotas specified for the transboundary Georges Bank stocks (i.e., GB cod, GB haddock, GB yellowtail flounder), which are managed through the US/CA Resource Sharing Understanding (as provided in Table 10 and Table 11), and therefore updated Canadian quotas would not be accounted for under No Action. These quotas are specified annually.

Rationale: The No Action alternative uses OFLs/ABCs/ACLs adopted in FW66, FW69, and A25 for most stocks. However, several groundfish stocks do not have specifications set for FY2026 and would therefore be subject to default specifications.

Table 9 – Alternative 1/No Action - Northeast Multispecies OFLs, ABC, ACLs, and other ACL sub-components for FY2026-FY2028 (metric tons, live weight), adjusted for final sector 2024 rosters and based on Framework Adjustment 69. Stocks in gray do not have specifications for FY2026. Values are rounded to the nearest metric ton or tenth. Underlined stocks are subject to adjustments in 2026 based on US/CA quotas, 2025 CA quotas were used to adjust in the interim. U.S. ABC is reduced to account for Canadian catches (*)

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub-Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub-ACL	Total ACL
EGOM Cod	2026	50	39	0.2	0.4		37	36.5		35.2	1.3		37
	2027	39	30	0.2	0.3		28	28.1		27.1	1.0		29
WGOM Cod	2026	603	460	23	5.0		407	289.8	118	280.1	9.7		436
	2027	769	586	30	6.4		519	369.3	150	356.9	12.4		555
<u>GB Cod</u>	2026	433	106		8.5		93	92.6		89.4	3.2		101
SNE Cod	2026	47	36	6.1	3.2		25	6.7	18	6.5	0.2		34
	2027	65	36	6.1	3.2		25	6.7	18	6.5	0.2		34
<u>GB Haddock</u>	2026	Default specifications (75% of FY2025 catch limits) would be in place through October 31, 2026											
GOM Haddock	2026	4,709	3,634	36			3,359	2,213.2	1,146	2,165.3	47.9	34	3,429
	2027	4,700	3,631	36			3,356	2,211.4	1,145	2,163.5	47.9	34	3,426
<u>GB Yellowtail Flounder</u>	2026		96			14.9	76	76.3		71.9	4.4	1.8	93
SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	2026	Default specifications (75% of FY2025 catch limits) would be in place through October 31, 2026											
CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder	2026	Default specifications (75% of FY2025 catch limits) would be in place through October 31, 2026											
American Plaice	2026	8,866	6,979		35		6,597	6,596.9		6,413.6	183.3		6,632

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub-Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub-ACL	Total ACL
	2027	7,368	5,791		29		5,474	5,474.0		5,321.9	152.1		5,503
Witch Flounder	2026		1,526	7.6	38		1,406	1,406.2		1,355.5	50.7		1,452
	2027		1,526	7.6	38		1,406	1,406.2		1,355.5	50.7		1,452
GB Winter Flounder*	2026			Default specifications (75% of FY2025 catch limits) would be in place through October 31, 2026									
GOM Winter Flounder	2026			Default specifications (75% of FY2025 catch limits) would be in place through October 31, 2026									
SNE/MA Winter Flounder	2026			Default specifications (75% of FY2025 catch limits) would be in place through October 31, 2026									
Redfish	2026	11,177	8,418				7,997	7,997.1		7,918.8	78.3		7,997
White Hake*	2026			Default specifications (75% of FY2025 catch limits) would be in place through October 31, 2026									
Pollock	2026	14,583	11,170	670	614		9,391	9,391.2		9,296.6	94.6		10,676
	2027	13,383	10,252	615	564		8,619	8,619.4		8,532.6	86.8		9,798
Northern Windowpane Flounder	2026		136		6.8	26.6	94	93.6			93.6		127
Southern Windowpane Flounder	2026	284	213	6.4	98	71.3	30	29.7			29.7		205
Ocean Pout	2026			Default specifications (75% of FY2025 catch limits) would be in place through October 31, 2026									
Atlantic Halibut*	2026		35	9.1	1.6		23	23.1			23.1		34
	2027		35	9.1	1.6		23	23.1			23.1		34
Atlantic Wolffish	2026			Default specifications (75% of FY2025 catch limits) would be in place through October 31, 2026									

4.2.2 Alternative 2 – Revised Specifications

Under Alternative 2, the annual specifications for FY2026 for GB cod, GB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder, and FY2026-FY2030 for CC/GOM yellowtail flounder, SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, GB winter flounder, GOM winter flounder, SNE/MA winter flounder, white hake, ocean pout, and Atlantic wolffish would be as specified in Table 12.

Alternative 2 includes adjustments to the state waters and other sub-component values for several groundfish stocks including: **[update following Committee input on sub-components analysis]**. GB winter flounder and white hake ABCs include adjustments for Canadian catch estimates.

Specifications previously set for other stocks would not change.

U.S./Canada Total Allowable Catches

This alternative would specify total allowable catches (TACs) for the U.S./Canada Management Area for FY2026 for Eastern GB cod, Eastern GB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder as listed in Table 10. If NMFS determines that the FY2025 catch of GB cod, haddock, or yellowtail flounder from the U.S./Canada Management Area exceeded the respective 2025 TACs, the U.S./Canada Resource Sharing Understanding and regulations require that the 2026 TAC for each be reduced by the amount of the overage. Any overage reduction would be applied to the components of the fishery that caused the overage of the U.S. TAC in 2025. To minimize any disruption to the fishing industry, NMFS would attempt to make any necessary TAC adjustments in the first quarter of the fishing year.

A comparison of the proposed FY2026 and FY2025 U.S. TACs is shown in Table 11. Changes to the U.S. TACs reflect changes to the percentage shares, stock status, and the Transboundary Management Guidance Committee's (TMGC) recommendations. The TMGC has typically negotiated the U.S./Canada allocations annually based on the historic proportions of fishery utilization and resource distribution in the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area. In 2025, the TMGC process included Andrew Lawler, NOAA's Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Fisheries, representing U.S. interests with Canadian fishing industry representatives and Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans officials. New England Council members on the TMGC were not included in negotiations but participated as observers.

In 2025, science advice used by the TMGC to develop the joint annual harvest recommendations for cod and haddock for 2026, was provided through the new approach called the Integration of Science Advice for Transboundary Stocks (ISATS) process. ISATS supports the decision-making process for the management of cod, haddock, and yellowtail flounder in the Eastern Georges Bank Management Area. This process includes a Technical Science Coordination (TSC) meeting of stock assessment leads where the outcomes from U.S. and Canadian domestic assessments are compiled into a joint document to provide scientific advice for the shared transboundary stocks. Domestic assessments from both countries are considered equally as the basis for informing catch advice. In 2025, the Georges Bank yellowtail flounder Management Track Assessment peer review was conducted after the ISATS process and results were considered directly by the TMGC.

Table 10 – Proposed FY2026 U.S./Canada TACs (mt).

	Eastern GB Cod	Eastern GB Haddock	GB Yellowtail Flounder
Total Shared TAC	473	4,750	57
U.S. TAC	151	998	31
Canada TAC	322	3,752	26

Table 11 – Comparison of the Proposed FY2026 U.S. TACs and the FY2025 U.S. TACs (mt).

Stock	U.S. TAC		Percent Change
	FY2025	FY2026	
Eastern GB cod	82	151	+184%
Eastern GB haddock	1,556	998	-36%
GB yellowtail flounder	96	31	-68%

Table 12 – Alternative 2 Revised Northeast Multispecies OFLs, ABC, ACLs for FY2026-FY2028 (metric tons, live weight), based on final 2025 sector rosters. Stocks in gray would not have changes in specifications through this action. Values are rounded to the nearest metric ton or tenth. Underlined stocks are subject to adjustments in 2026 based on US/CA quotas, 2025 CA quotas were used to adjust in the interim. Includes adjustments for Canadian catches (*), and state waters component and other sub-components **[to be updated following Committee input on sub-components analysis.]**

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub-Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub-ACL	Total ACL
EGOM Cod	2026	50	39	0.2	0.4		37	36.5		35.2	1.3		37
	2027	39	30	0.2	0.3		28	28.1		27.1	1.0		29
WGOM Cod	2026	603	460	23	5.0		407	289.8	118	280.1	9.7		436
	2027	769	586	30	6.4		519	369.3	150	356.9	12.4		555
<u>GB Cod</u>	2026	473	151										
SNE Cod	2026	47	36	6.1	3.2		25	6.7	18	6.5	0.2		34
	2027	65	36	6.1	3.2		25	6.7	18	6.5	0.2		34
<u>GB Haddock</u>	2026	8,177	4,425										
	2027												

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub-Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub-ACL	Total ACL
GOM Haddock	2026	4,709	3,634	36			3,359	2,213.2	1,146	2,165.3	47.9	34	3,429
	2027	4,700	3,631	36			3,356	2,211.4	1,145	2,163.5	47.9	34	3,426
<u>GB Yellowtail Flounder</u>	2026	57	31										
	2027												
SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	2026	46	33										
	2027	56	33										
	2028	*56	33										
	2029	*56	33										
	2030	*56	33										
CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder	2026	2,224	1,736										
	2027	2,638	2,062										
	2028	2,984	2,335										
	2029	3,225	2,335										
	2030	*3,225	2,335										
American Plaice	2026	8,866	6,979		35		6,597	6,596.9		6,413.6	183.3		6,632
	2027	7,368	5,791		29		5,474	5,474.0		5,321.9	152.1		5,503

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub- Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub- ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub- ACL	Total ACL
Witch Flounder	2026		1,526	7.6	38		1,406	1,406.2		1,355.5	50.7		1,452
	2027		1,526	7.6	38		1,406	1,406.2		1,355.5	50.7		1,452
GB Winter Flounder*	2026	2,279	1,713										
	2027	2,148	1,609										
	2028	2,070	1,555										
	2029	2,061	1,541										
	2030	2,060	1,540										
GOM Winter Flounder	2026	1,064	798										
	2027	1,064	798										
	2028	1,064	798										
	2029	1,064	798										
	2030	1,064	798										
SNE/MA Winter Flounder	2026	961	507										
	2027	1,009	532										
	2028	1,055	556										
	2029	1,101	556										
	2030	*1,101	556										
Redfish	2026	7,519	5,665										

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub-Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub-ACL	Total ACL
	2027	7,203	5,427										
	2028	6,999	5,273										
	2029	6,723	5,065										
	2030	6,513	4,907										
	2026	1,943	1,362										
White Hake*	2027	1,760	1,230										
	2028	1,640	1,143										
	2029	1,618	1,126										
	2030	1,698	1,184										
	2026	14,583	11,170	670	614		9,391	9,391.2		9,296.6	94.6		10,676
Pollock	2027	13,383	10,252	615	564		8,619	8,619.4		8,532.6	86.8		9,798
	2026		136		6.8	26.6	94	93.6			93.6		127
Northern Windowpane Flounder	2026	284	213	6.4	98	71.3	30	29.7			29.7		205
Southern Windowpane Flounder	2026												
Ocean Pout	2026	125	97										

Stock	FY	OFL	US ABC	State-Waters Sub-Component	Other sub-component	Scallops	Groundfish Sub-ACL	Comm. Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Rec Ground-fish Sub-ACL	Preliminary Sectors Sub-ACL	Preliminary Non-sector Groundfish Sub-ACL	MWT or Small mesh Sub-ACL	Total ACL
	2027	125	97										
	2028	125	97										
	2029	125	97										
	2030	125	97										
Atlantic Halibut*	2026		35	9.1	1.6		23	23.1			23.1		34
	2027		35	9.1	1.6		23	23.1			23.1		34
Atlantic Wolffish	2026	124	93										
	2027	124	93										
	2028	124	93										
	2029	124	93										
	2030	124	93										

*The SSC requested the PDT recalculate these OFLs if possible.

Rationale: This measure would adopt new specifications for only FY2026 for the three transboundary stocks: GB cod, GB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder. Specifications would also be adopted for 5 years (FY2026-2030) for SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, CC/GOM yellowtail flounder, GB winter flounder, GOM winter flounder, SNE/MA winter flounder, redfish, white hake, ocean pout, and wolffish. This is the first time that 5-year specifications would be adopted, consistent with the most recent stock assessment information. The Council's intent is to revisit specifications prior to FY2029 but the Council has taken this new approach to manage risk around reduced resources to conduct stock assessments on the current 3-year cycle. Thus, rather than recommend specifications for FY2026-2028, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) was asked to make recommendations for a 5-year period, including FY2029 and FY2030 should future gaps in federal resources prevent the provision of updated data.

4.3 ACTION 3 – RECREATIONAL FISHERY MANAGEMENT

Questions/Considerations for the Committee:

- In September 2025, the Council voted to resubmit a revised Amendment 25 to NMFS. Amendment 25 would revise the FMP to include four stocks of Atlantic cod.
- Only two cod stocks would have recreational sub-ACLs: WGOM cod and SNE cod.
- The FMP currently includes authority for the RA to set recreational measures, in consultation with the Council, for stocks with a recreational sub-ACL (includes GOM haddock).
- In Framework 69 (being reviewed by NMFS), the Council included additional authority for the RA to set recreational measures for GB cod and EGOM cod for only FY 2025.
- Alternative 2 would expand the existing RA authority to set recreational measures, in consultation with the Council, for all stocks of cod and haddock.
- This would use the existing consultation and rulemaking process but allow the process to consider all stocks of cod and haddock. This would allow for consistent measures across stocks of a species when appropriate.

4.3.1 Alternative 1 – No Action

Alternative 1/No Action would maintain the regulatory process that the Regional Administrator follows to adjust recreational fishing measures for only stocks with recreational sub-ACLs. The Regional Administrator would not have an established regulatory process for adjusting recreational fishing measures for any stock of cod or haddock that does not have a sub-ACL. These stocks would be Eastern Gulf of Maine (EGOM) cod, Georges Bank (GB) cod, and GB haddock.

Rationale: This would require the Council to set recreational measures for cod and haddock stock units without recreational sub-ACLs and additional Council action to revise those measures when necessary.

4.3.2 Alternative 2 – Establish a Regulatory Process for the Regional Administrator to Adjust Recreational Measures for Cod and Haddock

Alternative 2 would establish a regulatory process for the Regional Administrator, in consultation with the Council, to adjust recreational fishing measures for all stocks of cod and haddock, on a permanent basis. This would add any cod and haddock stocks without a sub-ACL (i.e., EGOM cod, GB cod, and GB haddock) to the existing regulatory process for the Regional Administrator to adjust recreational fishing measures for stocks with recreational sub-ACLs (Western Gulf of Maine (WGOM) cod, Southern New England (SNE) cod, and Gulf of Maine (GOM) haddock). After consultation with the Council, the Regional Administrator would set recreational measures for these stocks of cod and haddock consistent

with the Administrative Procedure Act. The consultation with the Council would allow for review of any measures under consideration. If time permits, the Recreational Advisory Panel and the Groundfish Committee would review the measures proposed by NMFS and make recommendations to the Council. The recreational measures implemented by this process would remain in place until they are changed.

Rationale: Establishing a regulatory process for the Regional Administrator to adjust recreational measures for all stocks of cod and haddock streamlines recreational management by creating a single process of all stocks of cod and haddock. This would allow recreational measures to be consistent across stock units, if appropriate. Recently, the Council included this authority on a 1-year basis in both Amendment 25 and FW 69. Establishing this regulatory process on a permanent basis, rather than on a temporary basis as was done in the past, reduces the burden for the Council to address changes to cod and haddock stocks without a sub-ACL. The Council would retain the option to adjust recreational measures for cod and haddock through management actions (i.e., framework adjustments) should there be a desire to change this process in the future.