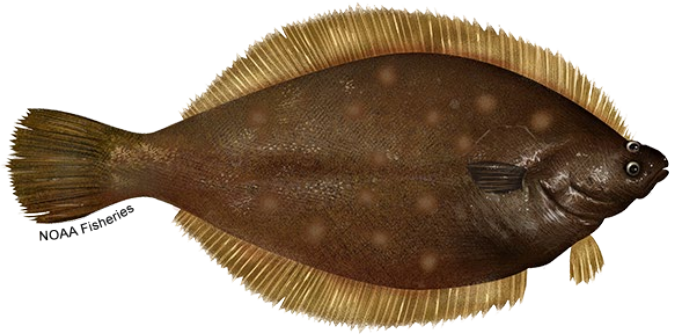
Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan

DRAFT Framework Adjustment 72

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



Framework Discussion Document

Council Version 2

November 2025

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

New England
Fishery Management Council

NOAA

Document history

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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
50 Water Street, Mill #2
Newburyport, MA 01950

National Marine Fisheries Service
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
Washington, D.C. 20235

For Further Information:

Dr. Cate O'Keefe, Executive Director
New England Fishery Management Council
50 Water Street, Mill #2
Newburyport, Massachusetts 01950
Phone: (978) 465-0492
Fax: (978) 465-3116

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. If approved, the FMP would contain 22 stocks.

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 SDCs specified for 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	½SSB_{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.

	Fishing Year									
	2026		2027		2028		2029		2030	
Stock	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

	Fishing Year									
	2026		2027		2028		2029		2030	
Stock	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	0.5% 0.4mt	1% 0.9mt	Increase by 0.5% 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.

Committee Motion – November 18, 2025:

Move to accept the PDT's recommendations for sub-components (as referenced in Table 8 in the draft Framework 72 discussion document).

Motion *passed by consensus and without objection.*

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-FY20230) and planning to revisit next year in 2026 with new data and updated bycatch projections.

Committee Motion – November 18, 2025:

Move to recommend setting the SNE/MA yellowtail flounder scallop fishery sub-ACL at the FY2025 sub-ACL (2.7 mt). This would be set for FY2026-2030 with plans for the PDT to re-evaluate in 2026 with updated data.

Motion *passed by consensus and without objection.*

Committee Motion – November 18, 2025:

Move to set the 2026-2030 ABC for GOM/Cape Cod yellowtail Flounder at 1736mt within Framework 72.

Rational: There are significant questions about the biological plausibility of the assessment results and projections. The 2025 stock assessment finds Cape Cod/GOM Yellowtail to be overfished, noting that the stock remains below the new SSBMSY proxy even though fishing pressure has been at historically low levels and that recruitment has been generally weak to moderate over the past decade. Despite these results, scaling changes in the model suggest catch could increase 10-fold. Further, the projections suggest biomass will nearly double between 2024 and 2025. Maintaining the ABC at the 2026 value tries to account for the seemingly implausible results while also allowing for significant increase in catches, which have been under 400mt over the last decade.

Motion *carried* (6/1/3).

Committee Motion – November 18, 2025:

Move to remove the sector mgmt. uncertainty buffer for white hake in FW72 for FY2026-2030 if the ASM target coverage rate is at least 90% or higher.

Motion *passed by consensus and without objection.*

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, 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 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 for FY2026 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-FY2030 (metric tons, live weight), adjusted for final sector 2025 rosters and based on Framework Adjustment 69 and Amendment 25. 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		35.1	1.4		37
	2027	39	30	0.2	0.3		28	28.1		27.0	1.1		29
WGOM Cod	2026	603	460	23	5.0		407	289.8	118	278.9	10.9		436
	2027	769	586	30	6.4		519	369.2	150	355.3	13.9		555
GB Cod	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
GB Haddock	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	2,155.2	58.0	34	3,429
	2027	4,700	3,631	36			3,356	2,211.3	1,145	2,153.4	57.9	34	3,426
GB Yellowtail Flounder	2026		96			14.9	76	76.4		71.4	5.0	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											

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
American Plaice	2026	8,866	6,979		35		6,597	6,596.9		6,392.5	204.4		6,632
	2027	7,368	5,791		29		5,474	5,474.0		5,304.3	169.6		5,503
Witch Flounder	2026		1,526	7.6	38		1,406	1,406.2		1,352.4	53.8		1,452
	2027		1,526	7.6	38		1,406	1,406.2		1,352.4	53.8		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		7,897.9	99.2		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		9,288.3	102.9		10,676
	2027	13,383	10,252	615	564		8,619	8,619.3		8,524.9	94.4		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, redfish, 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: CC/GOM yellowtail flounder, SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, GB winter flounder, GOM winter flounder, SNE/MA winter flounder, redfish, and ocean pout. GB winter flounder and white hake ABCs include adjustments for Canadian catch estimates.

This action also reaffirms specifications previously set for other stocks without changes. If either Framework Adjustment 69 is not approved ahead of the submission of Framework 72, this action incorporates the specifications from Framework 69 for approval, as shown in Table 12, based on the analyses supporting those actions.

Option A – Remove the management uncertainty buffer for sectors for white hake if the ASM target coverage rate is set at 90% or greater

This option would remove the management uncertainty buffer for sectors for white hake if the at-sea monitoring (ASM) target coverage rate is set at 90% or greater. This measure would remain in place for FY2026-FY2030.

Rationale: FW65 measures implemented a change to remove the sector management uncertainty buffer for certain allocated stocks (white hake and GOM haddock only) if the coverage rate is set at 90% or greater for FY2023, and FW66 measures implemented this same change through the next specifications cycle. This measure maintains that change only for white hake for FY2026-FY2030 (i.e., until the next specifications cycle). This approach is similar to what was approved under A23. Under A23 measures, when the target coverage rate is set to 100%, the management uncertainty buffer for sectors for allocated groundfish stocks will default to zero. The aim is to mitigate the economic impacts of low white hake ACLs, as white hake is a highly utilized stock for the fishery, by increasing the sector ACL to the sector ABC (+5%) for FY2026-FY2030. Adequacy of fishery monitoring data is one of the five elements of management uncertainty evaluated when fishery specifications are developed, and the increased at-sea monitoring coverage level in the commercial sector groundfish fishery will reduce uncertainty. The management uncertainty buffer would still remain in place for the common pool fishery, and there is a portion of the ABC set aside for other fisheries components.

U.S./Canada Total Allowable Catches

This alternative would specify 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 for the October TMGC meeting, the TMGC process included 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 for the Canadian TMGC. New England Council members on the US TMGC were not included in negotiations but participated as observers. Other NOAA staff that are members or support the US TMGC were unable to attend the October meeting of the TMGC due to overlap with the partial federal government shutdown.

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-FY2030 (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.

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		35.1	1.4		37
	2027	39	30	0.2	0.3		28	28.1		27.0	1.1		29
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
WGOM Cod	2026	603	460	23	5.0		407	289.8	118	278.9	10.9		436
	2027	769	586	30	6.4		519	369.2	150	355.3	13.9		555
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
GB Cod	2026	473	151		12.1		132	132.3		127.7	4.6		144
	2027												
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
SNE Cod	2026	47	36	6.1	3.2		25	6.7	18	6.5	0.23		34

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	65	36	6.1	3.2		25	6.7	18	6.5	0.2		34
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
GB Haddock	2026	8,177	4,425		22.1		4,098	4,098.2		4,004.0	94.2	82	4,203
	2027												
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
GOM Haddock	2026	4,709	3,634	36			3,359	2,213.2	1,146	2,155.2	58.0	34	3,429
	2027	4,700	3,631	36			3,356	2,211.4	1,145	2,153.4	57.9	34	3,426
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
GB Yellowtail Flounder	2026	57	31			4.8	25	24.5		22.9	1.6	0.6	30
	2027												
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												

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
SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	2026	46	33	0.2	0.7	2.7	28	28.0		20.4	7.6		32
	2027	56	33	0.2	0.7	2.7	28	28.0		20.4	7.6		32
	2028	67	33	0.2	0.7	2.7	28	28.0		20.4	7.6		32
	2029	80	33	0.2	0.7	2.7	28	28.0		20.4	7.6		32
	2030	92	33	0.2	0.7	2.7	28	28.0		20.4	7.6		32
CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder	2026	2,224	1,736	17	35		1,600	1,599.8		1,505.7	94.1		1,652
	2027	2,638	1,736	17	35		1,600	1,599.8		1,505.7	94.1		1,652
	2028	†2,638	1,736	17	35		1,600	1,599.8		1,505.7	94.1		1,652
	2029	†2,638	1,736	17	35		1,600	1,599.8		1,505.7	94.1		1,652
	2030	†2,638	1,736	17	35		1,600	1,599.8		1,505.7	94.1		1,652
American Plaice	2026	8,866	6,979		35		6,597	6,596.9		6,392.5	204.4		6,632
	2027	7,368	5,791		29		5,474	5,473.9		5,304.3	169.6		5,503
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
Witch Flounder	2026		1,526	7.6	38		1,406	1,406.2		1,352.4	53.8		1,452
	2027		1,526	7.6	38		1,406	1,406.2		1,352.4	53.8		1,452
	2028												
	2029												

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
	2030												
GB Winter Flounder*	2026	2,279	1,713		43		1,620	1,620.0		1,539.8	80.2		1,663
	2027	2,148	1,609		40		1,522	1,521.7		1,446.3	75.4		1,562
	2028	2,070	1,555		39		1,471	1,470.6		1,397.8	72.8		1,510
	2029	2,061	1,541		39		1,457	1,457.4		1,385.2	72.2		1,496
	2030	2,060	1,540		39		1,456	1,456.4		1,384.3	72.1		1,495
GOM Winter Flounder	2026	1,064	798	96	8		660	659.5		558.2	101.3		763
	2027	1,064	798	96	8		660	659.5		558.2	101.3		763
	2028	1,064	798	96	8		660	659.5		558.2	101.3		763
	2029	1,064	798	96	8		660	659.5		558.2	101.3		763
	2030	1,064	798	96	8		660	659.5		558.2	101.3		763
SNE/MA Winter Flounder	2026	961	507	25	81		381	380.5		323.6	56.9		487
	2027	1,009	532	27	85		399	399.3		339.6	59.7		511
	2028	1,055	556	28	89		417	417.3		354.9	62.4		534
	2029	1,101	556	28	89		417	417.3		354.9	62.4		534
	2030	1,148	556	28	89		417	417.3		354.9	62.4		534
Redfish	2026	7,519	5,665	28			5,355	5,354.8		5,288.4	66.4		5,383
	2027	7,203	5,427	27			5,130	5,129.9		5,066.3	63.6		5,157
	2028	6,999	5,273	26			4,984	4,984.3		4,922.5	61.8		5,011

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
	2029	6,723	5,065	25			4,788	4,787.7		4,728.3	59.4		4,813
	2030	6,513	4,907	25			4,638	4,638.3		4,580.8	57.5		4,663
White Hake*	2026	1,943	1,362		7		1,287	1,287.4		1,272.6	14.8		1,294
	2027	1,760	1,230		6		1,163	1,162.7		1,149.3	13.4		1,169
	2028	1,640	1,143		6		1,081	1,080.5		1,068.0	12.5		1,086
	2029	1,618	1,126		6		1,064	1,064.4		1,052.1	12.3		1,070
	2030	1,698	1,184		6		1,119	1,119.2		1,106.3	12.9		1,125
Pollock	2026	14,583	11,170	670	614		9,391	9,391.2		9,288.3	102.9		10,676
	2027	13,383	10,252	615	564		8,619	8,619.3		8,524.9	94.4		9,798
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
Northern Windowpane Flounder	2026		136		6.8	26.6	94	93.6			93.6		127
	2027												
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
Southern Windowpane Flounder	2026	284	213	6.4	98	71.3	30	29.7			29.7		205
	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
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
Ocean Pout	2026	125	87	0.9	30		52	51.8			51.8		83
	2027	125	87	0.9	30		52	51.8			51.8		83
	2028	125	87	0.9	30		52	51.8			51.8		83
	2029	125	87	0.9	30		52	51.8			51.8		83
	2030	125	87	0.9	30		52	51.8			51.8		83
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
	2028												
	2029												
	2030												
Atlantic Wolffish	2026	124	93				87	86.5			86.5		87
	2027	124	93				87	86.5			86.5		87
	2028	124	93				87	86.5			86.5		87
	2029	124	93				87	86.5			86.5		87
	2030	124	93				87	86.5			86.5		87

†Re-calculate 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 Measures

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 require 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.

6.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF ALTERNATIVES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The impacts of the alternatives under consideration are evaluated herein relative to the valued ecosystem components (VECs) described in the Affected Environment (Section 5.0) and to each other.

6.1.1 Evaluation Criteria

This action evaluates the potential impacts of alternatives using the criteria in Table 13.

Table 13 – General definitions for impacts and qualifiers relative to resource condition (i.e., baseline).

VEC	Resource Condition	Impact of Action		
		Positive (+)	Negative (-)	No Impact (0)
Target and Non-target Species	Overfished status defined by the MSA	Alternatives that would maintain or are projected to result in a stock status above an overfished condition*	Alternatives that would maintain or are projected to result in a stock status below an overfished condition*	Alternatives that do not impact stock / populations
ESA-listed Protected Species (endangered or threatened)	Populations at risk of extinction (endangered) or endangerment (threatened)	Alternatives that contain specific measures to ensure no interactions with protected species (e.g., no take)	Alternatives that result in interactions/take of listed resources, including actions that reduce interactions	Alternatives that do not impact ESA listed species
MMPA Protected Species (not also ESA listed)	Stock health may vary but populations remain impacted	Alternatives that will maintain takes below PBR and approaching the Zero Mortality Rate Goal	Alternatives that result in interactions with/take of marine mammal species that could result in takes above PBR	Alternatives that do not impact MMPA Protected Species
Physical Environment / Habitat / EFH	Many habitats degraded from historical effort (see condition of the resources table for details)	Alternatives that improve the quality or quantity of habitat	Alternatives that degrade the quality, quantity or increase disturbance of habitat	Alternatives that do not impact habitat quality
Human Communities (Social and Economic)	Highly variable but generally stable in recent years (see condition of the resources table for details)	Alternatives that increase revenue and social well-being of fishermen and/or communities	Alternatives that decrease revenue and social well-being of fishermen and/or communities	Alternatives that do not impact revenue and social well-being of fishermen and/or communities
Impact Qualifiers				
A range of impact qualifiers is used to indicate any existing uncertainty	Negligible	To such a small degree to be indistinguishable from no impact		
	Slight (sl) as in slight positive or slight negative	To a lesser degree / minor		
	Moderately (M) positive or negative	To an average degree (i.e., more than “slight”, but not “high”)		
	High (H), as in high positive or high negative	To a substantial degree (not significant unless stated)		
	Significant (in the case of an EIS)	Affecting the resource condition to a great degree.		
	Likely	Some degree of uncertainty associated with the impact		

*Actions that will substantially increase or decrease stock size, but do not change a stock status may have different impacts depending on the particular action and stock. Meaningful differences between alternatives may be illustrated by using another resource attribute aside from the MSA status, but this must be justified within the impact analysis.

6.1.2 Approach to Impacts Analysis

The specific approach to impacts analysis is described under each of the VECs – regulated groundfish and other species (Section 6.2), essential fish habitat (Section 6.3) endangered and other protected species (Section 6.4), human communities – economic (Section 6.5), and human communities – social (Section 6.6). Cumulative effects analysis is also provided (Section 6.7). The Council's preferred alternatives and options are identified in the impacts sections.

6.2 Impacts on Regulated Groundfish and Other Species – Biological

Biological impacts discussed below focus on expected changes in fishing mortality for regulated multispecies stocks. Changes in fishing mortality may result in changes in stock size. Impacts on essential fish habitat and endangered or threatened species are discussed in separate sections. Impacts are discussed in relation to impacts on regulated multispecies (groundfish) and other species. The impacts associated with the measures are anticipated to not be significant in comparison to the No Action alternatives. Throughout this section, impacts are often evaluated using an analytic technique that projects future stock size based on a recent age-based assessment. These projections are known to capture only part of the uncertainties that are associated with the assessment projections. There is evidence, in the case of multispecies stocks, the projections tend to be overly optimistic when they extend beyond a short-term period (i.e., 1-3 years), although recent work suggests some improvements. This means, generally, that the projections tend to overestimate future stock sizes and underestimate future fishing mortality. These uncertainties in the projection methodology should be considered when reviewing impacts that use this tool. Long-term projections (greater than 3 years) should not be over-interpreted since they are imprecise and are often overly optimistic. The uncertainty estimates (90% confidence intervals on SSB) from the projections do not cover the true uncertainty in the population. For stocks in rebuilding plans, see the overview in the Affected Environment for additional information.

6.2.1 Action 1 – Status Determination Criteria

6.2.1.1 Alternative 1 – No Action

Impacts on regulated groundfish

Under Alternative 1 (No Action), status determination criteria (SDCs) would not be adopted for GB yellowtail flounder and the FMP would be inconsistent with National Standard guidelines. 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. Without SDCs for GB yellowtail flounder, the stock status would need to be determined using alternative sources of information. The overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catches (ABCs) would continue to be recommended by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and to ultimately set specifications for subsequent fishing years. This stock would remain in a rebuilding plan with an end date of 2032, but the numerical estimates of SDCs in the 2025 assessment would not be used to evaluate progress toward the existing rebuilding target.

Alternative 1/No Action would not be expected to have direct or indirect impacts on groundfish species in the short-term. This measure is primarily administrative in that it establishes the criteria used to determine if overfishing is occurring or the stock is overfished. However, GB yellowtail flounder does not currently have SDCs specified. Without SDCs, determination of stock status, estimated OFLs, ABCs, and ACLs would lack a consistent quantitative basis consistent with the best scientific information available (BSIA). Over the long-term, impacts of Alternative 1/No Action would be negative, as biomass targets would not be based on the latest scientific information, increasing the risk of overfishing over the long-term. For these reasons, Alternative 1/No Action would have neutral to negative impacts on regulated groundfish, including GB yellowtail flounder, and neutral to negative impacts when comparing Alternative 1/No Action to Alternative 2

Impacts on other species

Alternative 1/No Action would not be expected to have direct or indirect impacts on non-groundfish species such as monkfish, dogfish, skates, and Atlantic sea scallops. This measure establishes the criteria used to determine if overfishing is occurring, or the stock is overfished. For these reasons when comparing Alternative 1/No Action to Alternative 2, the likely impacts on other species are neutral.

6.2.1.2 Alternative 2 – Updated Status Determination for Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder

Impacts on regulated groundfish

Alternative 2 would adopt new SDCs for GB yellowtail flounder (Table 2), as required by the National Standard guidelines. 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. SDCs for GB yellowtail flounder would be used for determining stock status, which are then used to derive OFLs, ABCs, and to ultimately set specifications for subsequent fishing years.

Alternative 2 would not be expected to have direct or indirect impacts on groundfish species in the short term. This measure is primarily administrative in that it establishes the objective quantitative criteria used to determine if overfishing is occurring or the stock is overfished. GB yellowtail flounder currently does not have SDCs specified. Over the long term, impacts of Alternative 2 would be positive, since adopting SDCs for GB yellowtail flounder according to the most recent assessment decreases the risk of overfishing over the long-term. For these reasons, Alternative 2 would have neutral to positive impacts on regulated groundfish, including GB yellowtail flounder, and when comparing Alternative 2 to Alternative 1/No Action, the likely impacts on regulated groundfish species are neutral to positive.

Impacts on other species

Alternative 2 would not be expected to have direct or indirect impacts on non-groundfish species such as monkfish, dogfish, skates, and Atlantic sea scallops. This measure is primarily administrative in that it establishes the criteria used to determine if overfishing is occurring or the stock is overfished. For these when comparing Alternative 2 to Alternative 1/No Action, the likely impacts on other species are neutral.

6.2.2 Action 2 – Revised Specifications

6.2.2.1 Alternative 1 – No Action

Impacts on regulated groundfish

Under Alternative 1/No Action, the ACLs specified for FY2026 and FY2027 would be unchanged from those adopted through prior actions for most stocks. Default specifications for GB haddock, 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 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 for FY2026 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. Under Alternative 1/No Action, there would be no new FY2026 quotas specified for the transboundary Georges Bank stocks of GB cod, GB haddock, and GB yellowtail flounder, which are managed through the U.S./CA Resource Sharing Understanding. These quotas are specified annually.

Under Alternative 1/No Action, the directed groundfish fishery would be expected to operate in all broad stock areas through October 31, 2026. As of November 1, 2026, GB haddock, 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 not have ACLs specified. In the absence of specifications for these nine stocks, commercial groundfish vessels would not be allowed to fish in all broad stock areas without these allocations. It is anticipated that Alternative 1/No Action would result in minimal changes in fishing effort during the first six months of the fishing year. After October 31, 2026, Alternative 1/No Action would be expected to halt commercial groundfish fishing effort in all broad stock areas. Without specification of an ACL, catch would not be allocated to the commercial groundfish fishery (sectors or common pool vessels), and targeted groundfish fishing activity would not occur for these stocks. Catches would not be eliminated because there would probably be incidental catches or bycatch from other fisheries. AMs in the multispecies fishery would be maintained but are expected to have a low probability of being triggered without allocations.

In addition to the lack of targeted groundfish fishing activity in all broad stock areas after October 31, 2026, certain provisions of the sector management system probably would constrain fishing even for stocks with an ACL within the fishing season. For example, current management measures require that a sector stop fishing in a stock area if it does not have ACE for a given stock. Fishing can continue on stocks for which the sector continues to have ACE, but only if the sector can demonstrate it will not catch the ACE-limited stock. In most cases, this provision results in little opportunity for sector vessels to fish on stocks that have an ACL under Alternative 1/No Action, and so most commercial groundfish fishing activity would not occur.

The default specifications for GB haddock, 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 continue to allow fishing for the first six months of the fishing year, but after that, fishing on groundfish trips would stop and biological impacts on regulated groundfish species would decline for stocks managed or located in each broad stock area. In general, Alternative 1/No Action would be expected to result in positive impacts on managed stocks. The ACLs are lower for several stocks under Alternative 1/No Action compared to Alternative 2; thus overall fishing mortality on regulated groundfish stocks would likely be lower under Alternative 1/No Action. However, OFLs and ABCs under Alternative 1/No Action would not reflect the most recent science.

Impacts on other species

Alternative 1/No Action is expected to have positive indirect effects on non-groundfish species such as monkfish, dogfish, skates, and Atlantic sea scallops that are captured incidentally during groundfish trips.

Indirect effects are generally likely to be beneficial given the expected reduced groundfish fishing activity. Catches of other species that occur on groundfish trips would decline as a result. There are only limited opportunities for groundfish vessels to target other stocks in other fisheries, so the shifting of effort into other fisheries is not likely to occur on a large scale. These other fisheries will also have ACLs and AMs so while such effort shifts may have economic effects, the biological impacts should not be negative. Considering the differences between the ACLs of Alternative 1/No Action and Alternative 2, the fishing mortality on other stocks that are caught incidentally during groundfish trips would probably be lower under Alternative 1/No Action.

Lastly, sub-ACLs are designed to limit the incidental catch of GOM and GB haddock by mid-water trawl (MWT) herring fisheries, and exceeding the allocations results in triggering AMs in-season. Alternative 1/No Action for GOM haddock and GB haddock would result in no change from those sub-ACLs as specified in a prior action.

6.2.2.2 Alternative 2 – Revised Specifications

Impacts on regulated groundfish

Alternative 2 would reflect the results of the 2023, 2024, and 2025 management track assessments, and the 2025 U.S. and Canadian domestic stock assessments for U.S./Canada stocks considered through the Transboundary Management Guidance Committee (TMGC). Alternative 2 would adopt new ABCs that are consistent with the most recent science. Alternative 2 would also specify total allowable catches (TACs) for the U.S./Canada Management Area for FY2026. Details on the SSC's recommendations are located in Appendix I. For stocks in formal rebuilding plans, a summary is provided in the Affected Environment (see Section 5.2.21). This summary incorporates the assessment results from the most recent stock assessments, 2023, 2024, or 2025, as appropriate.

Relative to FY2025, FY2026 total ACLs under Alternative 2 would increase for GB haddock, GOM haddock, CC/GOM yellowtail flounder, and GB winter flounder. There would be decreases in the total ACLs for GB yellowtail flounder, SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, American plaice, GOM winter flounder, SNE/MA winter flounder, redfish, and white hake. There would be no change in the total ACLs for witch flounder, pollock, northern windowpane flounder, southern windowpane flounder, ocean pout, Atlantic halibut, and Atlantic wolffish. The four Atlantic cod stocks of EGOM, WGOM, GB, and SNE are being added to the FMP for FY2026 (through Amendment 25) and so do not have comparative FY2025 ACLs.

Considering the differences between the ACLs of Alternative 1/No Action and Alternative 2, the overall fishing mortality on regulated groundfish stocks would likely be higher under Alternative 2. Therefore, biological impacts on regulated groundfish would be negative, relative to Alternative 1/No Action.

Revised specifications are determined according to updated stock assessments. These updated OFLs and ABCs are anticipated to prevent overfishing and increase the probability of rebuilding. A summary of the SSC recommendations by stock is located in Appendix I. Given that the updated OFLs and ABCs are based on the most recent science, the anticipated impact would be positive. For stocks without revised specifications, there is no material change in the prior year's scientific information supporting projected specifications; the analysis sufficiently supports adopting the projected specifications and the amounts remaining the same for the upcoming year as set previously by FW66, FW69, and A25.

This year, the SSC was asked to provide five years of catch specification advice in response to recent and expected continued changes in NOAA capacity. The SSC discussed the challenges of providing longer-term and inherently less certain catch advice that can credibly be expected to prevent overfishing without being systematically conservative with respect to the catch recommended. A substantial component of the increased uncertainty of longer-term catch advice are the projections upon which they rely. The SSC feels that an important area of research is how to best deal with increased uncertainty in setting OFLs and ABC

over longer periods and recognizes best practices for projections –especially across different life history/fishery types – remain an active area of research.

CC/GOM yellowtail flounder – The SSC recommended setting the ABCs at 75% F_{MSY}, with a modification to hold the 2028 ABC constant through 2030. The SSC had reservations about the assessment, including the large change in scale and aspects of the biological realism, and was concerned with the projections, particularly in 2029 and 2030. Most of the projected catch from 2028 onward are composed of fish cohorts based on projected recruits (i.e., "paper fish"), with the fraction increasing year over year. Given these uncertainties, the SSC recommended ABCs using the sensitivity run fixing the ABC constant in the latter two years. The FY2026 ABC at 75%F_{MSY} represents an approximate 90% increase from the ABC value for CC/GOM yellowtail flounder in FY2025. The stock is below SSB_{MSY} and the SSC believes these ABCs will limit the risk of overfishing on an overfished stock and promote rebuilding.

Table 14 – Projection results for CC/GOM yellowtail flounder (F_{MSY} proxy = 0.497 and SSB_{MSY} = 10,907 mt).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2026	2,224	1,736	0.373	9,056
2027	2,638	2,062	0.373	10,300
2028	2,984	2,335	0.373	11,163
2029	3,225	2,335	0.341	11,783
2030	3,424	2,335	0.318	12,306

SNE/MA yellowtail flounder – The SSC recommended setting the ABCs at the $F_{rebuild}$ of 70% F_{MSY}, with a modification to hold the 2026 ABC constant for each year of the specification period. The SSC had strong concerns about the assessment and projections. With no age data available for the past five years, the terminal year starting point for projections is highly uncertain and recruitment in the terminal year is based on the long-term average influenced by the recent decrease in the Gulf Stream Index. Recruitment has been chronically low, and the reliance of setting future catch limits based on projected recruitment and "paper fish" is especially acute for this stock. Given these strong reservations, the SSC elected to follow Option C of the Council's groundfish control rule, wherein catch is based on incidental bycatch only. In the absence of other values, the SSC recommended holding ABCs constant for FY 2026-2030 at the FY 2026 level of 33 mt based on 70% of F_{MSY}. By following Option C, the intent of the SSC is that the stock will be made bycatch-only, reflective of its continued poor status and the consensus that there is no catch level for a targeted fishery that is appropriate. The ABC represents an approximate 18% decrease from the ABC value for SNE/MA yellowtail flounder in the previous three years. The SSC believes these ABCs will limit the risk of overfishing on a severely overfished stock and ideally, if environmental conditions allow, promote rebuilding.

Table 15 – Projection results for SNE/MA yellowtail flounder (F_{MSY} proxy = 0.374 and SSB_{MSY} = 270 mt).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2026	46	33	0.26	132
2027	56	33		
2028	67	33		
2029	80	33		
2030	92	33		

GB winter flounder – The stock was indicated to be rebuilt as of 2025. The FY2026 ABC at 75%F_{MSY} represents an approximate 17% increase from the ABC value for GB winter flounder in FY2025. The SSC decided not to recommend holding the ABC constant in the final two years, despite these projected catches being considered uncertain based on their reliance on projected recruits (i.e.,"paper fish"), because the stock was assessed to be above SSB_{MSY}. The recommended ABCs are expected to limit sufficient risk of overfishing.

Table 16 – Projection results for GB winter flounder (F_{MSY} proxy = 0.431 and SSB_{MSY} = 5,182 mt).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2026	2,279	1,785	0.32	6,534
2027	2,148	1,681	0.32	6,213
2028	2,079	1,627	0.32	6,035
2029	2,061	1,613	0.32	5,974
2030	2,060	1,612	0.32	5,970

SNE/MA winter flounder – The SSC recommended setting the ABC based on the projections at 50%F_{MSY} and with a modification to hold the 2028 ABC constant through 2030. Concern over the substantial uncertainty in projections, continued poor stock condition, and uncertainty regarding the F_{MSY} proxy led to the SSC recommending continued use of a precautionary approach. The FY2026 ABC represents an approximate 19% decrease from the ABC value for SNE/MA winter flounder in the previous three years. The recommended ABCs are unlikely to result in overfishing for this stock and are expected to meet the Council's management objectives for this stock.

Table 17 – Projection results for SNE/MA winter flounder (F_{MSY} proxy = 0.233 and SSB_{MSY} = 3,114 mt).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2026	961	507	0.117	3,434
2027	1,009	532	0.117	3,691
2028	1,055	556	0.117	3,882
2029	1,101	556	0.112	4,072
2030	1,148	556	0.107	4,281

Acadian redfish - The FY2026 ABC at 75%F_{MSY} represents an approximate 32% decrease from the ABC value for redfish in FY2025. The recommended ABC is unlikely to result in overfishing for this stock.

Table 18 – Projection results for Acadian redfish (F_{MSY} proxy = 0.037 and SSB_{MSY} = 131,411 mt).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2026	7,519	5,665	0.028	201,902
2027	7,203	5,427	0.028	194,296
2028	6,999	5,273	0.028	187,354
2029	6,723	5,065	0.028	181,267
2030	6,513	4,907	0.028	176,177

White hake – The ABC is set at $F_{rebuild}$ for white hake which uses projections at 70%F_{MSY}. The FY2026 ABC represents an approximate 30% decrease from the ABC value for white hake in FY2025. The recommended ABC is unlikely to result in overfishing for this stock.

Table 19 – Projection results for white hake (F_{MSY} proxy = 0.176 and SSB_{MSY} = 25,004 mt).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2026	1,943	1,393	0.123	12,293
2027	1,760	1,261	0.123	11,497
2028	1,640	1,174	0.123	11,204
2029	1,618	1,157	0.123	11,252
2030	1,698	1,215	0.123	11,673

GB cod and GB haddock include transboundary Eastern Georges Bank management units which, along with GB yellowtail flounder, are jointly managed with Canada. The process for the joint management of these transboundary stocks with Canada has recently changed. The new procedure for providing domestic scientific advice from both countries to the TMGC involves sharing of domestic science between countries to inform negotiations on Eastern Georges Bank cod and Eastern Georges Bank haddock TACs by the TMGC at its annual meeting. GB yellowtail flounder is only assessed by the U.S. TMGC negotiations consider but are not constrained by groundfish ABC control rules and the Council's Risk Policy. The OFL and ABC will be set for these transboundary stocks for future year(s) as part of the annual U.S./Canada TMGC deliberations.

GB cod – TMGC agreed to base the negotiation on the Canadian Eastern GB cod assessment, with the U.S. biomass apportionment method applied to determine the proportion of the stock in the Eastern Georges Bank management unit area for the basis of the shared TAC. For 2026, the U.S. biomass apportionment indicated 100% of the stock abundance is in the Eastern GB area. The SSC confirmed the FY2026 OFL derived from the 2025 Canadian assessment and the ABC set equal to the OFL that aligns with the recommendation from the TMGC for the shared U.S./Canada TAC for FY2026. This ABC is set equal to the OFL derived from the Canadian DFO 2025 Eastern GB cod assessment (consistent with applying a fishing mortality (F) strategy defined as a very low risk of preventable decline) and consistent with the TMGC approach of reducing fishing pressure when stock productivity is poor. The recommended OFL and ABC aim to prevent overfishing. The FY2026 ABC represents an approximate 19% increase from the ABC value for GB cod proposed in FY2025.

Table 20 – Projection results for GB cod (based on Canadian EGB cod assessment).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2026	473	473	0.052	6,462

GB haddock – TMGC agreed to base the negotiation on the U.S. GB haddock assessment, with the U.S. biomass apportionment method applied to determine the proportion of the stock in the Eastern Georges Bank management unit area for the basis of the shared TAC. For 2026, the U.S. biomass apportionment indicated 75% of the stock abundance is in the Eastern GB area. The SSC confirmed the FY2026 OFL derived from the 2024 U.S. management track assessment and the ABC set equal to the OFL that aligns with the recommendation from the TMGC for the shared U.S./Canada TAC for FY2026. This ABC is set equal to the OFL derived from the U.S. management track assessment (associated with 50% chance of overfishing) and consistent with a neutral (50%) risk of exceeding the fishing mortality reference point in the Canadian assessment. The recommended OFL and ABC are not likely to result in overfishing for this stock. The FY2026 ABC represents an approximate 10% increase from the ABC value for GB haddock in FY2025.

Table 21 – Projection results for GB haddock (FMSY proxy = 0.26 and SSBMSY = 24,225 mt).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2025	8,177	8,177	0.264	36,029

GB yellowtail flounder – The SSC confirmed the FY2026 OFL derived from the 2025 management track assessment (associated with 50% chance of overfishing) and the ABC set equal to the OFL that aligns with the recommendation from the TMGC for the shared U.S./Canada TAC for FY2026. The FY2026 ABC represents an approximate 66% decrease from the ABC value for GB yellowtail flounder in FY2025.

Table 22 – Projection results for GB yellowtail flounder (F_{MSY} = 0.09 and SSB_{MSY} = 7,072 mt).

Year	OFL	ABC	F	SSB
2026	57	57	0.09	646

It is not possible to project stock sizes for the following stocks, because these stocks do not have an accepted analytical assessment model:

- GOM winter flounder
- Ocean pout
- Atlantic wolffish

For index-assessed stocks an estimate of the probability of overfishing cannot be determined but the proposed ABC is based on the default control rule applied at 75% of F_{MSY}, an exploitation rate (such as the ratio of catch to a survey index), or an alternative approach applied to the most recent estimate of stock size. Because the proposed ABCs for stocks with an empirical assessment are determined using

control rules which are intended to account for scientific uncertainty when setting ABCs in the absence of other information, the proposed ABCs are not expected to lead to declines in biomass for these stocks.

For stocks without projections and in some cases for stocks with projections, the SSC has recommended constant ABCs, and the Council adopted these recommendations.

Due to the impact of recent reductions in force on the NEFSC's stock assessment capacity, the Center provided a data update in lieu of an assessment for ocean pout and Atlantic wolffish.

GOM winter flounder - The OFL and ABC is recommended to remain constant for each year of the specification period. The ABC represents an approximate 1% decrease from the ABC value for GOM winter flounder in the previous three years. The recommended ABC is not likely to result in overfishing for this stock.

Table 23 – OFLs and ABCs (mt) for GOM winter flounder for FY2026-FY2030.

Year	OFL	ABC
2026	1,064	798
2027	1,064	798
2028	1,064	798
2029	1,064	798
2030	1,064	798

Ocean pout - The OFL and ABC is recommended to remain constant for each year of the specification period. The SSC recommended maintaining the OFL and ABC that had been in place for the previous eight years given no major changes in abundance were evident since the last assessment and catch recommendations issued, and uncertainty and concerns that suggested a cautious approach was warranted. The recommended ABC is unlikely to result in overfishing for this stock.

Table 24 – OFLs and ABCs (mt) for ocean pout for FY2026-FY2030.

Year	OFL	ABC
2026	125	87
2027	125	87
2028	125	87
2029	125	87
2030	125	87

Atlantic wolffish – The OFL and ABC is recommended to remain constant for each year of the specification period. Given that the catch and survey information for wolffish was generally stable (albeit at apparent low abundance levels), the SSC recommended maintaining the OFL and ABC that had been in place for the previous three years. The recommended ABC is unlikely to result in overfishing for this stock.

Table 25 – OFLs and ABCs (mt) for Atlantic wolffish for FY2026-FY2030.

Year	OFL	ABC
2026	124	93
2027	124	93
2028	124	93
2029	124	93
2030	124	93

Sub-ACLs for Other Fisheries

The ABCs and ACLs under Alternative 2 include specifications of sub-ACLs for other fisheries.

Sub-ACLs are designed to limit the incidental catch of yellowtail flounder and windowpane flounder by the scallop fishery. Exceeding catch limits may trigger accountability measures for the scallop fishery. The overall impact of Alternative 2 ABCs and ACLs are likely to be slight positive, neutral, or slight negative with respect to the Atlantic sea scallop resource.

Scallop Framework 40 Overview:

Scallop Framework 40 will set fishery allocations for FY2026 and FY2027 (default). This year the Scallop PDT was unable to conduct bycatch projections under the alternatives considered for Fishery Specifications and Rotational Management (Action 3), because area-specific projections of scallop catch under each alternative were not available, nor were updated d/K ratios (ratio of discards to all kept catch) for each stock/projection area, due to impacts from the partial federal government shutdown. In the absence of bycatch projections, the Scallop PDT provided qualitative information about potential scallop fishery effort in FY2026 as it relates to stock areas for the four flatfish stocks with scallop fishery sub-ACLs. Generally, scallop fishery effort is anticipated to be lower on Georges Bank, especially given that the Council is not considering access to Area II for FY2026. Open area effort on areas west of Area II is anticipated. These areas are within the GB yellowtail flounder and northern windowpane flounder stock areas. Increased open area effort in the Mid-Atlantic region is anticipated, which overlaps the SNE/MA yellowtail flounder and southern windowpane flounder stock areas. Alternative 2 would have a lower sub-ACL for GB yellowtail flounder than in Alternative 1/No Action and relative to FY2025. Alternative 2 would have a higher sub-ACL for SNE/MA yellowtail flounder than in Alternative 1/No Action and unchanged relative to FY2025. The sub-ACLs for northern windowpane flounder and southern windowpane flounder are the same under both Alternative 2 and Alternative 1/No Action and unchanged relative to FY2025.

In addition, sub-ACLs are designed to limit the incidental catch of GB yellowtail flounder by small-mesh fisheries, and exceeding the allocations results in triggering AMs in subsequent years. A summary of recent catches by the small-mesh fisheries is provided (Table in AE). The accountability measure requires vessels to fish an approved selective trawl gear that reduces the catch of flatfish in the GB yellowtail flounder stock area. As small-mesh species can be effectively prosecuted using modified trawl gear, it is difficult to predict if groundfish sub-ACLs may affect fishing mortality and stock size of small-mesh species (e.g., whiting and squid). The overall impact of Alternative 2 ABCs and ACLs are likely to be slight positive to negligible with respect to the squid and whiting resource on Georges Bank.

Sub-ACLs are also designed to limit the incidental catch of GOM and GB haddock by mid-water trawl (MWT) herring fisheries, and exceeding the allocations results in triggering AMs in-season. A summary of recent catches in the midwater trawl Atlantic herring fishery is provided for GOM haddock and GB haddock in the Affected Environment (Tables in AE). Alternative 2 for GB haddock would have higher

sub-ACLs than in Alternative 1/No Action and would have neutral to slight negative impacts on the Atlantic herring stock when compared with Alternative 1/No Action. The sub-ACLs for GOM haddock are the same under both Alternative 1/No Action and Alternative 2 and therefore impacts on the Atlantic herring stock would be neutral.

Lastly, the other sub-component of southern windowpane flounder is used to evaluate if an AM would be triggered for large-mesh non-groundfish fisheries (e.g., summer flounder and scup trawl fisheries). Exceeding the component and the overall ACL results in triggering AMs in a future year. AMs are gear restricted areas (GRAs) designed to reduce catches of flatfish, which would have positive biological benefits for summer flounder and to a lesser extent scup by reducing fishing mortality. A summary of recent catches for other sub-components is found in the Affected Environment (Table in AE). The ABC for southern windowpane flounder is the same under Alternative 1/No Action and Alternative 2 and therefore impacts would be neutral.

Option A – <u>Remove the management uncertainty buffer for sectors for white hake if the ASM target coverage rate is set at 90% or greater</u>

Impacts on regulated groundfish

For the option to consider removing the management uncertainty buffer for sectors for white hake for FY2026-FY2030 if the ASM target coverage rate is set at 90% or greater, this option would be expected to have slight negative impacts on regulated groundfish since there could be a possible increase in fishing effort relative to not removing the management uncertainty buffers for this stock. However, the removal of the buffers is conditional on a high level of sector at-sea monitoring (a minimum of 90% target coverage rate), which could have positive impacts. Adequacy of fishery monitoring data is one of the five elements of management uncertainty evaluated when fishery specifications are developed, and the increased at-sea monitoring coverage level in the commercial sector groundfish fishery will reduce uncertainty. Further, the management uncertainty buffer would remain in place for the common pool fishery.

Impacts on other species

The removal of the management uncertainty buffer for sectors for white hake for FY2026-FY2030 would not be expected to have direct impacts on other species. Indirectly, there is the possibility for increased fishing effort relative to not removing the buffers, which could have slight negative impacts on other species. However, the removal of the buffers is conditional on a high level of sector at-sea monitoring at a 90% target coverage rate, which could have positive impacts.

6.2.3 **Action 3 - Recreational Fishery Management Measures**

6.2.3.1 Alternative 1 – No Action

<u>Impacts on regulated groundfish</u>

Alternative 1/No Action would likely have neutral to positive impacts on regulated groundfish. Alternative 1/No Action would maintain the regulatory process for the regional administrator to adjust recreational measures for stocks with recreational sub-ACLs (WGOM cod, GOM haddock, and SNE cod), and this regulatory process would not extend to EGOM cod, GB cod, or GB haddock. This measure is largely administrative because it is specific to the process by which recreational measures would be set for these three stocks, though the recreational measures that could extend from this regulatory process would continue to have positive impacts to regulated groundfish. The Council would continue to set

recreational measures for EGOM cod, GB cod, and GB haddock, as well as other stocks without recreational sub-ACLs, through future actions.

Impacts on other species

Alternative 1/No Action would not be expected to have any direct biological impact on other species. It is administrative in nature because it focuses on the process for setting recreational measures rather than specific measures.

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

Impacts on regulated groundfish

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 (WGOM cod, SNE cod, and 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. This measure is largely administrative, though the recreational measures that could extend from this regulatory process could have positive impacts for regulated groundfish, including EGOM cod, GB cod, and GB haddock. The intent is to consider applying consistent recreational measures for a species across stocks, which would be developed in consultation with the Council, if appropriate.

Impacts on other species

Alternative 2 would not be expected to have any direct biological impact on other species. It is administrative in nature because it focuses on the process for setting recreational measures rather than specific measures.

6.3 Impacts on Physical Environment and Essential Fish Habitat

To be completed.

6.4 Impacts on Endangered and Protected Species

To be completed.

6.5 Impacts on Human Communities – Economics

Consideration of the economic impacts of the changes made in this framework is required pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) of 1976. NEPA requires that before any federal agency may take "actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment," that agency must prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that includes the integrated use of the social sciences (NEPA Section 102(2) (C)). The MSA stipulates that the social and economic impacts to all fishery stakeholders should be analyzed for each proposed fishery management measure to provide advice to the Council when making regulatory decisions (Magnuson-Stevens Section 1010627, 109-47).

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) provides guidelines to use when performing economic reviews of regulatory actions. The key dimensions for this analysis are expected changes in net benefits to fishery stakeholders, the distribution of benefits and costs within the industry, and changes in income and employment (NMFS 2007). Where possible, cumulative effects of regulations are identified and discussed. Non-economic social concerns are discussed in Section 6.6. The economic impacts presented here consist of both qualitative and quantitative analyses dependent on available data, resources, and the measurability of predicted outcomes. It is assumed throughout this analysis that changes in revenues would have downstream impacts on income levels and employment; however, these are only mentioned if directly quantifiable.

6.5.1 Action 1 –Status Determination Criteria

6.5.1.1 Alternative 1 – No Action

Under Alternative 1/No Action, status determination criteria (SDCs) would not be adopted for GB yellowtail flounder. Economic impacts in the short term would be negative, as there would not be SDCs specified for GB yellowtail flounder with which to specify OFLs, ABCs, and ACLs. In the long-term, biomass targets would not be based on the latest scientific information, increasing the risk of overfishing, and eroding long fishery net revenues over the long term. Overall, Alternative 1/No Action is expected to have negative economic impacts, and negative impacts when compared to Alternative 2.

6.5.1.2 Alternative 2 – Updated Status Determination for Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder

Alternative 2 would adopt updated SDCs for GB yellowtail flounder. In the short term, economic impacts could be positive or negative, since SDCs are needed to specify OFLs, ABCs, and ACLs, and these levels of catch may be lower than the fishery has experienced. In the long-term, Alternative 2 is expected to

have positive economic impacts, because adopting SDCs for GB yellowtail flounder, according to the most recent scientific assessments, decreases the likelihood of overfishing or the stock becoming overfished over the long run, which allows for increased fishery revenues. Overall, Alternative 2 is expected to have low positive economic impacts. Compared to Alternative 1/No Action, economic impacts are expected to be positive.

6.5.2 **Action 2 – Revised Specifications**

6.5.2.1 Alternative 1 – No Action

Commercial Groundfish Fishery - Sector component

Under Alternative 1/No Action, the fishery would operate under default specifications until October 31, 2026. After October 31, the total ACL would be set at 0 mt for groundfish stocks that do not have FY2026 ACLs specified under Alternative 1/No Action (GB haddock, 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).

Compared to Alternative 2, sector FY2026 sub-ACLs under Alternative 1/No Action would be higher for GB yellowtail flounder and redfish, and lower for GB cod.

Commercial Groundfish Fishery - Common Pool

Under Alternative 1/No Action when compared to Alternative 2, non-sector FY2026 sub-ACLs would be higher for GB yellowtail flounder and redfish and lower for GB cod.

A number of groundfish stocks would not have FY2026 ACLs specified under Alternative 1/No Action (GB haddock, 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). For these stocks, default specifications set at 75% of the FY2025 ACL would be in place until October 31, 2026. After October 31, the total ACL would be set at 0 mt, which would have negative impacts on the common pool fishery under Alternative 1/No Action relative to FY2025 and Alternative 2.

Recreational Groundfish Fishery

WGOM cod – The sub-ACL is the same under Alternative 1/No Action and Alternative 2, and so economic impacts to the recreational fishery would be neutral.

GOM haddock - The sub-ACL is the same under Alternative 1/No Action and Alternative 2, and so economic impacts to the recreational fishery would be neutral.

SNE cod - The sub-ACL is the same under Alternative 1/No Action and Alternative 2, and so economic impacts to the recreational fishery would be neutral.

Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery

As the sub-ACL would be higher under Alternative 1/No Action for GB yellowtail flounder, this provides positive economic impacts for the scallop fishery compared to Alternative 2. For SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, the sub-ACL under default specifications would be slightly lower under Alternative 1/No Action and would have slight negative impacts compared to Alternative 2. For northern windowpane flounder and southern windowpane flounder, the economic impacts are neutral relative to Alternative

1/No Action as the sub-ACLs are unchanged under Alternative 2. However, relative to the status quo, negative economic impacts are anticipated if AMs are triggered due to overages.

Midwater trawl (MWT) directed Atlantic herring fishery

GB haddock – Under Alternative 1/No Action, the 2026 sub-ACL for GB haddock would have negative to neutral impacts on the MWT Atlantic herring fishery when compared to Alternative 2. The economic impacts would be negative because the GB haddock sub-ACL in FY2026 would be set under default specifications which are lower than 82 mt under Alternative 2, and therefore more likely for the AM to be triggered in-season. Recent GB haddock catches by the MWT Atlantic herring fishery have been low in part due to lower Atlantic herring ACLs and fishing activity on GB. Therefore, the economic impact may be neutral given recent low catches of GB haddock.

GOM haddock - Under Alternative 1/No Action, the FY2026 sub-ACL for GOM haddock would have neutral impacts on the MWT Atlantic herring fishery when compared to Alternative 2 as the sub-ACL would remain the same. GOM haddock catches by the midwater trawl Atlantic herring fishery have been low in recent years.

Small-mesh fisheries

Under Alternative 1/No Action, the sub-ACL for GB yellowtail flounder would have neutral to positive impacts for the small mesh fisheries (e.g., whiting and squid) when compared to Alternative 2. Under Alternative 1/No Action, the sub-ACL for GB yellowtail flounder for the small mesh fisheries (e.g., whiting and squid) would be 1.8 mt which is higher than the sub-ACL of 0.6 mt under Alternative 2. However, economic impacts may be neutral as small mesh fishery catches in recent years have generally been low (Reference Table in AE).

Large-mesh non-groundfish fisheries

Southern windowpane flounder - The southern windowpane flounder "other fisheries" sub-component is used to evaluate when an AM could be triggered for large-mesh non-groundfish fisheries (e.g., summer flounder and scup trawl fisheries). The "other fisheries" sub-component was exceeded in FY2023 but the total ACL was not exceeded for southern windowpane flounder; therefore, AMs were not triggered. AMs may be triggered in the future if overall catches increase. Relative to Alternative 2, Alternative 1/No Action, impacts are expected to be neutral because the value would remain unchanged at 98 mt.

6.5.2.2 Alternative 2 – Revised Specifications

Comparisons between FY2025 and proposed FY2026 commercial sub-ACLs, recreational sub-ACLs, and other fisheries sub-ACLs for groundfish are provided in Table 26 and Table 27. Since the four Atlantic cod stocks are being added to the FMP through Amendment 25, they do not have FY2025 ACLs to make for a direct comparison; however, Table 28 provides a comparison between the commercial groundfish fishery sub-ACLs for FY2025 summed across the two old/existing cod stocks (GOM and GB) and proposed FY2026 sub-ACLs summed across the four new cod stocks (EGOM, WGOM, GB, SNE).

A number of groundfish stocks would not have FY2026 ACLs specified under Alternative 1/No Action (GB haddock, 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). For these stocks, default specifications set at 75% of the FY2025 ACL would be in place until October 31, 2026. After October 31, the total ACL would be set at 0 mt. Therefore, Alternative 2 would have positive

economic impacts compared to Alternative 1/No Action for these stocks since specifications would be in place for the entirety of the fishing year. Furthermore, without specifications in place for these stocks, this would restrict commercial groundfish fishing for all stocks in all broad stock areas.

Table 26 – Comparison of commercial (sector and common pool) groundfish sub-ACLs (mt) for FY2025 and proposed FY2026, including the percent change between years. Proposed FY2026 sub-ACLs as indicated under Alternative 2/Revised Specifications.

	Stock	Commercial groundfish sub-ACL		
		FY2025[1]	Proposed FY2026	% Change
Allocated Stocks	EGOM Cod	N/A	36.5	N/A
	WGOM Cod	N/A	289.8	N/A
	GB Cod	N/A	132.3	N/A
	SNE Cod	N/A	6.7	N/A
	GB Haddock	1,441.3	4,098.2	+184%
	GOM Haddock	2,076.8	2,213.2	+7%
	GB Yellowtail Flounder	76.3	24.5	-68%
	SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	33.4	28.0	-16%
	CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder	808.4	1,599.8	+98%
	American Plaice	8,220.9	6,596.9	-20%
	Witch Flounder	1,406.2	1,406.2	0%
	GB Winter Flounder	1,430.8	1,620.0	+13%
	GOM Winter Flounder	607.2	659.5	+9%
	SNE/MA Winter Flounder	440.8	380.5	-14%
	Redfish	7,859.3	5,354.8	-32%
	White Hake	1,815.8	1,287.4	-29%
	Pollock	10,705.3	9,391.2	-12%
Non-allocated Stocks	Northern Windowpane Flounder	93.6	93.6	0%
	Southern Windowpane Flounder	29.7	29.7	0%
	Ocean Pout	49.0	51.8	+6%
	Atlantic Halibut	23.1	23.1	0%
	Atlantic Wolffish	86.5	86.5	0%

[1] Includes sector management uncertainty buffers (MUBs). MUBs were ultimately removed since ASM target coverage for FY2025 was set at 100%.

Table 27 – Comparison of other fisheries sub-ACLs (mt) for FY2025 and proposed FY2026, including the percent change between years. Proposed FY2026 sub-ACLs as indicated under Alternative 2/Revised Specifications.

Fishery	Stock	FY2025	Proposed FY2026	% Change
Recreational Groundfish	WGOM Cod	N/A	118	N/A
	SNE Cod	N/A	18	N/A
	GOM Haddock	1,075	1,146	+7%
Sea Scallop	GB Yellowtail Flounder	14.9	4.8	-68%
	SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	2.7	2.7	0%
	GOM/GB Windowpane Flounder	26.6	26.6	0%
	SNE/MA Windowpane Flounder	71.3	71.3	0%
Midwater Trawl	GB Haddock	29	82	+183%
	GOM Haddock	32	34	+6%
Small-Mesh	GB Yellowtail Flounder	1.8	0.6	-67%
Other Sub-components – Large-Mesh Non-Groundfish[1]	SNE/MA Windowpane Flounder	98	98	0%

[1] The other sub-component for SNE/MA Windowpane Flounder is used to evaluate AMs for large-mesh non-groundfish trawl fisheries (e.g., summer flounder and scup trawl fisheries).

Table 28 – Comparison of commercial groundfish fishery sub-ACLs (mt) for FY2025 summed across the two old/existing cod stocks (GOM and GB) and proposed FY2026 summed across the four new cod stocks (EGOM, WGOM, GB, SNE), including the percent change between years. Proposed FY2026 sub-ACL reflects the summed sub-ACLs for EGOM cod, WGOM cod, GB cod, and SNE cod, as indicated under Alternative 2/Revised Specifications.

Commercial groundfish sub-ACL summed across cod stocks		
FY2025 GOM + GB	Proposed FY2026 EGOM + WGOM + GB + SNE	% Change
317.0	465.3	+47%

Commercial Groundfish Fishery - Sector component

Under Alternative 2 when compared to Alternative 1/No Action, sector FY2026 sub-ACLs would be higher for GB cod and lower for GB yellowtail flounder and redfish.

A number of groundfish stocks would not have FY2026 ACLs specified under Alternative 1/No Action (GB haddock, 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). For these stocks, default specifications set at 75% of the FY2025 ACL would be in place until October 31, 2026. After October 31, the total ACL would be set at 0 mt.

Commercial Groundfish Fishery - Common Pool

Under Alternative 2 when compared to Alternative 1/No Action, non-sector FY2026 sub-ACLs would be higher for GB cod and lower for GB yellowtail flounder and redfish.

A number of groundfish stocks would not have FY2026 ACLs specified under Alternative 1/No Action (GB haddock, 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). For these stocks, default specifications set at 75% of the FY2025 ACL would be in place until October 31, 2026. After October 31, the total ACL would be set at 0 mt. Therefore, Alternative 2 would have positive impacts for the common pool fishery relative to Alternative 1/No Action.

Recreational Groundfish Fishery

WGOM cod – The sub-ACL is the same under Alternative 1/No Action and Alternative 2, and so economic impacts to the recreational fishery would be neutral.

GOM haddock - The sub-ACL is the same under Alternative 1/No Action and Alternative 2, and so economic impacts to the recreational fishery would be neutral.

SNE cod - The sub-ACL is the same under Alternative 1/No Action and Alternative 2, and so economic impacts to the recreational fishery would be neutral.

Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery

As the sub-ACL would be a decrease under Alternative 2 for GB yellowtail flounder, economic impacts to the scallop fishery would be negative compared to Alternative 1/No Action. For SNE/MA yellowtail flounder, the sub-ACL would increase slightly under Alternative 2 compared to the default specifications under Alternative 1/No Action, and so economic impacts would be slight positive relative to Alternative 1/No Action. For northern windowpane flounder and southern windowpane flounder, the economic impacts to the scallop fishery are neutral relative to Alternative 1/No Action as the sub-ACLs are unchanged under Alternative 2. However relative to the status quo, negative economic impacts are anticipated if AMs are triggered due to overages.

Midwater trawl (MWT) directed Atlantic herring fishery and Atlantic mackerel fishery

GB haddock – Under Alternative 2, the FY2026 sub-ACL for GB haddock would have positive to neutral impacts on the MWT Atlantic herring fishery. The economic impacts would be positive because the GB haddock sub-ACL in FY2026 would be 82 mt, much higher than the 29 mt FY 2025 sub-ACL and the sub-ACL under default specifications in Alternative 1/No Action for FY2026. Therefore, it would be less likely for the AM to be triggered in-season under Alternative 2.

However, recent GB haddock catches by the MWT Atlantic herring fishery have been low in part due to lower Atlantic herring ACLs and fishing activity on GB. Therefore, the economic impact may be neutral given recent catches of GB haddock.

GOM haddock - Under Alternative 2, the FY2026 sub-ACL for GOM haddock would have slight positive to neutral impacts on the MWT Atlantic herring fishery. The economic impacts would be positive because the GOM haddock sub-ACL in FY2026 would be 34 mt, slightly higher than the 32 mt FY 2025 sub-ACL which is the same value under Alternative/No Action for FY2026, and therefore less likely for the AM to be triggered in-season.

However, recent GOM haddock catches by the MWT Atlantic herring fishery have been low in part due to lower Atlantic herring ACLs and fishing activity on GB. Therefore, the economic impact may be neutral given recent catches of GOM haddock.

Small-mesh fisheries

GB yellowtail flounder - Under Alternative 2, the sub-ACL for GB yellowtail flounder for the small mesh fisheries (e.g., whiting and squid) would decrease compared to Alternative 1/No Action and would have negative economic impacts. However, economic impacts of Alternative 2 on the small mesh fishery are expected to be neutral since catches in recent years have generally been low (reference table in AE).

Large-mesh non-groundfish fisheries

Southern windowpane flounder - The southern windowpane flounder "other fisheries" sub-component is used to evaluate when an AM could be triggered for large-mesh non-groundfish fisheries (e.g., summer flounder and scup trawl fisheries). Under Alternative 2, the other sub-component would remain unchanged at 98 mt from FY2025 and Alternative 1/No Action. If bycatch of southern windowpane flounder is low in FY2026, there would be neutral economic impacts of the sub-ACL under Alternative 2 compared to FY2025. The "other fisheries" sub-component was exceeded in FY2023 but the total ACL was not exceeded for southern windowpane flounder; therefore, AMs were not triggered. AMs may be triggered in the future if overall catches increase. Relative to Alternative 1/No Action, impacts and expected to be neutral.

Option A - Remove the management uncertainty buffer for sectors for white hake if the ASM target coverage rate is set at 90% or greater

Alternative 2, Option A would remove the management uncertainty buffer for sectors for white hake for FY2026-FY2030 if the ASM target coverage rate is set at 90% or greater and would have neutral to positive impacts on the sector portion of the commercial groundfish fishery compared to Alternative 1/No Action, if the ASM target coverage rate is set at 90% or greater. White hake is a highly utilized stock, with utilization near or exceeding 90% since FY2019 (Reference table in AE). In addition, lease prices have been increasing since FY2019, demonstrating the increasing importance of white hake as a constraining stock for the fishery (Reference table in AE). Removing the 5% management uncertainty buffer would enable the sector portion of the fishery to better prosecute species co-caught with white hake. However, reducing the management uncertainty buffer may reduce the amount of carryover to the next fishing year, potentially conferring neutral impacts in the long-term.

The impacts of Alternative 2, Option A would be neutral on the common pool fishery, as the management uncertainty buffer would remain in place under both Alternative 1/No Action and Alternative 2, Option A.

6.5.3 Action 3 - Recreational Fishery Management Measures

6.5.3.1 Alternative 1 – No Action

For cod and haddock stocks without recreational sub-ACLs (EGOM cod and GB cod, and GB haddock), the Regional Administrator would not have an established regulatory process for adjusting recreational fishing measures. The Council could consider proposing changes to regulations through its actions. Alternative 1/No Action would have neutral economic impacts on the commercial fishery and recreational fishery relative to Alternative 2.

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

As this process is administrative, Alternative 2 would have neutral economic impacts on the commercial fishery and recreational fishery relative to Alternative 1/No Action.

If the NMFS/Council consultation process includes consideration of the recommendations of the Recreational Advisory Panel, it could lead to positive social benefits for the recreational cod fishery participants in EGOM and GB with respect to the process of management decisions.

6.6 Impacts on Human Communities – Social

To be completed.