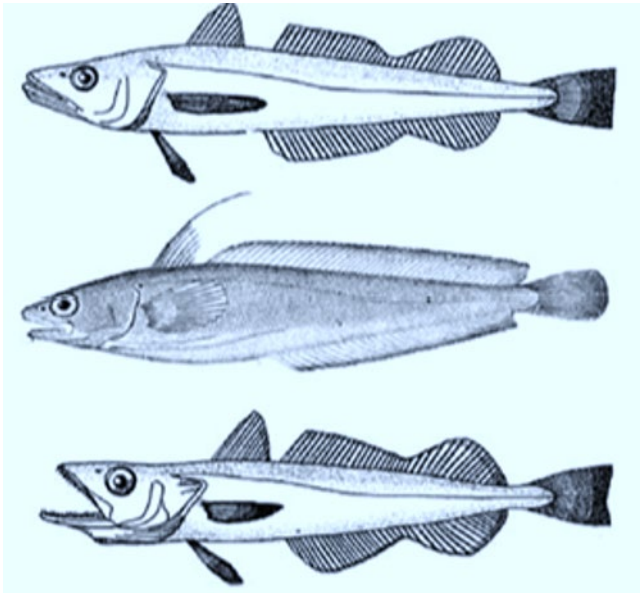
Analysis of fishery impacts for possession limit alternatives

Small-Mesh Multispecies Committee and Advisory Panel Meeting



NEFMC - Whiting PDT

November 19, 2026

New England Fishery Management Council

MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES FOR 2027 SPECIFICATIONS DOCUMENT

- Full set of 2027-2031 catch specifications
- Northern red hake possession limit
  - 3,000 lb status quo; 5,000 lb alternative
- Southern red hake possession limit
  - 600 lb status quo; 1,000 lb alternative
- Southern red hake TAL trigger
  - 41% status quo; alternatives: 65% fixed; 55-85% step; 90% fixed
- Cultivator Shoals Area monkfish possession limit
  - Status quo;
  - Alternative: Monkfish FMP non-target limits for northern area
- Cultivator Shoals Area lobster possession limit
  - Status quo;
  - Alternative: Lobster FMP non-trap gear limits

APRIL 1 DATA WORKSHOP

- Preliminary analysis based on observed trips
  - Catch on few trips exceeded 3,000 lb., therefore limited benefit expected
  - Limited at-sea sampling, particularly for small-mesh multispecies trips
  - Difficulty expanding a model estimate to the entire fishery; requires similar D/Kall assignment as is routinely conducted in CAMS using peer reviewed methods
  - Recommended using more complete CAMS data of observed and unobserved trips

CAMS DATA

- All trips catching small-mesh multispecies stocks during 2022-2025
  - Includes estimated catches on unobserved trips
  - Filters applied:
    - Trips catching northern red hake by any gear
    - Trips catching southern red hake using small-mesh trawls
    - Trips catching monkfish or lobster using small-mesh trawls in statistical area 522 (northern Georges Bank; overlapping the Cultivator Shoals Area)
    - Trips that fished in both northern and southern areas based on at-sea sampling or vessel trip reports were excluded; no apportionment.
    - Trips with reported whiting landings greater than 32,000 lb in the north and 42,000 lb in the south were excluded – likely aggregate trips.

POSSESSION LIMIT MODEL

- No change in fishing behavior was expected or modeled.
- Trips less than 2,800 lb of northern red hake or 500 lb of southern red hake were assumed to not experience a change in landings or estimated discards
- Trips with reported landings less than 85% of the current possession limit assumed to not experience a change in landings or estimated discards
- Otherwise, landings were assumed to increase to the alternative possession limit or the estimated catch, whichever was less.
  - Straight possession limit for northern and southern red hake
  - Straight possession limit AND a possession limit per day-at-sea (whole or partial) for monkfish and lobster.
  - Landed lobsters were assumed to average 2 lb based on 2022-2025 fall survey averages
- Value was estimated based on the price per pound for the landed species on that trip.
- Projected changes in total landings, revenue, and discards were compared with total reported landings, revenue, and estimated discards over all trips analyzed.

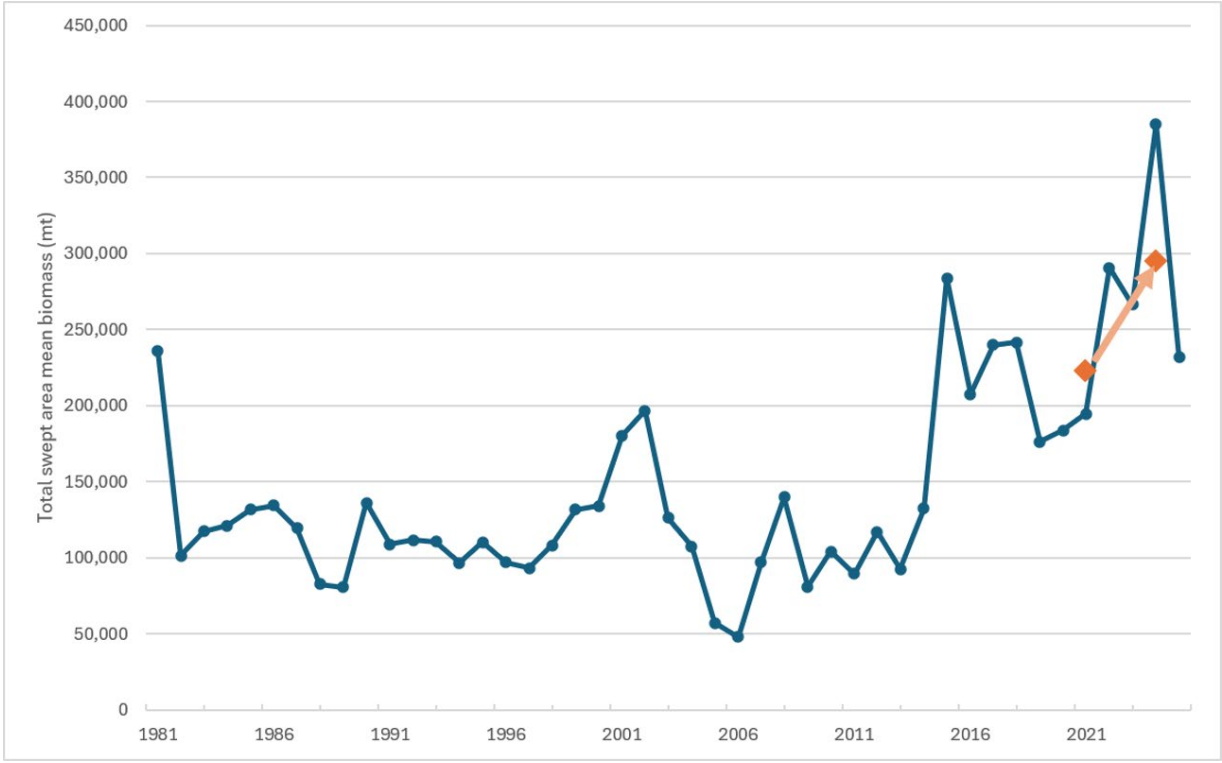
CAVEATS

- No effect on price from higher total landings
- Trips with landings exceeding the higher alternative possession limit were assumed to land the same amount as had been reported
  - An alternative sensitivity analysis was performed where these trips reduced landings to comply with the alternative possession limit.

NORTHERN RED HAKE POSSESSION LIMIT

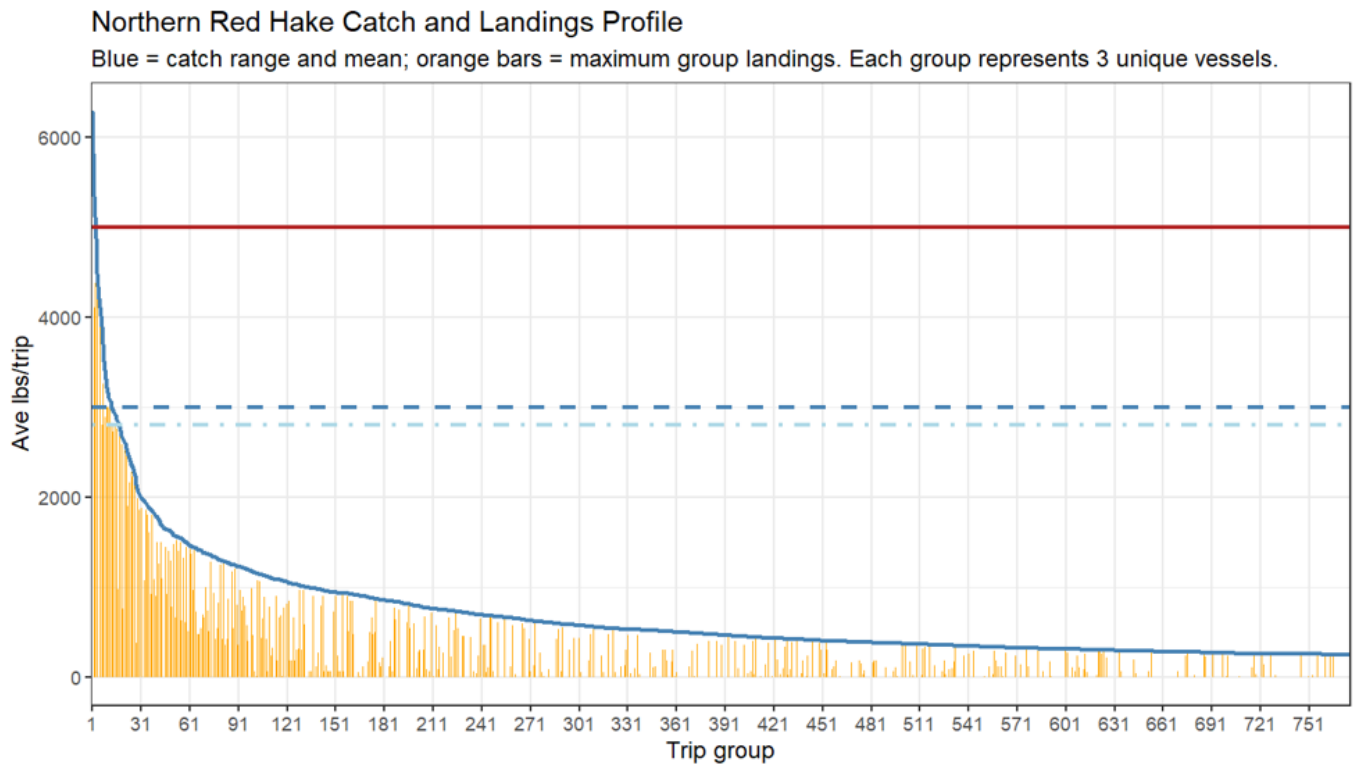
NORTHERN RED HAKE POSSESSION LIMIT ALTERNATIVES

- The 3,000-lb Northern red hake possession limit was implemented in 2015, when stock biomass was lower and overfishing was occurring. Currently, the northern red hake stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring.
- The northern red hake stock biomass has increased, but landings and price have declined. Utilization averaged 4.6% of the TAL during FY 2023-2025



NORTHERN RED HAKE 3,000 -> 5,000 LB

- Trip profile with respect to northern red hake catch and landings
- Trips ranked by total red hake catch, grouped into classes with three or more unique vessels
  - Individual vessels may appear in one or many profile classes
- Few trips with catch exceeding the existing possession limit
- Frequency and amount of landings decline with decreasing catch



NORTHERN RED HAKE 3,000 -> 5,000 LB

- 2,012 of 2,461 trips with less than 40% of revenue from small-mesh multispecies
- 2,461 trips with red hake landings
- 37 (1.5%) had landings > 2,800 lb and catches > 3,000 lb.
- Landings expected to increase by 51,424 lb (9.3%)
  - Revenue increase of $27,899 (8.9%)
  - Discards decrease by 1.2%.
- $754 average change in value on 37 affected trips.
- Landings decrease by 1,722 lb if no trips exceed the alternative possession limit

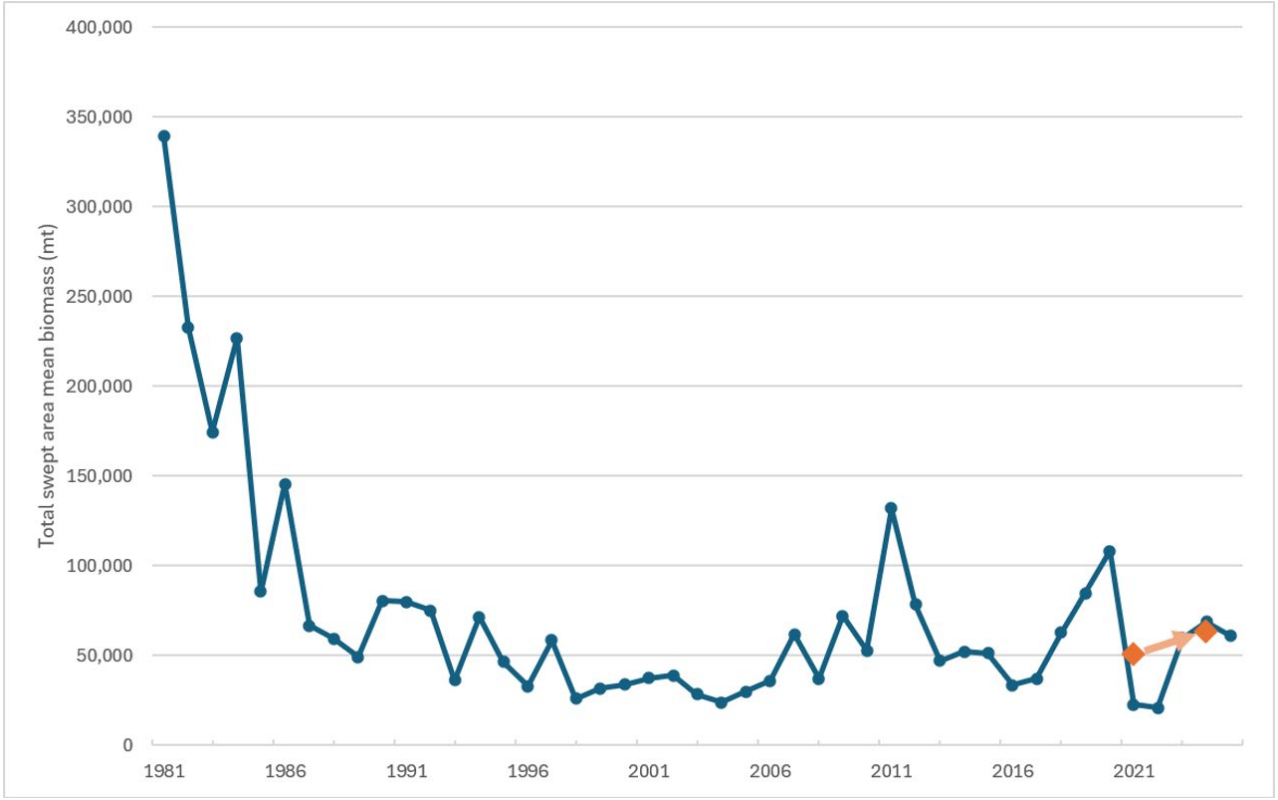
Table 3, Summary of northern red hake possession limit analysis, where trips were assumed to land as much as wasere caught, but no more than 5,000 lb (the alternative possession limit). If the reported landings on 2022-2025 trips landed more than 5,000 lb it was assumed that the 'trip' would continue to do so[3].

	Adjusted landings	Adjusted value	Adjusted discards
Total	602,148	$343,006	4,164,581
Difference	51,424	$27,899	(51,424)
Percent change	9.3%	8.9%	-1.2%
Trips with catch	717,765	Trips with landings	2461
Trips affected	37	Percent of trips	1.5%
Value/affected trip	$754.04		
Percent Small-mesh multispecies revenue			
	Trips		
40%	2,012	Min	0.0%
50%	6	Ave	20.2%
60%	3		
70%	16		
80%	22		
90%	33		
100%	284	Max	100.0%

SOUTHERN RED HAKE POSSESSION LIMIT

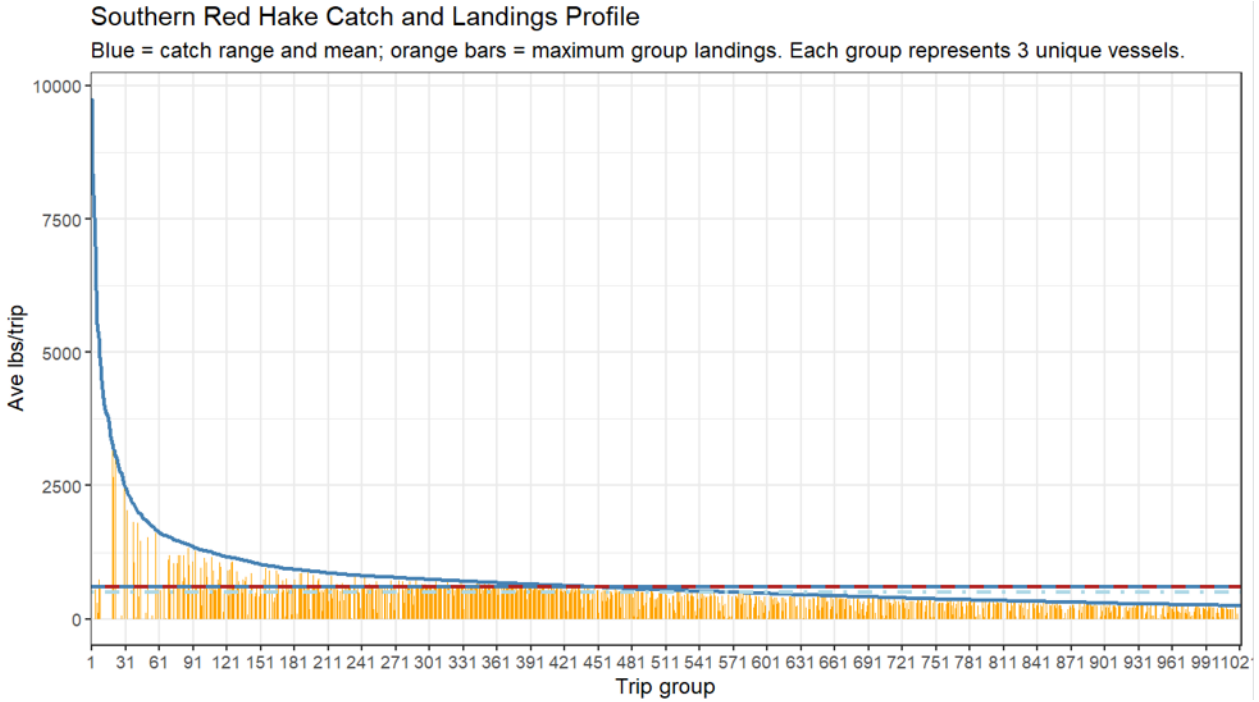
SOUTHERN RED HAKE POSSESSION LIMIT ALTERNATIVES

- The Council reduced the small-mesh multispecies fishery possession limit of red hake from 5,000 lb to 600 lb in Framework 62 as part of a biomass rebuilding strategy.
- The southern red hake stock biomass has remained low, but landings and price have declined. Utilization averaged 70.1% of the TAL during FY 2023-2025



SOUTHERN RED HAKE 600 -> 1,000 LB

- Trip profile with respect to southern red hake catch and landings
- Trips ranked by total red hake catch, grouped into classes with three or more unique vessels
  - Individual vessels may appear in one or many profile classes
- Some trips have catch exceeding the existing possession limit, some with considerably more than the alternative possession limit
- Frequency and amount of landings increase with decreasing catch



SOUTHERN RED HAKE 3,000 -> 5,000 LB

- 10,036 of 13,785 trips with less than 40% of revenue from small-mesh multispecies
- 13,785 trips with red hake landings
- 738 (5.4%) had landings > 500 lb and catches > 600 lb.
- Landings expected to increase by 276,703 lb (19.2%)
  - Revenue increase of $120,918 (17.3%)
  - Discards decrease by 3.4%.
- $164 average change in value on 738 affected trips.

Table 6, Summary of southern red hake possession limit analysis, where trips were assumed to land as much as were caught, but no more than 1,000 lb (the alternative possession limit). If the reported landings on 2022-2025 trips landed more than 1,000 lb it was assumed that the 'trip' would continue to do so.

	Adjusted landings	Adjusted value	Adjusted discards
Total	1,720,990	$821,112	7,956,283
Difference	276,703	$120,918	(276,703)
Percent change	19.2%	17.3%	-3.4%
Trips with catch	186,938	Trips with landings	13785
Trips affected	738	Percent of trips	5.4%
Value/affected trip	$163.85		
Percent Small-mesh multispecies revenue			
	Trips		
40%	10,036	Min	0.0%
50%	354	Ave	17.5%
60%	327		
70%	328		
80%	334		
90%	299		
100%	242	Max	100.0%

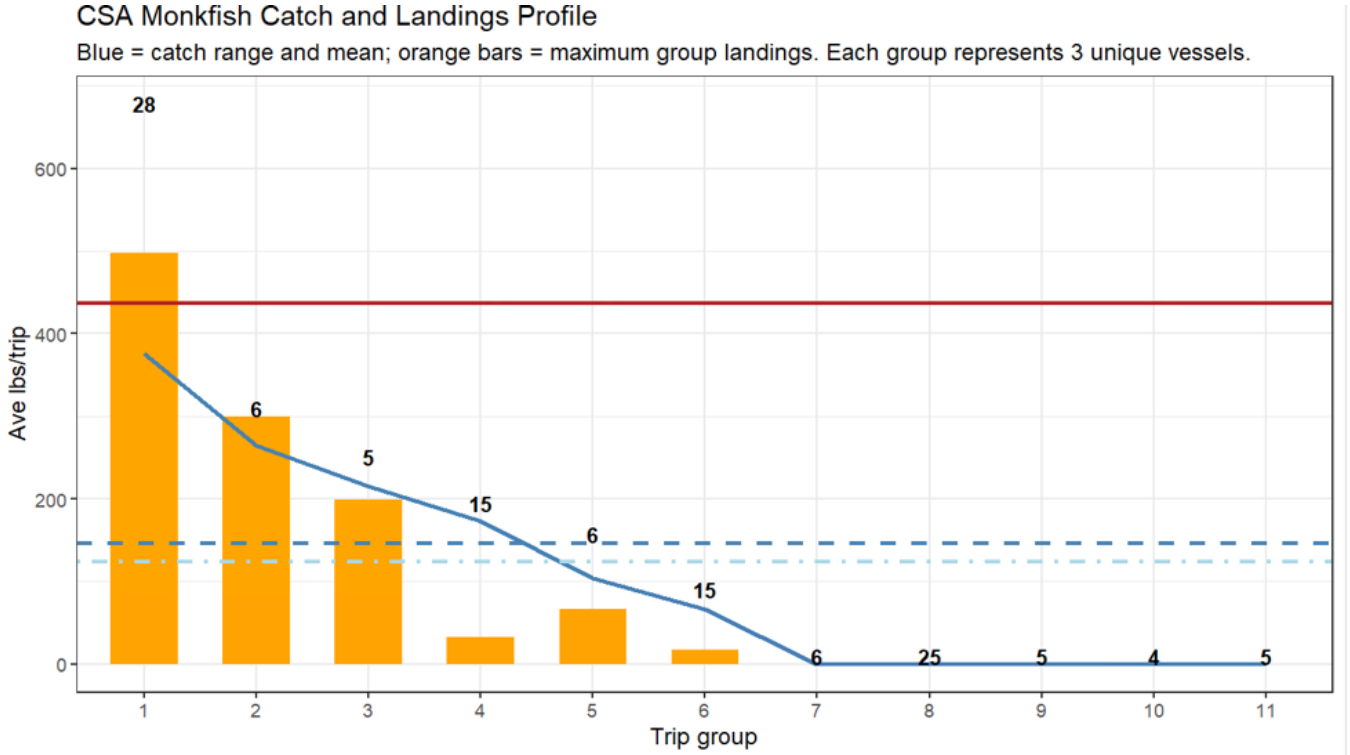
CULTIVATOR SHOALS AREA
MONKFISH POSSESSION LIMIT

MONKFISH POSSESSION LIMIT ALTERNATIVES

- Status quo: The current monkfish possession limit in the Cultivator Shoal Exemption Area is the lesser of 10%, by weight, of all other species on board OR up to 50 lb (23 kg) tail-weight/146 lb (66 kg) whole-weight of monkfish per trip
  - The intent of this more restrictive possession limit was to prevent vessels from using small-mesh trawls to target or potentially target monkfish in the early years of the monkfish fishery when prices were high.
- Alternative 2: The monkfish FMP possession limit for vessels using small mesh while not on a monkfish, multispecies, or scallop DAS is 50 lb (23 kg) tail weight or 146 lb (66 kg) whole weight of monkfish per day or partial day, up to a maximum of 150 lb (68 kg) tail weight or 437 lb (198 kg) whole weight per trip

MONKFISH 146 -> 437 LB PER TRIP OR 146 LB PER DAS

- Trip profile with respect to monkfish catch and landings
- Trips ranked by total monkfish catch, grouped into classes with three or more unique vessels
  - Individual vessels may appear in one or many profile classes
- Few trips have catch exceeding the existing possession limit (not based on the total weight of fish onboard limit)



MONKFISH 146 -> 437 LB PER TRIP OR 146 LB PER DAS

- 97 of 117 trips with more than 90% of revenue from small-mesh multispecies
- 20 trips with monkfish landings
- 10 (50%) had landings > 85% of 146 lb.
- Landings expected to increase by 985 lb (32.5%)
  - Revenue increase of $384 (27.6%)
  - Discards decrease by 6.8%.
- $38 average change in value on 10 affected trips.

Table 8, Summary of Cultivator Shoals Area incidental monkfish- possession limit analysis, where trips were assumed to land as much as were caught, but no more than 437 lb (the alternative possession limit). If the reported landings on 2022-2025 trips landed more than 437 lb it was assumed that the 'trip' would continue to do so.

	Adjusted landings	Adjusted value	Adjusted discards
Total	4,016	$1,775	13,392
Difference	985	$384	(985)
Percent change	32.5%	27.6%	-6.8%
Trips with catch	117	Trips with landings	20
Trips affected	10	Percent of trips	50.0%
Value/affected trip	$38.37		
Percent Small-mesh multispecies revenue			
	Trips		
40%	1	Min	32.8%
50%	2	Ave	91.4%
60%	3		
70%	5		
80%	12		
90%	39		
100%	58	Max	100.0%

CULTIVATOR SHOALS AREA
LOBSTER POSSESSION LIMIT

LOBSTER POSSESSION LIMIT ALTERNATIVES

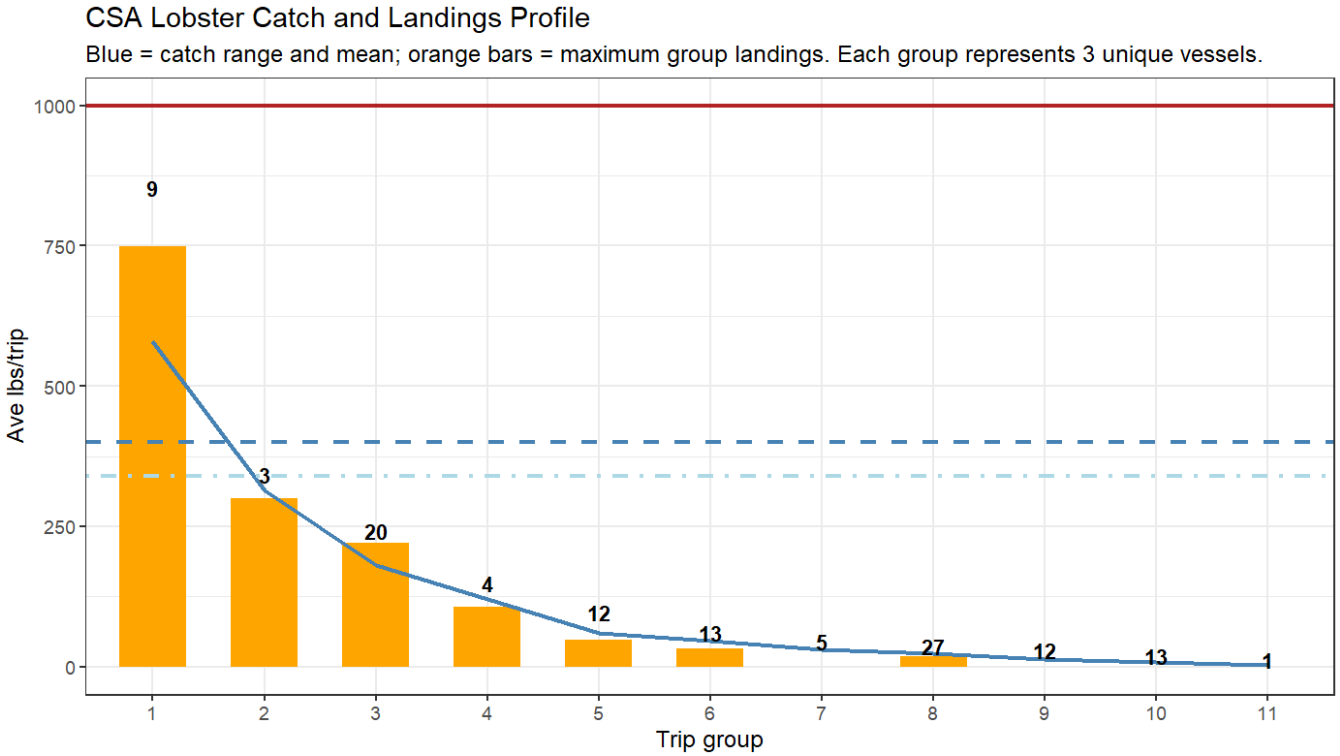
- Status quo: The current lobster possession limits specified for the Cultivator Shoal Whiting Fishery Exemption Area are the lesser or 10%, by weight, of all other species on board, or 200 lobsters, unless otherwise restricted by landing limits specified in the lobster FMP*
  - The intent of this more restrictive possession limit was to prevent vessels from using small-mesh trawls to target lobster.

*Lobster FMP limit is 100 lobsters per day or partial day

- Alternative 2: The lobster possession limit for Cultivator Shoals Area trips would be 500 lobsters (or parts thereof) per trip, while retaining the limit of 100 lobsters (or parts thereof) for each full or partial day-at-sea
  - For the purposes of analysis, the mean lobster weight was assumed to be 2 lb based on 2022-2025 fall bottom trawl survey catch.

LOBSTER 200 -> 500 LOBSTERS PER TRIP OR 100 LOBSTERS PER DAS

- Trip profile with respect to lobster catch and landings
- Trips ranked by total lobster catch, grouped into classes with three or more unique vessels
  - Individual vessels may appear in one or many profile classes
- Few trips have catch exceeding the existing possession limit (not based on the total weight of fish onboard limit).



LOBSTER 200 -> 500 LOBSTERS PER TRIP OR 100 LOBSTERS PER DAS

- 97 of 119 trips with more than 90% of revenue from small-mesh multispecies
- 33 trips with lobster landings
- 10 (50%) had landings > 85% of 146 lb.
- Landings expected to increase by 2 lb (<0.1%)
  - Revenue increase of $11 (<0.1%)
  - Discards decrease by <0.1%.
- $11 average change in value on 1 affected trip.
- If landings comply with the alternative possession limit, landings would decrease by 615 lb.

Table 10, Summary of Cultivator Shoals Area incidental lobster possession limit analysis, where trips were assumed to land as much as wasere caught, but no more than 437 lb (the alternative possession limit). If the reported landings on 2022-2025 trips landed more than 437 lb it was assumed that the 'trip' would continue to do so. Results in this table assume that the mean lobster weight is 2.0 lb.

	Adjusted landings (lb)	Adjusted value	Adjusted discards (lb)
Total	6,262	33,671	6,350
Difference	2	11	(2)
Percent change	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Trips with catch	119	Trips with landings	33
Trips affected	1	Percent of trips	3.0%
Value/affected trip	$10.96		
Percent Small-mesh multispecies revenue			
	Trips		
40%	1	Min	32.8%
50%	2	Ave	91.4%
60%	3		
70%	5		
80%	12		
90%	39		
100%	58	Max	100.0%

LOBSTER 200 -> 500 LOBSTERS PER TRIP OR 100 LOBSTERS PER DAS

- Effect of possession limit in pounds varies with the assumed mean size of lobster landed because the limits are expressed in number of lobsters
  - Allowing lobster landings to be held constant if above the possession limit, landings are expected to increase between 2 and 287 lb
  - Reducing lobster landings to the possession limit in pounds is expected to decrease landings by as much as 1,898 lb or increase landings by as much as 239 lb
- The change in landings is 'lumpy' because individual trips are affected in different ways by the assumption

Table 11. Possession limit model change in landings results with different mean lobster weight assumptions.

Mean lobster weight (lb)	Total landings change, lb	
	Reported landings can exceed Alternative 1 possession limit	Reported landings cannot exceed Alternative 1 possession limit
1	213	-1898
1.5	61	-1294
2	2	-615
2.5	138	-117
3	287	139
3.5	287	239
4	152	152