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New England Fishery Management Council

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 3, 2026
TO: Groundfish Committee
FROM: Groundfish Plan Development Team
SUBJECT: Framework 74 draft scope

The Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT) met on May 20, 2026, via webinar, to discuss the draft scope and likely range of alternatives for Framework Adjustment 74 (the annual specifications framework) which is expected to be initiated in June.

Overview

The Groundfish (Committee) is expected to discuss Framework Adjustment (FW) 74 at their June 10th meeting, including the draft scope and likely range of alternatives, and the Council is expected to initiate the action at their June meeting. The PDT discussed the draft scope and likely range of alternatives and offers recommendations for the Committee to consider for possible additional alternatives for inclusion.

PDT recommendations

Administrative Measures - Regulatory Clean-up / Streamlining

The PDT recommends for inclusion in FW74 two administrative items to address regulatory clean-up and/or streamlining. These items concern administration of two programs in the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and were identified and included within the recommendations the Council prepared for *Executive Order 14276 "Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness."* For both items, the PDT recognizes broader regulatory clean-up action would be desirable as the Council considers the utility of these programs. But in the short term, these administrative changes would provide a temporary way to reduce the annual workload, address recent challenges faced with implementation of these programs, and better align with how these programs have been operating.

1) Regular B DAS Program:

Issue: This program has been closed annually for almost a decade due to very low quota allocated into the Incidental Catch TAC, but requires an annual determination by the Regional Administrator (RA) and notification in the *Federal Register* to implement.

Suggested measure: Change the administration of the program such that it's by default closed unless the RA determines that sufficient quota is allocated to the Incidental Catch TACs to allow the program to operate in a given fishing year. This ensures that the program remains closed when necessary but alleviates the current need for GARFO to include closure of the program in annual rulemaking.

2) Closed Area II Yellowtail Flounder/Haddock SAP:

Issue: This program requires annual determination by the RA of whether this Special Access Program (SAP) is open in the upcoming fishing year to "Target Yellowtail Flounder"¹ or to "Target Haddock"². The RA must make this determination in a rulemaking in the *Federal Register* ahead of each fishing year. Open to "Target Yellowtail Flounder"³ is the default, but for at least a decade the determination has been made to open to "Target Haddock."

Suggested measure: Modify the administration of the SAP so that "Target Haddock" is the default status not requiring RA declarations, which would eliminate rulemaking requirements in the busy buildup to May 1. Also consider updating the naming conventions applied to this SAP, as these names are 1) very difficult to write out concisely in text and 2) result in misinterpretation about the requirements present in each mode (i.e., unfamiliar readers may (and often do) believe that the SAP being "open to target haddock" means that only haddock may be harvested from the area, which is not the case).

Georges Bank Haddock Mid-Water Trawl/Herring Fishery Sub-ACL

FW56 established a sub-ACL review process where, following an assessment of the GB haddock stock⁴, the Groundfish PDT conducts a review to recommend to the Council a sub-ACL for the mid-water trawl (MWT) Atlantic herring fishery of 1% to 2% of the U.S. ABC. The Council reviews the work of the PDT and determines if a change in the sub-ACL (up or down) would be considered in the action in which specifications for GB haddock would be adopted. Given a management track assessment for GB haddock will be conducted this year, the review of the sub-ACL will be included in FW74.

¹ If the SAP is open to target yellowtail, the season is July 1 through December 31. Vessels using trawl gear must use a haddock separator trawl, flounder trawl net, or Ruhle trawl. Vessels can take one trip per calendar month in the area during the season.

² If the SAP is open to target haddock, the season is August 1 through January 31, and sectors have an exemption that begins the season on May 1. Vessels must use a haddock separator trawl, Ruhle trawl, or hook gear (i.e., not flounder trawl nets). Vessels can take unlimited trips in the area during the season.

³ The determination is based on whether there is sufficient GB yellowtail flounder quota to support 150 trips into the SAP with a 15,000 lb trip limit for yellowtail flounder.

⁴ Per FW56: The review process would not take place following the assessment of only the Eastern Georges Bank (EGB) haddock stock.

The PDT recommends for inclusion in FW74 the consideration to set the sub-ACL to remain at a fixed amount (e.g., the current 2%) and discontinue the requirement of the review of the sub-ACL. As was raised previously in 2024 (the last year the review was conducted), MWT/herring fishery catches of GB haddock have been very low in recent years⁵, and Atlantic herring fishery effort has declined under low herring ACLs. Setting the sub-ACL to a fixed allocation percentage and discontinuing the review requirement would be consistent with how groundfish catches are evaluated in other fisheries (e.g., scallops, small-mesh), whereby the PDT would continue to monitor catches and make recommendations to the Council as appropriate.

⁵ Preliminary estimated MWT/herring fishery catch of GB haddock in FY2025 is 0.0 mt.
https://apps-garfo.fisheries.noaa.gov/quota-monitoring/haddock/archive-haddock//2026-05-02_qm_haddock_catch_caps.html

Final year-end report for FY2024 shows 2.5 mt for GB haddock
[Apps-garfo.fisheries.noaa.gov/quota-monitoring/groundfish/Sector_Monitoring/FY2024_mults_catch.htm](https://apps-garfo.fisheries.noaa.gov/quota-monitoring/groundfish/Sector_Monitoring/FY2024_mults_catch.htm)