

Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) ABC Control Rules Framework 68 (FW68) – Integration with Council’s Revised Risk Policy

2026 Council Groundfish Priority

In consultation with the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), continue work to revise ABC control rules for Northeast Multispecies stocks.

Work to Date

The Council added development of revised groundfish ABC control rules (CR) to its priorities in 2023. Framework 68 was initiated in June 2023.

In August 2023, the Council held a [facilitated meeting](#) to discuss and develop draft goals and objectives for the Groundfish ABC CR. Participants included members of the Groundfish Committee (Committee), the SSC, the Groundfish Plan Development Team (PDT), the Groundfish Advisory Panel (GAP), the Recreational Advisory Panel (RAP), the Risk Policy Working Group, and the public.

Following this input, in September 2023, the Council paused development of ABC CRs / FW 68 to first complete development of its revised Risk Policy. The Council approved the revised Risk Policy Statement in September 2024, and implementation began on January 1, 2025. During this time, the Risk Policy Working Group continued to refine the revised Risk Policy.

Approach for Integrating Revised Risk Policy with Groundfish ABC Control Rules

As the Risk Policy Working Group continued making refinements to the revised Risk Policy and the development of Framework 68 was restarted, it was recognized that some of the topics the Committee/Council identified in the draft goals and objectives for groundfish ABC CRs in have been incorporated into the revised Risk Policy.

Develop a tiered groundfish ABC control rule which considers, but is not limited to, potential categories, including: 1) stock status, including unknown and rebuilt; 2) stock assessment model type and sources or level of uncertainty; and 3) productivity regime. The control rule should also consider stability in the ABCs, with decision rules for when to use constant ABCs and the ability to use phasing-in ABCs consistent with National Standard 1 guidelines.

Incorporated into revised Risk Policy

To be considered through revised groundfish ABC CRs / FW 68

Incorporated into revised Risk Policy and to be considered through revised groundfish ABC CRs/FW68

Simulation testing

In 2025, [simulation testing contract work](#) under Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) initiative #1 began in support of both the development of groundfish ABC CRs / FW 68 and refinement of the revised Risk Policy.

The project includes the following objectives:

Objective 1: Evaluate the Council's updated Risk Policy and demonstrate factor scoring and potential for integration with ABC Control Rules.

Objective 2: Modify an existing Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) framework to evaluate the performance of the Risk Policy in the context of groundfish ABC Control Rules (Status Quo and Alternative ABC Control Rules).

Objective 3: Work with the project oversight team to co-develop priorities and alternative scenarios for the MSE and conduct simulation testing for representative groundfish stocks.

The contractor (University of Maine led by Dr. Lisa Kerr and Dr. Roger Brothers) works closely with a project oversight team, and periodically interfaces with relevant Council groups (Groundfish PDT, SSC, Risk Policy Working Group). The contractor also briefs the Groundfish Committee and the Climate and Ecosystem Steering Committee and will deliver a final report to the Committees. Work will continue in 2026 to support an expected final decision on FW68 at the April 2027 meeting.

Status Update

In June 2026, the Council approved a revised [Risk Policy Concept](#), establishing qualitative categories of low-, medium-, and high-risk tolerance to support management decisions beginning in 2026. Work to support quantitative application of the revised Risk Policy through integration with ABC CRs will continue through simulation testing. Simulation testing will be used to refine and evaluate the potential risk policy-integrated groundfish ABC CRs, working with the input provided by the Groundfish Committee through the draft Framework 68/ABC CRs goals and objectives, and refinements, consistent with the Council's revised Risk Policy.

Refined Scope:

- Modify/replace the existing groundfish ABC CRs to better address the goals and objectives of the FMP. Consider increasing uncertainty and variability in stock assessments, changing environmental conditions, and the [National Standard Guidelines](#). The new CRs should produce catch advice that prevents overfishing, rebuilds stocks, improves attainment of optimum yield, and seeks to minimize large changes in catch advice as appropriate.

Refined Objectives:

- Develop CRs which consider:
 - Stock status, including unknown and rebuilt;
 - Stock assessment model types and sources or levels of uncertainty; and
 - Productivity regime.
- Add ABC stability tools to the FMP, consistent with the [Magnuson-Stevens Act](#) and [updated National Standard 1 guidance](#).
 - [Phase-in ABC Control Rules](#)
 - [Carry-over ABC Control Rules](#); and
 - Guidance for the use of constant ABCs.

Range of Alternatives:

1. New ABC CRs
2. Sub-option to include phase-in ABC approach to FMP
3. Sub-option to include ABC carry-over to FMP
4. Sub-option to include guidance on the use of constant ABCs

Timeline

Expected timeframe for integrating the revised Risk Policy with new Groundfish ABC control rules:

	2025	2026	2027
Risk Policy	Development of revised Risk Policy, factor weighting, and approval by Council.	Implementation of revised Risk Policy – qualitative use.	Quantitative use of revised Risk Policy, integrated with revised ABC CR.
ABC CRs / FW 68	Simulation testing of revised Risk Policy integration with Groundfish ABC CRs.	Draft risk policy-integrated ABC CRs with tiered and phased-in approach alternatives.	Council final action in April 2027. Implementation of revised ABC CR in Groundfish framework action for specifications.

Detailed Timeline for FW68 / ABC CRs

Jan 2026	PDT feedback on initial simulation results; RPWG input on revisions in response to Risk Policy evaluation/demonstration.
Mar 2026	SSC update including worked example of risk policy integration with ABC CRs.
Apr 2026	Progress report to Council on risk policy integration with ABC CRs.
Jun 2026	Council approved Risk Policy.
Jul-Dec 2026	Simulation work to continue refining risk policy-integrated ABC CR options; GF CTE and PDT draft alternatives for ABC Stability Tools.
Jan-Mar 2027	Final report on simulations; SSC Review of approach for risk policy-integrated ABC CRs; Finalize Alternatives for Framework 68.
Apr 2027	Council – Final action on Framework 68.