



New England Fishery Management Council

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DRAFT MEETING SUMMARY

Atlantic Herring Committee and Advisory Panel Boston, MA and Webinar

September 2, 2026

The Atlantic Herring Committee (Committee) and Advisory Panel (AP) met jointly on September 2, 2026, starting at 9:30 am in Boston, MA and via webinar to: discuss Atlantic herring specifications for 2027-2031; make recommendations to the Committee or Council as appropriate; and discuss other business, as necessary.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Peter Whelan (Chair), Melanie Griffin (Vice-Chair), Terry Alexander, Doug Christel (GARFO), Greg Hueth (MAFMC), Raymond Kane (ASMFC), Bill Lucey, Scott Olszewski, Robert Ruhle (MAFMC), Geoff Smith, Melissa Smith, Renee Zobel (Committee members); Zack Klyver (AP Vice-Chair), Jeff Kaelin, Jaclyn Lunaas, Donald Lyons, David Mussina, Gerry O'Neill, Suzannah Raber, Dr. Tammy Silva, Mary Beth Tooley (Advisory Panel members); Daniel Salerno (Council Chair); Dr. Jamie Cournane, Emily Bodell, Alex Dunn, Dr. Rachel Feeney, Dr. Cate O'Keefe, Jonathon Peros (NEFMC Staff); Alli Murphy, Carrie Nordeen (NMFS GARFO Staff); Mitch MacDonald, Scott Sakowski (NOAA GC). In addition, about 18 other people attended.

KEY OUTCOMES

- The Committee and Advisory Panel discussed potential pathways for temporarily reallocating management area sub-ACLs as needed in 2027.
- The Advisory Panel recommended Alternative 2 for the 2027-2031 Atlantic herring specifications action.
- The Committee recommended Alternative 3 for the 2027-2031 Atlantic herring specifications action.

The Committee Chair opened the meeting at 9:30 am. There were no changes to the agenda.

AGENDA ITEM #1: MANAGEMENT UPDATES

Council staff provided an update on in-season quota monitoring, and shared that the Eastern Maine spawning closure has been implemented. Advisors discussed the relatively low fishing effort in Area 1A so far this year, mentioning a handful of potential factors. First, the Canadian weir fishery has been productive, and imports to the US can impact the herring market. Increased fuel costs could disincentivize vessels from taking exploratory trips or longer trips. An Advisor noted that herring appear to be further inshore in Area 1A, making it difficult for larger vessels to catch herring. A Committee member also relayed that there has been an abundance of Ilex squid in the Gulf of Maine, which could be driving herring further inshore.

AGENDA ITEM #2: 2027-2031 SPECIFICATIONS ACTION

Council staff presented an overview of the 2027-2031 specifications action, including the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) recommendations, draft set of alternatives, and draft impacts to target species and human communities. Staff also reviewed a potential path forward for reallocating herring management area sub-ACLs as discussed at the August 18th joint Committee and AP meeting.

2027-2031 Specifications

An Advisor asked about the analysis of Canadian weir fishery transfer to Area 1A, which could provide some scientific basis for using the 10-year or 5-year Canadian catch average. Staff explained that they would work to finalize the analysis for the Council meeting, but the Committee and AP could discuss the tradeoffs between the different management uncertainty buffer options. There was a question about SSC discussion regarding the management uncertainty buffer options. The SSC did not offer comments on the merits of using a 10-year versus 5-year average. Another Advisor was not as concerned about the risk to the stock if the 5-year average were used for the management uncertainty buffer, noting that the ACL would be higher but would still remain under the recommended OFL and ABC. An Advisor asked about potential rebuilding scenarios. Staff noted that the PDT discussed a suite of projection scenarios and the chances of rebuilding varied, but there is too much uncertainty to say which projections reflect the true state of nature. In the near term, the last assessment showed that the stock was within the 10-year rebuilding timeline. An Advisor stated that the 5-year catch average might align with other recommendations, such as the 5-year specifications.

A Committee member noted that the management track assessment peer review report raised some concerns about Canadian catch estimates, but that they were deemed sufficient for use. Council staff explained that the data term of reference for the stock assessment was fully met, which includes Canadian catch data. There was some discussion about the exchange between US and Canadian fish and potentially working on an analysis to figure out what those exchange rates could be. A Committee member asked about the Canadian weir catch for 2018, noting that this was an outlier compared to other catch in the last 10 years. Council staff explained that in past years, there were higher catches in the weir fishery, but it is a high value compared to recent years. There was a question about keeping the river herring and shad caps status quo – staff stated that keeping the caps status quo was recommended as the other river herring and shad action is developed. A Committee member asked when there might be another stock assessment for herring. Staff stated that there was a proposal to have another stock assessment in the next few years, but the schedule will be discussed by the NRCC. An Advisor provided some context about New Brunswick weir fishery catch, explaining that overall effort in the fishery has gone down due to the costs/effort associated with maintaining the gear and success in other fisheries.

Management Area Sub-ACLs

Council staff shared some information from GARFO staff about potentially using an in-season adjustment to temporarily change management area sub-ACLs. One Advisor felt that the idea was worth exploring but cautioned that this could be a heavier lift than originally anticipated. While herring catch has been low in Area 2 in recent years, there are different fisheries operating there, such as mackerel. Another Advisor did not support moving forward with adjusting the sub-ACLs without adequate biological information since the sub-ACLs were created to protect spawning sub-components. An Advisor agreed with the need for biological information but noted that MA DMF has a genomics study underway that may be relevant. They also felt it was important to consider the mackerel fishery, and there would be information available about the winter fishery by June 2027. Achieving optimum yield in the fishery is a goal under the national standards. The Executive Director offered some clarification that this would not have to be added to the Council's 2027 priorities if the idea is a temporary modification through an in-season adjustment. A more permanent change to the sub-ACLs would require Council action and would have to be added to the priorities list.

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A Committee member asked for some clarification on what the in-season adjustment would do – Council staff explained that if the consultation with NMFS were to take place, and, for example, the sub-ACL in Area 2 was not going to be utilized, the Council could determine what percentage of the sub-ACL might be utilized and redistribute that percentage to other areas to temporarily increase other sub-ACLs. There was a follow-up question regarding whether the Council would be providing recommendations to the Regional Administrator about the amount of quota shifted, or if the RA would determine what is appropriate. NOAA General Counsel explained that the Council would provide input and the agency would decide if it agrees with the recommendations. Another Committee member supported the idea, noting its similarity to state-to-state transfers. Transfer should consider the timing of the fishery in southern New England, and they suggested considering some kind of cap on transfers between sub-ACLs.

The Committee had a discussion about how modifying the sub-ACLs might interact with existing carryover provisions, with one Committee member stating that the Council has accepted the risk associated with 10% carryover provisions but combining that with a sub-ACL transfer may not be appropriate from a risk perspective. GARFO staff explained that carryover is determined based on initial sub-ACLs, so carryover from 2027 into 2029 (if the 2027 sub-ACLs were adjusted) would be based on the original 2027 specifications. A Committee member asked if biological data would be available in June for review. Council staff stated that the MA DMF genomics study likely would not be included in the analysis, though if preliminary information were available, it could be considered. An Advisor supported exploring the idea of sub-ACL adjustments, noting that things have changed since the 2000s, and Area 2 has been underutilized in recent years.

AGENDA ITEM #3: DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS TO COMMITTEE/ COUNCIL

Some Advisors voiced support for using the 5-year Canadian catch average, which would consider more recent data. An Advisor was not concerned and doubted that this could lead to overfishing and supported the 5-year average given its benefit to the domestic fleet.

1. ADVISORY PANEL MOTION 1: O'NEILL/KAELIN

Recommend to the Committee that they select Alternative 3 as preferred for the 2027-2031 Atlantic herring specifications.

Discussion: An Advisor preferred Alternative 2, noting that while there is not a substantial difference between the resulting ACLs, the 10-year average is a better look back at the highs and lows seen in the Canadian catch, and provides more risk tolerance that is needed given the rebuilding status of herring. Another Advisor supported the motion and felt that the 5-year average better reflects the current fishery. A few more Advisors supported Alternative 2, with one Advisor stating that including as much data as possible is a prudent risk management strategy. Other Advisors supported Alternative 2 as a more precautionary approach given comments in the SSC minority report and low recruitment. An Advisor stated that the specifications are already conservative and did not feel that the quota should be lowered based on circumstances outside of the US fleet's control when the 1,500 mt difference could be critical for the US fishery.

Roll-Call Vote:

Yes: Kaelin, O'Neill, Raber, Tooley

No: Klyver, Silva, Lyons, Mussina, Lunaas

Abstain: None

ADVISORY PANEL MOTION 1 FAILED 4/5/0 FOR LACK OF MAJORITY.

2. ADVISORY PANEL MOTION 2: LUNAAS/SILVA

Recommend to the Committee that they select Alternative 2 as preferred for the 2027-2031 Atlantic herring specifications.

Discussion: The maker of the motion noted that this would take a more conservative approach given uncertainty with the stock.

Roll-Call Vote:

Yes: Lunaas, Lyons, Mussina, Klyver, Silva

No: Tooley, Kaelin, O'Neill, Raber

Abstain: None

ADVISORY PANEL MOTION 1 CARRIED 5/4/0.

Council staff reminded the AP and Committee about the fixed gear set-aside alternative. An Advisor supported increasing the fixed gear set-aside to support the fishery.

1. COMMITTEE MOTION: ALEXANDER/GRIFFIN

Recommend that the Council select Alternative 3 as preferred for the 2027-2031 Atlantic herring specifications.

Discussion: The maker of the motion provided some rationale, noting that in the last 5 years of the preliminary Area 1A transfer analysis, Canadian catch has not exceeded around 4,800 mt, with the high catch in 2018 appearing to be an outlier. The 5-year average is more representative of today's Canadian fishery. Alternative 3 remains within the SSC recommendations for OFL and ABC and gives the herring fishery a chance to continue. The seconder of the motion agreed that recent Canadian catch did not exceed the buffer that would be established using the 5-year average catch. They also supported the SSC decisions on OFL and ABC and felt that Alternative 3 is a reasonable approach to achieve optimum yield while preventing overfishing. A Committee member supported the motion and acknowledged that while there are tradeoffs between the 10 and 5-year average, given changing environmental conditions and species shifts, using a more recent time period for Canadian catch is appropriate. Another Committee member asked for updated preliminary Canadian weir catch at the September Council meeting but generally felt that the shorter average is going to be more reflective of the current fishery and supported the motion. A Committee member supported the motion, stating that since there appears to be higher Canadian catch so far this year, using the 5-year average could be a more conservative approach as it results in a smaller threshold for the Area 1A transfer. The 5-year average is more indicative of current conditions. Another Committee member also supported Alternative 3, noting the one high catch value driving up the average in the 10-year catch average and the newer regime appearing in recent years. An Advisor supported the motion, noting that the one high year of catch appears to be an outlier.

Public Comment:

- **Libby Etrie (Conservation Law Foundation)** – Conservation Law Foundation did not support the motion and preferred Alternative 2. In 2019, industry strongly advocated for the Council to adopt the 10-year Canadian catch average to avoid the impact of high catches in the 2018 Canadian weir fishery. There was extensive rationale provided to support making the change, and though the PDT has provided some history, there is not much new information to dispute the original rationale for using the 10-year average. Shifting to the 5-year average appears arbitrary and could be risky for the resource.

COMMITTEE MOTION 1 CARRIED BY CONSENSUS AND WITHOUT OBJECTION.

AGENDA ITEM #4: OTHER BUSINESS

The Council Executive Director provided an overview of draft Atlantic herring priorities for 2027. AP and Committee members had a brief discussion about the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank haddock bycatch caps. Catch estimation is completed using a combination of at-sea observer and industry reported data but does not include portside sampling data. An Advisor asked about removing the requirement for midwater trawl vessels to carry an observer to access groundfish closed areas and suggested continuing to work with the Observer Program and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council to allocate SBRM observers to the winter fishery, which would address some of the challenges associated with low coverage in the fishery. The Executive Director added the topics to the list of potential priorities, which could also be incorporated into longer-term strategic planning efforts.

The AP and Committee meeting adjourned at approximately 12:45 pm.