

New England Fishery Management Council
Joint Groundfish Committee and Groundfish Advisory Panel

By Webinar

March 31, 2026

Meeting Motions

Attendance

Groundfish Advisory Panel

Present: Hank Soule (Chair), Cassie Canastra Larsen (Vice-Chair), Bonnie Brady, Ben Martens, Joe Letourneau, Jerry Leeman, Rick Bellavance

Absent: Al Cottone, Gib Brogan

Groundfish Committee

All Present: John Pappalardo (Chair), Terry Alexander (Vice-Chair), Pete Christopher (GARFO), Andy Dangelo, Jim Gilmore (MAFMC), Melanie Griffin, Jackie Odell, Mike Pierdinock, Paul Risi (MAFMC), Geoff Smith, Megan Ware, Peter Whelan

The meeting started at approximately 9:00 am.

Redfish Sector Exemption Review

No motions.

Other Business:

Committee Motion 1 (Odell/Pappalardo):

Related to the Georges Bank haddock 2026 Management Track assessment, the Groundfish Committee recommends the Council request the NEFSC and the June 2026 Management Track Peer Review Panel specifically consider “review panel comments or SSC concerns from the most recent prior management track assessment” under Management Track Assessment TOR #6 (“Respond to any review panel comments or SSC concerns from the most recent prior research or management track assessment”).

These comments/concerns include the following:

- Decoupling recruits from ages 2+ to generate separate model estimates of yearly correlation for both recruits and age 2+
- Removing the bias correction (lognormal adjustment), which implied using the median instead of the mean recruits in the reference point calculation
- Exploring model-based index approaches that include a diel variable (day vs. night) in the model to account for potential catchability effects and seeing if there is improvement in the model diagnostics once new years are added to the assessment
- Continue the comparative analysis of the 2-year averaging of weight-at-age (WAA) and the Gaussian Markov Random Field (GMRF) model approaches to determine if the GMRF approach may not work well when there is a transition from decreasing WAA to increasing or vice versa.

Rationale / Additional Recommendations:

Management Track TOR #6 specifies that previous review panel comments or SSC concerns should be explicitly addressed in updated management track assessments. *The identified review panel comments and SSC concerns should be addressed both quantitatively in the assessment bridge runs and qualitatively in the assessment report.* The 2024 Peer Review Panel noted that the combined changes of decoupling recruits and not using the lognormal adjustment produced the best fitting model but increased the retrospective pattern. They noted that the missing survey and age composition data in the terminal year of the assessment was believed to be a large contributor to the increased retrospective. The SSC commented that the impact of turning off the log-normal bias adjustment in the 2024 assessment on the scale of SSB and MSY estimates was significant. These changes had a major change in the historical scale of the biomass reference point (2022 SSBMSY=120,000 mt; 2024 SSBMSY= 24,000 mt.)

Motion *passed* unanimously with one abstention (GARFO).

Committee Motion 2 (Odell/Pappalardo):

In response to the request for public input for the 2027 assessments, the Groundfish Committee recommends the Council request the NEFSC and 2027 Management Track Peer Review Panel address the specific comments/concerns raised during the Atlantic cod 2024 Management Track assessments (all four stocks) under Management Track Assessment TOR #6 (“Respond to any review panel comments or SSC concerns from the most recent prior research or management track assessment”).

These comments/concerns include the following:

- Peer Review Panel comments about WHAM model formulations, Plan B backup approaches, and projections derived from the models
- Peer Review Panel concerns with estimates of scale coming out of the models (e.g., three of the four cod stock catches were close to the total SSB in recent years)

- Peer Review Panel requests for estimates of swept area biomass from the NEFSC survey and exploitable biomass for comparison of scale with model outputs
- Peer Review Panel recommendation for results to be shown in numeric tables to visualize differences in past vs. updated model results

Rationale / Additional Recommendations:

Management Track TOR #6 specifies that previous review panel comments or SSC concerns should be explicitly addressed in updated management track assessments. *The identified review panel comments and SSC concerns should be addressed both quantitatively in the assessment bridge runs and qualitatively in the assessment report. Any consideration of removal of the bias correction (lognormal adjustment), which implied using the median instead of the mean recruits in the reference point calculation, or other WHAM parameters not considered by the Research Track should be made available and results on SSB and MSY should be presented in numerical tables.*

Motion *passed* unanimously with one abstention (GARFO)

Committee Request 1:

The Groundfish Committee requests an update from the Science Center to the Council on Portside Biological Sampling. It was noted during the virtual meeting for the Atlantic cod community outreach meeting on March 18th that there continues to be no age-based samples for US Georges Bank cod. With up to 100% monitoring in the commercial groundfish sector fishery for multiple years and a pilot program initiated between the fishing industry and MA DMF, there should be an action plan for acquiring samples from vessels fishing in multiple broad stock areas. The Georges Bank cod assessment approach, which assumes a single, combined commercial fleet (US and Canada) and relies on Canadian catch-at-age information is inherently mis-specified. This approach ignores selectivity parameter issues from established regulation differences between the US and Canada (e.g., mesh-size regulations, seasonality of fishing effort, and spatial transferability of quota allocation).

The meeting ended at 1:22 pm.