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New England Fishery Management Council

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MEETING SUMMARY

Joint Monkfish and Skate Plan Development Teams

Webinar

May 29, 2025

The Monkfish and Skate Plan Development Teams (PDT) met jointly on May 29, 2025, at 1:00 pm to: 1) continue planning development for specifications actions for both fisheries; 2) discuss Executive Order 14276 Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness; 3) receive an update on and develop input for the omnibus action to update essential fish habitat (EFH) designations; and 4) discuss other business, as necessary.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Jenny Couture (Monkfish PDT Chair) and Dr. Rachel Feeney (Skate PDT Chair; Monkfish PDT); Emily Bodell and Julian Garrison (NEFMC staff); Sharon Benjamin, Laura Deighan, Ashleigh McCord, Danielle Palmer, Spencer Talmage, and Sara Turner (NMFS/GARFO); Dr. Chris Legault and Samantha Werner (NMFS/NEFSC); Jason Didden (MAFMC); Tara Dolan (MADMF); Renee St. Amand (CTDEEP); Matt Gates (Monkfish Committee Chair); and Scott Olszewski (Skate Committee Chair). In addition, about ten other people attended.

KEY OUTCOMES

- The PDTs are proceeding with developing specifications actions and tasking from the Committees, navigating the evolving uncertainties about timing and available staff resources.
- The PDTs began developing ideas for how to respond to Executive Order (EO) 14276 Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness.
- The PDTs received an update on the EFH omnibus action and discussed how to provide input.

AGENDA ITEM #1: INTRODUCTIONS/ APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The Skate PDT Chair opened the meeting at 1:00 pm and introduced the various attendees. There were no changes to the agenda.

AGENDA ITEM #2: CONTINUE PLANNING DEVELOPMENT FOR SPECIFICATIONS ACTIONS FOR BOTH FISHERIES

Action Timeline, Stock Assessments, Management Flexibility Action

The Monkfish PDT Chair reviewed an updated timeline for skate and monkfish specifications actions, noted that NEFSC will provide data updates for skate and monkfish rather than stock assessments for 2025, and introduced the NEFMC's new priority to develop an omnibus management flexibility action.

A Council member asked for clarification on what would be included in the monkfish data update. Council staff noted that the update is expected to include updates to the spring and fall survey indices and fishing year landings and discard information. The SSC will review that information and make any necessary recommendations. For any changes in effort controls, Council staff are planning a meeting focused on methods for calculating monkfish days at sea (DAS) over the summer. Another Council

member asked about the number of years that will be included in the specifications package. Council and GARFO staff noted that while specifications are tied to the timing of assessments in the monkfish regulations, they are anticipating that this year's specification action would set specifications for three fishing years, with the understanding that if there is a new assessment next year, for example, the specifications can be revised as part of the annual review process. A Council member also recommended aligning the specifications cycles for skates and monkfish, noting that skate specifications are set for two years while monkfish specifications are set for three.

Joint PDT Tasking

Council staff reviewed outcomes from the joint monkfish and skate Advisory Panel and Committee meetings on March 19 and 20, 2025, respectively. The Advisory Panels provided some feedback on recent fishery performance, and the APs and Committees reviewed background information on the skate and monkfish fisheries as well as potential analyses to conduct over the summer. The joint Committee also developed tasking for the PDT. Council staff presented a staff suggestion for prioritizing the tasking given recent changes in capacity.

A PDT member noted that there is a national working group forming to bolster the understanding of various markets and recognized that this information does need to be improved. She also asked about the timing for completing the various analyses. Council staff explained that the next AP and Committee meetings would likely be held in early September, so tasking should be completed by late August. A few of the analyses, particularly monkfish DAS use and monkfish and skate landings by DAS declaration could be informative for the monkfish workshop planned for the summer, but it is not essential to complete the tasking before that meeting.

Follow-ups:

- Couture, Feeney: coordinate follow up with Bodell, Turner, and Werner regarding capacity for pulling data.

AGENDA ITEM #3: EXECUTIVE ORDER 14276 RESTORING AMERICAN SEAFOOD COMPETITIVENESS

Council staff provided an overview of EO 14276 and resulting Council tasking. The Council has until the end of September to develop recommendations that stabilize markets, improve access, enhance economic profitability, and prevent closures and to develop a workplan for prioritizing related actions. The PDTs reviewed draft lists of ideas to recommend for monkfish and skates. A PDT member noted that there are no profit analyses available because there is no mandatory cost data collection in the region. There is a voluntary program, but there was a 15% response rate in 2022, which limits the amount of analysis that can occur specific to certain sectors/ fisheries. She suggested economic data collection as a potential item. GARFO staff noted that the skate regulations state that the status determination criteria numbers can be updated via specifications or a framework, but updating the methods would require an amendment. Council staff noted that other fishery management plans have more flexibility in this regard, this regulation inhibited consideration of updates in the last skate assessment, and that some ideas on the draft list may not provide direct relief to the fishery but could increase flexibility and consistency across fishery management plans. A PDT member asked if the list could include the current efforts to jointly manage skates and monkfish. Council staff noted that some of these efforts are already planned as part of one of the Council's Inflation Reduction Act projects, but there could be an opportunity to clarify what work would occur as part of the IRA project and what could be completed as part of the EO workplan.

A PDT member suggested considering a strategy to decrease transportation costs or increase capacity for processing and distribution as well as local markets and asked for clarification on AP comments regarding rising costs in the monkfish fishery. Council staff and a Council member explained that in the Mid-Atlantic, there are smaller ports, so monkfish fishermen from different ports sell their catch to the same

buyer which trucks product to New England for distribution. In recent years, processing has been largely consolidated in New Bedford. With fewer fishermen landing fewer fish, it is not as feasible to get products to market. A similar situation is occurring in the spiny dogfish fishery. The PDT member noted that there could be a recommendation related to reducing costs. Another PDT member explained that many of the ideas compiled thus far were related to smoothing and simplifying existing regulations and removing extraneous barriers to the industry, but there may not be much qualitative information regarding how those efforts might improve profitability. Changes related to processors are outside of the Council's scope. A PDT member emphasized that understanding market constraints and having data collection more broadly will be important for determining the efficacy of these ideas/potential measures. A Council member stated that some of these issues, such as transportation and processing, are more related to the private sector. He noted that making fishing trips more productive would help mitigate transportation costs for vessels. He also suggested potentially exploring leasing options or individual transfer quota (ITQ), and recommended soliciting feedback from the Advisory Panels.

Follow-ups:

- Council staff to resend draft list to PDT for additional feedback, then collaborate across Council staff to develop a plan for collecting Committee and Advisory Panel input.

AGENDA ITEM #4: OMNIBUS ACTION ON ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT (EFH) DESIGNATIONS

Council staff provided a brief overview of the omnibus EFH action for 2025, which includes updating monkfish and Northeast skate complex essential fish habitat maps and text.

Follow-ups:

- Julian Garrison, with the help of other Council staff, will solicit additional input on the EFH framework document (revised EFH designation text and maps) from PDT members and provide feedback either at a follow-up meeting or via correspondence.

AGENDA ITEM #5: OTHER BUSINESS, RECAP OUTCOMES, NEXT STEPS

Council staff reminded the PDTs of some upcoming meetings, including another joint PDT meeting in July or August, along with the monkfish CPUE-focused meeting currently polling for end of July/early August.

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at 3:07 pm.