New England Fishery Management Council
50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492
Daniel Salerno, *Chair* | Cate O'Keefe, PhD, *Executive Director*

# MEETING SUMMARY

## Atlantic Herring Plan Development Team

Webinar

December 15, 2025

The Atlantic Herring Plan Development Team (PDT) met on December 15, 2025 by webinar to discuss a work plan for 2026 Council priorities for Atlantic herring, river herring and shad, plans for the 2026 Management Track Stock Assessment for Atlantic herring, including supporting analysis the PDT may complete, an update on the state sampling program, and other business, as necessary.

***MEETING ATTENDANCE:*** Dr. Jamie Cournane (PDT Chair), Emily Bodell (NEFMC); Carrie Nordeen, Ashley Asci (NMFS/GARFO); Jon Deroba (NMFS/NEFSC); Emilie Franke (ASMFC), Matt Cieri (ME DMR); JA Macfarlan (RI DEM), and Jason Didden (MAFMC). In addition, about 12 other people attended.

The meeting began at 10:00 am.

***KEY OUTCOMES***

- Discussed the work plan for 2026.
- Reviewed possible PDT analyses to support the 2026 Atlantic herring Management Track Stock Assessment.
- Received an update on the state sampling program.

***MANAGEMENT UPDATES***

GARFO staff provided a brief management update. On November 17, the Area 1A Canadian weir fishery transfer was processed, reallocating 1,000 MT from the management uncertainty buffer to the Area 1A sub-ACL. The 2,000 lb possession limit for Area 1A was implemented on December 2. The final rule implementing the FY 2025-2027 Atlantic herring specifications was published on Thursday, December 11, which allowed for additional harvest in Areas 1A, 2, and 3, but not in Area 1B due to a catch overage earlier this year.

ASMFC staff relayed that following the 1,000 MT transfer, the states from Area 1A decided to open for one landing day on Monday, November 24th. Just over 800 MT of Atlantic herring were landed and the Area 1A fishery closed at 6 pm on the 24th. After the implementation of the FY 2025-2027 specifications, the states scheduled a days out meeting for December 15th to discuss Area 1A landing days for the remainder of 2025.

***AGENDA ITEM #1: WORK PLAN - 2026 COUNCIL PRIORITIES***

Council staff provided an overview of the 2026 Council priorities for herring, including: 1) action to set ABC/ACL for Atlantic herring stock for FY 2027-2031, develop measures to minimize interactions with

river herring and shad; 2) Herring Management Track Assessment; 3) Amendment 10: minimize user conflicts, achieve OY, and support rebuilding of the Atlantic herring resource; and 4) coordination with MAFMC/ASMFC for river herring/shad issues. Council staff also reviewed a draft outline of the upcoming specifications action and potential management measures to be included (see Attachment).

*Discussion*

Council staff noted that the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) was asked to develop five-year specifications for the first time this year and sought to develop criteria for those recommendations in a more consistent manner. SSC leadership will likely debrief on this process and continue to discuss how to make recommendations for five years. A PDT member asked about the PDT sub-groups formed to address Amendment 10 tasking. The group focused on analyzing and developing recommendations to improve the accuracy and precision of river herring and shad catch estimates completed their tasking but did not write a final summary due to the pause in Amendment 10 work. Once that summary report is completed, the PDT can reconvene the other sub-groups to work towards tasking. Another PDT member cautioned that five-year specifications for herring may be fairly precautionary in the out years.

### *AGENDA ITEM #2: PDT SUPPORTING ANALYSIS - 2026 MANAGEMENT TRACK STOCK ASSESSMENT*

Council staff shared some possible areas where the PDT can support the 2026 management track stock assessments, including evaluating Canadian catch and providing assistance with projections.

*Discussion*

The herring stock assessment scientist stated that they could use help from PDT members with commercial catch data, state survey indices, and CAMS catch updates. If the PDT is considering reevaluating Canadian catch, additional assistance may be needed to run projections. A PDT member noted possible tradeoffs with using a shorter timeframe for Canadian catch estimates – for example, if a 3- or 5-year window is used and there is one year with a large catch, the average can change substantially. They felt it is important for the PDT to include timeframes where there has been large Canadian catch and see how it may impact projections moving forward. Canadian catch estimates fall under management uncertainty and does not require peer review, but it would be included in projection runs. It would be best to have these prepared before projections are run but it is not urgent.

### *AGENDA ITEM #3: UPDATE ON THE STATE SAMPLING PROGRAM*

Maine Department of Marine Resources (ME DMR) staff provided an overview of potential changes to the state sampling program. ME DMR has been sampling Atlantic herring from ME to New Jersey, supported first by an ACCSP grant then through ASMFC. However, ASMFC is looking to explore ways for states to collect and transport samples to ME DMR instead of ME also being responsible for sample collection. ME DMR would continue to conduct aging and biological workups of all samples. These samples are used to provide data for the stock assessment, but they also have many additional management applications. A PDT member noted that the current administration is prioritizing cooperative work for NOAA, which may support additional sampling.

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at 10:45 am.

*ATTACHMENT*

**Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan**
**Action: Framework Adjustment or Amendment**

## 4.0 ALTERNATIVES UNDER CONSIDERATION – ***DRAFT OUTLINE***

### 4.1 Action 1 – Atlantic Herring Specifications Process

4.1.1 No Action

4.1.2 Specifications Process

- Remove certain outdated specifications items
- Revise to make the process regulations less prescriptive

### 4.2 Action 2 – Atlantic Herring Specifications for 2027-2031

4.2.1 No Action

4.2.2 Atlantic Herring Specifications for 2027-2031

- Based on 2026 management track stock assessment and recommendations from the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)
- Evaluation of management uncertainty, including Canadian catch
- Identify status quo specifications
- Summarize in a table to compare combinations of the options, as appropriate

### 4.3 Action 3 – Carryover of Unharvested Catch

4.3.1 No Action

4.3.2 Modify Carryover Provisions

- Allow for flexibility to not allow carryover of unharvested catch
- Limit or suspend carryover of unharvested catch when the Atlantic herring stock is overfished or in a rebuilding plan

### 4.4 Action 4 – River Herring and Shad Management Measures

*Recommend for this section that a sub-panel of the SSC review PDT analysis/draft measures*

4.4.1 No Action

4.4.2 Modify Catch Caps and Catch Cap Areas

- Revise the reference period for the catch caps
- Scale the catch caps to changes in the Atlantic herring biomass
- Use biologically-based approaches for catch caps developed by ASFMC during the River Herring Benchmark Stock Assessment as starting point

4.4.3 Establish Time/Area Closures within Atlantic Herring Management Areas 2 and 3

- Where aggregations of river herring and shad overlap with the directed Atlantic herring fishery
- PDT develops species distribution models

4.4.4 Remove River Herring/Shad Avoidance Areas

- Have not used these areas for management

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# MEETING SUMMARY

## Atlantic Herring Plan Development Team Webinar

via Webinar
March 2, 2026

The Atlantic Herring Plan Development Team (PDT) met on March 2, 2026, at 11:30 am via webinar to discuss development of an action and PDT analysis for Atlantic herring specifications for 2027-2031, river herring and shad measures, and other measures, and other business, as necessary.

***MEETING ATTENDANCE:*** Dr. Jamie Cournane (PDT Chair); Michelle Bachman, Emily Bodell, Dr. Rachel Feeney, Julian Garrison (NEFMC); Ashley Asci, Carrie Nordeen, Danielle Palmer, Marianne Randall, Ashley Trudeau (NMFS/GARFO); Dr. Jon Deroba (NMFS/NEFSC); Dr. Matt Cieri (ME DMR), Ben Gahagan, Dr. Micah Dean (MA DMF), James Boyle, Dr. Katie Drew, Emilie Franke (ASMFC), Kevin Job, Kurt Gotschall (CT DEEP), J.A. Macfarlan (RI DEM), Jason Didden (MAFMC), Robert Atwood (NHFG), Peter Whelan (Committee Chair), Kaitlynn Wade (UNC; Invited Speaker). In addition, about 13 other people attended.

### *KEY OUTCOMES*

- The PDT reviewed the draft action plan for the 2026 Atlantic herring management action, including 2027-2031 specifications and river herring and shad measures.
- The PDT discussed current Atlantic herring specification items and possible items to remove from the list.
- The PDT received a draft report from the task 3 PDT sub-group, which examined the river herring and shad bycatch estimation methods, and discussed the group's recommendations.

### *AGENDA ITEM #1: 2026 MANAGEMENT ACTION*

*REVIEW OF ACTION PLAN*

Council staff reviewed a draft action plan for the 2026 Atlantic herring management action, which may be a framework or amendment depending on the management measures included in the action, and would likely require an environmental assessment. The Council is anticipated to review some draft alternatives (not specifications) in June, with final action slated for September.

*REVIEW OF CURRENT ATLANTIC HERRING SPECIFICATION ITEMS*

Council staff presented a list of items that are typically updated in each specifications action, including three values that have been set to zero in recent years (research set-aside, U.S. at-sea processing, and border transfer). The PDT discussed whether any of these items might be removed from the specifications process (see Attachment). A PDT member noted that trans-shipment is written into the Magnuson Act, and border transfer corresponds to that, so it may need to remain in the specifications. The research set-aside (RSA) has been set to 0 since 2023 due to low fishing quotas but eliminating it altogether then

adding it back to specifications would require re-establishing the RSA. The PDT felt that it may be best to keep RSA as a specifications item in case quotas increase and there is renewed interest in the program. The PDT also noted that they were not aware of any recent interest in U.S. at-sea processing, so that might be an item to remove. Council staff plan to flag this for discussion by the Herring Advisory Panel.

*River Herring and Shad PDT Task 3 Review*

Council staff reviewed the herring outlook by quarter, noting that the PDT will be completing river herring and shad tasking between now and June. The PDT started addressing these tasks with task 3, which called for the PDT to analyze and develop recommendations for improving the accuracy and precision of river herring catch estimates in the Atlantic herring fishery. A PDT sub-group completed this task, and the sub-group lead presented an overview and a draft report to the PDT. The sub-group recommended using a gear-specific global rate when data is available, but other methodological changes to increase observer data in the calculations did not improve accuracy or precision of estimates.
The PDT chair asked about the next steps should the PDT forward the sub-group's recommendation. The work has been reviewed internally by GARFO APSD staff and likely would not have to undergo any additional peer review beyond the PDT since it is not a major methodological change. Council staff explained that an option to fully wrap up task 3 could be to present the work to the Committee, then if they forward the recommendation, the Council could write a letter to GARFO with some context for the conclusions. A PDT member supported the sub-group's recommendation but noted that it would be helpful to consider the recommendation as part of the river herring and shad tasking more broadly.

*RHAPCAST Project Overview*

The PDT invited Kaitlynn Wade, a PhD student at the University of North Carolina, to provide a brief presentation on RHAPCAST, a river herring avoidance model developed under a Mid-Atlantic Council Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) project.

A PDT member asked if the model had been used to predict relative abundance. The researchers had not tried to estimate abundance using the current model but are working on a new iteration of the model that may be able to provide abundance estimates. There was another question about how the model incorporated the migration ecology of river herring and shad, noting that in the spring, the fish move to inshore southern New England. The model currently uses sea surface temperature and the day of the year to track migration, but since the base model is data limited, it is difficult to answer these migration questions. There was also a question about whether the model would incorporate fishery dependent data – while the current model does not include fishery dependent data, it may be incorporated into the next version of the model. A member of the public asked if shapefiles of the model predictions are available, which Ms. Wade offered to provide if there is interest. Council habitat staff asked about the process for identifying areas with high target species abundance and low bycatch species abundance. The individual species presence/absence are estimated using separate general additive models, then researchers calculate the joint distribution by multiplying Atlantic herring probability by standardized river herring probability. The model included alewife and blueback herring in the river herring data. A PDT member suggested exploring modeling for each species, noting that the probability may be driven by one species more than the other, and flagged that the Council's catch caps include shad as well. A herring Advisor asked whether there was a way to validate the model using hindcasting and comparing it to large river herring bycatch events in the observer data. The model has been validated by hindcasting to a particular date and reviewing observer data with the maps to see how well presence/absence is predicted, and the model is able to correctly predict river herring presence and absence around 60% of the time.

***Follow-Up Items***

- Council Staff – add question for Advisory Panel regarding US at-sea processing to the herring specifications outline document; finalize river herring and shad task 3 report
- Dr. Cournane – poll for upcoming PDT and PDT subgroup meetings

- PDT – reach out to Dr. Cournane with interest in participating in sub-groups

With no other business, the PDT meeting adjourned at approximately 1:00 pm.

## ATTACHMENT

**Atlantic Herring Fishery Specifications Overview – DRAFT – Revised March 10, 2026**

Specifications for the Atlantic herring fishery are annual amounts specified for the fishing year (January – December), and are typically updated every two years. Some of the specifications values such as the overfishing limit, acceptable biological catch, and annual catch limit are updated during each cycle based on new fishery data, stock assessment results, and other information sources. Other specifications have remained static in value for a number of years, such as border transfer, the fixed gear set-aside, and river herring and shad catch caps. The following table defines each herring fishery specification, including how frequently the values and/or methods are updated. Specifications that have remained set to 0 for a number of years are highlighted in green.

| Herring Fishery Specification | | Description |
|---|---|---|
| Overfishing Limit (OFL) | | Updated every specifications action using ABC control rule |
| Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) | | Updated every specifications action using ABC control rule |
| Optimum Yield (OY)/Annual Catch Limit (ACL) | | Updated every specifications action; ABC - management uncertainty |
| Management Area sub-ACLs | Area 1A (28.9%) | Percentages have remained static; values updated every specifications action based on ACL |
| | Area 1B (4.3%) | |
| | Area 2 (27.8%) | |
| | Area 3 (39%) | |
| Management Uncertainty buffer | | Calculated as most recent 10-year average catch from the Canadian/ New Brunswick weir fishery |
| Domestic annual harvest (DAH) | | Equivalent to or less than ACL/OY; value updated every specifications action |
| Domestic annual processing (DAP) | | DAP = DAH – border transfer specification; value updated every specifications action |
| Border Transfer (BT) | | US-caught herring shipped to BT was set to 4,000 mt from start of herring FMP through 2018; revised to 0 mt for 2019 using an in-season adjustment. Has been set to 0 mt since 2019 |
| US at-sea processing (USAP) | | Has been set to 0 mt since 2010 |
| Fixed gear set-aside | | Allocated for fixed gear fisheries in Area 1A; Set to 30 mt since 2020 |
| Research set-aside (RSA) | | Grant process administered by NEFSC. Value is set as a percentage of the sub-ACL for any or all herring management areas, up to 3%. Has historically been either 0% or 3%; no herring RSA program in recent years, set to 0% since 2023. |
| River herring and shad (RH/S) catch caps | | Values set based on the reference period (2008-2014); current values have not changed since 2016. |

**Definitions of Specifications currently set to 0** (Adapted from Herring Framework 8)

***Border Transfer:*** The Border Transfer (BT) specification is U.S.-caught herring transshipped to Canada via Canadian carrier vessels and used for human consumption. This specification is not a set-aside; rather, it is a maximum weight of Atlantic herring caught by U.S. vessels from Area 1A that can be transshipped to Canadian vessels for human consumption. GARFO tracks BT utilization through a separate dealer code. Note that setting border transfer at a value above 0 does not require that such transfers occur, but it provides the possibility for transfer, as opposed to, for example, selling the herring for bait.

***US At-Sea Processing:*** The Atlantic Herring FMP states that "part of DAP may be allocated for at-sea processing by domestic vessels that exceed the vessel size limits" (Herring FMP, Section 3.6.6). This allocation will be called the 'U.S. at-sea processing' (USAP) allocation. The term 'at-sea processing' refers to processing activities that occur in the Exclusive Economic Zone outside state waters. When determining this specification, the Council will consider the availability of other processing capacity, development of the fishery, status of the resource, and opportunities for vessels to enter the herring fishery." The USAP specification serves as a cap for USAP activities, it is not a separate allocation but a limit within the domestic catch limit to be used for this purpose.
During the 2007-2009 fishing years, the Council maintained a USAP specification of 20,000 mt (Areas 2/3 only) based on information received about a new at-sea processing vessel that intended to utilize a substantial amount of the USAP specification. At that time, landings from Areas 2 and 3 – where USAP is authorized – were considerably lower than allocated sub-ACLs for each of the past several years. Moreover, the specification of 20,000 mt for USAP did not restrict either the operation or the expansion of the shoreside processing facilities during the 2007-2009 fishing years. However, this operation never materialized, and none of the USAP specification was used during the 2007-2009 fishing years. The Council has set USAP at zero in each specifications cycle since 2010.

PDT question to AP: is there any industry interest in conducting at-sea processing?

***Research Set-Aside:*** The Research Set-Aside (RSA) program is a competitive grants process administered by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center. Proposals are requested for research, and incoming proposals are reviewed and ranked by a technical body. With competitive grants awarded through this process, different entities will apply. In the past, the Council has allocated either 0% or 3% of the sub-ACL for each management area for the RSA program. The regulations allow a set-aside of up to 3% in any or all herring management areas. The RSA program has not been active in recent years, and the set-aside has been set to 0% since 2023.

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# MEETING SUMMARY

## Atlantic Herring Plan Development Team Webinar

via Webinar
April 27, 2026

The Atlantic Herring Plan Development Team (PDT) met on April 27, 2026, at 10:00 am via webinar to discuss development of an action and PDT analysis for Atlantic herring specifications for 2027-2031, river herring and shad measures, and other measures, and other business, as necessary.

***MEETING ATTENDANCE:*** Dr. Jamie Cournane (PDT Chair), Emily Bodell, Julian Garrison (NEFMC); Dr. Daniel Hocking, Carrie Nordeen, Danielle Palmer, Marianne Randall (NMFS/GARFO); Dr. Jon Deroba (NMFS/NEFSC); Dr. Matt Cieri (ME DMR); Ben Gahagan, Dr. Micah Dean (MA DMF); James Boyle, Dr. Katie Drew, Caitlin Starks (ASMFC); Kevin Job, Kurt Gotschall (CT DEEP); J.A. Macfarlan (RI DEM); Jason Didden (MAFMC); Robert Atwood (NHFG) (PDT members and supporting analysts); Peter Whelan (Committee Chair). In addition, about 14 other people attended.

***KEY OUTCOMES***

- The PDT discussed several potential topics and alternative sets for the 2026 management action, including the Atlantic herring specifications process, management uncertainty buffer options and other specifications, carryover provisions, and river herring and shad catch caps.

The PDT Chair opened the meeting at 10:00 am. There were no changes to the agenda. The Chair welcomed Caitlin Starks from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), who will be filling in for Emilie Franke temporarily.

***AGENDA ITEM #1: 2026 MANAGEMENT ACTION***
***ATLANTIC HERRING SPECIFICATIONS PROCESS***

Council staff reviewed discussion from the March 23, 2026, Herring Advisory Panel (AP) meeting regarding specifications items set to 0 in recent years, noting that the AP suggested retaining the specifications items. Staff also suggested working with GARFO and other staff to propose clarifications to the regulatory text about herring specifications. **The PDT supported leaving all specification items in the action and working to clarify the regulatory text.**

***ATLANTIC HERRING SPECIFICATIONS FOR 2027-2031***

The PDT discussed options for the management uncertainty buffer. In Herring Framework 8, the PDT provided options for 3-, 5-, and 10-year averages of Canadian catch, though 3 years may be too short based on recent data. The PDT Chair suggested considering the most recent 5- and 10-year averages and providing those to the stock assessment scientist. The stock assessment scientist stated that a final choice for the buffer is not required before the assessment peer review. The peer review panel will review and approve the method, and the PDT can alter the buffer that is used as needed. A PDT member noted that one large catch year in the New Brunswick weir fishery can have a more substantial impact on the 5-year average than the 10-year average, and there tend to be years with large amounts of catch in the fishery. The stock assessment scientist clarified that the assessment would not be changing projection methods because it was just tested in the research track stock assessment. Another PDT member suggested remaining consistent with past recommendations, noting that New Brunswick weir catch has varied widely in the last 10 years, though there is an overall declining trend. The PDT Chair asked when the Canadian data would be ready, and the stock assessment scientist stated that there is a data meeting in mid-May, after which the final data will be available. While the stock assessment scientist did not anticipate any major issues with the data, they plan to flag any changes with the PDT. **The PDT supports continuing to use the 10-year average, reiterating its conclusions on its prior analysis.**

GARFO staff will continue to develop an analysis of Area 1A transfers and report back at another PDT meeting. Analysis will focus on using Canadian landings.

**The PDT supported continuing the status quo approach for the remainder of the specifications items.**

***CARRYOVER OF UNHARVESTED CATCH***

The PDT discussed potential alternatives for the carryover provision, including making stock status a condition for whether carryover occurs. A PDT member suggested it may be prudent to make sure the stock is not overfished when carryover occurs, and if that condition is set, it would not have to be revisited until the stock is not overfished. Another PDT member noted that it is a risk tolerance question for the Council. GARFO staff consulted with NOAA General Counsel regarding the carryover language in the regulations, which states that there shall be carryover. The regulations could be revised to say that there will be carryover unless the Council determines that carryover would be inconsistent with the goals and objectives of the fishery management plan and notifies NMFS, which could occur via a letter. **Based on the PDT's discussion, the PDT chair outlined three possible alternatives for carryover to develop further in the action: 1) no action/ leave the carryover provision as is, 2) carryover will occur unless the stock is overfished, and 3) carryover will occur unless it is inconsistent with the FMP goals and objectives.** GARFO staff noted that there may be interest in selecting both alternatives 2 and 3 if there is a situation where the stock is not overfished but there is a large swing in catch advice that may require suspending carryover. They also explained how carryover occurs – carryover can be up to 10% of the applicable sub-ACL provided the overall ACL was not exceeded. It also does not increase the total ACL. There was a question from a Herring AP member about ways to streamline the Area 1A transfer process.

***RIVER HERRING AND SHAD MANAGEMENT MEASURES – CATCH CAPS***

The PDT reviewed a draft table summarizing various catch cap approaches and discussed data needs. The PDT Chair suggested developing summary tables similar to those in Appendix I of the 2016-2018 specifications action document and will report out at the next PDT meeting. A PDT member recommended changing "biological" to "dynamic" in the description of the river herring catch cap proof-of-concept model from the 2024 river herring stock assessment, noting that the catch caps would be based on a reference period and would be able to increase and decrease with changes in abundance. ASMFC staff stated that the proof-of-concept model was not tied to biological reference points and explained that more work is required to create a maximum sustainable yield concept for river herring. The PDT Chair asked ASMFC staff whether they considered applying the proof-of-concept model for shad species. ASMFC staff explained that it was beyond the scope of the assessment, and that the ASMFC does not assess hickory shad, though there is a separate American shad assessment. A similar model could be developed for other species, but it would be significantly more work for hickory shad as there are no indices of abundance. A member of the public asked if there are any other catch cap methods being explored and suggested looking into the Alaskan pollock fishery and salmon bycatch caps.

***AGENDA ITEM #2: MAY 26 PDT MEETING PLANNING***

The PDT Chair outlined several potential topics for the May 26th PDT meeting, including: Area 1A transfer analysis, updates to the river herring/shad catch cap analysis and species distribution models, and any Atlantic herring stock assessment considerations that may arise. A Committee member asked if there would be further discussion about challenges with monitoring/ data availability, and strategies for overcoming some of these challenges. The PDT Chair noted that this would be included in discussion of the tradeoffs between different catch cap approaches.

***FOLLOW-UP ITEMS***

- Cournane, Bodell – note that the PDT supports leaving all specifications items in the 2026 action.
- Cournane, Bodell, Nordeen, Trudeau, Starks, Kerns, Didden – review Atlantic herring specifications regulatory text and propose clarifications/other revisions as appropriate.
- Cournane, Bodell – note that the PDT supported using a 10-year approach for Canadian catch averages in the management uncertainty buffer.
- Cournane, Bodell, Nordeen, Trudeau, Starks, Kerns – develop alternatives for carryover provisions.
- Cournane, Bodell – continue to develop working paper on catch caps.
- Cournane, Hocking, Bodell – draft river herring and shad catch cap data tables for PDT review.

With no other business, the PDT meeting adjourned at approximately 11:15 am.