



New England Fishery Management Council

50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492

Daniel Salerno, *Chair* | Cate O'Keefe, PhD, *Executive Director*

DATE: June 30, 2026
TO: Dr. Joe Caracappa, Northeast Fisheries Science Center
FROM: Michelle Bachman, Dr. Rachel Feeney, and Jonathon Peros, NEFMC Staff
SUBJECT: Council Feedback on 2026 State of the Ecosystem Report

Thank you for presenting the 2026 State of the Ecosystem Report (SOE) to the New England Council at our April meeting. Staff have compiled key comments and recommendations below. We plan to participate in the SOE review meetings you are hosting in July and look forward to working on these issues with you and other Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) staff including during the July 31, 2026 meeting.

1. The SOE is currently presented to multiple groups including the New England and Mid-Atlantic SSCs, East Coast Coordination Group Core Team, and the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils. A brief presentation was also provided this spring to the Climate and Ecosystem Steering Committee. For efficiency, the Council suggests considering combining the Mid-Atlantic and New England reports into a single product. There are multiple species and fisheries managed by each council that span the two geographic regions. The Council also recommends holding an occasional (i.e., every two years) full-day meeting to discuss SOE results and their applications in detail. Attendees would include Council members, SSC members, and Council staff, NEFSC scientists, GARFO staff, fishermen, and others as appropriate. The Councils could organize this meeting but would need NEFSC staff assistance and participation.
2. The Council would like to continue to work with NEFSC to understand the implications of the revised stability metric for decision making support. NEFSC's definition of this metric implies that a stable state (vs. unstable state) is desirable, but it would be useful to articulate which aspects of stability can be influenced by Council decisions, and how.
3. The report emphasizes distribution shifts. You suggested that this information could be used to support (1) jurisdictional and allocation-related discussions and (2) implementation of dynamic reference points, specifically refining assumptions about stock productivity. The Council is interested in continuing to explore these data and decision support opportunities with NEFSC.
4. The Council recommends that NEFSC continue to evaluate the hypothesis that slope water intrusion is the source of recent cold-water inflows to the New England shelf and that the NEFSC estimate downstream impacts of these inflows. A suggested approach was to examine nutrients as an indicator. During the Council discussion you noted that the 10-year projections from MOM6 predicted this cooling event, and the 1-year forecasts estimate near-term future conditions. You suggested that it would be useful for

the Council to articulate the management concerns that would be relevant to decadal-scale timeframes so that NEFSC can continue to evaluate the utility of the 10-year projections to managers. We can consider this question of management applications for decadal-scale projects, potentially via our Climate and Ecosystem Steering Committee.

5. The Council appreciated the highlights section, which incorporates fishermen's observations (similarly, Council members observed many on-the-water observations were shared during the NEFSC Cooperative Research Summit held in early April). The Council suggests working towards incorporating these observations into stock assessments, especially since the observations are being vetted via the SOE process. You explained that the fishermen's observations are being compared to other data sources and used to formulate hypotheses, and that NEFSC staff consider it a collaborative effort to pose and test these scientific questions.
6. The Council emphasized that the availability of quota drives the geographic distribution of fishing effort and is leading to shifts in fishing effort on Georges Bank vs. in the Gulf of Maine. The Council didn't offer a specific suggestion for evaluating this dynamic landscape but recommended that these shifts should be captured in the report metrics if possible. Dr. Caracappa noted that one opportunity might be to evaluate the extent to which vessels are fishing in areas that are new to them, or landing in ports they did not previously land in.
7. The Council asked whether additional recreational species could be included in the report in the future to more accurately reflect trends in that segment of the fishery. A relatively complete picture would include Atlantic cod, striped bass, bluefin tuna, black seabass, big eye tuna, yellowfin tuna, and sharks such as mako shark. The Council also suggested combining New England and Mid-Atlantic species into one set of recreational metrics across Councils but evaluating areas north and south of Cape Cod separately as patterns of effort are different in the two geographic areas.
8. The Council noted that recreational port metrics are challenging to evaluate; for example, year-round population size in a community may be small, but fishing effort may be highly reliant on seasonal tourism. You noted that SOE preparers are aware of this issue and are revising the metrics for next year.
9. The Council asked whether ocean models could be used to better understand advection and its influence egg/larval transport, which could help the Council to better understand recruitment dynamics. During the meeting, you noted that this would be a substantial undertaking, and that this sort of evaluation would benefit from separating out different depth layers and locations depending on the species of interest.
10. The Council suggested that it would be useful to standardize SOE metrics across regions as a next step beyond current efforts to standardize language. This would be particularly useful between the northeast and southeast regions as there are species that move north and south of Cape Hatteras. We are working collaboratively with the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Councils on climate-resilient fisheries strategies, and having consistent metrics between our SOE and their Ecosystem Status Reports would be useful.
11. Future reports should clarify the meaning of gross vs. managed revenue.
12. The Council was interested in the finding that managed stocks are declining while the aggregate ecosystem biomass as a whole is not declining, and the Council remains unsure of how to respond to this information. Because the Council manages individual stocks

and stock complexes, the Council recommends NEFSC explore ways to derive species-specific information from the SOE report to support catch advice and management recommendations at the species or stock level. We understand that Ecosystem Status Reports and short-form versions of these reports might be a vehicle for this information, so it will be important to ensure that the ESR and SOE reports are complementary.

13. The Council is about to finalize a revised Risk Policy Concept, and would like to continue to work with NEFSC on ecosystem indicators that can be incorporated into the Risk Policy in the future.
14. The Council requested that you continue efforts to clarify information about costs and revenues in the report, such as whether costs include leasing and at-sea monitoring. You noted that costs are an estimate based on distance traveled combined with some fixed costs, and that labor is not included. You also noted that SOE authors are working to incorporate data from the cost survey but have not done so yet, and that you could split off certain types of trips where costs are different to look at them separately. The Council supports this ongoing work.