



New England  
Fishery Management  
Council



#8a2

## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** June 2, 2026  
**To:** New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils  
**From:** Council Staff  
**Subject:** Update on Vessel Baselines Evaluation

### Background

The Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils agreed to evaluate the current length and horsepower vessel baseline restrictions in 2026, with the goal of informing their consideration of initiating a future management action to consider possible modifications. A workgroup of Council and NOAA Fisheries staff was formed and has begun work on this evaluation. During their respective June 2026 meetings, the Councils will receive a progress update. The evaluation will be complete in time for the September 2026 New England Council meeting and the October 2026 Mid-Atlantic Council meeting.

### Current Vessel Baseline Restrictions

Vessel baseline restrictions apply to most commercial limited access fisheries managed by the Councils. These restrictions require that vessel replacements or upgrades must be within 10% of the length and 20% of the horsepower of the permit's baseline vessel ([50 CFR 648.4](#)). The baseline vessel is the vessel that had the relevant permit during the specified baseline year, which varies by permit type (Table 1).

### May 2026 Advisory Panel Meetings

The Councils convened three joint meetings of all their advisory panels in May 2026. The goal of these meetings was to better understand how the vessel baseline restrictions are impacting the fisheries and to inform the next phase of the ongoing evaluation. Summaries of these meetings and written comments received through May 29, 2026 are included in the briefing materials for the June 2026 meetings of both Councils.

### Initial Analysis

The workgroup has begun to analyze Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) federal vessel permits. A few initial points are included here.

In 2025, there were 1,807 permit suites (i.e., single permits or permits grouped together) subject to vessel baseline restrictions, with 1,167 of those permit suites issued to vessels and 640 in Confirmation of Permit History (CPH). Of the 1,167 permit suites with baselines issued to

vessels (i.e., not in CPH) in 2025, 164 had multiple baselines of length, horsepower, or both, and 1,003 had one baseline length and horsepower (Figure 1).

The permit data suggest that, across all relevant fisheries in 2025, most vessels remain at or below their original baselines for length and horsepower (Table 2).

The workgroup also categorized vessels across all fisheries with baseline restrictions into four horsepower categories and four length categories and illustrated how the vessels in those categories compare to their maximum allowable horsepower and length (Figures 2 and 3). For example, these data show that most vessels were in the 31 - 60 foot category, and most vessels in that category were within 5 feet of their maximum allowable length (Figure 3). Most vessels with baselines have engines that are 800 or less in horsepower, and most of those are within 100 horsepower of their maximum allowable horsepower (Figure 2). It is important to note that the length and horsepower categories defined by the workgroup were generated as examples and could be defined differently.

The workgroup also calculated the average vessel age over time by permit type (Figure 4). These data show the average age in 2025 ranged from 34 to 40 years, depending on the permit type. From about 2011-2025, the average vessel age by permit type has been consistently increasing, suggesting that few vessels have been replaced with newer vessels during that time period. However, around 2000-2010, the trends in average age were more flat, suggesting more vessels may have been replaced with newer vessels or, as suggested by some advisors, been sold during buyback programs during that time period.

The workgroup presented all this information during three Advisory Panel meetings in May 2026. Advisors provided some insights into the trends shown in the data. This input is documented separately in the summary of those meetings.

### **Next Steps**

Over the next few months, the workgroup will continue to analyze the data. This may include additional evaluations of changes over time, characterizations by fishery/permit type, summaries based on permit suites, and evaluations of vessels with multiple baselines. The workgroup also plans to look into trends in relinquishing permits to assess if permits with more restrictive baselines are more likely to be relinquished. The workgroup will also look at landings data to consider which vessels are most active in the fisheries. The workgroup may also make some comparisons with fleets not subject to baseline restrictions.

Input received during the Advisory Panel meetings and guidance provided by the Councils during their June meetings will help inform next steps for this evaluation.

The evaluation will be completed in time for the September 2026 New England Council meeting and the October 2026 Mid-Atlantic Council meeting. In December, the Councils will consider if

they wish to prioritize a management action in 2027, such as an omnibus amendment to consider revisions to the vessel baseline restrictions.

More information on the ongoing evaluation is available at:

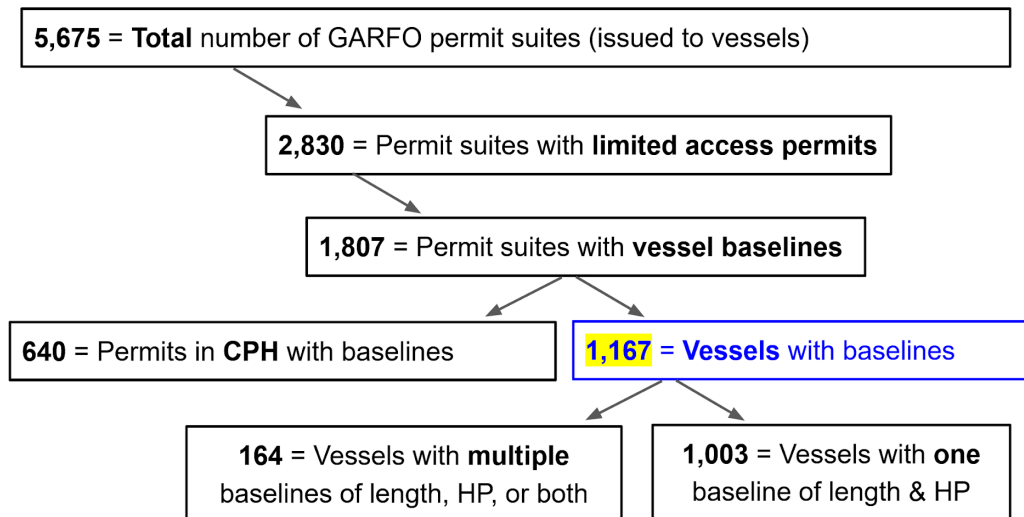
<https://www.nefmc.org/library/vessel-baselines-restrictions-evaluation> and

<https://www.mafmc.org/actions/vessel-baseline-restrictions>.

## Tables and Figures

**Table 1.** Baseline year by permit type.

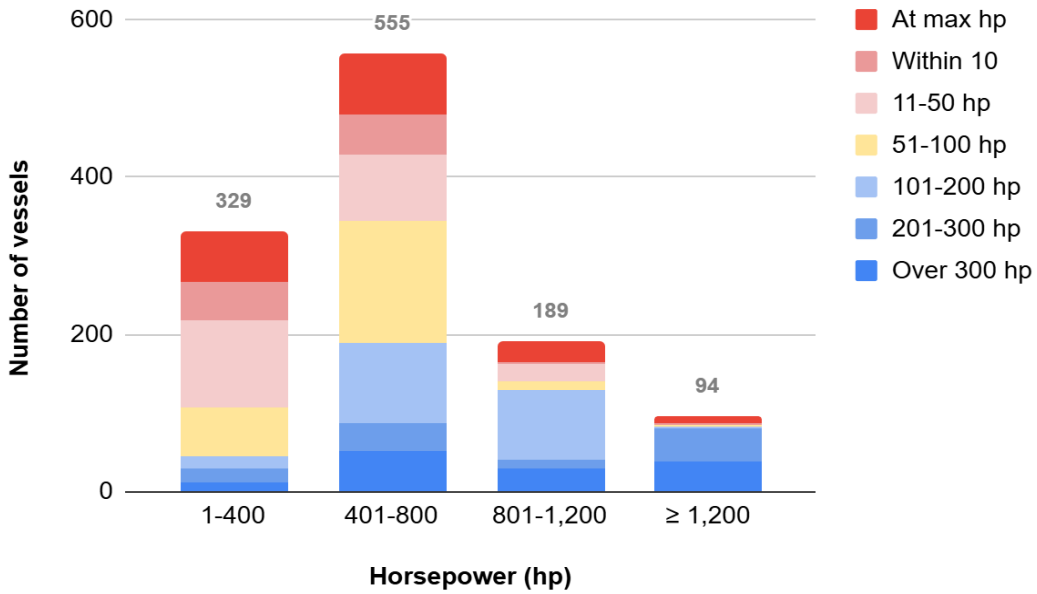
Permit Type	Baseline Year
Northeast multispecies (except Handgear A)	1994
Atlantic sea scallop	
Red crab	1999
Summer flounder	
Scup	
Black sea bass	
Longfin squid (except Tier 3)	
<i>Illex</i> squid	
Butterfish	
Maine mahogany quahogs	2000
Monkfish	
Atlantic herring	2007
Atlantic mackerel	2011



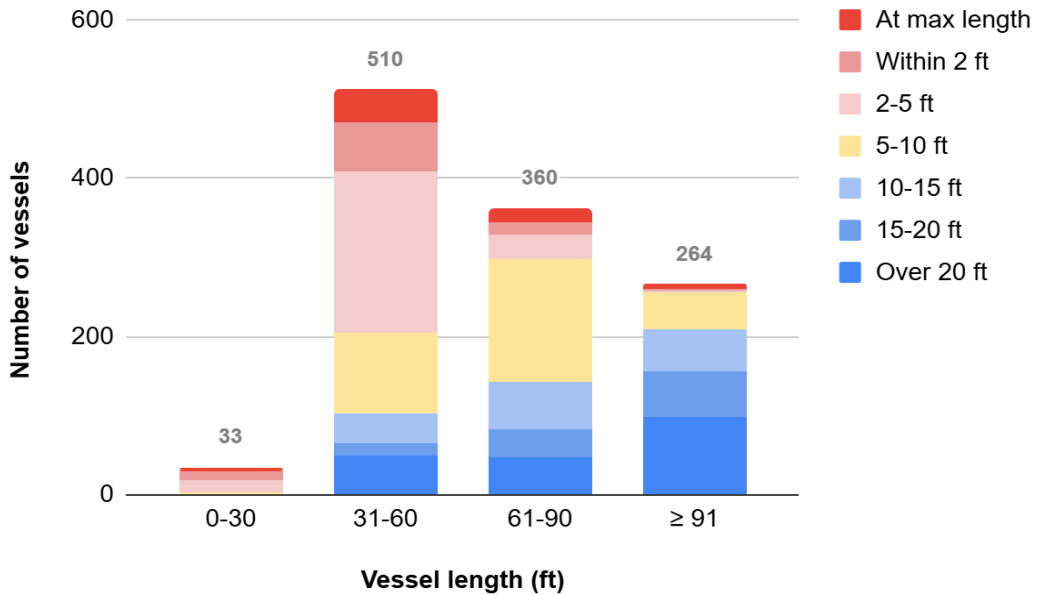
**Figure 1.** Categorization of permits issued by GARFO in 2025.

**Table 2.** Number of vessels with baselines in 2025 (n=1,167), as well as the percentage of vessels under/at or above their original baselines.

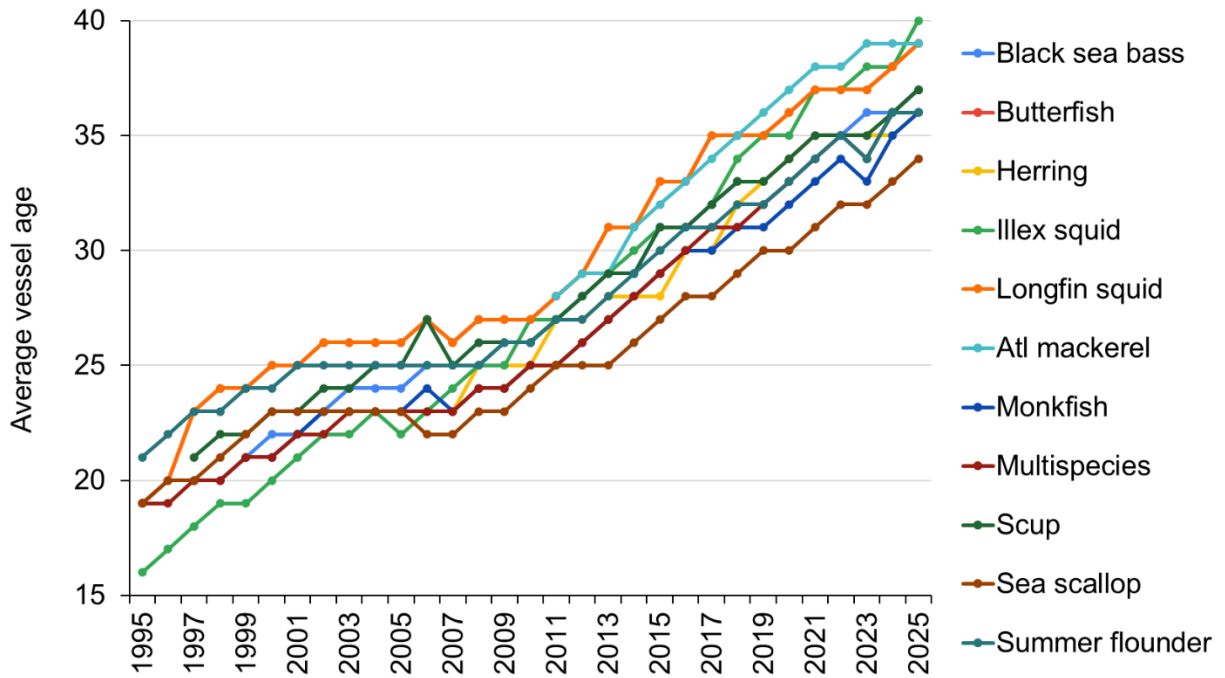
Permit Type	Number of vessels	Vessel Length		Vessel Horsepower	
		% of vessels under/at original baseline	% of vessels above original baseline	% of vessels under/at original baseline	% of vessels above original baseline
Atlantic Red Crab	5	80%	20%	80%	20%
Maine mahogany Quahog	15	67%	33%	67%	33%
<i>Illex</i> Squid	65	77%	23%	71%	29%
Atlantic herring	74	77%	23%	73%	27%
Atlantic Mackerel	115	82%	18%	77%	23%
Butterfish	268	82%	18%	60%	40%
Longfin Squid Tiers 1 & 2	268	81%	19%	59%	41%
Sea Scallop	346	79%	21%	51%	49%
Monkfish	486	81%	19%	62%	38%
Scup	529	78%	22%	59%	41%
Black Sea Bass	585	78%	22%	59%	41%
NE Multispecies	626	79%	21%	62%	38%
Summer Flounder	656	81%	19%	57%	43%



**Figure 2.** Breakdown of the 1,167 permit suites issued in 2025 and subject to length/horsepower baseline restrictions by four horsepower categories. Colored shading indicates how the vessels in each category compare to their maximum allowable horsepower.



**Figure 3.** Breakdown of the 1,167 permit suites issued in 2025 and subject to length/horsepower baseline restrictions by four length categories. Colored shading indicates how the vessels in each category compare to their maximum allowable length.



**Figure 4.** Average age of vessels with baselines by permit type, 1995-2025.