



New England Fishery Management Council

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

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

MEETING SUMMARY

Joint Monkfish and Skate Plan Development Teams

Webinar

August 21, 2025

The Monkfish and Skate Plan Development Teams (PDT) met jointly on August 21, 2025, at 1:00 pm via webinar to: 1) provide updates on Scientific and Statistical Committee recommendations for monkfish and skate specifications, 2) continue development of analyses of fishery performance and identifying fishery overlaps, 3) develop recommendations for potential changes in effort controls to be included in monkfish and skate specifications actions, 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 (NEFMC staff); Sharon Benjamin, Laura Deighan, Ashleigh McCord, Danielle Palmer, Matthew Rigdon, Spencer Talmage, and Dr. Sara Turner (NMFS/GARFO); Dr. Jason Boucher, Dr. Chris Legault, and Samantha Werner (NMFS/NEFSC); Jason Didden (MAFMC); Dr. Tara Dolan (MADMF); Ben LaFreniere (ME DMR); Eric Schneider (RI DEM); Renee St. Amand (CT DEEP); Matt Gates (Monkfish Committee Chair); and Scott Olszewski (Skate Committee Chair). In addition, about six other people attended.

KEY OUTCOMES

- The PDTs discussed data to address Committee tasking and identified next steps.
- Regarding recommendations on potential changes in effort controls, the PDT recommended:
 - Monkfish: Consider status quo possession limits and monkfish days at sea for both the Northern and Southern management areas.
 - Skates: Consider a 5,000 lb possession limit in season 1 and up to 7,000 lb possession limits year-round for skate wings.

There were no changes to the agenda.

AGENDA ITEM #1: SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE (SSC) RECOMMENDATIONS

The PDT was updated on SSC recommendations for monkfish and skate specifications, namely the overfishing limits and acceptable biological catch values. The PDT briefly discussed the Council's Omnibus Flexibility Action as it relates to setting specifications through FY 2030. There was a clarifying question about what would occur if the Council did not move forward with modifying the specifications-setting timeline. Council staff explained that if the Council did not recommend that portion of the action, they would still need to submit 2-year specifications for skates (as required) and would likely recommend 3-year specifications for monkfish (as is typical for monkfish specifications setting). If there is no new data update or assessment, the Council would still have the SSC's recommendations through FY 2030 to fall back on. It was further clarified that the management flexibility action would not change the process for reviewing new incoming information or the ability to revisit values in future years, and the PDT recommended adding some language to that effect into the specifications document would be helpful. GARFO staff also noted their plan to coordinate between monkfish and skate staff to ensure consistency within documents.

AGENDA ITEM #2: CONTINUE DEVELOPING SPECIFICATIONS ACTIONS

The PDT discussed progress on fulfilling the tasks provided by the Joint Monkfish-Skate Committee in March. For each, Council staff presented the task and data that had been pulled thus far, which was followed by questions and discussions to identify additional work needed for each task. A Council member commented on recent monkfish fishery performance, noting that the fishery continues to be impacted by hitting skate limits. They stated that while skates are plentiful, they provide marginal pay, and retaining crew can be a challenge.

Follow-ups:

- Couture, Feeney: coordinate follow up data acquisition and analyses and lead revisions to the memo document.
- Bodell: Assist with analyses.
- All PDT: Continue to review memo when updates are available.

AGENDA ITEM #3: EFFORT CONTROL RECOMMENDATIONS

Council staff prompted a discussion by the PDT to develop recommendations for potential changes in effort controls to be included in Monkfish Framework 17 and the Skate Specifications action. Effort controls include monkfish and skate possession limits and Monkfish days-at-sea (DAS). The PDT reviewed the timeline and work expected for upcoming meetings of the Advisory Panels and Committees to prepare specifications for final action by the Council in September (and October for monkfish by the Mid-Atlantic Council). Recent fishery performance relative to specifications was reviewed and an update was provided on the Councils' Inflation Reduction Action project that includes potential coordination of monkfish and skate management. The project is focused on how fishery management plans are structured and how they overlap with each other and evaluating opportunities to improve management efficiency.

For monkfish, the PDTs noted that northern area landings are close to the quota, so increasing limits may not be appropriate. In the southern area, there are several factors impacting the low catch (i.e., availability, abundance, fishery impacts). Given the underachievement of quota and high uncertainty, it would be helpful to get some input from the Advisory Panel then potentially consider incremental changes. There was support for keeping effort controls constant across all five years of specifications rather than changing them for FY 2029-2030.

For skates, the PDT supported a DAS trip limit increase for skate wings given the increase in catch limits and feedback from industry members that the skate wing limit has been constraining. Council staff noted difficulties in predicting changes in landings based on changes in possession limits. Increasing the Season 1 limit to 6,000 lb was discussed, an idea raised by advisors, as well as other values for both seasons, possibly up to 7,000 lb.¹ Staff asked about the level of analysis necessary to support possession limit changes in the supplemental information report (SIR) document, which GARFO staff will follow up on. A Committee member supported a possession limit increase but was concerned that increasing the limit beyond 5,000 lb in the spring could drop the price and compromise the benefit of increased landings. A PDT member pointed out that there could be some offsets to potential changes in skate prices, such as increased monkfish landings. The PDT made the following consensus recommendations:

Monkfish: Consider status quo possession limits and monkfish days at sea for both the Northern and Southern management areas.

Skate: Consider a 5,000 lb possession limit in season 1 and up to 7,000 lb possession limits year-round for skate wings.

¹ 8,000 lb was discussed during the meeting, but with additional review of data after the meeting, the PDT is suggesting up to 7,000 lb be considered.

Follow-ups:

- Couture, Feeney: revise SIR documents for monkfish and skate actions to include PDT recommendations.
- Benjamin, McCord: advise on necessary descriptions of the proposed action and impacts in the SIR documents.
- All PDT: Review draft SIR documents.

AGENDA ITEM #4: OTHER BUSINESS

Council staff briefly described another part of the Council's Omnibus Management Flexibility Action, which includes alternatives to allow for specifications for monkfish (and groundfish) to be done through a specifications package vs via a Framework action, which is currently required. The Monkfish PDT reviewed a draft list of items that could be revised through a specifications process.

Follow-ups:

- Monkfish PDT: review proposed list of items that could be included in a monkfish specifications action.

With no additional other business, the meeting adjourned at 4:04 pm.