



# New England Fishery Management Council

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PRESS CONTACT: Janice Plante  
(607) 592-4817, [jplante@nefmc.org](mailto:jplante@nefmc.org)

## April 2023 Council Meeting Highlights: Monkfish, Skates, EBFM, Sturgeon, Gear Conflict Working Group, Risk Policy, and More

The New England Fishery Management Council met [April 18-20, 2023](#) in Mystic, Connecticut and covered a dozen different topics ranging from monkfish to skates, scallops to habitat, groundfish to Atlantic sturgeon, Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management, and more. Here are the highlights.

**MONKFISH:** One of the Council's 2023 priorities is to consider recommendations from the [Research Set-Aside \(RSA\) Program Review](#) and develop measures to improve the Monkfish RSA Program's effectiveness. The charge is two-fold: (1) revisit the use of RSA days-at-sea and the ability to flip to an RSA day while at sea; and (2) form a workgroup of fishermen, NOAA Fisheries and Council staff members, Monkfish Committee members, and others as needed to "discuss the Monkfish RSA Program and identify potential improvements." The Monkfish RSA Program has seen limited use for many years now, which prompted the Council's request to undertake the review as a [2023 Council Priority](#).

- **THE RESULT:** The Council viewed [this presentation](#) and approved the [proposal for establishing a workgroup](#) to improve the Monkfish RSA Program. The workgroup will meet [June 5, 2023](#).

**PROTECTED RESOURCES – ATLANTIC STURGEON:** The Council [received an update](#) on efforts underway to reduce bycatch of Atlantic sturgeon in the large-mesh monkfish and spiny dogfish fisheries. The New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils jointly manage the two fisheries. New England has the administrative lead for [monkfish](#) and the Mid-Atlantic Council has the lead for [dogfish](#). The two Councils are collaborating on a joint sturgeon action as outlined in this [draft 2023 work plan](#).



– Atlantic Sturgeon, NOAA Fisheries photo

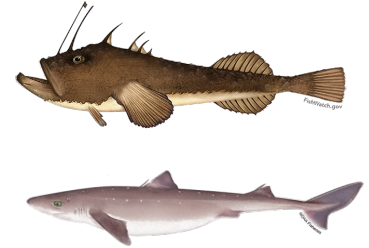
- **THE RESULT:** For its part, the New England Council initiated [Framework Adjustment 15](#) to the Monkfish Fishery Management Plan. The measures in the framework will be based on recommendations from NOAA's [Action Plan to Reduce Atlantic Sturgeon Bycatch in Federal Large-Mesh Gillnet Fisheries](#). Large mesh is defined as "greater than or equal to 7 inches" in this action.
- Visit the Mid-Atlantic Council's [Sturgeon Bycatch Framework webpage](#) for more information. Here are two upcoming



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meetings related to this action:

- **May 16, 2023** – [Joint Monkfish and Spiny Dogfish Advisory Panel Webinar](#)
- **May 17, 2023** – [Joint Monkfish and Spiny Dogfish Committee Webinar](#)



**ON-DEMAND/ROPELESS FISHING GEAR CONFLICT WORKING GROUP:** In early April, the Council sent out a [press release](#) soliciting fishermen and other members of the public to serve on a new On-Demand Fishing Gear Conflict Working Group. The working group's goal is to identify strategies for reducing gear interactions between on-demand gear, often referred to as ropeless gear, and fisheries that use other gear types, such as the groundfish, monkfish, and scallop mobile gear fisheries and the recreational party/charter rod-and-reel fishery.

- **THE RESULT:** The Council was given [an update](#) on the working group's formation. It then approved the [draft work plan](#) for the group. The Council will be setting up an On-Demand Fishing Gear Conflict Working Group webpage to house key documents related to the group's work. More information on the webpage will be coming soon.

**SOCIOECONOMIC SURVEY:** The Council received a [presentation](#) on the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's latest socioeconomic survey to assess the current social and economic conditions of commercial fishing crews. The survey is a follow-up to science scenter's 2018-2019 study to determine changes over time in demographics, well-being, and work conditions. The [survey](#) and related materials are [posted here](#).

**ENFORCEMENT:** Meeting materials related to the Enforcement Committee report are [posted here](#).

**SEAFOOD STRATEGY:** The Council received a short overview of NOAA's [National Seafood Strategy](#).



Boats in New Bedford. – New England Fishery Management Council photo





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**SKATES:** The Council viewed [this presentation](#) and related [meeting materials](#) during the skate report and covered three items. (1) The Council received an update on a [Draft Thorny Skate Rebuilding White Paper](#) being developed by the Skate Plan Development Team (PDT). The thorny skate stock is in year 20 of a 25-year rebuilding plan, but abundance has not improved. The white paper summarizes the state of knowledge about thorny skates and progress towards rebuilding. It also identifies potential approaches to managing the species. (2) The Council is working on fishing year 2024-2025 specifications for the skate complex and other skate management measures. It received a refresher on the specifications process and an early progress report on this work. (3) The Council received a short overview of the upcoming 2023 Skate Management Track Stock Assessment.

- **THE RESULT:** The Skate PDT will continue to refine the white paper for submission to the Council in June. Final action on specifications is slated for December. The Council agreed by consensus to send a letter to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center with four recommendations related to the 2023 skate assessment as listed on [slide 16 here](#).



Thorny Skate. – Andy Murch photo

**UPCOMING MEETINGS:** Here are a few upcoming meetings related to the Council's skate work.

- **May 22, 2023** – [Assessment Oversight Panel Meeting for Fall Management Track Assessments](#) (skates scheduled for 9:15 a.m.);
- **June 12, 2023** – [Skate Advisory Panel Webinar Meeting](#);
- **June 14, 2023** – [Skate Committee Meeting](#); and
- **September 18-22, 2023** – [Fall Management Track Assessments Peer Review Meeting](#).

**UNCERTAINTY IN STOCK PROJECTIONS:** The Council received a [general overview](#) of how uncertainty in growth, recruitment, and mortality, along with other factors, can impact stock projections. The Council then viewed two additional presentations – one related to [scallop](#)s and the other to [groundfish](#) – that further illustrated uncertainty in stock projections.



**RISK POLICY:** The Council received an update from its [Risk Policy Working Group](#), which was reconstituted in March 2023 to review the Council's current [Risk Policy](#) and develop recommendations for future change.

- **THE RESULT:** The Council approved the [Terms of Reference](#) for the working group after viewing [this presentation](#). The group's next meeting is scheduled for [June 8, 2023](#).



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**CONGRESSIONAL UPDATE:** The Council received a [presentation](#) on the wrap-up of the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress and the current activities of the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress.

**MARINE RESOURCE EDUCATION PROGRAM (MREP):** The Council was given a [backgrounder and update](#) on MREP titled “Bridging the gap between fishermen, scientists, and managers since 2001.”

**ECOSYSTEM-BASED FISHERY MANAGEMENT:** The Council received [an update](#) on the prototype management strategy evaluation (pMSE) being conducted to help inform a full-scale MSE on the Council’s work to develop an example fishery management plan ([eFEP](#)) for Georges Bank. The Council has produced a wide array of [outreach materials](#) related to this work on EBFM. Here is the [SSC’s input](#) on the pMSE.

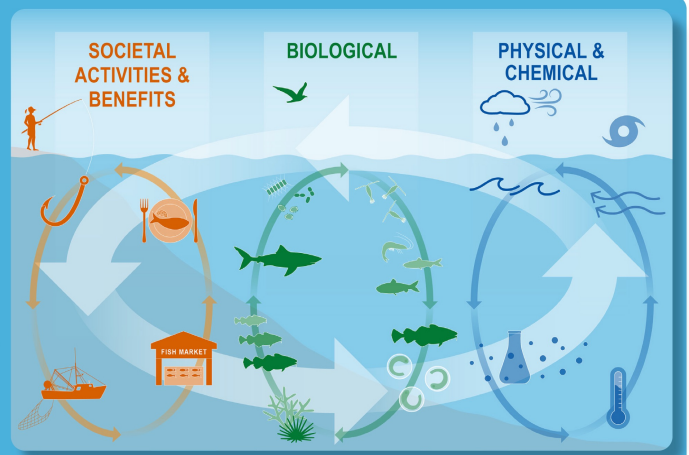
The Council also received a brief update on the EBFM deep-dive public outreach workshops that are being planned for this summer and early fall. The Council issued a [request for proposals \(RFP\)](#) to solicit applications from interested parties to organize and facilitate two online workshops and one in-person plenary meeting between August and mid-September 2023. The deadline for submitting proposals was May 1, 2023. The Council is now working to advance planning for the workshops with the selected contractor.

**STATE OF THE ECOSYSTEM:** The Council received a [presentation](#) on the 2023 State of the Ecosystem Report for New England.

- The report itself is [posted here](#).
- The Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee’s feedback on the 2023 report can be found in [this presentation](#) and [memo](#).
- View the [tracking memo](#), which summarizes New England and Mid-Atlantic Council suggestions for updates over time.

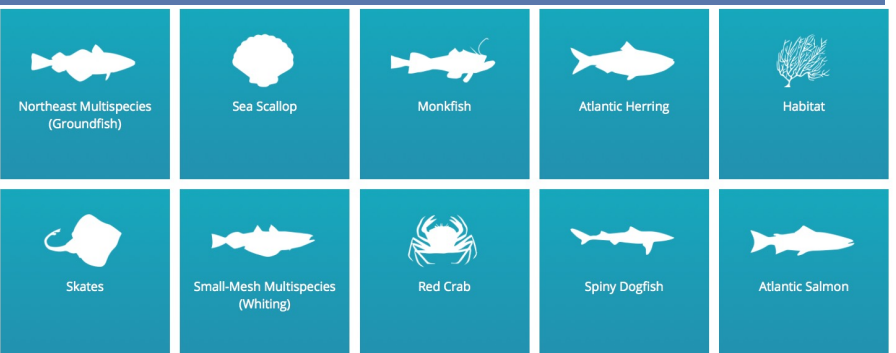
## Multiple System Drivers

The Northeast shelf ecosystem is changing, which is affecting the services that the ecosystem provides. To illustrate how multiple factors are driving change in this complex ecosystem, we are using three overarching concepts: multiple system drivers, regime shifts, and ecosystem reorganization. Societal, biological, physical, and chemical factors are the **multiple system drivers** that influence marine ecosystems through a variety of different pathways.



*Above, an image from the NOAA Fisheries State of the Ecosystem Report 2023 for New England, which can be [downloaded here](#).*

## Habitat, Scallops, Groundfish, Herring: Did You See the News?



*The Council previously sent out news releases about the following topics: (1) scallop access to the Northern Edge of Georges Bank, [posted here](#); (2) final action on the Atlantic Salmon Aquaculture Framework, [posted here](#); (3) a Gulf of Maine haddock emergency action request to NOAA Fisheries, [posted here](#); and (4) an Atlantic herring and river herring/shad update, [posted here](#).*