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PRESS CONTACT: Alex Dunn

978-465-0492 ext. 112; adunn@nefmc.org

Council Addresses Executive Order and NOAA Directives through 2027 Work Priorities

During its September 2026 Council Meeting the New England Fishery Management Council addressed multiple management priorities that were identified by NOAA in a [July 2, 2026](#) letter regarding Executive Order 14276, “*Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness*”. Updates and Council next steps on each item are outlined below. The Council will send an official response to NOAA by September 30, 2026.

IMPLEMENT ROTATIONAL ACCESS FOR THE NORTHERN EDGE SCALLOP FISHERY

The Council committed to considering scallop fishery access to the Northern Edge during the 2027 priority setting process at the [December 2026](#) meeting. NOAA had requested the Council establish a controlled, rotational limited-access scallop fishery within the Northern Edge Habitat Areas of Particular Concern. This will allow time to evaluate the request alongside all potential 2027 priorities. The Council considered four potential management options to open the area to scalloping including a holistic habitat management review; a dedicated habitat action; a scallop action that builds on previous analyses and alternatives; or not including this work as 2027 priorities which could lead to a Secretarial Action. The [Northern Edge](#) is currently designated a Habitat Management Area, which closes it to dragging gear to minimize impacts on essential fish habitat for Atlantic cod, American lobster, Atlantic herring, among other species.

IMPLEMENT SCALLOP PERMIT STACKING

NOAA tasked the Council with pursuing an action on scallop permit stacking but due to capacity constraints, the Council will not include this issue as a 2027 priority, deferring to NOAA and a potential Secretarial Action. While the Council does not have a position on stacking permits, it last took up the issue of consolidation at the [September 2022](#) meeting when it opted not to develop an action to allow leasing in the Limited Access component of the fishery following a scoping process. At the time, the Council cited concerns about job losses and other negative economic impacts on waterfront communities as reasons for not developing an action. The [July 2026](#) NOAA letter also cited these associated risks of stacking including “foreign ownership, job reductions, and erosion of our critical

working waterfronts.” Proponents of stacking cite the economic relief of reduced operational costs, reduced congestion in ports and while fishing, and the ability to fish two allocations on their safest and best vessel.

RESCIND HERRING INDUSTRY FUNDED MONITORING (IFM) REQUIREMENTS

Following a robust discussion, the Council will move forward with consideration of rescinding Industry Funded Monitoring (IFM) requirements in the herring fishery, responding to NOAA's request to reduce monitoring costs. The Council will consider incorporating Herring IFM rescission in the ongoing river herring/shad management action, alongside potential changes to haddock bycatch caps and slippage move-on provisions. The proposed action targets a final decision by April 2027.

DEPRIORITIZE ADVANCING REQUIREMENTS FOR ROPELESS GEAR

The Council supported pausing additional activity on complex ropeless gear requirements while NOAA's ongoing [Request for Information](#) and pending federal legislation is underway, including the recently passed, [H.R. 9436](#) (Northeast Lobsterman Protection Act of 2026), which extends the deadline from 2028 to 2035. The Council had paused a decision on ropeless gear during a [2025](#) meeting when it voted to postpone action on the Joint Omnibus Alternative Gear-Marking [Framework Adjustment](#), which would have allowed the use of ropeless gear in areas previously closed to persistent buoy lines under the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan.

EVALUATE VESSEL BASELINE RESTRICTIONS

Council work is proceeding in the evaluation of vessel baseline restrictions including length and horsepower upgrades. At the September 2026 meeting, Council received and approved the final Vessel Baseline Evaluation [Report](#), fulfilling its 2026 work priority and outlining a path forward to potential revisions to existing regulations. The work is being done jointly with GARFO and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council who will receive the report at their [October](#) meeting. Following review by both councils, a decision on whether to prioritize a joint action to revise or remove these restrictions will be considered for 2027.

CONSIDER REOPENING THE GREAT SOUTH CHANNEL HABITAT MANAGEMENT AREA TO SURFCLAMS

The Great South Channel HMA evaluation was presented at the meeting, and the Council plans to consider prioritization of activities in December 2026. The report provides a technical foundation for considering future habitat management activities. The Council discussed applying evaluation results to revise existing exemption area measures, expanding Exempted Fishing Permit opportunities, and conducting additional research on clam density and economic value.

REGIONAL STOCK PRIORITIZATION

Dr. O’Keefe on behalf of the Northeast Regional Coordinating Committee ([NRCC](#)), updated the Council on a draft [Regional Stock Prioritization Matrix](#), developed as part of a larger response to Executive Order 14276. This tool evaluates New England managed stocks based on biological and management risk alongside economic and social value, placing each stock into one of four quadrants (high or low risk vs. high or low value). The structured

framework is intended to inform, not dictate management decisions and helps the Council direct management resources to “high risk/value” stocks, while alleviating management burdens on “low risk” stocks. The tool will be finalized in an October summary report, with the NRCC set to review applications for the regional five-year stock assessment schedule and future priorities in November.

BACKGROUND ON EO 14276

Following the April 17, 2025, issuance of [Executive Order 14276](#), the Council engaged its Plan Development Teams, Advisory Panel members, and the public to identify actions that support domestic fishing, economic profitability, and closure preventions. The Council responded to NOAA with a work plan on [September 30, 2025](#). Following two and half months of Government shutdown in early 2026, NOAA reopened the public comment on EO 14276. The Council reviewed these new public comments and confirmed with NOAA that no changes were necessary to the workplan in an [April 23, 2026](#) letter. On [July 2, 2026](#), NOAA requested that the Council take multiple management actions. The Council’s Executive Committee proposed next steps for each of these requested management actions on [September 4, 2026](#) which the full Council approved during the [September 2026](#) Council meeting. A final Council response to NOAA will be sent by September 30, 2026.

Secretarial Action Explained

The Secretary of Commerce may prepare a fishery management plan or any amendment to any plan, in accordance with the national standards, if:

- The Council fails to develop and submit, after a reasonable period of time, a fishery management plan or any necessary amendment, if the fishery requires conservation and management;
- The Secretary disapproves or partially disapproves any such plan or amendment and the Council fails to submit a revised plan or amendment

In preparing any plan or amendment, the Secretary shall:

- Conduct public hearings, at appropriate times and locations in the geographical areas concerned, to allow interested persons an opportunity to be heard in the preparation of the plan and regulations

- *Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act*

