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PRESS CONTACT: Alex Dunn

978-465-0492 ext. 112; [adunn@nefmc.org](mailto:adunn@nefmc.org)

## Council Focuses on Timely Implementation of Fishery Specifications; Recommends Changes to Habitat Research Area

The New England Fishery Management Council met from June 23-25, 2026, in Mystic Connecticut. The following is a summary of actions taken and issues considered affecting several Fishery Management Plans (FMPs). Meeting materials, motions, and the meeting [audio recordings](#) are available on the Council's [June 2026](#) meeting page.

### HERRING INDUSTRY-FUNDED MONITORING TO BE REVISITED

The Council decided to consider rescinding the Atlantic herring Industry Funded Monitoring (IFM) program as a possible 2027 priority, to be further discussed at its December 2026 meeting. The discussion was sparked by a [letter from NOAA](#) requesting the Council rescind the Herring IFM program in response to Executive Order 14276 and ongoing litigation. Multiple Council members spoke about the importance of completing current [Herring priorities](#) as planned. The Council and NOAA partners noted that other existing IFM programs for scallops and groundfish would not be affected. The Council plans to respond to NOAA in a letter following the June meeting. More information can be found [here](#).

### HERRING SPECIFICATIONS PRIORITIZED; SEPARATED FROM OTHER MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The Council voted unanimously to separate Atlantic herring specifications for fishing years (FY) 2027-2031 into a standalone action distinct from ongoing work to modify river herring and shad (RHS) management measures. The Council plans to take final action on the specifications at its [September 2026](#) meeting. In a separate action, the Council directed the Plan Development Team (PDT) to continue working on (1) time-area closures for RHS with and without existing catch cap methodology; (2) an updated specifications process; (3) carryover provision modifications, with final action targeted for April 2027. The full herring report can be found [here](#).

## SCALLOPS SHOW STRONG LANDINGS; COUNCIL ENSURES TIMELY IMPLEMENTATION OF SPECIFICATIONS

The 2026 scallop fishing year (FY) is seeing strong early season landings, driven by high catch rates of over 2,000 pounds per day in the Mid-Atlantic. FY2026 specifications allocated 36 Days-at-Sea to full-time Limited Access vessels and did not allocate any access area trips.

**Scallop Framework 42 (FW42):** The Council voted unanimously to prioritize fishery specifications for FY2027 by splitting specs from FW42. Splitting the actions reduces the risk of specifications being delayed past the start of the fishing year on April 1, 2027. Continued development of FW42 includes region-specific Limited Access Day-at-Sea management, as well as sub-management areas within the Northern Gulf of Maine management area. FW42 is scheduled for implementation in FY2028. Scallop meeting information can be found [here](#).

**Research Set Aside (RSA)** NOAA staff reported a record-setting 40 applications for the 2026-2027 RSA Announcement. Over a dozen proposals have been selected with an announcement expected from NOAA Grants in the coming weeks; check [NOAA's RSA](#) webpage for updates. All 2026 RSA Set-Aside pounds and nearly all 2027 pounds will be awarded, and there is not an expected award cycle in 2027. The Council also voted unanimously on the [FY2027-2028](#) RSA Priorities.

## GROUNDFISH FRAMEWORK 74 INITIATED; UPDATES ON FRAMEWORK 68 AND AMENDMENT 23

**Framework Adjustment 74 (FW74):** The Council voted unanimously to initiate Framework Adjustment FW74, which would set specifications for FY2027–2031 and include targeted management measures. These proposed measures include simplifying Southern windowpane flounder Accountability Measure triggers and exploring alternative methods for setting Atlantic halibut catch limits.

**Framework Adjustment 68 (FW68):** The Council agreed to extend the timeline for FW68 with work continuing through the summer and potential final action in April 2027. FW68 aims to modify or replace existing groundfish Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) Control Rules to incorporate the Council's new Risk Policy.

The revised control rules are intended to provide catch advice that minimizes large fluctuations in catch limits when appropriate. In addition to revised control rules, potential management approaches under consideration include:

- Phased-in ABCs to promote industry stability
- ABC carryover provisions to support safety and market stability
- Rules for the use of constant ABCs to improve consistency

**Amendment 23 (A23):** The Council received an update on ongoing evaluation work for the Groundfish Monitoring Program established under A23. The program is designed to improve catch accounting and enhance the quality of fisheries data. Initial evaluation results indicate that the program has strengthened monitoring efforts, mitigated the effects of bias, improved overall data quality, and increased the effectiveness of coverage. All groundfish report documentation can be found [here](#).

## SMALL MESH MULTISPECIES 2026 ACTION

The Council approved a 2026 Small Mesh Multispecies action that includes specifications, application of the new risk policy in the catch-setting process, and targeted possession limit adjustments. The Council deferred potential changes to exemption area boundaries and seasonal provisions to allow for broader coordination across all existing exemption areas. The Whiting Committee Report can be found [here](#).

## RECOMMENDED CHANGES TO HABITAT RESEARCH AREAS

The Council passed three motions during the [habitat report](#). The first action approved the scope of a Clam Dredge Exemption Program Review while the other motions affected Dedicated Habitat Research Areas (DHRA). They also received an update on the 2026 Essential Fish Habitat Framework (EFH) to designate EFH for groundfish, small mesh, and Atlantic scallop management plans.

**Clam Dredge Exemption:** The Council agreed on the scope of a report evaluating the surfclam dredge exemption program in the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area (HMA). The report will examine the effectiveness of three exemption areas implemented in 2018 from a habitat conservation and fishery management perspective. The review will incorporate updated scientific models, fishing effects analyses, vessel monitoring and catch accounting data, fishery performance information, and Experimental Fishing Permit-based (EFP) research. It will compare pre- and post-implementation conditions. The report is scheduled for completion ahead of the September Council meeting.

**DHRA** decisions hinged on whether active or planned research meeting the Council's objectives existed in each area. The Council recommendations to the Regional Administrator were to sunset the [Georges Bank DHRA](#), as they saw no qualifying planned research, and retain the Stellwagen Bank DHRA which does have active and planned research. **WHAT IS A DHRA?** Dedicated Habitat Research Areas (DHRA) are areas closed to certain bottom-tending gears to allow scientific study of seafloor habitats in a controlled environment. These year-round closures are re-examined every three years, after which time GARFO consults with the Council and the public on whether to maintain the designation.

## MONKFISH AND SKATE LISTENING SESSIONS INFORM REQUEST TO NOAA

The Council received a [summary](#) of the Monkfish and Skate Listening Sessions that took place this spring. The summary highlighted industry concerns related to individual fishing quotas, area-specific management, effort controls, market conditions, latent effort, monkfish and skate interactions, protected resource regulations, and offshore wind development. The Council acknowledged these concerns and approved a motion to develop a joint letter to GARFO with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) to request information on the effectiveness of current Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan measures. The Councils seek an assessment of whether modifications to the plan could reduce negative socioeconomic impacts on affected fisheries, consistent with concerns raised during the Listening Sessions. The MAFMC supported this work in a [motion](#) at their June meeting and will provide an update at a future meeting.

