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PRESS CONTACT: Alex Dunn

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

Council Takes Action on Scallops, Herring, and Habitat; Elects Officers

The New England Fishery Management Council met from September 15-17, 2026, in Plymouth, Massachusetts. The following is a summary of actions taken, updates, and other business affecting multiple Fishery Management Plans. Meeting materials, motions, and the meeting [audio](#) recordings will be available on the [September](#) 2026 meeting page.

COUNCIL ELECTS LEADERSHIP; WELCOMES NEWEST MEMBER

The Council opened its September 2026 meeting with the annual election of officers. The Council reelected **Daniel Salerno** (New Hampshire) as Chair and **Melanie Griffin** (Massachusetts) as Vice Chair. The Council filled the three remaining Executive Committee seats by electing **Megan Ware** (Maine), **Michael Pierdinock** (Massachusetts), and **Jackie Odell** (Massachusetts) from a slate of five candidates.



Melanie Griffin and Daniel Salerno



Kirby Aarsheim

The Council also welcomed its newest voting member, **Kirby Aarsheim** (Massachusetts), who took the [Oath of Office](#) and committed to a three-year term. A partner at Farrell Smith O'Connell Aarsheim Aprans LLP, Aarsheim brings a lifetime of commercial fishing experience and expertise in fisheries management. She has served on the Council's Sea Scallop and Enforcement Advisory Panels and remains active in regional maritime policy, including leadership roles with the American Bar Association's Admiralty & Maritime Law Committee and the Propeller Club Port of Boston. She is also a commercial scallop vessel owner in New Bedford. Returning members **Daniel Salerno**, **Terry Alexander** (Maine) and **Jackie Odell** (Massachusetts) were also sworn in for new three-year terms. Council member bios are available [here](#).

HERRING SPECIFICATIONS APPROVED; LEVELS REMAIN LOW

The Council took final action to set Atlantic herring specifications for fishing years 2027–2031. The Council voted to set annual catch limits **(ACL) at 6,926 metric tons**, a 24% decrease from the 2026 level of 9,134 mt, and at a constant level for each year (2027-2031). The Council recognized the potential for continued negative economic impacts on the fishing industry. The decision factored in the results of the 2026 stock assessment and peer review, the Council’s Risk Policy, recommendations from the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and the Herring Committee, with input from the Advisory Panel and Plan Development Team. The Council also discussed a separate action that would modify **River Herring and Shad Management** through an amendment as part of a multi-year priority. The current river herring and shad catch caps will remain at status quo levels while this work continues.

Atlantic Herring Specifications 2027–2031 (metric tons)		
OFL	ABC	ACL
13,165	10,532	6,926

SCALLOP SURVEY AND WORK PLAN UPDATES

The Council received an update on the **2026 scallop surveys**, which indicate continued growth of a large scallop cohort in the southern Nantucket Lightship, strong signs of recruitment in eastern Closed Area II, and sustained growth and productivity in the Mid-Atlantic, while the Northern Gulf of Maine shows shifting biomass distribution and a small incoming year class. The Council reviewed these results and discussed implications on FY 2027 specifications, including Days-at-Sea and access area fishing in the Nantucket Lightship.

The Council also reviewed the Committee-approved, **Scallop Work Plan for 2027–2029**, highlighting its connection to the Council’s Holistic Strategic Plan. This work plan serves as a tool to sequence work priorities that were identified in the [Scallop Strategic Plan](#), focusing on building greater flexibility and adaptability into the Scallop Fishery Management Plan.

The Council affirmed the scope of **Framework 42**, which considers region-specific Scallop Days-at-Sea management and sub-area boundaries in the Northern Gulf of Maine. Work on this action will continue into 2027, with the Committee focusing on 2027-2028 specifications between now and December.

HABITAT FRAMEWORK APPROVED; SURFCLAM REPORT IS REVIEWED

The **2026 Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Designation Framework** was approved by the Council. The framework updates EFH designations for 16 species using new survey and environmental data spanning from 2002–2022, based on predictive outputs of species distribution models. The Council reviewed the draft designations and feedback received during the development of the action on map boundaries, species biology, and EFH text descriptions. Updated EFH designations will be used to support future Council actions.

The Council also received a **Great South Channel Surfclam Exemption Evaluation Report**. The report compiles updated information since the program’s 2020 inception and represents the first Council review of the program

and its objectives, including the dynamic and diverse habitats of the management area and the presence of multiple federally managed species.

SSC REPORTS ON DYNAMIC REFERENCE POINTS WORK

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reported on its [June](#) workshop that examined dynamic reference points (DRPs) which are benchmarks that can be used to determine stock status, inform management measures such as ABCs, and define rebuilding targets. DRPs are time-varying reference points that can account for changes in stock productivity and persistent ecosystem changes. The workshop reviewed current regional and national approaches, evaluated when DRPs would be appropriate for use with NEFMC stocks, considered alternative methods and data requirements, and identified implementation challenges, and tradeoffs. The SSC recommended creating an SSC subgroup to further develop approaches for evaluating and implementing DRPs in the region. The Council will consider making the work a 2027 priority during the December 2026 meeting. The SSC report is available [here](#).

STRATEGIC PLAN

The Council approved the Holistic Strategic [Plan](#) by unanimous consent, making it effective immediately. The Council will now begin implementation and tracking of Goal 1 which aims to “build flexibility and adaptability into Fishery Management Plans and streamline the process of developing management measures.” The four major strategies to achieve this include:

1. Revise the annual priority setting process
2. Reduce redundancy in information sharing throughout action development
3. Set specifications through streamlined processes, decoupled from other management measures
4. Focus analyses and documentation on identified action objectives

The plan, which was developed with support from The Parnin Group, included a year-long effort with discovery, analysis, and strategy phases. Moving forward, plan progress will be guided and monitored using a series of actions and key performance indicators that are outlined in the [staff presentation](#) to Council.

PARTNER UPDATES

The **Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel (NTAP)** gave an update on the recent Regional Industry Based Trawl Survey (RIBTS) work which is using fishing vessels (F/V). While the 2025 government shutdown stalled the work for several weeks, the survey working group is looking to advance to a two-boat model, potentially in Fall of 2027.

The **Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan Team** presented on a 60-day public scoping period with the goal of gathering industry and public input on gear modifications and spatial closures in place to sustain the North Atlantic right whale recovery. Stakeholders are urged to participate in the public webinars or submit formal comments via www.regulations.gov using docket #NOAA-NMFS-2025-0041 by October 16, 2026. The team reported some good news citing an estimated population increase from 359 individuals in 2020 to roughly 380 today.

Northeast Fishery Science Center (NEFSC) Cooperative Research on Mackerel: The NEFSC reported on current work with industry vessels to advance understanding of Atlantic mackerel, updating data that in some cases are nearly 100 years old. The collaborative effort focuses on acoustic detection, egg surveys, spawning seasonality, movement and mixing, and ecosystem drivers to strengthen future stock assessments in support of management. Some of this collaborative research is underway and the NEFSC will be seeking industry partners for 2027 research, including an acoustic detection project, egg surveys, and more. The NEFSC also planted the seeds for similar, future cooperative research on Atlantic herring. For questions, please contact Anna Mercer at anna.mercer@noaa.gov. View the full report [here](#).

A **Draft Regional Offshore Wind Fisheries Compensation Framework** has been released by the Regional Fund Administrator (RFA) and is now open for public review and feedback. The [Draft Regional Offshore Wind Fisheries Compensation Framework](#) is open for public comment through November 3, 2026. Feedback can be submitted electronically through the [RFA Contact Us page](#) or by email at Contact@RFAInfo.com. The RFA will host a **public webinar on September 30, 2026**, to provide an overview of the Draft Framework and explain how stakeholders can participate in the public comment process. [Register for the webinar](#).

LOOKING AHEAD

A **Management Timeline** can now be found on the Council's [homepage](#). This new visual tool breaks down Council work by FMP/Priority across multiple meetings, giving a better visual tracker for major decisions and actions. The timeline document will be updated periodically, so please check back before and after each Council meeting.

The Council will hold its next meeting **December 8 – 10, 2026** in Newport, RI. An agenda and meeting materials will be posted on the [meeting page](#) as they become available. Some of the anticipated actions include specifications setting for:

- Atlantic scallops for FY27-28
- Groundfish for FY27-31
- Small-Mesh for FY27-31

