

# Monkfish and Skate

## Listening Sessions to Identify Fishery Improvements

**New England Fishery Management Council**  
**April 20 – May 18, 2026**



New England  
Fishery Management Council

# Listening Session Overview

Matt Gates (CT DEEP), Monkfish Committee Chair

Scott Olszewski (RI DEM), Skate Committee Chair

Jenny Couture, Monkfish FMP Coordinator

Rachel Feeney, Skate FMP Coordinator

Emily Bodell, Skate staff

# Agenda: 4:00 – 6:30 pm

- Monkfish / Skate Committee Chair welcome;
- Listening Session overview, goals and ground rules;
- Review discussion topics and questions;
- Open group discussion;
  - Where are we now (current management, recent fisheries performance)?
  - What work has been completed recently?
  - Where are we going (top five challenges and ideas for changes in management)?
- Next steps

# Goal of Listening Sessions

- Solicit comments on ideas for fishery improvements in monkfish and skate fisheries
  - Use Existing Information: Present prior Monkfish/Skate priority ideas, recent [CPUE review](#) info, [white paper](#) on governance
  - Target specific dynamics: Seek feedback on gear-type dynamics, skate fishery components, differences between northern and southern monkfish components
- Sessions are designed to:
  - Identify the challenges the monkfish and skate fishing sectors are grappling with
  - Identify possible management measures for the Council to address those challenges in the future

*! Listening Sessions are not scoping for specific management actions or making formal recommendations !*

# What will the Council do with your feedback?

- Your input will help the Council define the range of issues considered for potential future Council work priorities for the monkfish and skate fisheries.
- Input will be summarized for each meeting (as meeting summaries) and compiled across meetings and comments received.
- Report out at the June NEFMC meeting (Mystic, CT: June 23-25) and August MAFMC meeting (Philadelphia, PA: August 10-13).
- Short joint Monkfish/Skate Advisory Panel/Committee webinar meeting in fall 2026 to review, provide any additional input, and recommend prioritization of ideas for 2027 work priorities.

# Listening Session Meeting Schedule

Written comments accepted  
April 20-May 18  
via postal mail or  
to [comments@nefmc.org](mailto:comments@nefmc.org)

## Date and Time

## Location

<b>Portland, ME</b> Monday, April 27, 2026 4:00 – 6:30 PM	The Westin Portland Harborview Hotel 157 High Street, Portland, ME 04101 Telephone: (207) 775-5411
<b>New Bedford, MA</b> Wednesday, April 29, 2026 4:00 – 6:30 PM	Fairfield Inn & Suites 185 MacArthur Drive, New Bedford, MA 02740 Telephone: (774) 634-2000
<b>Riverhead, NY</b> Thursday, April 30, 2026 4:00 – 6:30 PM	Cornell Cooperative Extension Suffolk County The meeting is held in the 1 <sup>st</sup> floor conference room 423 Griffing Avenue, Riverhead, NY 11901 Telephone: (631) 727-7850
<b>Manahawkin, NJ</b> Tuesday, May 5, 2026 4:00 – 6:30 PM	Stafford Township The meeting is held in the Council Room 260 East Bay Avenue, Manahawkin, NJ 08050 Telephone: (609) 597-1000
<b>Webinar</b> Monday, May 11, 2026 4:00 – 6:30 PM	<a href="https://nefmc-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/CjSy3wZ4SfSBSOgc87uRiQ">https://nefmc-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/CjSy3wZ4SfSBSOgc87uRiQ</a> After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

## Ground Rules

- Sustain a professional meeting environment before, during, and after meeting.
- Focus your comments on the issues – not on individuals.
- Listen respectfully to the comments of others.
- Share the floor and allow time for others to speak.

## Unacceptable Behaviors

- Ridicule of others' opinions
- Threats aimed at anyone
- Harassment
- Discrimination

**The Council will not tolerate harassment or retaliation against those who report harassment.**

# Where are we now?

Current state of the monkfish and skate fisheries

- Management
- Assessment

# Overview of Monkfish Fishery Management Plan

## Monkfish Fishery

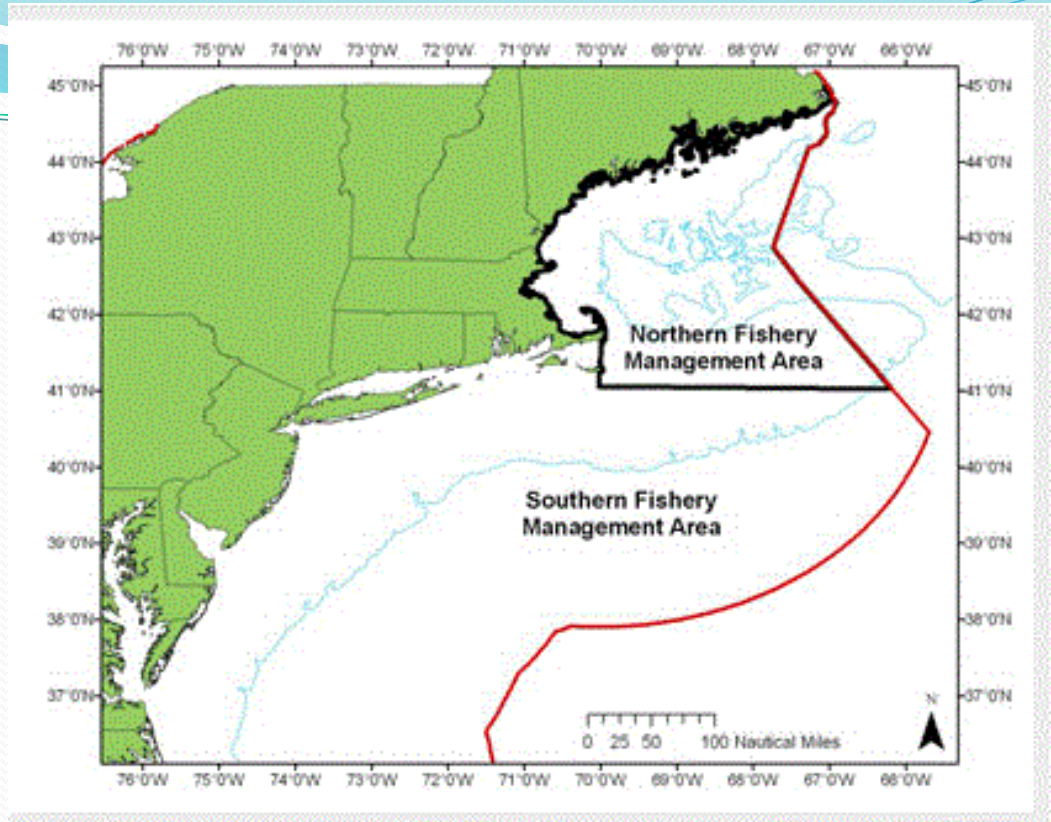


### Northern Stock:

Gulf of Maine +  
Northern  
Georges Bank

### Southern Stock:

Southern  
Georges Bank +  
Mid-Atlantic



- ❖ *Each area has a separate Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), Total Allowable Landings (TAL), Days-at-Sea (DAS), allocation, daily possession limits*
- ❖ *Six Limited Access Permits + One Open Access Permit*

**Table 11. Monkfish permits issued by GARFO for FY 2024.**

Monkfish Permit Type	Category	Number of Permits
<b>Limited Access</b>	A	13
	B	30
	C	235
	D	187
	F	15
	H	7
<b>Total Limited Access</b>	<b>A, B, C, D, F, H</b>	<b>487</b>
<b>Total Open Access</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>1,390</b>
<b>Total Monkfish Permits</b>		<b>1,877</b>

*Source: Greater Atlantic Region Vessel, Dealer, Operator, and Tuna Permit Data [website](#), accessed October 16, 2025.*

# Monkfish Assessment Overview

- Analytical assessment failed in 2016, not available since then.
- Cannot estimate fishing mortality or biomass. Stock status is UNKNOWN.
- “Ismooth” backup approach used in 2016, 2019, 2022: spring and fall trawl survey indices combined and smoothed. Indices from latest 3 years provide direction and rate of change (i.e., survey multiplier).
  - Note: a data update was used in 2025.
- Catch advice: future catch should change based on recent trawl survey performance (e.g., if survey has decreased, catch should decrease).

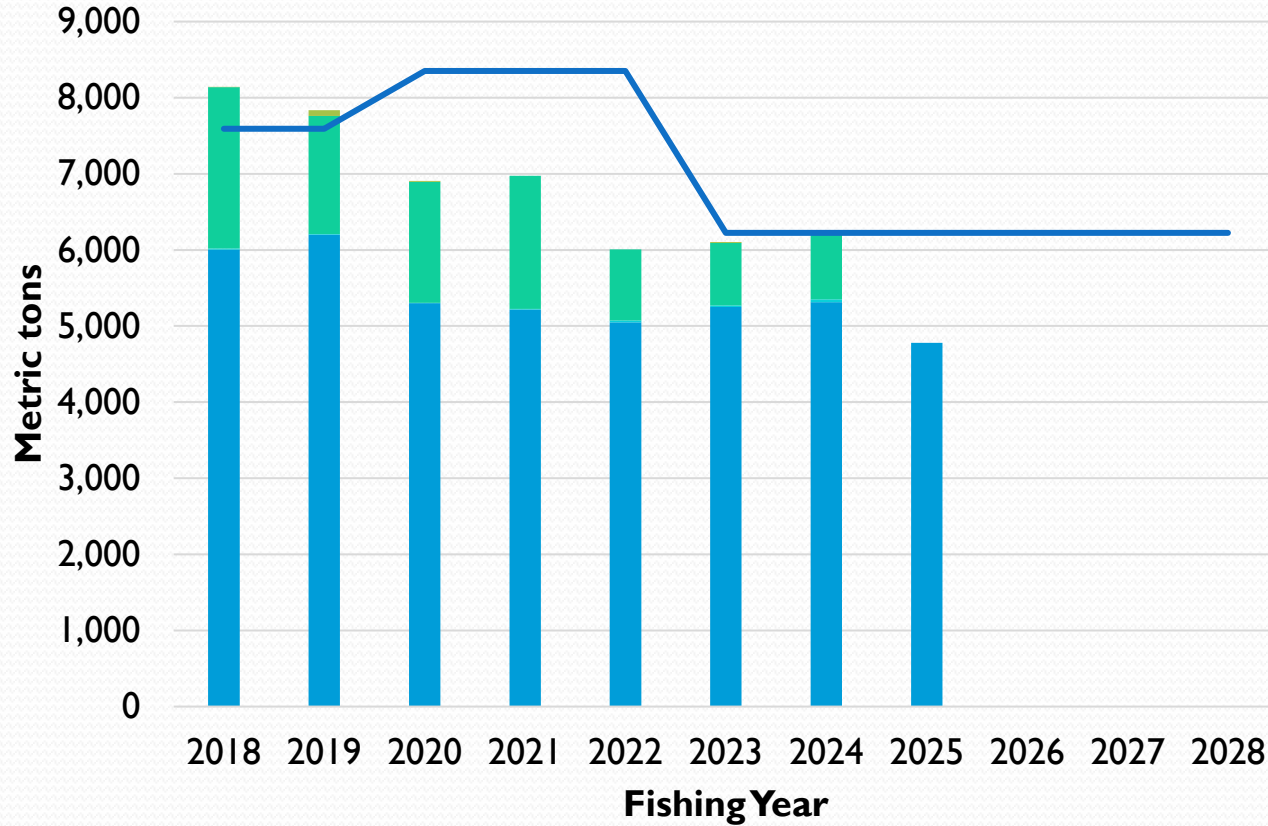
*Ismooth: Trawl survey multiplier \* latest 3-year average catch = catch advice*

# Monkfish Catch Relative to ACL, FY 2018-2025

## FY 2026-2028 are Council ACL recommendations

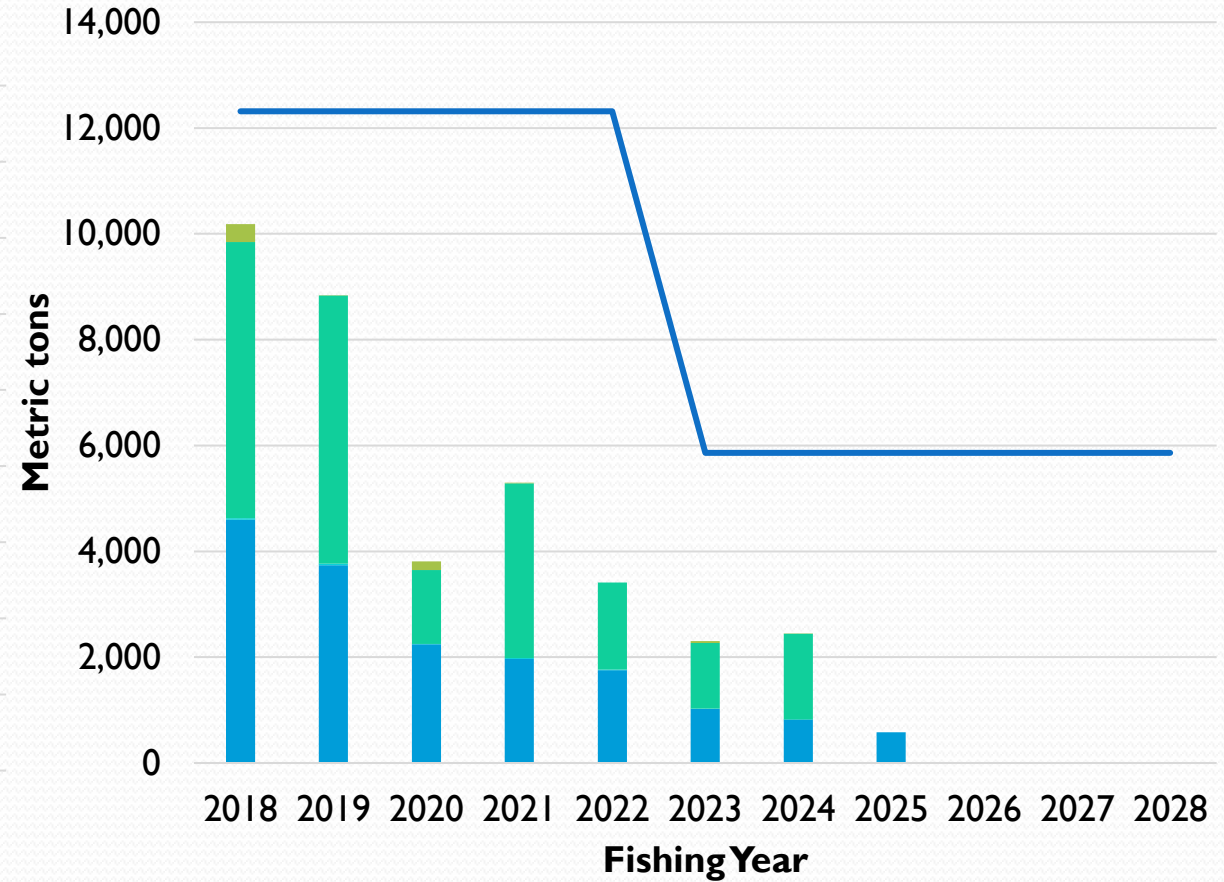
FY 25 data through 4/15/2026  
 Source: GARFO Quota Monitoring

### Northern Area



- Recreational catch (MRIP landings & discards)
- Estimated dead discards
- State commercial landings
- Federal commercial landings
- ABC = ACL

### Southern Area



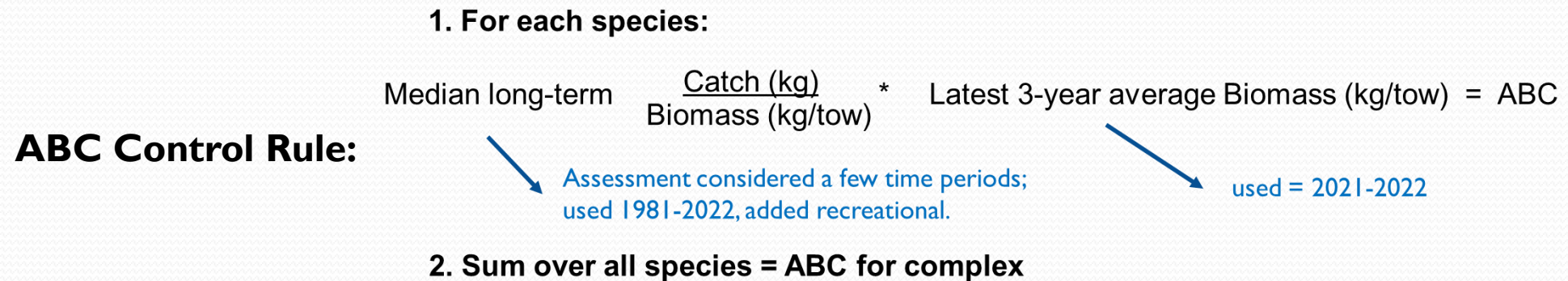
- Recreational catch (MRIP landings & discards)
- Estimated dead discards
- State commercial landings
- Federal commercial landings
- ABC=ACL

# Skate Fishery Overview

- Seven skates managed as complex (single Annual Catch Limit, Total Allowable Landings)
- Open access permit, effort controlled by trip limits that vary by wing vs bait, season and trip declaration.
- 2 fishery components:
  - Skate wing (66.5% of TAL, 87% of vessels land only wings)
    - Targets winter skates
    - Vessels need to have a limited access groundfish, monkfish, or scallop permit and declare a DAS to land 4,000/6,000 lb (increase to 4,500/6,500 lb proposed for FY 2026-2028), otherwise incidental levels
  - Skate bait (33.5% of TAL, 5% of vessels land only bait)
    - Targets little skates
    - Vessels fish under a skate bait Letter of Authorization (LOA); can land on wing trips with lower possession limits
    - 25,000 lb possession limit under LOA (increase to 30,000 lb proposed for FY 2026-2028)

# Skate Stock Assessments & Management

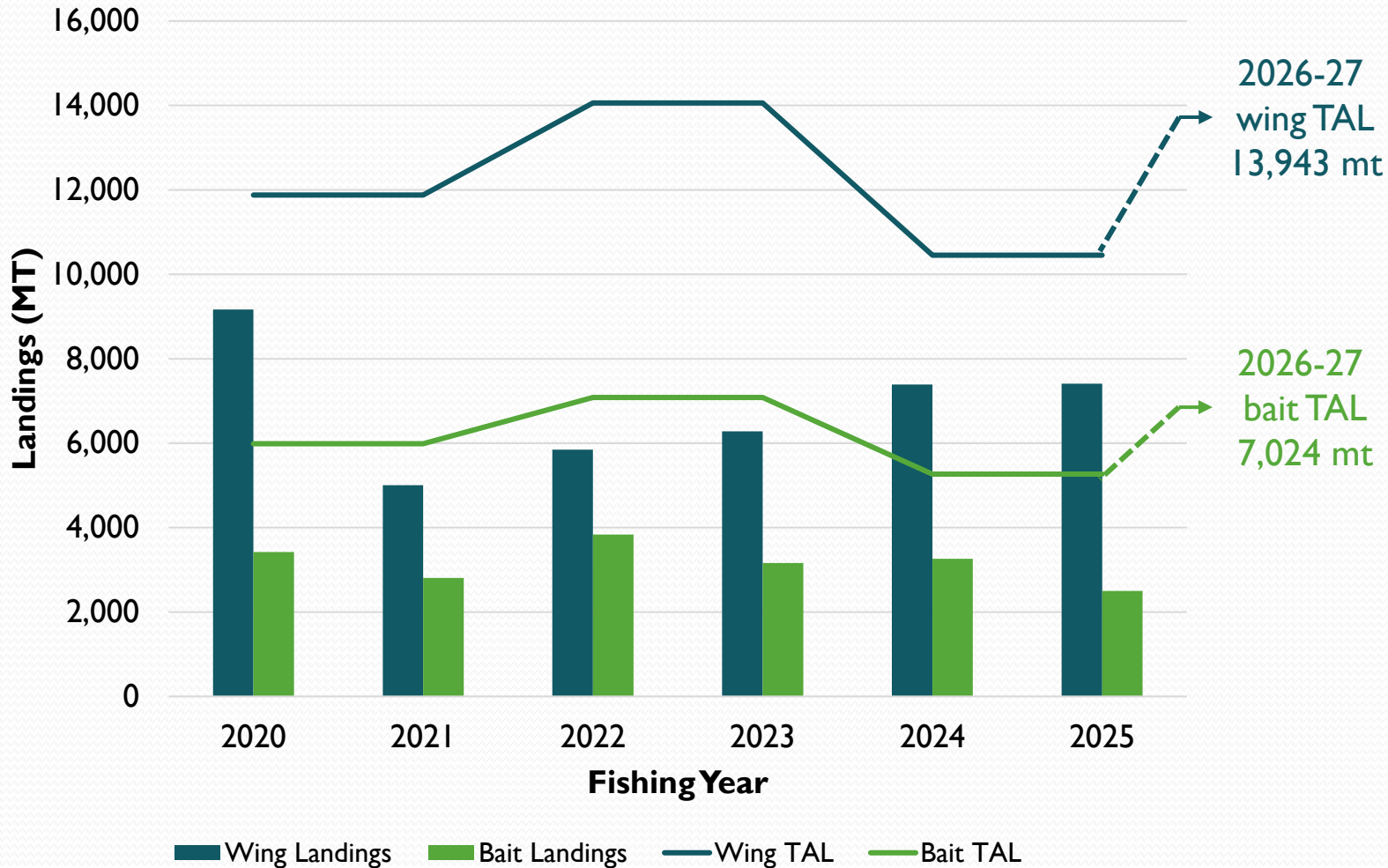
- Known errors in skate species data and uncertain population dynamics led to setting the Skate Complex ABC using an index-based method
- Last management track assessment – 2023; data update in 2025
- **Survey Biomass Index** (kg/tow) during a specific set of years and survey



- **Overfishing status** = If the % change in the 3-year moving average of the **survey biomass index** > average CV of the **Survey Biomass Index** (full time series), then fishing mortality is assumed to be >  $F_{MSY}$  and overfishing is occurring.

# Recent Skate Catch

Skate Wing and Bait Landings and TALs, FY 2020-2025



- Total catch ~46-84% of ACL since FY 2020.
- ACL has never been exceeded.
- Dead discards ~17-42% of catch since FY 2020, declining since 1989, largely from scallop dredge and otter trawl gear.
- TAL use since FY 2020
  - Wing = 42-77%
  - Bait = 47-62%



FY 2020-2024 Data Source: [CAMS Database](#)  
 FY 2025 data through April 15, 2026; Source: [NOAA GARFO Quota Monitoring](#)

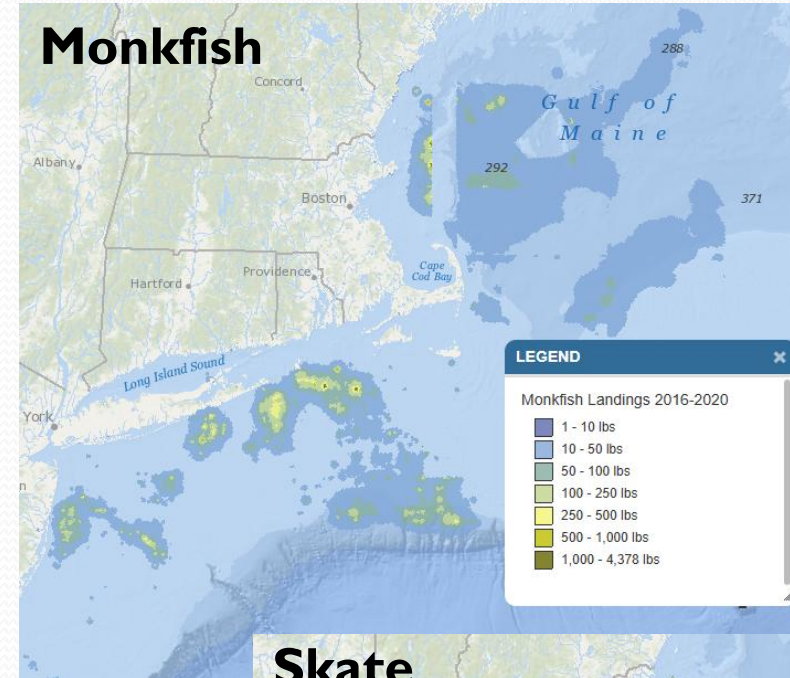
# Monkfish and Skate Fishery Overlaps

- **Northern monkfish area**

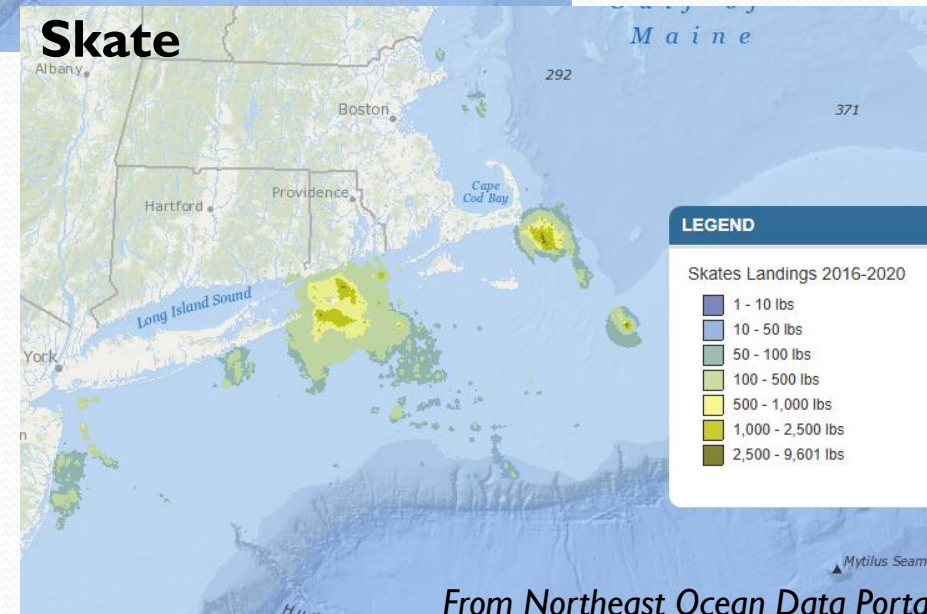
- Skate wings landings primarily on groundfish sector trips, minor from monkfish-only and monkfish sector trips.
- Minor skate bait fishery, no overlap with monkfish.

- **Southern monkfish area**

- Skate wing landings primarily on monkfish-only and monkfish sector trips.
- 26% of monkfish DAS trips from FY 2018-2024 (excluding FY 2020) landed 75-100% of the skate wing limits. On these trips, the percent of monkfish limits landed varied across permit categories and months - factors beyond skate possession limits constrain the fishery (e.g., market demand, fish availability).



**Landings  
2016-2020**



# What work has been completed recently?

- Monkfish catch per unit effort (CPUE) work
  - Two projects: SMAST/Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance & NEFSC Cooperative Research Branch
  - Project review by the NEFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee's Subpanel
- Monkfish and Skate 2025 Joint Management Summary Report

*Note: NEFMC IRA project on joint governance in progress*

# Monkfish CPUE Work

## SMAST Project:

- Recent declines in monkfish landings from increased skate catch, market weakness, regulatory constraints rather than monkfish availability
- Overall findings:
  - Southern indices: high biomass in early 2000s, decreasing to low biomass in early 2010s, increasing since 2017 (consistent with 2015 recruitment event), and decrease last couple of years
  - Northern indices: high biomass in early 2000s, decreasing to low biomass in early 2010s, all data sources except logbook suggest increasing since 2017

## NEFSC Project:

- Many similarities to NEFSC surveys
- Good correspondence between standardized CPUEs and trawl survey indices & among CPUEs for different gears
- Consistent tech creep may be an issue: need further evaluation to rule out or quantify impact to smooth multipliers

## Scientific and Statistical Committee Peer Review:

- SMAST project tried to incorporate skate fishery dynamics given the hypothetical impact of skates on monkfish catch rates in gillnet fishery → monkfish catch rates might decline faster than biomass due to skate interaction
- Concern regarding assumption of constant catchability (used to derive CPUE indices)

# 2025 Joint Efforts Across Monkfish and Skate

## Overarching lessons to inform any future joint management

- Improved efficiency BUT mixed opinions on success, outcomes, & if joint approach was beneficial
- Focused on southern monkfish and skate wing fisheries (i.e., minimal focus on GOM monkfish, skate bait, etc.) → created hierarchy of species (winter skate and southern monkfish stock)
- Analyses should account for different fishing behavior between GOM, S. New England, Mid-Atl. With different day-at-sea use, target species, adding/dropping federal skate permit, etc.
- Data did not show consistent patterns in interaction between southern monkfish & skate wing fisheries due to unpredictability of external factors → this was the primary impetus for trialing joint process in 2025

### Other considerations:

- Joint management of monkfish with MAFMC creates additional challenge given skates is not → Should monkfish be managed by one Council? Should skates be managed by both Councils?
- More proactive management aligning regulations across both FMPs could be helpful (DAS use, possession limits per DAS vs trip, overage declaration, etc.)

\*\*Summary report\*\*

# Cross-jurisdictional governance

## Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) project

- [IRA 4.1 and 4.2](#) focus on improving cross-jurisdictional governance to:
  - Evaluate advisory body structure, use, and decision-making; consider representativeness of membership given shifting species distributions.
  - Evaluate joint management approaches and consider the need to more clearly document and revise them.
  - Evaluate opportunities to combine fishery management plans within or across Councils and consider the benefits and costs.
  - Collaborate with partner organizations to develop regionally consistent approaches where possible.
- Monkfish/Skate feedback contributed to East Coast staff-to-staff governance workshop (Feb 2026).
- Early 2027 East Coast regional workshop, planning exercise, potential revisions to management operations, plan structures, etc.



**Questions?**

# Where are we going?

- Top five fishery challenges by fishery sector/gear type
- Top five fishery management changes to address those challenges
- Next steps: listening sessions summary, opportunity for further input
- Additional resources

# Are any of the previously identified ideas relevant?

- Defining and reducing latent effort in the monkfish fishery including analyzing fishery characteristics
- Streamline management / evaluate whether current management system provides sufficient flexibility (incl. reducing bycatch, allow either back or front-loading DAS such that DAS charge is based on actual landings, Monkfish DAS leasing)
- Managing monkfish and skates under the same FMP OR:
  - Manage southern monkfish and skate wing fishery as part of one fishery management plan, retaining skate bait letter of authorization?
  - Manage the Northern monkfish as part of the groundfish trawl sector system?

Recurring ideas for monkfish and skate priorities since 2014

- Implement Monkfish Research Set-Aside (RSA) 2023 Working Group recommendations (including ability to flip to a directed RSA DAS while at sea)
- Create a DAS leasing program for monkfish and skate wings to allow flexibility (once skate DAS are created)
- Skate possession limits based on # of DAS used (versus per trip)
- Create skate Research Set-Aside program
- Three-season skate wing fishery
- Increase the Southern New England Skate Bait Trawl Exemption Area to the south
- Create skate wing DAS to replace Northeast multispecies DAS for fishing on skate wings

Recurring ideas for monkfish and skate priorities since 2014

# Discontinued ideas after Council consideration

## Applicable to both monkfish and skates:

- Create an Individual Fishing Quota/sector management program for monkfish/skate wing fisheries → discontinued in [April NEFMC 2026](#)

## Monkfish

- Catch share/ITQ program, DAS leasing/allocations/latent effort, RSA measures, integrate monkfish into groundfish sectors, etc. ([Amendment 6](#) – 2014)
- VMS requirement ([FW13](#) – 2022)
- Increase allowable DAS adjustment for a trip limit overage (use an extra DAS/trip for an extra trip limit) ([FW13](#) – 2022)
- Measures to reduce discards in southern area ([FW13](#) – 2022)
- Changes in DAS use for groundfish vessels (declare a NE Mult DAS at sea, increase Monk DAS based on common pool DAS) ([FW9](#) – 2016)

## Skates

- Limited access skate permit, intermediate triggers/landing limits, monitoring/reporting requirements, restricting switching between state/federal waters, year-round permit, gear modifications ([Amendment 5](#) – 2021)

# 1) What are the top 5 overarching challenges and 2) top 5 management changes you would make to address these challenges in the...

Northern monkfish fishery?

- Gulf of Maine gillnet fishery
- Gulf of Maine dragger fishery

Southern monkfish fishery?

- Southern New England gillnet fishery (caught with skate wings)
- Mid-Atlantic gillnet fishery

Skate bait fishery?

- Bait LOA, exemption areas
- Landing bait on wing trips

Skate wing fishery?

- GOM trawl fishery (with groundfish)
- Southern New England gillnet fishery (caught with southern monkfish)
- Incidental fishery

# Additional Resources

- Jenny Couture, Monkfish Plan Coordinator
  - [jcouture@nefmc.org](mailto:jcouture@nefmc.org); 978-465-0492 (ext. 111)
- Rachel Feeney, Skate Plan Coordinator
  - [rfeeney@nefmc.org](mailto:rfeeney@nefmc.org); 978-465-0492 (ext. 110)
- Council's webpages
  - Monkfish: <https://www.nefmc.org/management-plans/monkfish>
  - Skate: <https://www.nefmc.org/management-plans/skates>

# Providing Public Comments

- **Oral Comments:** today at the listening session
- **Email to:** [comments@nefmc.org](mailto:comments@nefmc.org)
- **Mail to:** Cate O’Keefe, PhD, Executive Director  
New England Fishery Management Council  
50 Water Street, Mill #2  
Newburyport, MA 01950

*Please provide your name and affiliation and note on your correspondence: “Monkfish and Skate Fishery Improvement Comments”*

***Written comments due by Monday, May 18, 2026***