



# New England Fishery Management Council

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## Council Acts on Monkfish, Scallops, Cod; Updates Key Habitat Protections

### MONKFISH AND SKATES: STABILITY FOR MONKFISH, ADDED FLEXIBILITY FOR SKATE FISHERMEN

The Council approved final actions on monkfish and skate specifications for fishing years (FY) 2026–2028, with minimal changes to current monkfish catch limits through 2028 and increased opportunity for skates with changes in and skate wing and bait possession limits.

**Monkfish:** The Council recommended maintaining current catch limits for both the northern and southern management areas through Framework Adjustment 17, with no change to the existing days-at-sea or possession limits. The SSC recommended maintaining current catch limits through 2028, with precautionary reductions for the southern stock beginning in 2029. While overall catch limits remain status quo, the total allowable landings (TAL) for the northern area will decline by about 3% due to updated discard estimates; the southern area TAL remains unchanged. The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) made the same recommendation at their [October](#) Meeting.

**Skate FY 2026-2028 Specifications:** The SSC advised higher near-term catch limits and a gradual reduction through 2030, noting no overfishing but continued rebuilding for thorny skate, which remain overfished, and recommended revisiting catch advice within two years. The Council recommended a 28% increase in the Annual Catch Limit (ACL) over the current FY 2024-2025 ACL (32,155 mt) for FY 2026-2027 (41,282 mt) and a 10% increase for FY 2028 (37,154 mt). The Council usually recommends skate specifications for two years at a time, but for this cycle it recommends three years, aligning the timing of monkfish and skate specification setting moving forward. The Council also recommended modest increases in skate possession limits to improve operational efficiency and offset travel costs around wind farm areas, while avoiding market oversupply. **Skate wing** limits will rise by 500 lbs. per season (to 4,500 lbs in Season 1 and 6,500 lbs in Season 2), and **skate bait** limits will increase by 5,000 lbs., to 30,000 lbs. per trip. You can find meeting materials for both decisions [here](#).

## SCALLOPS: FRAMEWORK 40 MOVES FORWARD; 2025 SURVEYS SHOW LOW BIOMASS

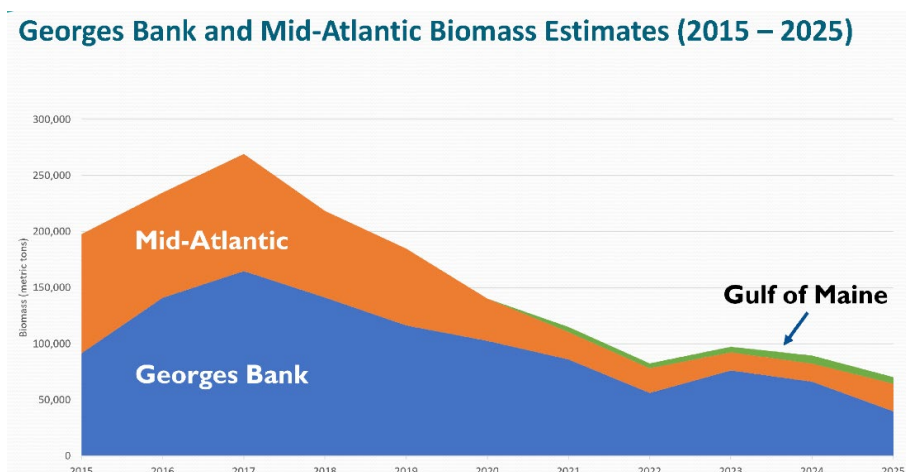
The Council received results from the **2025 scallop surveys** showing biomass at historic lows, which is expected to limit access area fishing opportunities in 2026, including rotational areas on Georges Bank.

At the same time, the large year-class in the Nantucket Lightship South Region continues to grow, representing roughly 46% of total scallop abundance, a potential bright spot for future harvests.

**Framework 40**, which will set 2026 scallop fishery specifications and 2027

default measures, may also consider steps to strengthen regional management by establishing separate Day-at-Sea allocations east and west of the 71° W line and look into creating two Northern Gulf of Maine subareas: “Stellwagen North” and “NGOM-Other.” The Council will vote on final approval of Framework 40 at its [December 2025](#) meeting in Newport, RI.

As part of its broader scallop work, the Council received an update on the **Scallop Strategic Plan** and voted to send a letter urging NOAA Fisheries to publish the 2026 Scallop Research Set-Aside (RSA) Notice of Funding Opportunity to support timely research planning. Continued and timely RSA funding remains critical to support industry-driven research and ongoing resource surveys. You can find all scallop meeting materials [here](#).



## GROUNDFISH: AMENDMENT 25 FOR COD MANAGEMENT ADVANCES

The Council approved a revised **Amendment 25** for [resubmission](#) to NOAA Fisheries. The amendment would replace the current Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank stock units with four new cod stock units: Eastern Gulf of Maine, Western Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank, and Southern New England.

The action incorporates cod-specific measures from Framework [Adjustment 69](#), including stock status determination criteria, stock-specific catch limits, recreational sub-ACLs, buffers for management uncertainty, and accountability measures. Collectively, these measures represent Phase 1 of the Council’s Atlantic Cod Management [Transition Plan](#). Specifications for **Georges Bank cod** will be finalized separately to align with U.S.-Canada management. The Council also discussed restarting the paused work including redfish sector exemption program, the Amendment 23 monitoring system, and

revisions to ABC control rules – all decisions that will be considered for 2026 Council Priorities and made during the December 2025 Council Meeting. You can view all groundfish materials from the September meeting [here](#).

### COUNCIL TAKES FINAL ACTION ON THE 2025 ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT DESIGNATION

The Council voted to adopt “Alternative 2, Updated Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Designations” for **Atlantic cod, Atlantic herring, skate complex, and monkfish**. The designation methods were developed in collaboration with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and represent a substantial advancement to prior approaches. The new designations use two decades of fish abundance and environmental data from multiple inshore and offshore surveys as well as temperature, salinity, currents, depth, bottom complexity, and sediment type to identify areas currently important to each species. The updated designations will undergo federal review before implementation. The Council plans to revise EFH designations for remaining groundfish species, small mesh multispecies, and Atlantic sea scallops in 2026.

This decision will advance habitat protections and better reflect the latest scientific understanding of species distributions and habitat needs. This action does not add, modify, or remove habitat management areas that restrict the use of specific types of fishing gears to protect EFH. Also, this action does not modify any Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC), which are subsets of EFH and receive special attention during development of habitat conservation measures. If the Council considers revisions to habitat management areas or HAPC in the future, it will rely on this updated EFH information. For more information on the EFH designations and updated maps, see the meeting [Presentation](#) or the [online mapping tool](#).

### ADDITIONAL OUTCOMES

Council Director, Cate O’Keefe updated the Council on future planning and [2026 priority](#) setting. 2026 will integrate mandated work under the IRA projects and Executive Order 14276 while balancing ongoing tasks. The Council is moving ahead with near-term actions including submission of the Management Flexibility Omnibus, Groundfish Amendment 25, and specifications for monkfish and skates. Staff and Council leadership will continue refining the proposed 2026 priorities through committee and Council review this fall, with final adoption planned for the December Council Meeting.

The [Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel](#) (NTAP) advanced the Regional Industry-Based Trawl Survey (RIBTS) by approving a Phase 1 pilot, funded at \$360,000, with fieldwork expected in late 2025 or early 2026. Phase 2 planning is underway, aiming to expand operations across multiple vessels and regions to build a long-term survey. The meeting presentation can be found [here](#).

The **Climate and Ecosystem Steering Committee** referenced the upcoming State of the Ecosystem Report which will include new indicators drawn from ocean forecasts, revised community metrics, and a profitability “net revenue” component to feed into Risk Policy scoring. Committee members also discussed applying seasonal forecast products—such as temperature projections—to pilot initiatives like scallop rotational management. The 2025 State of the Ecosystem Report can be found [here](#).

A presentation from the NEFSC’s **Cooperative Research Branch** outlined ongoing work with commercial fishermen to collect high-resolution temperature data through the eMOLT program, conduct industry-based surveys for monkfish and scallops, and test gear innovations that reduce bycatch. Dr. Anna Mercer also outlined new initiatives including expanded electronic monitoring trials and collaborative habitat research using industry vessels to improve stock assessments.