



# New England Fishery Management Council

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
October 24, 2023

PRESS CONTACT: Janice Plante  
(607) 592-4817, [jplante@nefmc.org](mailto:jplante@nefmc.org)

## Council Approves Monkfish RSA Working Group Final Report and Range of Monkfish/Spiny Dogfish Alternatives for Sturgeon

During its [late September meeting](#) in Plymouth, Massachusetts, the New England Fishery Management Council acted on two items related to monkfish.

- The Council approved the range of alternatives for a joint action that is being developed in conjunction with the Mid-Atlantic Council to reduce the bycatch of Atlantic sturgeon in the monkfish and spiny dogfish large-mesh gillnet fisheries; and
- The Council also approved the Monkfish Research Set-Aside (RSA) Working Group's [final report](#).

**MONKFISH RSA WORKING GROUP:** The working group was formed early this year to review and develop measures to improve the Monkfish RSA Program's effectiveness. As part of its charge under the Council's 2023 priorities, the working group evaluated the findings and recommendations of the broader [2019 RSA Program Review](#) to determine which, if any, of those recommendations should be further considered for the Monkfish RSA Program.

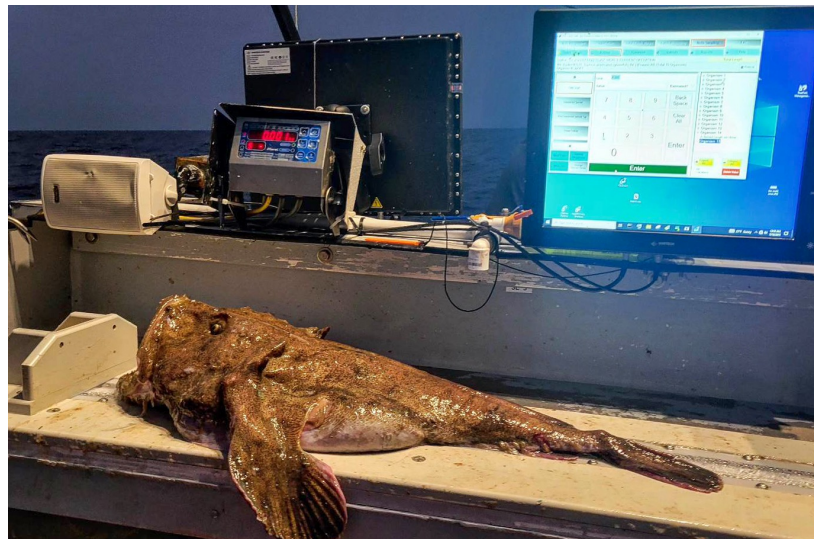
Fishermen, NOAA Fisheries and Council staff, Monkfish Committee members, and others served on the working group, which held [three meetings](#). The group categorized its recommendations as follows:

**High Priority:** The working group recommended making these changes first;

**Important:** The group recommended addressing items in this category after high priority items were considered; and

**Do Not Recommend:** The group discussed 13 other possibilities but opted to remove them from further consideration.

The recommendations were further categorized by: (a) communication improvements; and (b) RSA allocation improvements. An at-a-glance list of these recommendations by category can be viewed in [this presentation](#). Detailed tables can be found in the [final report](#).



*A monkfish lies on top of a digital measuring board – one of the pieces of equipment that is part of NOAA's integrated fisheries scientific computer system. – NOAA Fisheries/Zach Fyke photo*



# New England Fishery Management Council

The Council also voted to [send a letter](#) to GARFO – the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office of NOAA Fisheries – encouraging “the uptake of the communications improvements recommended by the working group that are under the purview of NOAA Fisheries.” Next, the Council will consider following up on the working group’s recommendations when it discusses 2024 priorities during its [early December meeting](#).

**STURGEON BYCATCH:** The Council continues to work on a joint framework action with the Mid-Atlantic Council to reduce sturgeon bycatch in large-mesh monkfish and spiny dogfish gillnet fisheries.

The New England Council [approved the range of alternatives](#) for both monkfish and spiny dogfish during its September meeting, while the Mid-Atlantic Council approved the same range for the two fisheries during its [October meeting](#).

The proposed management measures (listed in the boxes at right) are based on recommendations from [NOAA’s Action Plan to Reduce Atlantic Sturgeon Bycatch in Federal Large-Mesh Gillnet Fisheries](#).

The two Councils manage monkfish and dogfish jointly. The New England Council has the administrative lead for [monkfish](#) and will be implementing the sturgeon measures through [Monkfish Framework 15](#). The Council will receive an update during its January 2024 meeting and intends to take final action in April 2024.

The Mid-Atlantic Council has the administrative lead for [spiny dogfish](#) and is working on a [similar timeline](#) for the joint framework action. Visit the Council’s Sturgeon Bycatch Framework [webpage](#) for more information.



## Options for Atlantic Sturgeon Bycatch Reduction

### Range of Monkfish Alternatives

**Restriction/closure options** to be applied to selected time and area options

1. Gear restrictions: low profile gillnet as defined in draft alternatives document
  - a. Only applicable to NJ hotspot

2. Closures

**Area options** (to encompass hotspot areas with a 1-mile buffer which is TBD)

1. Straight lines parallel to shore for SNE and/or NJ hotspot (estimating 6-9 miles offshore)

**Time options** (to encompass months with greatest sturgeon interactions)

1. Southern New England hotspot

- a. May 1-31: closures of 1, 2, 3, consecutive week periods or the entire month within this timeframe
- b. June 1-30: closures of 1, 2, 3, consecutive week periods or the entire month within this timeframe

2. NJ hotspot

- a. December 1-31: gear restrictions throughout this timeframe or closures of 1, 2, 3, consecutive week periods or the entire month within this timeframe
- b. May 1-31: gear restrictions throughout this timeframe or closures of 1, 2, 3, consecutive week periods or the entire month within this timeframe
- c. Year-round: would apply to gear restrictions only (in addition to 2a and 2b options)

### Range of Dogfish Alternatives

**Restriction/closure options** to be applied to selected time and area options

1. Gear restrictions: soak time limits
  - a. No overnight soaks (proposal: 8pm until dawn)

2. Closures

**Area options** (to encompass hotspot areas with a 1-mile buffer which is TBD)

1. Straight lines parallel to shore for NJ and/or DE/MD/VA hotspots (estimating 6-9 miles offshore)

**Time options** (to encompass months with greatest sturgeon interactions)

1. NJ hotspot

- a. November 1 – December 31: gear restrictions throughout this timeframe or closures of 1, 2, 3, 4 consecutive weeks or entire timeframe
- b. April 1-30: gear restrictions throughout this timeframe or closures of 1, 2, 3, consecutive week or entire month within this timeframe

2. DE/MD/VA hotspots

- a. December 1 – January 31: gear restrictions throughout this timeframe or closures of 1, 2, 3, 4 consecutive week or entire timeframe
- b. March 1-31: gear restrictions throughout this timeframe or closures of 1, 2, 3, consecutive week periods or entire month within this timeframe



- Questions about the Monkfish Research Set-Aside Working Group should be sent to Jenny Couture at [jcouture@nefmc.org](mailto:jcouture@nefmc.org).
- Questions about the Atlantic sturgeon bycatch reduction action under Monkfish Framework 15 should be sent to Robin Frede at [rfrede@nefmc.org](mailto:rfrede@nefmc.org) or Jenny Couture.