



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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PRESS CONTACT: Alex Dunn

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

## April 2026 Council Meeting Summary

The New England Fishery Management Council met from April 14-16, 2026, in Portland, Maine. The following is a summary of actions taken and issues considered during the meeting. Presentations, meeting materials, motions, and meeting audio recordings are available on the Council's April 2026 meeting page.

### ACROSS THE STOCKS

**Monkfish and Skates:** The Council considered input from the Joint Advisory Panels and Committees and voted to discontinue the 2026 priority related to IFQ Scoping for monkfish and/or skate wing fisheries. The Council approved a series of listening sessions for monkfish and skate fishermen across New England and the Mid-Atlantic to solicit input and ideas for fisheries and management improvements. Read the full press release [here](#).

**Herring:** The Council received an update on the 2026 herring action that will:

- Set Atlantic herring specifications for fishing years 2027-2031.
- Enhance river herring and shad (American shad and hickory shad) avoidance and other catch reduction measures to support ongoing coastwide restoration efforts.
- Address other management measures such as the carryover of unharvested catch.

This action will be initiated in [June](#) with Council final action planned for the [September 2026](#) meeting.

**Redfish Sector Exemption Review:** The Council received a report evaluating the performance of the Redfish Sector Exemption program. This program allows commercial trawl vessels enrolled in sectors to target redfish with smaller mesh gear in designated areas. It was established as a universal sector exemption in the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery Management Plan (FMP) in [Framework 61](#). The review found generally strong sector compliance with catch thresholds and stable participation. It also examined bycatch of other groundfish, vessel-level performance, and program goals and objectives. The review was a regulatory requirement and a 2026 Council Priority. Based on information from the review, the Council may consider modifications to the redfish sector exemption program in the future.

**Groundfish Action Update:** Framework 69, which set specifications for several groundfish stocks for fishing years 2025-2027, was implemented on March 8, 2026. Amendment 25 (A25), which incorporates the four Atlantic cod stocks (Eastern Gulf of Maine; Western Gulf of Maine; Georges Bank; and Southern New England) into the Northeast Multispecies FMP and sets status determination criteria and management measures for these stocks, including accountability measures, recreational provisions, and catch limits for fishing years 2026 and 2027, was

approved by NMFS on [April 6, 2026](#). The action received broad public support, with over 250 comments largely favoring timely approval and implementation. Final implementing regulations are forthcoming, with interim default allocations expected to be in place until the rule is finalized. Framework 72, which will set specifications for several groundfish stocks for FY2026-2028, is currently in review with anticipated implementation in the coming months.

## WINDOWPANE FLOUNDER: COUNCIL RESPONDS TO INDUSTRY CONCERNS WITH ACTION TO ADDRESS ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES

**Background:** Catch of Southern windowpane flounder in fishing year 2024 exceeded the annual catch limit, triggering a mandatory Accountability Measure (AM) scheduled to begin May 1, 2026. This AM will affect a large area in Southern New England and apply to vessels using 5-inch or larger mesh, with vessels limited to approved gear such as haddock separator trawls, Ruhle trawls, or rope separator trawls. Industry representatives told the Council the restrictions would significantly reduce access to key fishing grounds and harm revenues. Current regulations allow the AM duration to be shortened on or after September 1, 2026, if final fishing year 2025 data show the ACL was not exceeded, but Council members noted that review would come too late to prevent the initial impacts of the May closure.

The Council unanimously voted to include revisions to the AMs for southern windowpane flounder in development of Framework 74, which is expected to be implemented in Fishing Year 2027. The Council's motion proposed to modify how the southern windowpane flounder AM is implemented when the stock is rebuilt. Under the proposal, when the stock is rebuilt, only the smaller of the AM gear-restricted areas would be implemented, rather than the larger restricted area (see Figure 1). This modification would apply to both the groundfish fishery and large-mesh non-groundfish fisheries.

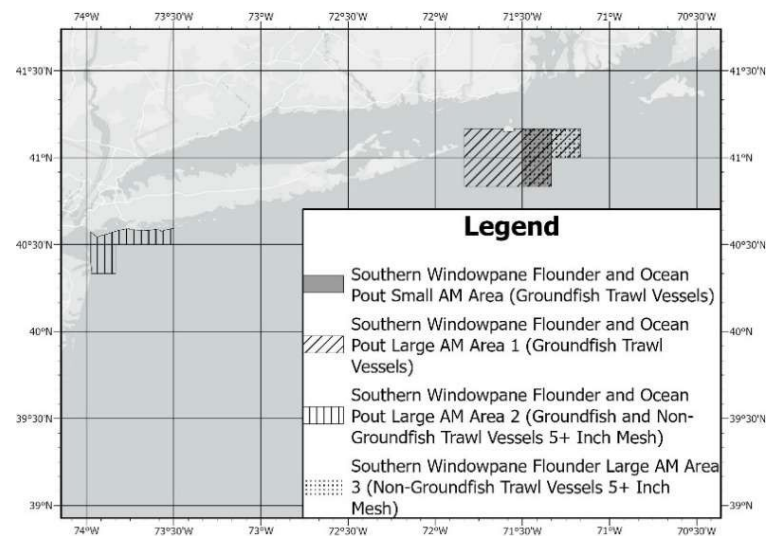


Figure 1. Gear Restricted Areas for Southern Windowpane Flounder

The vote came after extensive public comment from fishermen and industry representatives who warned that the gear restricted areas that will be implemented on May 1, 2026, will create significant economic hardships for vessels operating in Southern New England. The Council's rationale for action included the rebuilt status of southern windowpane flounder, and encouraging NMFS to reconsider implementation of the "Large Area AM" on May 1, 2026, with the understanding that the Council would be changing the AM through Framework 74 to apply on May 1, 2027.

## REGIONAL UPDATES

**Executive Order (EO) 14276:** The Council approved the [Executive Committee's recommendations](#), stating that no additional changes will be made to the EO 14276 workplan that was submitted in September 2025. The Council reviewed over thirty New England specific comments that arrived during the reopened comment

period. These included expanded scallop access on the Northern Edge of Georges Bank, which was not prioritized in 2026, and rescinding industry-funded monitoring, which is involved in ongoing litigation. Much of the Council's recent work aligns with the EO, including increased management flexibility and reduced regulatory burden. This topic will be considered at the Council Coordination Committee (CCC) Meeting in May.

**GARFO Updates:** GARFO is accepting expired or un-issued Certificates of Documentation for fishing permit applications (see the list [here](#)) while the Coast Guard [pauses permit renewals](#) due to a lapse in appropriations. Scallop specifications for FY2026 and default measures for FY2027 are open for public comment until April 27, 2026.

## PARTNER UPDATES

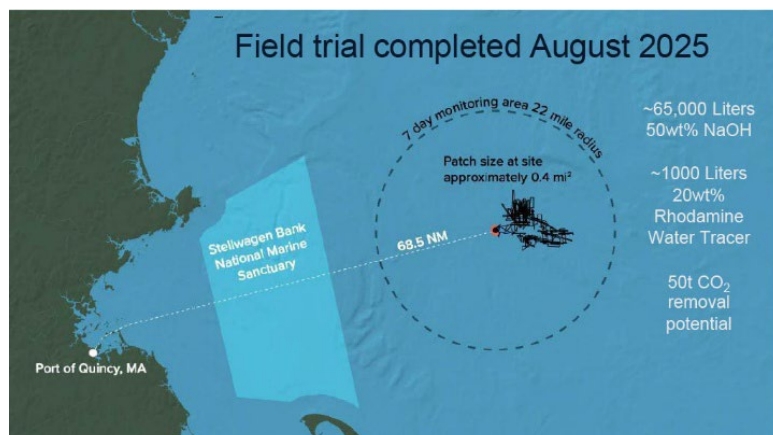


**State of the Ecosystem Report:** Staff from the NEFSC presented the [2026 State of the Ecosystem Report – New England](#). Key findings indicate that warming waters, despite a cooler Gulf of Maine since 2024, shifting species distributions, and changing ocean conditions are increasingly affecting fish productivity, survey results, and fishery operations. The presentation highlighted that many stocks are shifting northward into deeper waters, often beyond historic fishing grounds, and changing seasonal water temperatures are altering the timing of migrations and spawning. It signals a growing need for more flexible, climate-ready management that protects stocks while helping fishing businesses adapt to rapid environmental change. The report remains an important resource for industry, scientists, and managers.

**Fishery Independent Surveys:** NEFSC's Director of Population and Ecosystems Monitoring and Analysis Division, Dr. Kathryn Ford, presented an update on NEFSC's fishery independent surveys. The presentation highlighted that fishery-independent surveys remain the backbone of stock assessments, but vessel changes, weather disruptions, offshore wind development, and aging infrastructure are creating growing risks for consistent data collection. For fishermen, this means future quotas and management decisions will increasingly depend on maintaining reliable surveys while expanding new technologies like autonomous systems, cameras, and alternative sampling methods.

**LOC-NESS Project:** The Council heard an update from WHOI staff on the [LOC-NESS Project](#), which is studying the feasibility of large-scale carbon dioxide removal through boosting the alkalinity of the surface ocean.

This is a unique, science focused project occurring in New England waters, that is engaging the fishing industry along the way. The LOC-NESS group reported lab results showing minimal harm to phytoplankton or zooplankton, and the study will soon test alkalinity changes on lobster and tautog larvae. The at-sea study showed that the alkalinity patch of ~65,000 liters of a sodium hydroxide solution dissipated quickly, returning to background levels in about 4 days.








## LOOKING AHEAD

**Risk Policy:** The Council reviewed progress on the Risk Policy and discussed plans to approve revisions to the Risk Policy at its June meeting. The [presentation](#) focused on the basics of the Risk Policy concept and included a demonstration of how the process works for several groundfish stocks. By linking the Council’s policy preferences (weighting) with data (scoring), the Risk Policy generates a level of risk tolerance that can be applied to management decisions or integrated with ABC control rules. In June, the Council will weigh five “factors” considered in the Risk Policy: Biomass/Stock Status; Recruitment; Climate Vulnerability; Commercial Fishery Characterization; and Recreational Fishery Characterization. Contractors from the University of Maine also previewed how the newly developed risk policy can be applied alongside existing ABC control rules.

**Holistic Strategic Plan Development:** The Parnin Group delivered a draft Holistic Strategic Plan and [final report](#), concluding a year-long effort with discovery, analysis, and strategy phases. The Strategic Plan includes Vision and Mission statements, along with goals, strategies, and objectives. The Council will spend the coming months refining the goals and developing an implementation plan that aligns with the priority setting process. The Council will receive an update on the Holistic Strategic Plan in June and approve the work at the September meeting.

**June 2026 Council Meeting:** Will be held from June 23 - 25, 2026 in Mystic, CT. The table below shows topics that will be discussed, including several updates, reports, and action initiation. Meeting materials and an agenda will be developed in the coming weeks and posted [here](#).

UPDATES 	DECISION / REVIEW 	REPORTS 	INITIATE ACTION 	FINAL ACTION 
Groundfish FW68 ABC CRs		Groundfish Amendment 23 Review	Groundfish – Specifications and Other Measures (FW74)	Risk Policy with Council Weightings
EFH Framework 2		Monkfish / Skate Listening Sessions	Small Mesh – Specifications and Other Measures	
Scallop Projection Methods			Scallop – Specifications and Other Measures (FW42)	
IRA Initiatives			Herring – Specifications and Other Measures	
Holistic Strategic Plan Implementation				
Vessel Baseline Evaluation				

