



# New England Fishery Management Council

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## New England Council Approves 2017 Management Priorities

The New England Fishery Management Council recently approved its 2017 management priorities, which will guide the Council's committees and working groups in the year ahead. The Council annually takes this step for two reasons: to focus its time on mutually agreed-upon issues of importance; and to give the public a snapshot of what to expect in the foreseeable future.

"Our priority-setting exercise helps us determine how to best allocate available resources," said Council Executive Director Tom Nies. "We always have more proposals on the table than we're able to handle each year, so by collectively deciding upfront which actions rank the highest, we're able to work much more efficiently on the Council's most pressing issues without getting sidetracked."

Setting annual catch limits and other fishery specifications – a requirement under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act – remains the Council's highest cross-cutting priority.

But for 2017, the Council also supported many high-priority items that fishermen and other stakeholders said were especially important. Here are a few of the highlights that were approved during the Council's mid-November meeting in Newport, Rhode Island:

- **Sea scallops:** Consider regulatory changes to the Northern Gulf of Maine Management Area;
- **Groundfish:** Revise Atlantic halibut management measures;
- **Groundfish:** Review groundfish catches in "other" non-groundfish fisheries and assess implications;
- **Recreational fishing:** Improve Gulf of Maine cod and haddock recreational management process;
- **Barndoor skates:** Initiate action to allow landings of this rebuilt species;
- **Habitat:** Coordinate wind power issues with other agencies over the long term, not just 2017; and
- **Council:** Conduct a programmatic review of Council operations.



– Portland Fish Exchange photo



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Many actions already underway remained top-ranking priorities for 2017. Some of these include:

- **Atlantic herring** – Continue work on Amendment 8 to address localized depletion and user conflicts in the fishery and develop a new acceptable biological catch control rule using a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process;
- **Habitat** – Complete the Omnibus Deep-Sea Coral Amendment and a separate framework adjustment to address surf clam fishery access to pending Habitat Management Areas;
- **Whiting** – Move forward with Amendment 22 to consider limited access for the Small-Mesh Multispecies Complex and consider changes to possession limits;
- **Skates** – Prepare an amendment to consider limited access for both the skate bait and skate wing fisheries with provisions that may consider catch share alternatives; and
- **Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management** – Continue work on the development of operating models and a draft example Georges Bank Fishery Ecosystem Plan and develop a MSE process to engage fishermen and other stakeholders while conducting testing and validation.

A table identifying all of the Council's 2017 management priorities is available at:

[http://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/161201\\_Approved\\_Priorities.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/161201_Approved_Priorities.pdf).

*We put a lot of time, effort, and hard work into developing our priorities," said Council Chairman Dr. John Quinn. "We think we can move forward with all of the tasks on our list using existing Council resources."*



– University of Massachusetts Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology photo

## Here's How it Works

The Council goes through an extensive process to establish annual management priorities. This year:

- The Council's executive director – with considerable input from the technical staff – developed an initial list in August.
- Requests by members of the public and all committees were considered.
- The draft was reviewed and modified by the Executive Committee and previewed by the full Council in September.
- Council members voiced initial comments and requests for additions or modifications.
- Council members next ranked each proposed task on the draft list as a "high," "medium," or "low" priority.
- Results were compiled and presented again to the Executive Committee, which made additional decisions.
- The Council spent close to three hours debating individual items during its November meeting, which resulted in several modifications to what became the final 2017 approved list.