

2025 SPRING NRCC MEETING NOTES
Historic Inns of Annapolis, Governor Calvert House
58 State Circle, Annapolis, MD, 21401
May 21-22, 2025

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC)

Joe Cimino, Chair
Dan McKiernan, Vice-Chair
Bob Beal, Executive Director
Toni Kerns, Fisheries Policy Director
Patrick Campfield, Fisheries Science Program Director

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC)

Wes Townsend, Chair
Mike Luisi, Vice-Chair
Dr. Chris Moore, Executive Director
Brandon Muffley, MAFMC staff
Dr. Paul Rago, Scientific and Statistical Committee

New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC)

Rick Bellavance, Chair
Dr. Cate O'Keefe, Executive Director
Dr. Jamie Cournane, NEFMC staff
Dr. Lisa Kerr, Chair, Scientific and Statistical Committee

NOAA Fisheries Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC)

Dr. Jon Hare, Director, NEFSC
Dr. Michael Simpkins, Chief, Resource Evaluation and Assessment Division

NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO)

Mike Pentony, Regional Administrator
Moiria Kelly, Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries
Mark Grant, Sustainable Fisheries Division (NRCC staff support)
Laura Deighan, Sustainable Fisheries Division (NRCC staff support)

Guest Presenters

Dave Gouveia, GARFO, Analysis and Program Support Division
Geoff White, Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP)
Katherine McArdle, NEFSC, Fishery Monitoring and Research Division
Russell Brown, NEFSC, Resource Evaluation and Assessment Division

Additional Attendees

Stephen Pearson, MAFMC staff
Hannah Hart, MAFMC staff
Kiley Dancy, MAFMC staff
Jason Didden, MAFMC staff
Mary Sabo, MAFMC staff

Julia Beaty, MAFMC staff
Jose Montanez, MAFMC staff
Kathy Collins, MAFMC staff
Jonathon Peros, NEFMC staff
Robin Frede, NEFMC staff
Emily Bodell, NEFMC staff
Jenny Couture, NEFMC staff
Rachel Feeney, NEFMC staff
Angelia Miller, NEFMC staff
Michelle Bachman, NEFMC staff
Andrew Applegate, NEFMC staff
Connor Buckley, NEFMC staff
Alex Dunn, NEFMC staff
Adelle Molina, NEFSC, Resource Evaluation and Assessment Division
Brian Hooper, NEFSC, Resource Evaluation and Assessment Division
Kristan Blackhart, NEFSC, Resource Evaluation and Assessment Division
Chad Demarest, NEFSC, Resource Evaluation and Assessment Division
Jessica Blaylock, NEFSC, Resource Evaluation and Assessment Division
Adelle Molina, NEFSC, Resource Evaluation and Assessment Division
Paul Nitschke, NEFSC, Resource Evaluation and Assessment Division
Nichole Rossi, NEFSC, Fishery Monitoring and Research Division
Chad Keith, NEFSC, Fishery Monitoring and Research Division
Colleen Rodenbush, NEFSC, Fishery Monitoring and Research Division
Glenn Chamberlain, NEFSC, Fishery Monitoring and Research Division
Ashley Asci, GARFO, Analysis and Program Support Division
Laura Smith, GARFO, Analysis and Program Support Division
Kris Winiarski, GARFO, Analysis and Program Support Division
Sara Turner, GARFO, Analysis and Program Support Division
Daniel Hocking, GARFO, Analysis and Program Support Division
Claire Fitz-Gerald, GARFO, Analysis and Program Support Division
Shannah Jaburek, GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries Division
Spencer Talmage, GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries Division
Allison Murphy, GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries Division
Maria Fenton, GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries Division
Liz Sullivan, GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries Division
Ryan Silva, GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries Division
Emily Gilbert, GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries Division
Emily Keiley, GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries Division
Heather Nelson, GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries Division
Ashley Trudeau, GARFO Sustainable Fisheries Division
Travis Ford, GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries Division
Caroline Potter, GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries Division
Matt Rigdon, GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries Division
Doug Potts, GARFO, Sustainable Fisheries Division
Laurie McKenna, NOAA, Fisheries Finance Program
Melanie Griffin, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries

Kelly Whitmore, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries
Tara Dolan, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries
Sefatia Romeo Theken, Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game
Jesse Hornstein, New York Department of Environmental Conservation

Public Attendees

Gib Brogan, Oceana
Greg DiDomenico, Lund's Fisheries
John Quinn, Fisheries Survival Fund
Katie Almeida, Town Dock
Libby Etrie, Conservation Law Foundation
Matt Seeley, Environmental Defense Fund
Evan Balzano, Maine Coast Fishermen's Association
Roger Brothers, University of Maine
Alex Schneider, Virginia Institute of Marine Science
Kate Wilke, The Nature Conservancy
Tony W.
Dustin Colson Leaning, Environmental Defense Fund
Michael Waine, American Sportfishing Association
Gareth Lawson, Conservation Law Foundation
Steve Cadrin, University of Massachusetts School of Marine Science and Technology
+6 unidentified attendees

– Day 1 –

Budgets and Available Resources

The Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) and Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) are still awaiting approval of the fiscal year 2025 (October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025) NOAA spend plan. NEFSC is currently receiving monthly allotments. GARFO has received most of its fiscal year 2025 allotment under the fiscal year 2024 spend plan. Mr. Pentony stated that the message at the May 13-15, 2025, Council Coordination Committee (CCC) meeting was 'uncertainty and unpredictability,' and, if there are cuts in the 2025 spend plan required later in the year, they will be more difficult to implement. NMFS noted that fiscal year 2026 is also still in flux. The President's "skinny" budget for fiscal year 2026 was released, but it does not include much detail on either NOAA or NMFS. NOAA is awaiting the release of the full fiscal year 2026 budget. While the agency normally has a role in the draft Presidential budget, Congress may have different priorities than the President. In addition, there are new guidelines that all funding obligations must be approved at the NOAA or Department of Commerce (DOC) level (except purchase card items). This has led to additional uncertainty in terms of being able to obligate funds and has pushed the agency to make tough decisions around things it previously funded (e.g., cancelling its bi-monthly insert with information on NMFS activities in Commercial Fisheries News). Right now, NMFS is focused

on its core functions and its mission to support the Councils and Commission, and more tangential efforts may fall away.

At the CCC meeting, NMFS indicated the Councils would receive another portion of their annual funds soon, but it was unlikely to be the complete balance of fiscal year 2025 funds. The NRCC principals provided updates on their current organizational budgets and the potential impacts of not receiving their full balances. The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) is operating under the assumption that it will receive its full fiscal year 2025 appropriation at some point. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) expects to receive the bulk of its funds in June and was granted a no-cost extension to roll over some unspent fiscal year 2024 funds, which has been helpful. The states and ASMFC are in a holding pattern with respect to grant funding to the states (e.g., Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act funds), but there are indications of progress. ASMFC also receives a contract to reimburse Northeast multispecies (groundfish) sectors for their at-sea monitoring (ASM) costs. Mr. Beal noted that those funds have not run out but are getting close. ASMFC has not received any updates on the next batch of ASM funding and will need to receive it soon to avoid unpaid invoices¹. The New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) is currently holding back funds for state technical assistance to ensure it does not run out of operational funds while waiting for its full 2025 funding. Dr. O’Keefe stated that it is unclear whether NEFMC can continue funding state technical assistance, though it would like to do so. Dr. Moore responded that MAFMC does not have state technical assistance contracts, but five of the eight fishery management councils do.

Mr. McKiernan noted that the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries’ (MA DMF) inshore survey on the R/V Gloria Michelle is funded with Wallop-Breaux funds and that he hoped that NEFSC could continue to work with MA DMF on it. In response to a question regarding contract approvals, Dr. Hare stated that he was not aware of any contracts or grants for mission-critical work that had not been approved. The scallop dredge survey on a commercial vessel was approved, and the award is in progress. NEFSC is moving the ROV survey from the R/V *Sharp* to the R/V *Henry Bigelow* as a cost-saving measure. The fiscal year 2025 scallop surveys will be conducted as planned.

NRCC discussed funding and staff support for the Marine Resource Education Program (MREP). NRCC members agreed that MREP is extremely valuable and has tremendous industry buy-in. Dr. Hare and Mr. Pentony stated that the Center and Regional Office would continue to provide in-kind support (i.e., staff participation), but they would need to check on future funding with NMFS Headquarters, which is responsible for all of the program’s funding. Later in the meeting, during the *NOAA Restructuring and Reduction in Force (RIF) Updates* session, Dr. Hare provided an update that NOAA Headquarters intends to continue funding MREP.

¹ A new contract for ASM reimbursement funds was approved at the end of May 2025.

NEFMC is considering holding its meetings virtually, in anticipation of budget cuts in 2026. Dr. O'Keefe also noted that the CCC requested that NMFS extend the response deadline for the President's Executive Order (E.O.) on streamlining (E.O. 14192) to September 30, 2025. Without an extension, NEFMC would need to add an extra meeting to allow for a two-meeting process, which will increase costs under a decreased budget.

The NRCC agreed that members should keep in touch more frequently to respond to changing information.

NOAA Restructuring and Reduction In Force (RIF) Updates

Dr. Hare and Mr. Pentony provided information about changes that have affected NMFS' staffing or may do so in the future. NOAA sent plans for a RIF to DOC, and DOC sent them to the Office of Personnel Management. Implementation will be determined by the Office of Personnel Management's schedule, but is expected by the end of September 2025. Regional leadership is not privy to what is included in those plans. NMFS has undergone three staffing adjustments this calendar year: The deferred resignation program in early February; the termination, re-hiring, and re-termination of probationary employees; and the voluntary early retirement and voluntary separation offers. In addition, NMFS is still under a hiring freeze, and any reductions from normal attrition will not be backfilled. As leadership roles (e.g., branch and division chiefs) are vacated, NMFS will provide acting coverage and will keep in touch with management partners on those changes. NMFS, and NRCC, will need to think about how those changes will impact core functions. At GARFO, staff losses have impacted sector support and exempted fishing permit support in the Sustainable Fisheries Division; work in the Protected Resources Division; essential fish habitat, energy, and aquaculture work in the Habitat and Ecosystem Services Division; quota monitoring efforts in the Analysis and Program Support Division; data modernization efforts in the Technology and Data Management Division; and funding disbursement in the Operations and Management Division. GARFO is still working to understand the full impacts of those losses and how to ensure ongoing support for the Councils and Commission. Dr. Hare stated that every NEFSC program has fewer staff than it had at the beginning of the year, and that staff from all over NEFSC have stepped up to help fill gaps.

In response to a question, Mr. Pentony noted that while the news has published a NOAA-wide target of 1,029 staff being cut, regional leadership does not have information on the accuracy of that number or how the voluntary early retirements and separations, and other staffing reductions, would impact a RIF.

NRCC members asked how the Councils and Commission can continue to fill their roles as resource managers and how the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSC) can support the Population Dynamics Branch, Social Sciences Branch, etc. Dr. Hare said that NEFSC is evaluating what its highest priorities are, whether there is anything that is currently being managed that may not need to be, and how to keep everyone in the conversation as things progress. NEFSC needed to modify the 2025 assessment schedule and will need to continue to adapt in response to budget and restructuring updates.

Mr. Luisi noted that the NRCC needs to think about how timelines for deliverables will change. When a work product has a set delivery date, any lag should be built into the timeline to ensure work is prioritized appropriately and started early enough. Mr. Pentony responded that he wished he had more specific information on revised timelines, but GARFO is still learning. While there was previously a presumed timeline from a proposed rule to a final rule, that has evolved. Actions that are currently underway may be impacted. In the past, remaining staff would have temporarily filled staffing gaps, but the current gaps are too big. GARFO needs to prioritize all of its work, and is prioritizing specifications and any actions that ensure fisheries can continue to operate over other actions that improve efficiency, etc. For example, every fisheries action goes through an Endangered Species Act (ESA) section 7 consultation. With this Administration prioritizing energy development, and with the reductions in the Protected Resources Division, ESA section 7 consultation on energy actions will be prioritized over fisheries actions. There are updates behind the scenes that will impact how data modernization efforts are prioritized. Mr. Pentony requested that the Councils and Commission reach out to GARFO when their programs are impacted, so those impacts can be communicated to NMFS and NOAA leadership. Dr. O’Keefe requested that regional leadership communicate these changes to the Council directly, and Mr. Pentony agreed.

Ms. Etrie (Conservation Law Foundation) asked how changes to Agency staffing will impact uncertainty, and, in turn, levels of acceptable biological catch (ABC) and overfishing limits (OFL). Dr. Hare responded that Ms. Kelly Denit's (Director, NMFS Office of Sustainable Fisheries) presentation to the CCC made a general statement that less certainty would not necessarily mean reductions in ABCs and OFLs, but the specifics will vary from plan to plan and species to species.

In response to a question about the statement in the President’s skinny budget that some NOAA functions should move to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mr. Pentony and Dr. Hare responded that the details are unclear and there are a range of activities that could move. Some of those potential changes may be worrisome to the Councils, and some may not. The full budget request will include further details. The timeline for the full budget is unclear, but it may be available in about four to eight weeks.

E.O. 14192 (Deregulatory E.O.)

Mr. Pentony provided an overview of two recent E.O.s relevant to the NRCC: ‘Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation’ and ‘Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness’. E.O. 14192, the deregulatory E.O., says that the collective group of management bodies should identify ways to enhance the ability of seafood producers to provide seafood to the American people. There is a 10-to-1 requirement for 10 deregulatory actions for every regulatory action, but this requirement does not apply to all actions. The previous Trump Administration had a similar E.O., but with a 2-to-1 requirement. The metrics are managed at the DOC, rather than at NOAA or NMFS. Without knowing the number of regulations going through DOC, it is hard to predict how the 10-to-1 requirement will affect the review of NMFS’ actions, particularly as NMFS deregulatory actions may balance out regulatory actions at other DOC agencies. While there is a perception that there are a lot of fishing regulations, NMFS tends to run as a deregulatory agency. Actions that authorize fishing, such as specifications, are considered

deregulatory, and this is consistent with accepted practice developed during the first Trump Administration. Routine specifications and in-season actions are below the radar of the deregulatory E.O. The E.O. focuses on rules that the Office of Management and Budget determines are significant under E.O. 12866 (\$100M or greater). The majority of current actions are specifications and routine actions, and none have been identified as regulatory so far.

E.O. 14276, the Seafood E.O., is the fisheries-specific implementation of the larger deregulatory E.O. It solicits input from the councils in addition to Agency review of fishery regulations. This is similar to what happened under the first Trump Administration, but it is less broad, as it does not include aquaculture. The NRCC can focus on this E.O. as a way to accomplish the goals of the deregulatory E.O. Mr. Pentony suggested that the Councils prioritize deregulatory actions as they develop next year's work plans. Councils do not need to focus on whether actions are 'significant.' For example, all specifications actions will count as deregulatory, and NEFMC's Multispecies Framework 69 has deregulatory aspects that remove some reporting requirements.

Dr. O'Keefe noted that the 30-day deadline to identify the most heavily-regulated fisheries has passed and that the timing in the E.O. does not align with NEFMC's processes. She asked about the intended process and timing, and whether a request would be made to the councils. Mr. Pentony responded that most of the E.O. process is happening at the NOAA leadership level. Mr. Sam Rauch (NMFS Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs) provided an update at the CCC meeting that, while it's hard to quantitatively or qualitatively identify the 'most heavily-regulated' fisheries, NMFS is looking at fisheries with reductions in landings over the last 3-5 years. Nationally, total landings have been relatively consistent over approximately 20 years, but since 2020-2021, landings have been consistently lower. NMFS is working to identify the top three fisheries that contributed to the decline in landings in the last 5 years, what led to the decline, and what the agency can do through regulation to increase those landings. Mr. Luisi asked if the reduction was due to regulation or the availability of fish and how this information will be evaluated, given some fisheries may not be able to withstand higher fishing mortality. Mr. Pentony answered that reductions may be the result of a depleted resource (temporary or long-term), markets, a constraining bycatch limit, etc. However, those market challenges likely existed in the 25 years of consistent landings, and the decreases in landings are relatively recent, which is what NMFS is focusing on.

In response to a question regarding the E.O.'s perceived focus on commercial fisheries, Mr. Pentony said this was likely because the math of evaluating commercial fisheries is easier. He noted that recreational fisheries are a huge economic driver in the United States and that recreational fisheries should also be addressed. Recreational landings are among GARFO's top five issues, including MAFMC's sector separation amendment.

The NRCC discussed seafood market challenges, including the import-export balance, American consumers' willingness to pay for seafood, and the impact of seafood certification and sustainability ratings. NRCC members expressed a desire for NOAA's FishWatch to become the go-to source for seafood sustainability information for U.S. seafood. They suggested working with dealers to get them to adopt the FishWatch logo on seafood packaging to drive use of the FishWatch website. The group also discussed the successful community campaigns to support local fisheries during the COVID pandemic, including CARES Act-funded efforts. Mr.

McKiernan highlighted the need to ensure local marketing campaigns do not compete against each other and the benefits of pooling resources regionally.

In response to a question about the E.O.'s directive to implement less expensive and more reliable technologies within fisheries management, Mr. Pentony noted that, while the E.O. directs modernization of data systems, the two GARFO staff leads on that project were probationary employees who were terminated. While the Administration has provided clear direction on priorities, NMFS needs to determine how to prioritize its resources to support that direction. He noted that exempted fishing permits (EFP) provide an opportunity to work with industry to develop collaborative research, in support of the E.O. However, GARFO's staffing to support EFPs is compromised. Dr. Hare explained that NEFSC is already working toward new technology and cooperative research, but also needs to adjust based on its current resources. He cited the HabCam, where long-range AUVs can reduce dependence on large ships for surveys in the future, and the passive acoustic monitoring network, which can help fisheries with whale avoidance and can experimentally detect spawning aggregations, as examples. He noted that NEFSC's Cooperative Research Branch is largely intact, but the cooperative research budget is uncertain. During the discussion on NOAA restructuring, Mr. Pentony had clarified that the scallop research set-aside program is moving forward this year. Dr. O'Keefe suggested that the Councils will need to identify ways to work with non-Federal partners to adapt to the Agency's reduction in resources.

Mr. Pentony discussed public requests for deregulatory actions. GARFO is tracking the region's requests in a spreadsheet, and will need to work with the Councils on them. Some actions would require statutory changes. The Councils should also identify actions to improve their own programs. The Councils and NMFS can discuss which actions to prioritize through Council actions and direct Agency actions. It is important that everyone understand that any actions under this E.O. take away resources from other planned actions.

Normally, a petition for rulemaking would come through GARFO and go to the Secretary of Commerce, requesting rulemaking under the Administrative Procedures Act. GARFO would brief headquarters on the merit of the request and whether the Council or Agency should act. If it is an action better served through Secretarial action, GARFO would publish a notice soliciting input on whether the Agency should take the proposed action. If it is an action better served through council action, then GARFO would write to the council to suggest it consider the issue, and the council would decide whether or not to take action. With the petitions submitted in response to the E.O., it is unclear if NMFS leadership will direct the Agency to take action or will strongly recommend the councils take action as quickly as possible. Taking Secretarial action does not completely exclude the councils from the process. However, it only includes consultation with the councils during the comment period, before the Secretary makes a final decision. The development of alternatives and the analyses would be completed exclusively by NMFS staff. The role of the councils is to provide input and recommendations, but not to develop alternatives and select a preferred alternative.

In response to a question about how the Councils should start working through the list of requests, Mr. Pentony explained that GARFO is still in the very early stages of reviewing the petitions. Staff are preparing multiple briefings on the petitions for Mr. Rauch. NMFS has not

decided how to proceed on individual requests, but will work with the Councils and the Commission once it has more insight into NMFS leadership's plans. NMFS may notify the Councils of recommended council actions by letters of petition. It may provide a notice to the Councils of actions it determines would best serve the public by a Secretarial action. There may be some petitions NMFS determines do not have sufficient merit. Dr. Moore said that MAFMC will start discussions on proposed actions at its June meeting and will present on those actions at its August meeting, to provide feedback by the September deadline. Mr. Beal noted that there may need to be a process to involve the states if any of the proposed Secretarial actions conflict with state management. Mr. Pentony responded that NMFS is working to communicate with and educate its new leadership about who is responsible for the management of individual fisheries and which fisheries may not be appropriate for Secretarial action.

In response to a question whether there would be a fishery-by-fishery or species-by-species analysis of why underperforming fisheries are underperforming, Mr. Pentony indicated there was not a specific plan at this time.

Ms. Etrie (Conservation Law Foundation) asked how the agency will evaluate the petitions, particularly with respect to actions a council has already vetted and decided not to act upon, such as access to the Northern Edge for the scallop fishery. Mr. Pentony responded that GARFO's briefings for leadership will include the history and past council decisions on the proposed action, but the process after the briefings is currently unclear. Dr. O'Keefe noted that the new NOAA Assistant Administrator for Fisheries announced publicly that he has decided to open the Northern Edge to scallop fishing in response to a petition and that none of the rulemaking process described has occurred. Neither Mr. Pentony, nor NEFMC, was notified about the decision in advance. NEFMC already has a priority to set specifications for the scallop fishery. If the petition creates a delay in the specifications process, it would create a challenge. Dr. O'Keefe recommended that the NRCC discuss how to adapt to that level of uncertainty and noted that, by her understanding, the Secretary of Commerce cannot force the Council to take action. In response to a question whether the proposed action would follow the Administrative Procedure Act, Dr. O'Keefe responded that she hoped that it would, but that she was uncertain that is a valid assumption.

Assessment Working Group: Assessment Schedules

Assessment Schedules

Dr. Simpkins led a discussion including the upcoming assessment schedule, revisions to the process document developed by the Assessment Working Group (AWG), and stakeholder engagement in the stock assessment process. The NRCC previously worked to revise the assessment schedule for 2025, including replacing some planned assessments with data updates and pausing some research track assessments. Dr. Simpkins highlighted that there is a lot of overhead in the assessment process, and that developing a revised assessment schedule should likely include the frequency and complexity of assessments, as well as the complexity of the assessment process. Dr. Hare suggested the NRCC should look at a 30- to 40-percent reduction in capacity for stock assessments.

The NRCC tasked the AWG with developing an initial draft of an assessment schedule for 2026 and future years (**Action Item #1**). The NRCC agreed to discuss the draft at an August 2025 intersessional meeting to inform fall discussions at each council (**Decision #1** and **Action Item #5**). The scope of the planning for a revised assessment schedule will include: Assessment frequency and complexity; assessment process complexity; and other science/assessment support.

The discussion included setting guidelines for the number of years for which an assessment should provide biological reference points (BRP) and short term stock projections. There was a general consensus that future assessments should plan to provide guidance for a longer period of time than current assessments, but that 4 years might be a prudent limit to avoid the risk associated with BRPs and catch projections that are no longer aligned with biological conditions.

The discussion expanded to the topic of possible options to supplement NEFSC stock assessments with external resources, including: State agencies; universities; SSCs; management committees; and technical committees. The spring 2025 CCC meeting included discussion of a strawman approach using a “risk-value matrix” based on the 2018 stock assessment improvement plan produced by the Research Track Steering Committee, and a stock assessment prioritization process. The Greater Atlantic Region is a test case for the process and is expected to help improve those documents based on its experience with the process. Dr. Lisa Kerr (NEFMC SSC) reminded the NRCC to be mindful of opportunities for stakeholder input and cautioned that some potential assessment process pathways may limit stakeholder participation until assessments are near final. Dr. Cournane raised for consideration that revised Marine Resource Information Program (MRIP) data is expected to be available in 2026 (for use in 2027 assessments) and assessments without a recreational component could be prioritized first so that assessments for stocks with a recreational component would be conducted after the MRIP data are available. The on-going research track assessment for *Loligo* squid was discussed in terms of whether it would be possible for a research track assessment to provide management advice rather than each research track requiring a follow-on management track assessment to provide management advice. There was concern that the *Loligo* research track would not use the desired data to provide management advice, but the NRCC remained interested in the general topic of finding efficiencies in the research track/management track cycle.

The NRCC moved on to a discussion of reviewing the current 2026 schedule to identify any potential adjustments. The clam survey was redesigned to sample surfclams for 4 years followed by sampling ocean quahogs for 2 years. Mr. Muffley identified that if the clam survey is not conducted in 2025, the ocean quahog data will be 10 years old. Dr. O’Keefe offered Atlantic halibut as a stock where a different approach may be warranted and noted that southern red hake and offshore hake are being considered for a move to ecosystem component species. Dr. O’Keefe also identified monkfish as a species that is receiving a data update this year in place of an assessment, but whose northern stock is growing in importance. She stated NEFMC would like to get monkfish on the assessment schedule. Atlantic cod, which recently moved to four stock-specific management track assessments, was raised because Amendment 25 (which would have revised the fishery management plan (FMP) accordingly) was disapproved, but the NRCC felt it was too early to make a decision on cod stock assessments. Mr. Muffley identified butterfish as a stock whose assessment could be moved because the stock status is healthy and

catch is below the catch limit. Mr. Pentony agreed that low-risk stocks with catch below their limits should be looked at for moving their assessments out in time.

As part of the discussion, the NRCC explored possible ways to balance timing and uncertainty, including holding peer reviews earlier, when data is 80 to 90 percent finalized, and using a year-old data set. Members highlighted that some data sets are changing more rapidly than others, and this was seen as another factor to consider. As an example, the Atlantic herring research track could perhaps be put off if a large change in biomass that would affect stock status and quotas is not expected. Herring might see a quota doubling in 2026, but the idea of an in-season adjustment based on an SSC-reviewed data update was floated as an alternative to a management track. Georges Bank cod and haddock were identified as species also assessed by Canada where perhaps Canadian data could be used, but concerns were identified with relying too heavily on Canadian data in negotiations with Canada.

Assessment Process Document

Copy edits to the AWG's assessment process document that were discussed at the NRCC's previous meetings have been addressed and were not further discussed at this meeting. The AWG worked through three remaining questions that Dr. Simpkins presented to the NRCC for decisions. The first was whether to encourage or require the management track assessment peer review chair to attend the prior assessment oversight panel (AOP). The second was to clarify the types of projections (i.e., short, long, or both) to be considered under term of reference (TOR) 6 during a research track assessment. The third question was on TOR 5 for status determination criteria in research track assessments.

The NRCC agreed to 'strongly encourage,' but not require, the management track assessment chair to attend the preceding AOP (**Decision #2a**). This reflected concerns about the time and costs associated with travel to the AOP, as well as the increased burden it places on the chair and how that affects recruitment of chairs. The NRCC also agreed to include "short-term," but not "long-term" projections under research track assessments TOR 6. After a brief discussion, the NRCC decided not to specifically define "short-term" (**Decision #2b**).

The NRCC discussed the concept of having research track assessments compare outcomes to BRPs. In some instances, the BRPs from a previous model are no longer accurate in the new model developed by a research track assessment. Discussion continued around the value of a research track assessment comparing the new approach to the previous approach to provide context for changes in catch advice that may be associated with using the new model in a subsequent management track. To address this, the NRCC decided to update research track assessments TOR 5 to read: "Update or redefine Biological Reference Points (BRPs; point estimates or proxies for B_{MSY} , $B_{Threshold}$, F_{MSY} , and MSY^2 reference points) and provide estimates of those criteria and their uncertainty, along with a description of the sources of uncertainty. If analytic model-based estimates are unavailable, consider recommending alternative measurable proxies for reference points. For illustrative purposes, where feasible and appropriate, compute the ratios of the research track assessment's terminal year stock size and fishing mortality to existing, and any redefined, BRPs" (**Decision #2c**).

² Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY)

Stakeholder Engagement

Dr. Simpkins also provided a summary of the first stakeholder input session for assessments that was held in February 2025. The stakeholder engagement session was designed to get input on June 2026 management track assessments well in advance of the start of the assessments. There were 55 attendees from commercial fisheries, recreational fisheries, federal and state agencies, Councils, research institutions, and the public. The input included the movement of stocks, population dynamics, etc. There were good conversations and helpful information was provided to the assessment scientists (who also attended). Stakeholders were also able to provide input through an online form through April, which yielded additional input. Next, the assessment leads will review the input that was received and consider what should be incorporated in the assessments, and how. Collated comments will also be included in the recommendations section of the management track assessment report, including how the comments were addressed. The lessons learned are that the amount and type of input varied depending on the fishery. Dr. Simpkins suggested it could be useful to think about specific questions by stock to refine future input. Dr. Simpkins also suggested the NRCC should consider other ways to promote public input for assessments and welcomed feedback on the new stakeholder engagement process. The NRCC decided to receive an update on stakeholder engagement at the fall 2025 meeting (**Decision #6**).

Management Flexibility Actions

Dr. O’Keefe introduced the topic by explaining that NEFMC staff members had started thinking about how to respond to cuts to GARFO and NEFSC staff, and potential cuts to GARFO, NEFSC, and Council budgets. NEFMC staff members had identified that some NEFMC FMPs include provisions that hamper flexibility. In response, the NEFMC’s Executive Committee sent a memorandum to the NEFMC suggesting that the Council revise its priorities to consider a new omnibus action for all NEFMC FMPs to increase flexibility. Dr. O’Keefe stated the NEFMC would work with GARFO on the correct vehicle and process. She also explained that NEFMC is sharing information with MAFMC and ASMFC, and noted that NEFMC would be in touch with the MAFMC regarding their two shared FMPs (monkfish and dogfish).

Delving further into the details, Dr. O’Keefe stated that NEFMC is looking at specification frequency, rollover provisions, and in-season adjustments; and explained that NEFMC’s FMPs are inconsistent with respect to how often specifications must be updated. Not all NEFMC FMPs have provisions for specifications actions; some FMPs require a Framework Adjustment to set specifications. The intent is that NEFMC would replace all FMP-specific requirements and set an overall requirement that specifications should not be set for more than X years at a time. NEFMC is considering the appropriate number of years to include in this requirement. Rollover provisions also differ among NEFMC FMPs. Some FMPs allow automatic rollover of specifications in the absence of a new specifications action; others have default specifications that go into place. NEFMC would like consistent provisions in all of its FMPs for specifications to rollover. NEFMC also wants to revise its FMPs to allow NMFS to make in-season adjustments to specifications, in consultation with the Council. This would allow in-season adjustments in both directions to prevent overfishing or revise quotas based on new data.

Mr. Pentony suggested NEFMC could learn from approaches adopted by MAFMC and suggested MAFMC's Mackerel, Squid, Butterfish FMP is a good example of flexibility. Mr. Pentony also supported NEFMC's intent as a way to reduce inconsistencies between NEFMC and MAFMC. He highlighted that setting specifications for up to 5 years would increase flexibility, but cautioned that the NRCC should avoid having years where no specifications are updated or years where all specifications are updated. However, Mr. Pentony pointed out that there are also inconsistencies among the MAFMC's FMPs.

Ms. Kerns reminded the NRCC that changes to the FMPs for herring or winter flounder might require ASMFC to undertake an addendum, but noted the interstate FMPs for those fisheries may already have provisions for multi-year specifications. Mr. Luisi added support for the concept of multi-year specifications, but asked if the NRCC could explore a way to eliminate annual review of multi-year specifications even when no additional action is required.

The NRCC briefly discussed the possibility of changing fishing years across FMPs to provide more flexibility in the assessment and the rulemaking calendars. Dr. O'Keefe stated that the industry is not interested in making that change now, and would want to address fishing year on an FMP basis, but that it was not off the table. Dr. Moore added that MAFMC has discussed the issue, but needs to evaluate whether changing fishing years is a frameworkable action, and that the MAFMC would need to coordinate with the ASMFC. Mr. McKiernan noted that Massachusetts has required emergency rulemaking for 20 years to match the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass FMP's fishing year. Mr. Cimino suggested that those stocks would be good candidates for rollover specifications because of the state monitoring of quotas, but added that recreational management could be a challenge.

The conversation turned to vessel baselines and now being a good time to evaluate the appropriateness and utility of vessel baselines in conjunction with the deregulatory E.O. and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) work looking at permit flexibility measures. NEFMC has started discussing vessel baselines, and MAFMC developed a white paper on the topic in March 2025 (**Action Item #3**; circulated to the NRCC after the meeting). All permit baselines limit the increase in length overall to 10 percent and horsepower (HP) to 20 percent. A challenge is that a 350-HP engine manufactured in 1980 is not equivalent to a 350-HP engine manufactured today, and there may not be reasonable or comparable replacement engines available within the current upgrade limits. The *Illex* squid and mackerel fisheries also have hold capacity limits. There was general consensus to pursue the topic.

NEFMC Letter to NEFSC

Dr. O'Keefe provided an overview of a letter NEFMC's Executive Committee sent to NEFSC in December 2024 describing management challenges from the scientific support system. The letter prioritized the issues that could be addressed in the near- and long-term and provided recommendations to address them. The letter noted disruptions in time series, inconsistent approaches to applying survey time-series after the 2009 survey vessel change, missing biological samples, instability in stock advice, and large swings in biomass. The Executive Committee is interested in adding biological plausibility as a TOR for stock assessment results. The letter recommended completing all research track TORs, having an assessment oversight

panel chair external to NEFSC's Population Dynamics Branch, having presentations of assessments and peer reviews aligned to the audience, revising the review schedule to allow for completing requested homework, and suspending Level 1 reviews until the overarching issues are resolved. NEFSC sent a response to the Executive Committee in February 2025. The Executive Committee met with Dr. Hare and Mr. Pentony, and the group agreed to recommendations, including: A comparison of maintaining a single time series vs. splitting time series; continued development and application of Vector Autoregressive Spatio-Temporal (VAST) modeling approaches; consideration of a broader approach to sampling for species, rather than stock specific; better communication of reviewed results, including narratives of how approaches have evolved; and robust assessment peer reviews with adequate time and a large pool of expertise. The group also discussed the need to adapt to reduced staffing and funding, including the potential need to reduce science and management complexity, to use more indicator-based management supported by data updates, and to align priorities.

Dr. Hare expressed NEFSC's commitment to improving its science, working with the Councils, and using the Executive Committee's recommendations to improve. Dr. Moore asked that MAFMC be involved in the initiative because the Councils share the NEFSC's resources. The NRCC agreed that MAFMC staff would provide feedback on the letter to the NRCC (**Action Item #2**).

The NRCC discussed the letter's use in a lawsuit to support an argument that all science in fisheries is bad. Mr. Bellavance noted that the letter was intended to improve the process and not meant to be derogatory; the lawsuit's use of the letter was an unfortunate outcome and unintended consequence.

NRCC Assessment Peer Reviews

Dr. O'Keefe presented NEFMC's proposal to increase the pool of stock assessment peer review candidates. Currently, there are two peer reviews scheduled per year in June and September. The peer review panels include a chair, who is typically from the primary region, and members of the Councils' SSCs and ASMFC's Assessment Science Committee. This often results in the Councils or ASMFC being required to provide more than one panelist. The Councils and ASMFC often have to rely on the same people over and over, which does not bring in new perspectives, and the timing of the reviews is often difficult. Dr. O'Keefe suggested the NRCC discuss NEFMC's proposed process to solicit additional reviewers and consider tasking the NRCC deputies with the development of a more detailed proposal for the NRCC to finalize at its fall 2025 meeting. The pool of peer reviewers could include staff from other science centers, staff from state agencies, past SSC members, academics, and members of research organizations. NEFMC proposes an open solicitation for resumes and a brief description of relevant experience for interested reviewers. The NRCC deputies would review the applications based on specific selection criteria. The approved applicants would be added to a pool of peer review candidates, and applicants may be selected when the normal process does not produce a sufficient number of reviewers. Selection of specific peer reviewers would be made with consideration towards travel expenses. The contract process would be the same as the current process.

Mr. Muffley agreed that MAFMC and its SSC also struggle with this issue. He noted that some SSC members are not necessarily the best fit to review stock assessments because they have other expertise, such as in the social sciences. Mr. Campfield noted that there may be implementation costs associated with external peer reviewers. ASMFC does not pay members to participate in peer reviews. He also remarked that the large majority of assessments are approved without changes, and the NRCC should consider the costs and benefits. Dr. Cournane suggested that a change to more frequent and shorter peer review meetings may also increase the available pool of peer reviewers. The current commitment to five days presents a challenge.

Multiple NRCC members expressed support for the idea. Dr. Hare noted that the NRCC deputies and the AWG have a significant overlap, and the NRCC tasked the AWG with developing the 2026 assessment plan. The NRCC agreed to task the NRCC deputies with developing a full proposed process (**Action Item #4**), after the completion of the proposed 2026 assessment schedule. The proposal will be presented at the fall 2025 NRCC meeting, allowing the solicitation for additional peer review candidates to be implemented by the end of 2025.

Inflation Reduction Act and East Coast Coordination Group Updates

Mr. Beal and Ms. Kerns provided an update from the May 20, 2025, [East Coast Coordination Group](#) (ECCG) meeting, noting that the group had been renamed (previously known as the East Coast Climate Coordination Group or E3CG). The ECCG is broadening its focus from changing climates to changing environments. Action D8 (i.e., Develop a process between management and science organization to prioritize data needs for climate-ready management) has been updated to focus on the prioritization of data needs under evolving ecosystems and evolving NMFS funding and staffing. It was moved from the parking lot to a high priority action. Action D2 (i.e., Use survey mitigation around offshore energy to transition to industry-based surveys or other survey platforms) was moved from a high priority to a medium priority. IRA projects run through 2027 and remain a high priority. The ECCG will work to identify management efficiencies and the minimum information necessary to support the work of the Councils and ASMFC, as well as to coordinate on overlapping issues (e.g., committee-use and procedures, cooperative agreements). The group will complete guidance on Council committee structures ahead of a staff-to-staff workshop planned for fall 2025. The ECCG is coordinating joint workshops in 2026 and supporting the Councils working in parallel to each other.

The next ECCG meeting will be held virtually at 1 pm ET on October 23, 2025.

– *Day 2* –

For-Hire Did-Not-Fish Reports

Mr. White presented an update on the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program's (ACCSP) effort on did-not-fish (DNF) vessel trip reporting (VTR) for the for-hire fleet. At its fall 2024 meeting, the NRCC agreed to receive an update on the implementation of DNF

requirements in the Southeast region (through the Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting Program (SEFHIER)) and Atlantic highly migratory species (HMS) fisheries before making a decision on whether to implement a for-hire DNF requirement in the Greater Atlantic region.

He noted that perspectives on the submission of weekly for-hire DNF reports differ between ACCSP, MRIP, and the regions. However, eTrips has the functionality not to require DNF reports during longer periods of inactivity, which is used in other regions. The existing and proposed DNF reporting requirements in other regions vary between weekly or monthly submissions, and between allowing advanced reporting at any time to no more than 30 days in advance. The weekly requirement during the active season only is intended to build a reporting habit while reducing the reporting burden during periods when the vessel is inactive. Any VTR indicating fishing activity overwrites an overlapping DNF report. The Southeast has required DNF reports for three years, and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is working to address compliance with DNF requirements.

ACCSP has proposed a for-hire VTR methodology that will be evaluated in conjunction with MRIP, pending funding for the evaluation. The methodology would require logbooks and weekly DNF reports. The IRA-funded '*Standardizing East Coast Logbooks*' (a Fishery Information System Program project between GARFO, NMFS' Southeast Regional Office, NMFS' Southeast Fisheries Science Center, and ACCSP) will align the technical requirements of different regional initiatives with the goal of implementing one-stop reporting for vessels on the Atlantic coast. It is likely to include a DNF component. Mr. White noted that one-stop reporting for the East Coast has been delayed, but is mostly available on the Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System (SAFIS). SAFIS eTRIPS will be updated for GARFO, SEFHIER, and HMS in 2025, and FishOnline and VESL will be updated later. It is not clear whether regulatory requirements will be on the same timeline.

Mr. Pentony requested information on the frequency of reporting compliance to help evaluate the impact DNF reporting requirements have had on VTR compliance.

In response to a question regarding the Councils' role in the implementation of one-stop-reporting, Mr. Pentony responded that some aspects of one-stop reporting have been available for years, but regulatory updates are needed for its full implementation. Different regions have different requirements, including paper reporting and different economic data collection. The Councils, rather than NMFS headquarters, would need to take action to fully align requirements across the regions. He also noted that some existing databases have limited the ability to implement one-stop reporting through FishOnline.

In response to a comment about what would be required of vessels that do not hold permits in multiple regions, Mr. White noted that SAFIS eTRIPS will likely build state requirements into the app, but it is not ACCSP's decision whether specific requirements are triggered by the species reported or the permit held. Mr. Pentony added that VTRs require vessels to complete all of the data requirements for each region that has issued the vessel a permit for every trip, regardless of catch. Mr. Bellavance suggested VTRs should require data based on the species

landed, rather than regional requirements. Mr. White responded that ACCSP cannot implement that because it does not align with the current regional requirements.

In response to a question about whether GARFO's reporting systems are capable of collecting DNF reports, Mr. White said that the capability will need to be rebuilt within GARFO's databases. Dr. Moore noted that implementation of for-hire DNF reports were not a priority for GARFO at the fall 2025 NRCC meeting, but that aligning reporting requirements for the East Coast seems to require it. Mr. White agreed that implementation at GARFO would support MRIP's use of for-hire VTRs and would be beneficial. The NRCC agreed to request the ECCG's core team to track the '*Standardizing East Coast Logbooks*' IRA project (**Action Item #6**).

Mr. Gouveia presented an update on GARFO's DNF report white paper. At the spring 2024 NRCC meeting, GARFO presented a white paper on what led to the removal of the DNF report requirement, the value of reinstating it, and the burden of reinstating it, with a focus on both commercial and for-hire fisheries. The data indicated that VTR submissions increased from 2010 to 2015, which was due to a shift from monthly to weekly reporting in the groundfish fishery and the removal of all Greater Atlantic DNF reporting requirements in 2015. The analysis included projections if DNF reporting requirements remained effective after 2015, separated by vessels that fish year-round, vessels that fish part of the year, and vessels that are inactive. The category of inactive vessels included active lobster-only vessels because they did not have a VTR requirement at that time. The projections suggested approximately 5,000 vessels would be required to submit approximately 45,000 reports per year if the DNF reporting requirements were reinstated for all vessels. This is likely an underestimate because reporting requirements have since been implemented for lobster-only vessels. The white paper concluded that reinstatement of DNF reporting requirements would create a significant burden and would likely be ineffective in increasing reporting compliance, and that resources would be better allocated to other management needs.

After the spring 2024 meeting, the white paper's analysis was shifted to focus on for-hire fisheries only, separating vessels holding commercial-only, charter/party-only, recreational-only, and all unique combinations of the three permits. The number of recreational permits increased between 2020 and 2024 while commercial permits remained relatively steady. The number of VTRs submitted by commercial/for-hire combination vessels increased in 2024 due to the implementation of reporting requirements for the lobster fishery. The analysis indicated that approximately 2,400 vessels would be required to submit approximately 25,000 DNF reports per year if the requirement were reinstated for the commercial and for-hire permit combinations. If it were only reinstated for the for-hire permit combinations, approximately 1,500 vessels would be required to submit approximately 17,500 DNF reports per year.

Implementing the DNF reporting for for-hire vessels would require both regulatory support and increased resources to develop the database architecture. The previous DNF reporting requirements were in place when GARFO required paper reports. Now that GARFO has shifted to electronic reporting, the capability would need to be programmed into the database to allow for re-implementation. Re-implementation would also require support to ensure compliance, which will slow down the data auditing, data reconciliation, and permit issuance processes, particularly during the permit renewal period. Even when reports are required throughout the

year, permit holders often submit information much later in the year. While commercial reporting compliance is supported by VTR and dealer matching, there is no equivalent for the for-hire fisheries. Mr. Pentony added that there are a relatively small number of commercial trips that require further investigation, usually due to the dealers and VTRs reporting different landings amounts or inaccurate reporting of permit numbers and/or VTR trip identification numbers.

Mr. DiDomenico (Lund's Fisheries) asked whether permits are issued to vessels that have never submitted VTRs. He expressed frustration with unused permits and the fact that misreporting may result in a Notice of Violation and Assessment, but a complete failure to report does not. Mr. Gouveia confirmed that permits can be, and often are, issued to vessels that have never submitted VTRs. This is especially true for open-access permits, such as many for-hire and recreational permits, which do not require proof of fishing activity or reporting compliance as a condition for annual renewal. He noted that enforcement typically requires corroborating data (e.g., dealer reports, VMS, or observer information) to prove that fishing occurred and a report was withheld. Since reporting compliance for the recreational fishery is only reliant on VTR submissions, it is challenging for enforcement to verify when a fisherman fished or not without actually observing the fishing activity.

Mr. Pentony questioned the benefit of implementing DNF reporting requirements for the for-hire sector. He asked whether the implementation of for-hire DNF reporting requirements has resulted in increased reporting compliance in other regions. He asked how the region would deal with vessels that do not meet the routine reporting requirements, but submit reports for the full year at the end of the year, when it is required to renew their permits. He noted that enforcement does not have the capacity to track down every vessel that does not submit a report each week. Mr. White responded that the implementation of a for-hire DNF reporting requirement would allow additional VTR data to be used in MRIP, which would reduce the percent standard error and improve the data quality. Mr. Bellavance added that frustration with the lack of data-use contributes to low compliance, and that increased data-use is likely to lead to increased compliance.

Mr. McKiernan noted that GARFO's proposal for a for-hire letter of authorization (provided to MAFMC for discussion at its June meeting), and its reliance on conservation equivalency, may require DNF reports. Mr. Pentony acknowledged the previous points, agreed that GARFO would like to see increased use of for-hire trip data, split by modes, and agreed to look into the topic further. However, he noted that NMFS is under resource constraints, with decreased resources and double the number of commercial reports. The addition of for-hire DNF reports would increase the burden on an already under-resourced organization. In light of this constraint, the NRCC agreed to hold off on a decision whether to implement for-hire DNF reports in the Greater Atlantic Region and to receive an update on the broader East Coast effort at its fall 2025 meeting (**Decision #3**). Dr. O'Keefe noted that NEFMC would need to add this to its priority list now if it were to be developed and that she would not recommend moving ahead with it in light of the Administration's push toward deregulatory measures.

Port Biological Sampling Program

Ms. McArdle provided an update on NEFSC's efforts to merge the Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP) and the Port Biological Sampling Program (PBSP) contracts. The merge is intended to achieve efficiencies and increase the number of samples obtained throughout the region. The merge will allow NEFOP to absorb travel costs when observers are able to multitask and collect samples for PBSP. It will allow training costs to be combined under the Fishery Monitoring and Research Division (FMRD) and PBSP's QA/QC to be absorbed into NEFOP's QA/QC.

FMRD has revised NEFOP's Performance Work Statement to include both programs under one contract. It is working on developing training, morphing data structure, and understanding the sampling schedule. FMRD and the Resource Evaluation and Assessment Division are working together to identify improvements for PBSP, including being more responsive to data gaps, and conducting outreach to partners. FMRD has developed a new safety training program for PBSP. PBSP staff attended a demonstration of the Biological Information System Software application and a walkthrough of the Biosampling Monitoring database and are now testing the software and electronic length frequency boards. FMRD are reviewing and revising the PBSP manual to be included in the NEFOP manual and are testing training software. Adding PBSP training to the NEFOP training program is expected to add one to one and a half days of training. FMRD has been coordinating with the Information Technology Division on the Data Information Systems and the Population Dynamics Branch to evaluate data-use and assess the feasibility of integrating PBSP data with existing observer data.

FMRD is working through some outstanding challenges, including biological samples from split stock-area trips. While observers' knowledge of where catch occurs allows catch to be attributed to an area, addressing this challenge requires market category information from dealers. Only approximately 23 percent of samples do not require market categories. FMRD is also evaluating sample length collection tools to expand sampling. Mr. Bellavance added that it is important to resolve the issue of fish lengths versus dealer market categories to make use of collaborative research samples. In 2026, the PBSP request list will be aligned with the NEFOP sea-day schedule. Industry outreach is planned from July through September.

FMRD is working to align the start and end dates of the existing PBSP contracts by extending the contracts with earlier end dates to align with the end of the PBSP QA/QC contract on September 30, 2025. The new NEFOP re-compete contract, including PBSP, is expected to begin on October 1, 2025, although there is currently uncertainty with contract actions and NMFS' budget and priorities. NEFSC posted a solicitation for the re-compete contract on April 18, 2025, and the contract will be awarded in the summer. The contract will include a one-year base contract and four option years and will have built in provisions to routinely track contractor performance and program progress.

In response to a question about the level of sampling expected under the merged contracts, Ms. McArdle responded that the efficiencies gained from the merge are expected to result in approximately 33,000 more samples. However, Mr. Pentony noted that the number of samples will not increase to the level seen in 2017-2019 due to budget constraints.

Dr. Moore noted MAFMC SSC's is interested in the contract merge and may request a presentation. The NRCC agreed to receive an update on the contract merger at its fall 2025 meeting (**Decision #4**).

Mr. Brown provided an update on state and Federal agency coordination on biological data collection. NEFSC is working with several state agencies to plan a one- to one and a half-day workshop in late July to exchange information, share sampling technology, evaluate the collective dependency of sampling programs on Federal funding, and generate recommendations to improve sampling coordination and data accessibility. The NRCC agreed to receive an update on this effort at the fall 2025 NRCC meeting (**Decision #5**).

Mr. McKiernan provided an update on MA DMF's groundfish port sampling project. The project was developed in response to shortcomings anticipated in the groundfish assessment, particularly for cod, due to poor sample availability. It is funded by an Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act grant and the Conservation Law Foundation. The funding has allowed MA DMF to add staff and purchase sampling equipment. Some of the more active groundfish advocates have worked closely with MA DMF on the project, which has built trust between the industry and the agency. MA DMF worked with NEFSC assessment biologists to determine sample areas and methods to access fish from rarely sampled stocks and areas. MA DMF then identified vessels operating in hard-to-sample areas and helped establish communication between the vessels and the scientists. The samples are collected at the tow level and are set aside in a zip-tied container to prevent contamination. There is a conversion factor study to update length:weight and round:gutted weight ratios. There were 120 unique dealers last year and 73 unique dealers this year, with the majority of sampling around Gloucester. A hiring freeze earlier this year slowed progress, but it has since been lifted.

Mr. McKiernan noted that the continuation of the project is dependent on continued Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act funding and expressed hope that it would continue. The project is proof-of-concept that captains can isolate catch from particular areas for sampling. It is successfully demonstrating data improvements with members of the industry. The work with the fleet has also helped the agency be more aware of trends and emerging issues, which has been valuable. While the model may not be replicable in all states, it is working well for MA DMF.

Multiple NRCC members expressed support and appreciation for the project. Mr. Muffley noted there are a lot of species that need port sampling and asked the cost of scaling the program to other species. Dr. Hare noted that the program is not limited to cod and agreed to provide a full list of the species included in the project (**Action Item #7**).

Updates on Previous Action Items

The NRCC reviewed action items from the fall 2025 NRCC meeting. The group agreed to revisit the topic of updating the Councils' operating agreements at the fall 2026 meeting (**Decision #7**). Mr. Pentony said that the omnibus action to support the use of on-demand gear is in process, and GARFO has provided, and will continue to provide, updates at MAFMC and NEFMC meetings.

Review Action Items and Decisions

The NRCC reviewed the draft list of meeting decisions and action items. The NRCC agreed to task the AWG with resolving the scheduling conflict between NEFMC and Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization meetings (as part of **Action Item #1**). The group agreed to set a date for a virtual intersessional meeting in August via email (**Action Item #5**), to use the same location in Annapolis for the fall meeting on November 5-6, 2025, and to set the spring 2026 meeting date either via email or at the fall meeting.

Dr. Moore acknowledged that Mr. Bellavance, Mr. Townsend, and Mr. Cimino would no longer serve on the NRCC, as their terms on their respective member organizations were coming to an end. He, and the other NRCC members, thanked them for their support and participation in the NRCC.