

Transboundary Management Guidance Committee Intersessional Meeting May 7, 2026 – Webinar 1:00 PM (EDT)/2:00 PM (ADT)

SUMMARY

Overview

The Transboundary Management Guidance Committee (TMGC) held its spring intersessional meeting to review US and Canadian fishery and management updates, review outcomes from the 2025 ISATS process and consider proposals for 2026, plan for 2026 US/Canada activities, and discuss a TMGC/ISATS process review.

Participants

- TMGC Members:
 - Canada: Alain d’Entremont (Canadian Co-Chair), Kathy Cooper-MacDonald, Melanie Barrett, Aaron d’Entremont, Tyson Paul
 - US: Cate O’Keefe (US Co-Chair), Spencer Talmage, Jon Hare, Eric Hansen, Jackie Odell, Dan Salerno
- Additional US/Canada Participants:
 - Canada: Tara McIntyre – Canadian ISATS Co-Chair; Josh Bragg – DFO International Fisheries Management Negotiations
 - US: Mike Simpkins – US ISATS Co-Chair; Robin Frede – NEFMC; Heather Nelson – NOAA Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office
- Several members of the public attended the virtual meeting

Meeting Summary

The Co-Chairs reviewed the agenda with the group, and no additional items were added.

US Updates – Organization, Management, and Fisheries

The New England Fishery Management Council (Council) has assumed the organizational lead for the US/Canada process for the US. Council staff will support TMGC and Steering Committee logistics, communications, scheduling, and meeting coordination. The Council’s role is intended to improve administrative efficiency and provide greater flexibility for contracting and meeting support. Membership updates included the departure of John Pappalardo due to completion of his Council term.

Spencer Talmage provided an overview of recent management actions and rulemaking affecting transboundary stocks including the following:

Emergency Measures and Framework Actions:

- The 2025 fishing year began under emergency measures, which implemented fishing year 2025 US TACs for Eastern Georges Bank cod and haddock.

- Georges Bank yellowtail flounder remained at the placeholder value established in Framework 66.

Framework 69:

- This action became effective on March 9, 2026 and established specifications for several groundfish stocks for fishing years 2025–2027, including the agreed-upon shared TACs for Eastern Georges Bank cod and haddock.
- Participants noted that implementation occurred very late in the fishing year, creating operational uncertainty for industry.

Amendment 25:

- This action revises Atlantic cod stock structure from two stocks to four stocks and was initially disapproved for procedural reasons.
- The Council revised and resubmitted the action, and NOAA Fisheries approved the measures on April 6, 2026. Implementation regulations are being finalized.

Framework 72:

- This action is expected to be implemented later in 2026 and will establish specifications for several stocks for fishing years 2026–2028.
- The US fishing year began on May 1, 2026 under default specifications pending final implementation of Framework 72.

Robin Frede discussed evolving Council policy regarding the role of the SSC in relation to TMGC catch advice, which currently functions as advice confirmation. The Council is reviewing regulatory language to allow TMGC advice to serve as the US Overfishing Limit (OFL) and Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) for transboundary stocks. The proposed change is intended to improve efficiency and streamline implementation.

Preliminary 2025 catch information indicated relatively low utilization of Eastern Georges Bank cod and haddock quotas, minimal groundfish yellowtail flounder catch, and continued scallop fishery yellowtail bycatch. Fishery performance information indicated that 2025 catch levels for cod and haddock were lower than 2024, reduced fishing effort was associated with lower default quotas and delayed implementation of final specifications, and industry uncertainty affected fishing decisions throughout the year. Spring seasonal fishing opportunities were partially missed because final quotas were not implemented until late in the fishing year. Participants noted that Georges Bank haddock quota reductions had substantial impacts on fishing behavior, lease markets, vessel operations, and purchase agreements.

Canadian Updates – Organization, Management, and Fisheries

Alain d'Entremont delivered the Canadian update on behalf of Kathy Cooper-MacDonald. Canadian TMGC membership remained unchanged with representatives from DFO Resource Management and Science, fixed and mobile gear interests, and Indigenous commercial communal representation.

Canadian fishery updates indicated approximately 80% utilization of both cod and haddock quotas with very low yellowtail flounder catch. Some cod discard adjustments were added

following comparisons between observed and non-observed trips and yellowtail catch was primarily associated with scallop fishery bycatch.

Observer coverage increased relative to previous years, both in percentage of observed trips and percentage of observed landings. There were 155 observed trips out of 249 total.

A policy change in 2026 no longer permits fixed gear vessels to direct for cod. Previously, only mobile gear fleets were restricted from directed cod fishing. Fixed gear vessels may still participate in fisheries for Atlantic halibut, haddock, and pollock where cod may still be encountered as bycatch.

Preliminary 2026 winter fishery activity (January 1 to February 1) showed reduced haddock and cod utilization relative to this timing in previous years and significantly lower total fishing effort. Factors contributing to lower activity include lower quotas, alternative fishing opportunities elsewhere, and strategic decisions by fleets to conserve quota for later in the year.

ISATS: Recap of 2025 and Planning for 2026

The ISATS Co-Chairs, Mike Simpkins and Tara MacIntyre, provided a presentation on the Integration of Science Advice for Transboundary Species (ISATS) process, including reflections on the 2025 cycle and planning considerations for the 2026 process. The group discussion focused on improving the ISATS process, particularly around communication between the Technical Science Committee (TSC), TMGC, and science staff from both countries. Participants discussed ways to streamline the process, reduce workload, improve transparency, and provide TMGC members with more useful information for management negotiations and industry consultations.

2025 ISATS Report

Several TMGC members expressed concerns that the 2025 ISATS report lacked sufficient detail and explanatory context. They noted the need for more robust descriptions of how model assumptions and methods influence outputs and how managers should consider different domestic products to support resource allocation negotiations and catch advice decisions. They highlighted the challenges of explaining scientific differences to industry stakeholders and suggested increased clarity to ensure industry confidence. The TMGC stated that they wanted to maintain efficiency in the process and avoid increased workloads for science staff. However, they cautioned that lack of clarity in the ISATS report could lead to unintended consequences, specifically that industry members may simply favor whichever assessment produces the most favorable outcome, managers may struggle to build trust in the process, and science advice could become difficult to defend during negotiations.

Suggested improvements included:

- Side-by-side model assumption comparisons
 - The group noted independent activities on this topic that were conducted in 2025 and requested that each country share reports.
- Robust descriptions of how model differences may be interpreted for management applications

- The group emphasized the challenges in translating separate domestic science products into joint management advice.
- Clear descriptions of how differences in spatial boundaries and stock definitions influence model outputs
 - They highlighted confusion around biomass distribution calculations and how to explain differences between Eastern Georges Bank, Western Georges Bank, and the broader Georges Bank.

The ISATS Co-Chairs welcomed additional feedback via correspondence by May 22nd.

2026 ISATS Process Proposals

The ISATS Co-Chairs presented proposals for the Technical Science Committee process, including convening the TSC meeting in mid-July, followed by the TMGC Informational Session, as well as the possibility to draft the ISATS report via correspondence. They noted that there will be three assessment updates (Canadian EGB cod and haddock, US GB haddock) conducted this year that are not expected to have fundamental differences from previous model configurations, which may allow drafting of the ISATS report via correspondence in lieu of the TSC meeting.

The group discussed an alternative proposal that would allow TMGC members to listen directly to the TSC meeting in lieu of the TMGC Informational Session. TMGC members indicated general support for this approach, noting that it may improve understanding of model assumptions and methods, could improve efficiency to reduce the number of meetings in July, and provide an opportunity for follow-up questions via correspondence after the meeting concludes.

The ISATS Co-Chairs acknowledged that the proposal had merit but would need additional consideration. They noted the potential need to restructure the TSC meeting to include more digestible information and context, which could increase workloads for science staff. They emphasized that the ISATS process was intended to increase efficiency through reliance on domestic assessment processes and products, and reports are intended to provide context and comparison without recreating the heavy workload associated with the former TRAC process. They requested feedback from TMGC about the tradeoffs between earlier engagement with scientific information compared to more polished and digestible reports following the TSC meeting.

Consensus decisions included:

- Scheduling the TSC meeting in July with a contingency to pivot to a correspondence ISATS report
 - The group agreed on a contingency plan decision deadline by July 2nd.
- Drafting an alternative July meeting schedule for continued discussion that would include TMGC members listening to the TSC in lieu of the TMGC Informational Session.
 - The ISATS Co-Chairs agreed to develop this alternative for distribution to the TMGC before the May 13th Steering Committee meeting. TMGC will consider the alternative option via correspondence.

2026 Planning

The group discussed scheduling the fall 2026 TMGC and Steering Committee meetings and identified Boston, MA as the preferred location with the US serving as the 2026 host. They reviewed timing constraints, including other national and regional meetings, and considered early October as the most viable timeframe. Additional details for the fall meetings will be developed in the coming months.

Proposal for 2027 Process Review

The group discussed conducting a review of the TMGC and ISATS processes in 2027, with consensus reached that some form of review should occur. Participants emphasized that the review should focus on practical operational improvements while maintaining the collaborative scientific foundation of the bilateral process. They acknowledged that the recommendations from the 2024 Process Improvement Workshop have not been fully implemented due to unforeseen events and that the transition toward the ISATS framework continues to evolve.

Proposed objectives for the review included:

- Evaluating the effectiveness of the ISATS framework following 2026 implementation
- Reviewing communication pathways between scientific and management bodies
- Assessing whether timelines are adequately supporting domestic implementation
- Identifying opportunities to reduce process and science uncertainties
- Clarifying roles and expectations among participating organizations and individuals

The group suggested conducting the review in fall 2027 noting budget limitations and other commitments in spring 2027. The TMGC Co-Chairs agreed to draft options for review logistics and objectives to facilitate follow-up group decisions for scheduling.

Closing Remarks

Cate O'Keefe indicated that the Meeting Summary would be drafted and distributed with a request for feedback before the May 13th Steering Committee meeting.

The Co-Chairs thanked all participants and presenters, and the meeting adjourned at 2:48pm EDT/3:48pm ADT.