FY 2026-2030 Monkfish OFLs and ABCs

Scientific and Statistical Committee Meeting

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New England Fishery Management Council
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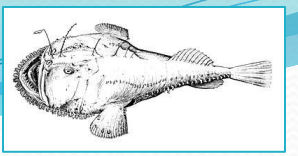
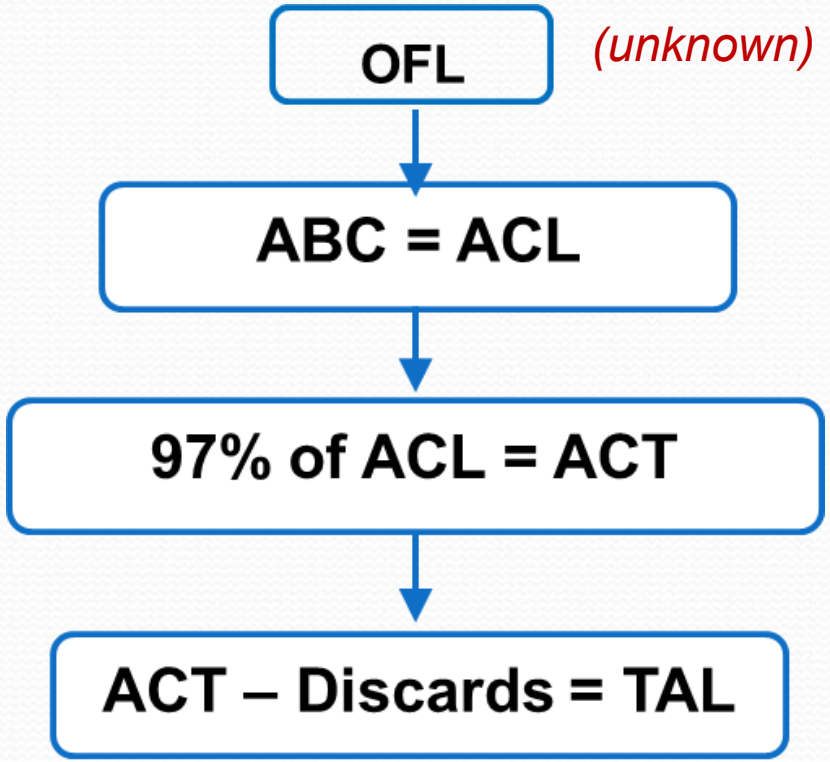
Framework Adjustment 17



1. Overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) for North and South for FY 2026-2028 (default for FY 2029-2030)
2. Subsequent specifications (e.g., discard deduction, Total Allowable Landings)
3. Effort controls (e.g., Monkfish Days-at-Sea and possession limits)



SSC Task Today:

1. **Recommend OFLs and ABCs for northern and southern monkfish stocks for FY 2026-2030**

Terms of Reference: OFLs, ABCs

A. Consider the results of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's (NEFSC) 2025 Data Update for northern and southern monkfish and information provided by the Council's Monkfish Plan Development Team (PDT).
B. Recommend OFLs and ABCs for monkfish in both the northern and southern management areas for FY 2026 – 2030 (defaults for FY 2029 and 2030) that will prevent overfishing, meet the objectives of the fishery management plan, and consider the Council's Risk Policy Statement and Concept.

Monkfish Data Updates

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2025 NEFSC data updates

- NEFSC provided a data update for northern and southern monkfish in lieu of a management assessment in 2025. This update included northern and southern monkfish landings and discards through 2024 (landings beginning in 1964 and discards beginning in 1980), bottom trawl survey index of northern and southern monkfish from 1963 through 2025 (biomass, kg/tow), and stratified mean indices at length for the bottom trawl survey for northern and southern monkfish from 1963 through 2025 (*note: this is included in data update documents*).

U.S. commercial monkfish landings and discards (mt) by management area from 2018 – 2024

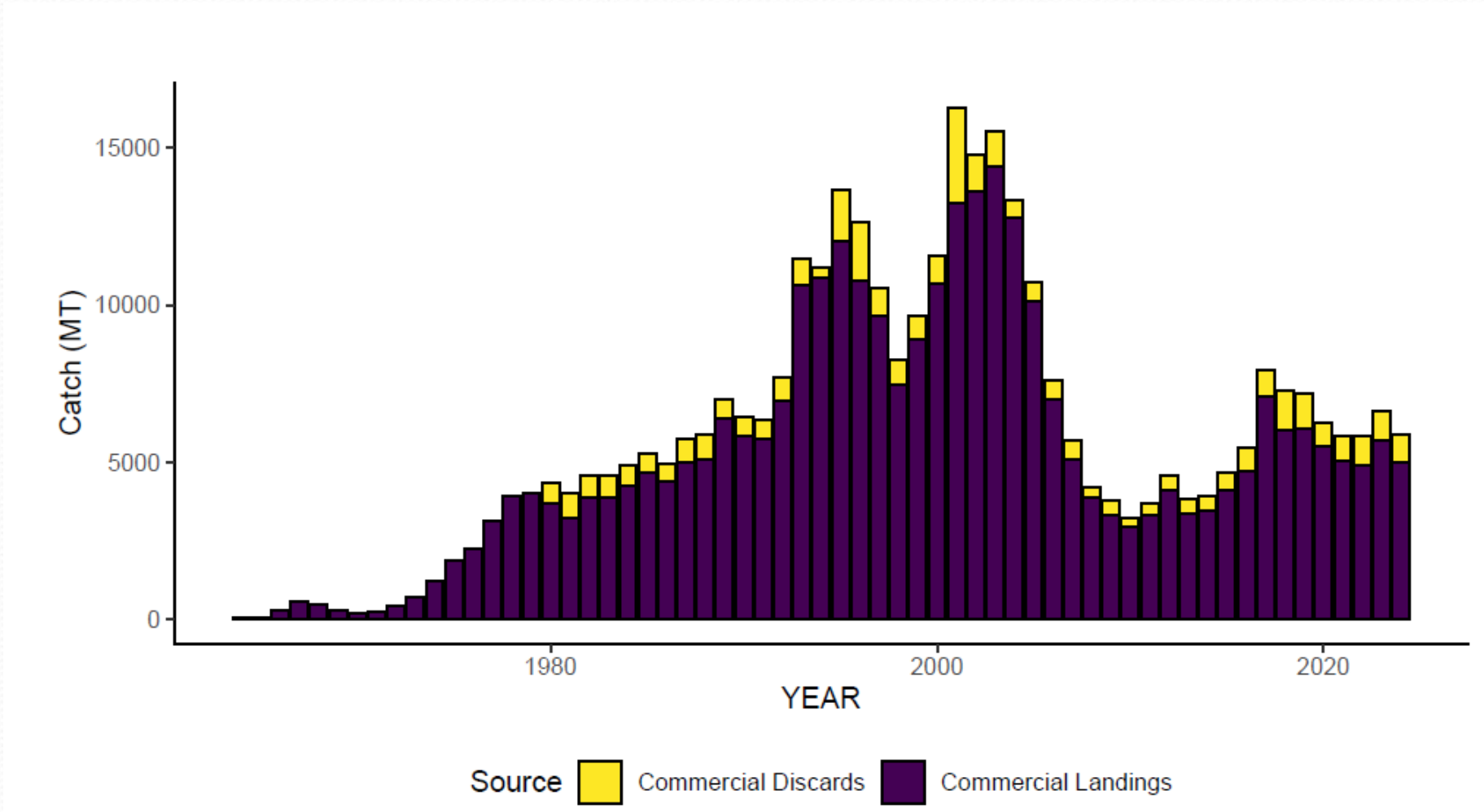
Calendar Year	Northern Fishery Management Area		Southern Fishery Management Area	
	Monkfish Landings (mt)	Monkfish Discards (mt)	Monkfish Landings (mt)	Monkfish Discards (mt)
2018	6,009	1,253	4,388	3,476
2019	6,084	1,080	4,373	3,358
2020	5,508	721	2,644	2,263
2021	5,043	788	1,954	2,317
2022	4,900	947	1,818	1,758
2023	5,687	914	1,364	1,634
2024	4,998	886	961	2,134

North:
- Landings have fluctuated over 2022-2024 while discards have declined

South:
- Landings have generally declined over 2022-2024 while discards have fluctuated

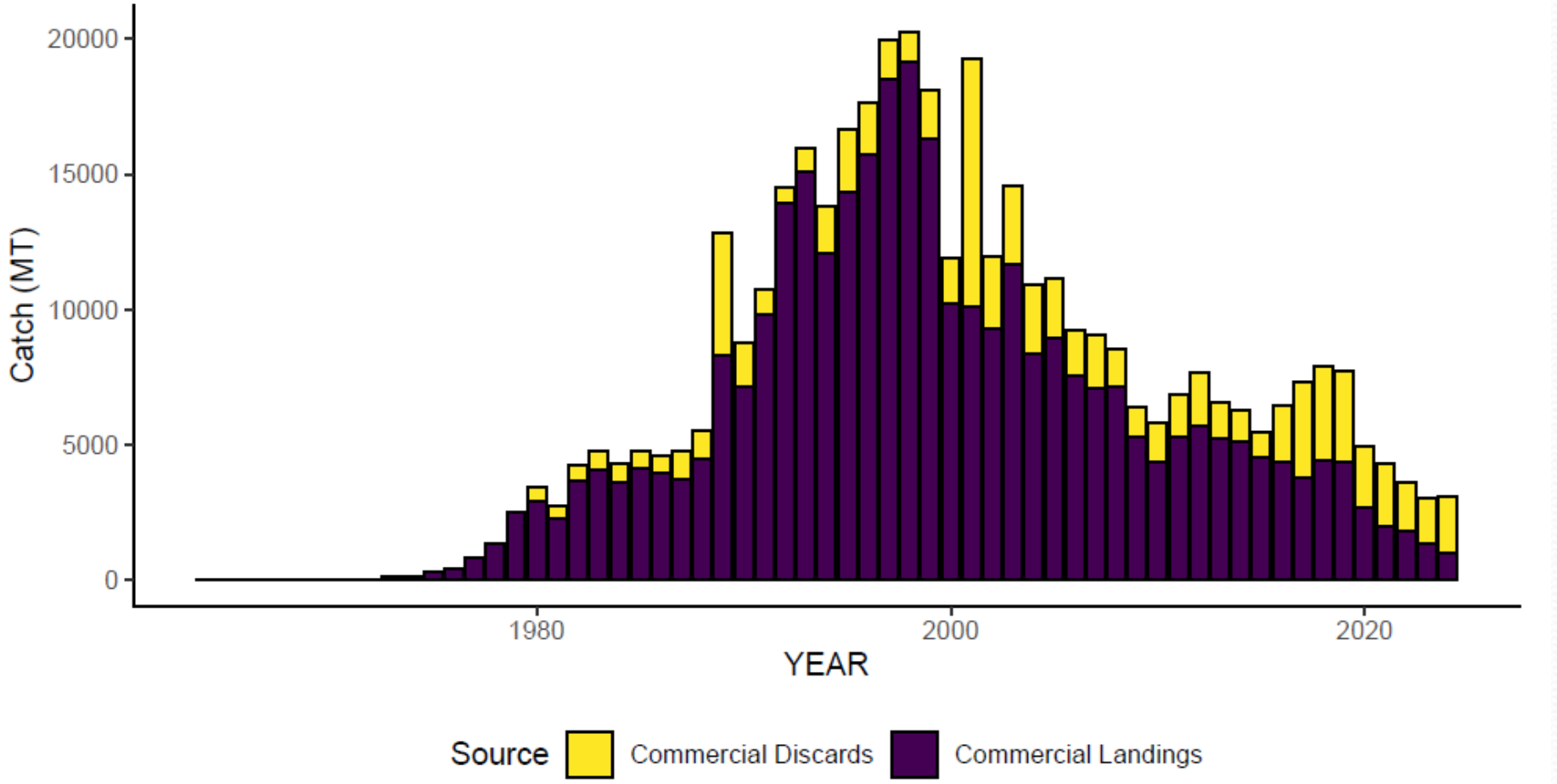
Source: 2025 NEFSC Data Update; additional years provided in data update

Monkfish landings (mt) and discards (mt) in the **Northern** Fishery Management Area from calendar year 1964 through 2024.



Source: 2025 NEFSC Data Update

Monkfish landings (mt) and discards (mt) in the **Southern** Fishery Management Area from calendar year 1964 through 2024.



Source: 2025 NEFSC Data Update

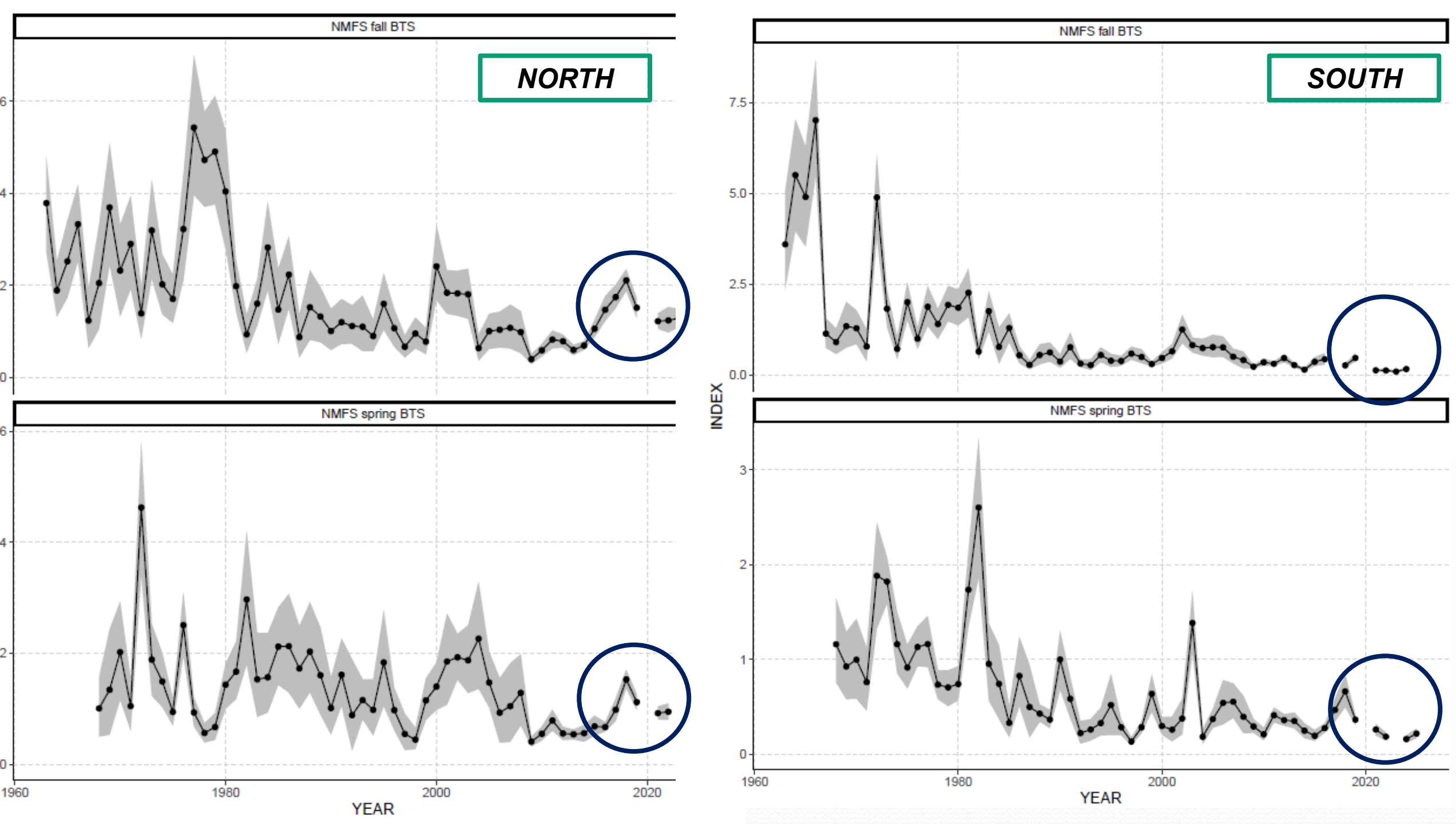
Bottom trawl survey spring and fall index (biomass, kg/tow) of northern and southern monkfish from 2018 – 2025.

Calendar Year	Northern Fishery Management Area		Southern Fishery Management Area	
	Fall index	Spring index	Fall index	Spring index
2018	2.1099	1.5277	0.2657	0.6615
2019	1.5151	1.1198	0.4706	0.3634
2020				
2021	1.2224	0.9202	0.1322	0.2588
2022	1.2406	0.9460	0.1263	0.1832
2023	1.2865		0.0955	
2024	1.3245	1.6959	0.1655	0.1584
2025		1.5028		0.2162

North:
- Fall: index increased by ~0.04 kg/tow in each of the last three years
- Spring: index increased by ~0.75 kg/tow from 2022 to 2024 (missing survey index in 2023) and declined by ~0.2 kg/tow from 2024 to 2025

South:
- Fall: index marginally decreased over 2021 to 2023 and increased by 0.07 kg/tow from 2023 to 2024
- Spring: index followed a similar trend as the fall during those time periods

Source: 2025 NEFSC Data Update; additional years provided in data update


NMFS fall BTS
NORTH
NMFS fall BTS
SOUTH
INDEX
NMFS spring BTS
NMFS spring BTS
0
2
4
6
0.0
2.5
5.0
7.5
1
3
1960
1980
2000
2020
YEAR

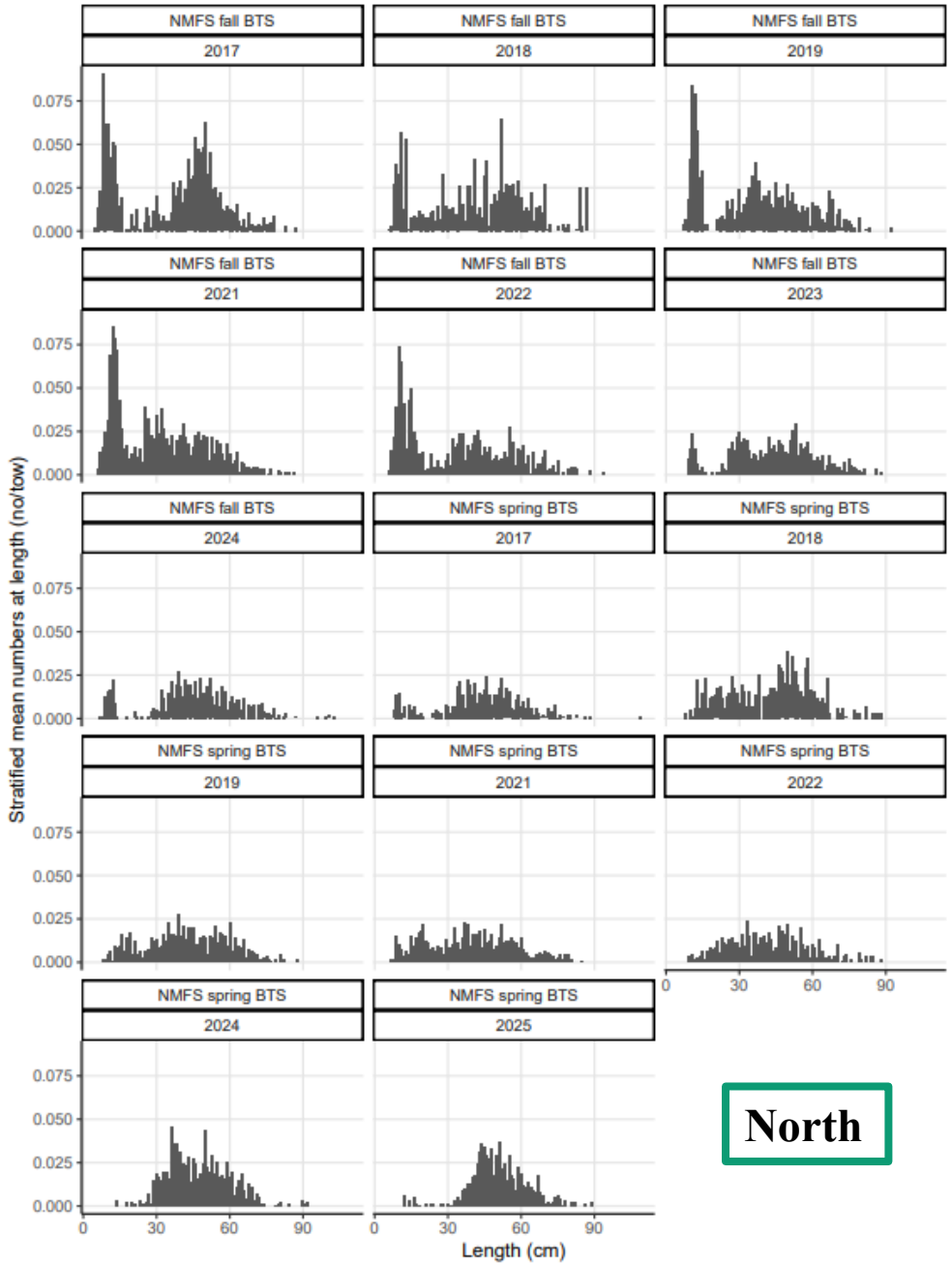


Figure 5: Stratified Mean Indices at Length for the Bottom Trawl Survey of Northern Monkfish from 2017 through 2025. Survey was incomplete in Fall 2020, Spring 2020, and Spring 2023.

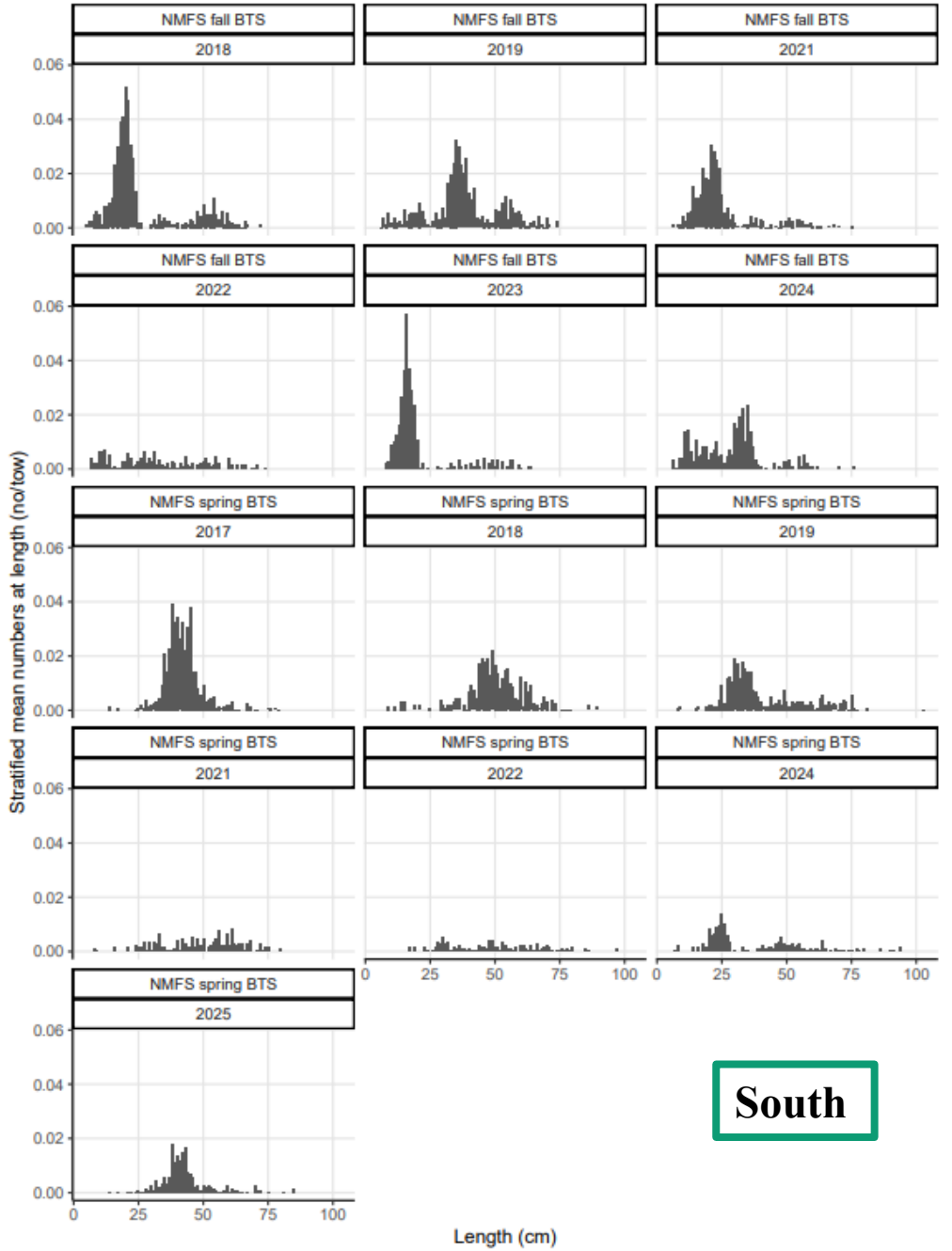


Figure 5: Stratified Mean Indices at Length for the Bottom Trawl Survey of Southern Monkfish from 2017 through 2025. Survey was incomplete in Fall 2020, Spring 2020, and Spring 2023.

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Brief history of OFLs & ABCs

- Analytical assessment failed in 2016 → precluded use of OFL and ABC control rules
- Since then, monkfish catch advice developed with I-Smooth approach, though ABC setting has not followed consistent methods
  - FY 2020-2022 ABC = trawl survey multiplier * latest ABC
  - FY 2023-2025 ABC = average of (trawl survey multiplier * latest ABC) & (trawl survey multiplier * latest catch)
    - *Why? To transition to intended application of I-Smooth approach while lessening the impact of reduced quota*

Overfishing Limit

- OFLs for both Northern and Southern areas are unknown (as of 2023)
- Why?
  - OFL cannot be calculated without absolute biomass and a fishing mortality rate
  - Unknown stock status (as of 2023)
  - Age-based assessment invalidated in 2016

Management Area	Status Quo OFL	PDT recommended OFL for FY 2026-2030
Northern	Unknown	Unknown
Southern	Unknown	Unknown

Acceptable Biological Catch

- 2025 is the first year with a data update for monkfish
  - I-Smooth assessment method was not updated
  - FMP does not include guidance on how data updates would be used to change catch advice from existing ABCs
  - Status quo ABCs have been in place for the past three fishing years (FY 23-25)
- Applicable across both northern and southern management areas:
  - No substantial change to the catch and survey indices in data update that indicate the specifications in place via 2022 assessment are inappropriate
  - PDT concerned about stratified mean indices at length and applicability for monkfish → difficult to interpret & detect new recruitment events without additional analysis and unclear if these figures are informative for monkfish
    - Other info doesn't suggest a new year class

PDT Considerations for Northern ABC

- Fall index shows a slight increase over 2021 – 2024 (range of 1.2224 to 1.3245 kg/tow), spring index shows slight increase followed by a larger decrease over 2021 – 2025 (excluding missing survey year 2023; range of 0.9202 to 1.6959 kg/tow)
- Other comments about the data update:
  - Proportion of discards relative to commercial landings and the commercial landings appear relatively stable in recent years; commercial monkfish landings range of 4,900 mt to 5,687 over 2022-2024.

→ Recommend Status Quo for Northern ABC

PDT Considerations for Southern ABC

- Fall index shows similar index values over 2021 - 2024 (range of 0.0955 to 0.1655 kg/tow), spring index shows a slight decrease followed by a slight increase over 2021 – 2025 (excl. missing survey year 2023; range of 0.2588 to 0.1584 kg/tow)
- Southern monkfish landings appear to be driven primarily by market conditions & presence/interaction with skates
- Missing scallop dredge survey index from data update BUT proportion of discards relative to landings has remained ~ stable & overall decline in landings
- FY 2024 year-end catch accounting: ~3.4 M lb dead discards vs ~1.8M lb landings; prior data show most discards from scallop dredge gear

→ Monkfish appear available for the directed fishery but external factors at play unrelated to monkfish biomass; does not appear to be justification for ABC +/-

- Other comments to consider: Scallop fishing effort in the Mid-Atlantic is likely to be minimal in FY26, possible minor increase in FY27, shifting effort towards Georges Bank
  → Anticipate minimal unforeseen mortality for southern monkfish

→ Recommend Status Quo for Southern ABC

Default Values for FY 2029-2030

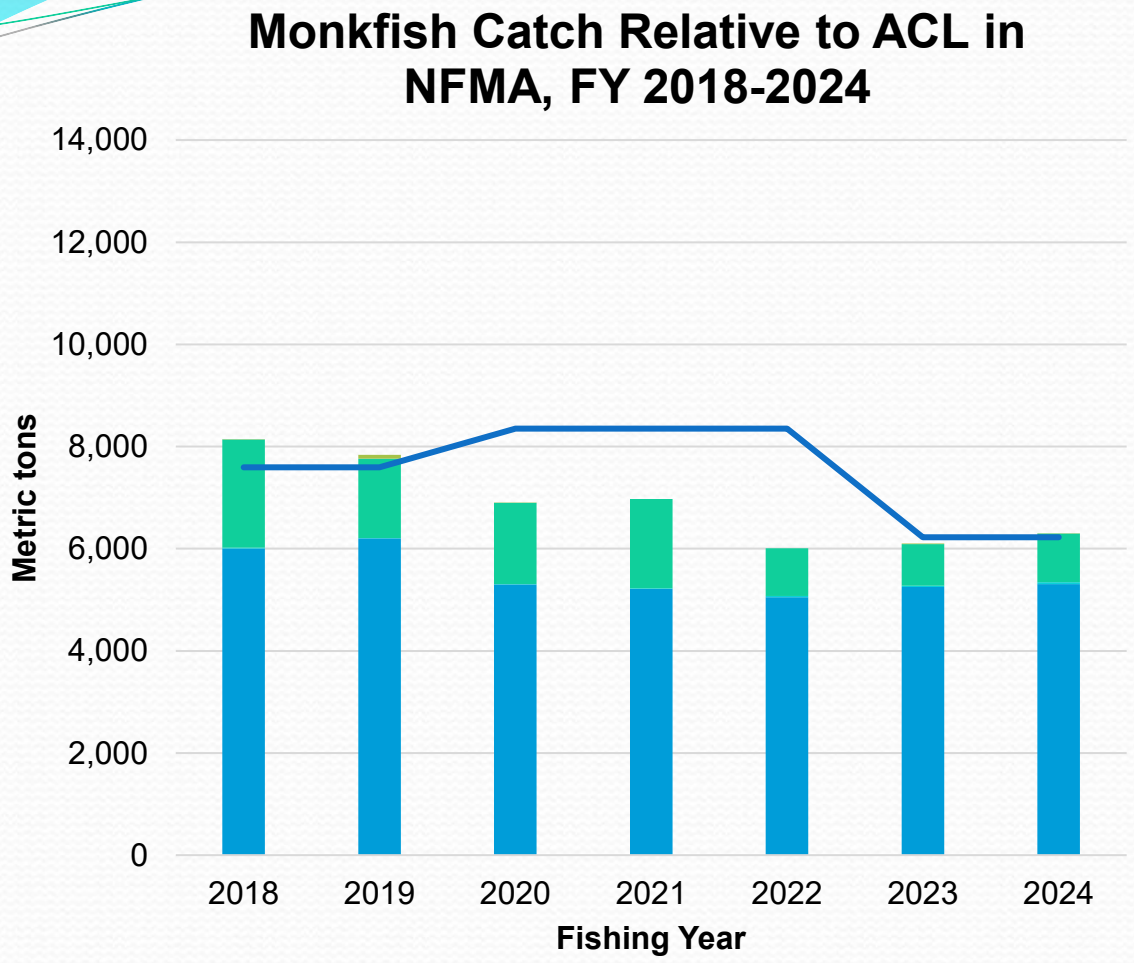
- SSC traditionally recommended monkfish specifications at 3-year intervals
  - Recent reductions in federal resources highlighted potential need for more flexibility in management/regulations
  - Council is requesting specifications for FY 2029-2030 as defaults
  - PDT discussed a precautionary approach for default years (reduction in ABCs from FY 2026-2028 given uncertainty in future years), though PDT recommends status quo ABCs for default years

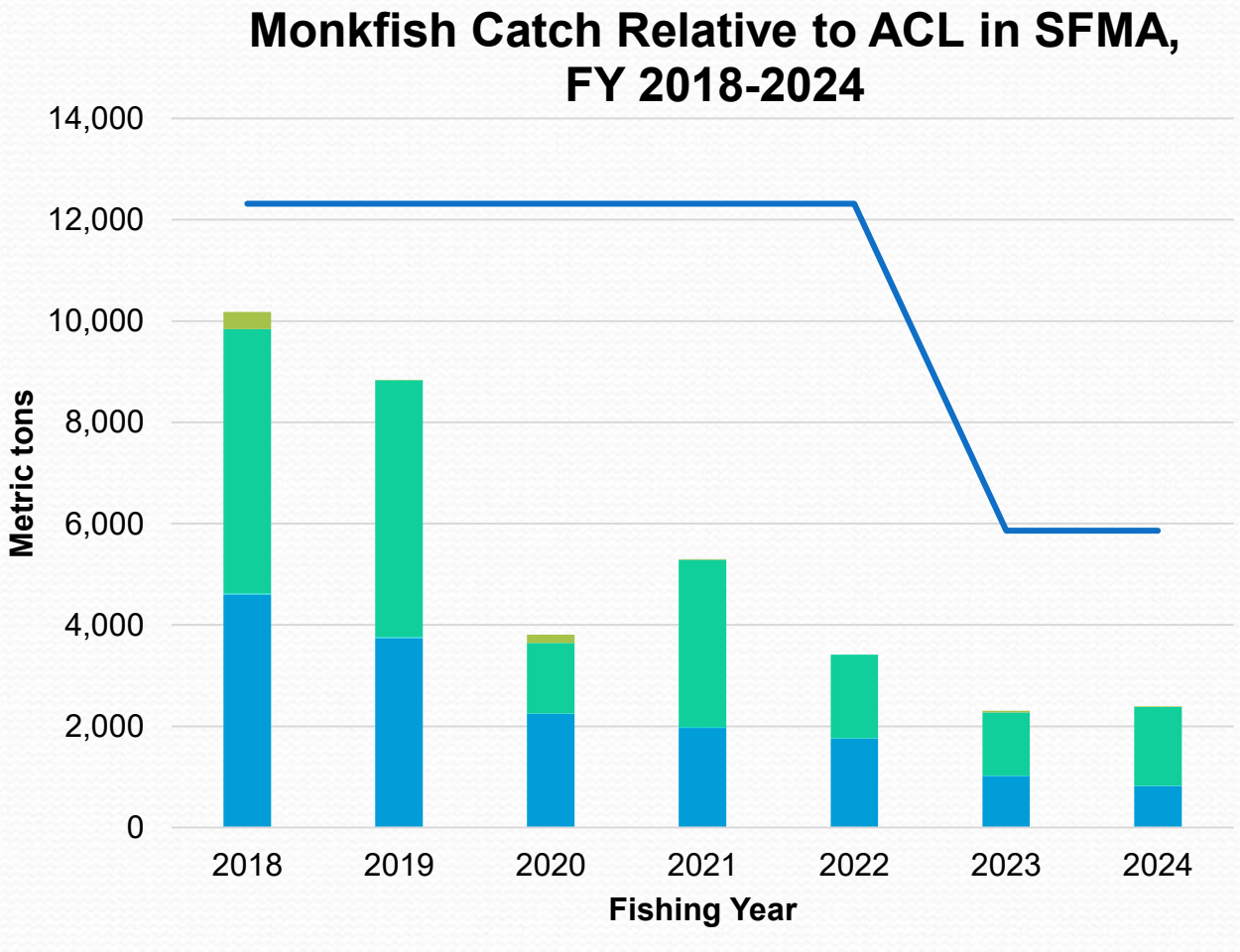
Other considerations

- Directed fishery includes harvesting monkfish using a Monkfish day-at-sea with gillnet (targeting skates too); also caught as part of groundfish trawl fishery; & caught as bycatch in scallop dredge fishery
- 525 limited access permits in FY 2023 (520 in FY22, 542 in FY21)
  - 226 landed > 1 lb monkfish in FY23 (232 in FY22, 258 in FY21)
  - 106 landed > 10,000 lb monkfish in FY23 (108 in FY22, 127 in FY21)
- Landings relative to TALs
  - North: ~101% in FY24, ~100% in FY23, ~78% in FY22
  - South: 23% in FY24, 29% in FY23, 30% in FY22
- Other constraints: effort controls creating inefficiencies, lower skate possession limits, low price, shift in timing for fishing

→ Additional information included in Risk Policy Matrix (doc. biii)

Fishery Performance





Summary of PDT Recommendations

Management Area	Status Quo OFL	PDT recommended OFL (FY 2026-2030)
Northern	Unknown	Unknown
Southern	Unknown	Unknown

Management Area	Status Quo ABC	PDT recommended ABC (FY 2026-2030)
Northern	6,224 mt	6,224 mt
Southern	5,861 mt	5,861 mt

SSC Recommendations in 2022 & 2023 (remand)

SSC Recommendation #4 & #5	PDT Response
4. The SSC recommends that alternative assessment methods for monkfish should be investigated in the next assessment iteration.	Unfortunately, alternative assessment methods and consideration of additional survey indices and swept-area biomass estimates, etc. have not been evaluated for monkfish. The 2025 monkfish management track assessment was cancelled, and the 2027 monkfish research track assessment has been paused, both of which are due to a change in resource and staffing availability. It is unclear what resources may become available in the future for exploring alternative assessment methods and additional survey indices.
5. The SSC recommends consideration of additional survey indices, analyses of differences in survey indices, and swept-area biomass estimates derived from survey indices be analyzed.	