



# New England Fishery Management Council

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## New England Council Initiates Skate Framework Adjustment 6; Discusses Industry-Funded Monitoring and Research Steering

The New England Fishery Management Council today initiated Framework Adjustment 6 to the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan to consider alternatives for prolonging the skate wing fishery. The intent of this action is to better utilize total allowable landings and keep the fishery open as long as possible. The Council agreed to take this step at the request of industry. Many skate fishermen approached the Council during its December 2017 meeting asking that the framework be a 2018 priority.

The Skate Plan Development Team – with considerable input and guidance from the Skate Committee and Advisory Panel – will work over the next few months to analyze possession limit alternatives and other approaches that would help meet the framework’s goals and objectives. The Council will receive a progress report at its April meeting in Mystic, CT. Final action will occur either in April or June with the intent of having new measures in place during the second half of the 2018 fishing year, which ends April 30, 2019.

### Industry-Funded Monitoring

The Council also received an update from the National Marine Fisheries Service’s (NMFS) Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) on an electronic



*Skates captured during a cooperative research trip. – Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) photo*

monitoring (EM) project that GARFO and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) conducted from August 2016 to January 2018 aboard 11 midwater trawl vessels participating in the Atlantic herring and mackerel fisheries. An estimated 1,000 hours of EM footage was collected on 126 herring trips, and 32 of those trips also were monitored by at-sea observers. The project was designed to evaluate whether or not electronic monitoring is an effective tool for tracking catch, discards, and slippage events on midwater trawl vessels involved in these fisheries.

In April 2017, the Council took final action on an Omnibus Industry-Funded Monitoring (IFM) Amendment that contains alternatives for potentially allowing EM and portside sampling as monitoring options for the



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Atlantic herring midwater trawl fishery. Mackerel is managed by the Mid-Atlantic Council, which has not acted yet on this amendment. The proposed rule for the New England Council's action is being developed by NMFS and has a target implementation date of fall 2018.

Once the amendment is in place, herring fishermen will need to pay a substantial portion of the costs associated with monitoring the fishery, as implied in the term "industry-funded monitoring." NMFS's final report and recommendations resulting from the EM project will be presented to the Council at its April 17-19 meeting.

*The final EM project report is expected to help the Council better assess whether accurate estimates of catch – both retained and discarded – can be obtained through a combination of electronic monitoring and portside sampling.*

Herring industry members also are interested in learning whether or not these new tools can be more cost effective than at-sea monitoring.

## Setting Research Priorities

Based on recommendations from its Research Steering Committee (RSC), the Council endorsed several improvements to its research priority-setting process. It also provided guidance on improving the format for listing and tracking the priorities.

- The Council agreed that plan development teams should continue to have the lead in developing and updating research needs. The RSC and Scientific and Statistical Committee will review research priorities before the Council is asked to approve them. The RSC will take the lead in tracking whether or not research needs are being met.



*In conjunction with the first day of the New England Fishery Management Council's January 30-31 meeting in Portsmouth, NH, GARFO and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center hosted a vendor show to help fishermen familiarize themselves with available at-sea, electronic, and portside monitoring service providers. Four at-sea monitoring service providers and seven electronic monitoring providers participated, as well representatives from two state agencies that regularly conduct portside sampling. Pictured above are representatives from MRAG Americas, which currently provides services for the Northeast Fisheries Observer Program and others.*

*– NEFMC photo*



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- The Council, as a first step, also supported using a spreadsheet rather than a Word document to list research priorities. However, it directed the Research Steering Committee to explore the feasibility of developing a searchable database as a longer-term goal.
- The Council endorsed the use of a more informative labeling system to describe research priorities that includes:
  - A description/rationale for the work;
  - A priority category label such as near-term, long-term/strategic, or urgent/immediate;
  - An indication of the fishery management plan and/or species the work applies to;
  - An indication of whether or not the priority is included on other lists such as the research set-aside program or stock assessment data collection; and
  - The research status, indicating whether or not the work is underway or has been completed.

In related actions, the Council agreed to: (1) ask the Council Coordination Committee to urge NMFS to require anyone applying for national research program funding to indicate if and how their proposals would meet a regional fishery management council research priority in addition to national priorities; and (2) add, as a Council research priority, a more thorough evaluation of methods to reduce seabed impacts by ground cables used in trawl fisheries.



The Council also received a short briefing from its Research Steering Committee on the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Northeast Cooperative Research Program activities, as well as an overview of recent management reviews conducted for three completed projects. These were:

- (1) the Seasonal Scallop Bycatch Survey;
- (2) the River Herring Bycatch Avoidance project; and
- (3) Effects of Fishing on Herring Aggregations.

- Information about these projects and all Research Steering Committee documents used at this meeting are available at <https://www.nefmc.org/library/january-2018-research-steering-committee-report>.
- The Council's Research Steering Committee webpage can be found at <https://www.nefmc.org/committees/research-steering-committee>.
- Questions? Contact Dr. Rachel Feeney, the Council's Research Steering Committee coordinator, at (978) 465-0492 ext. 110, [rfeeney@nefmc.org](mailto:rfeeney@nefmc.org).