



New England Fishery Management Council

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Atlantic Herring: Council Initiates Framework to Consider Spawning Protection in Offshore Areas; Reviews MSE Process

The New England Fishery Management Council has initiated a framework adjustment to the Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan to develop options to protect spawning herring in offshore waters.

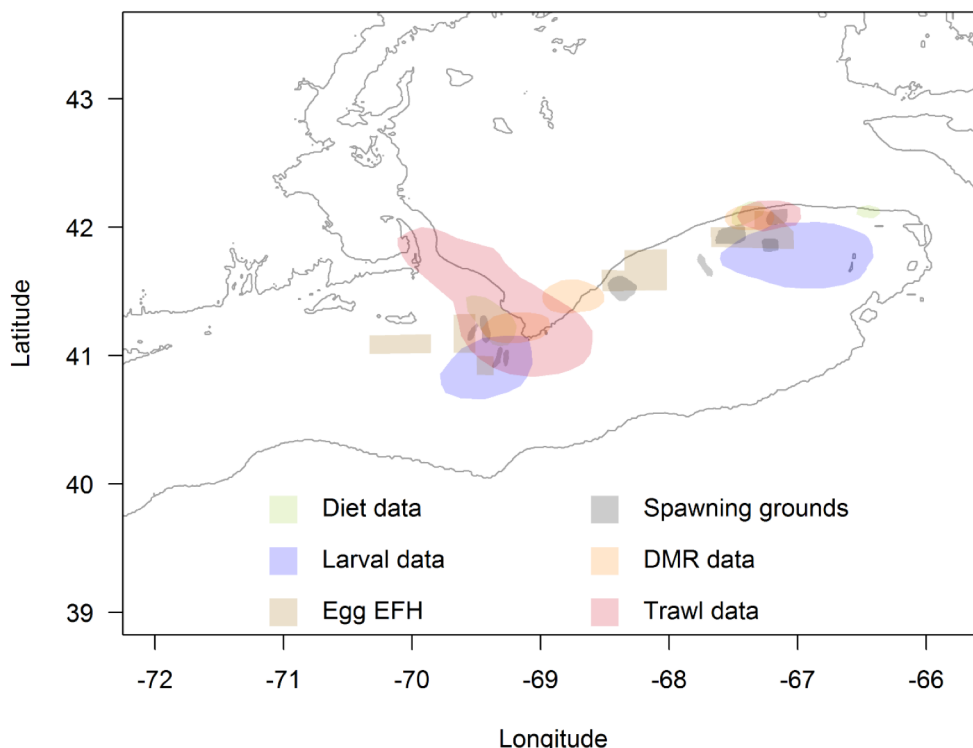
One of the Council's 2019 priorities was to consider offshore spawning protection for Atlantic herring on Georges Bank. In order to facilitate this work, the Council issued a contract to the Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI) to review both historical and current scientific research, as well as other relevant information and previous management actions for spawning herring.

GMRI looked at results from numerous data sources, including the Maine and Massachusetts dockside sampling programs, trawl survey information, larval distribution and diet studies, essential fish habitat for herring eggs, and historical spawning areas. GMRI overlapped all of the resulting information to start "building a consensus" in identifying where important spawning locations are likely to be and when spawning is likely to occur (see map below for locations). All data sources combined indicated that

spawning activity is most concentrated in two locations along the northern edge of Georges Bank – one in the west (Nantucket Shoals/Great South Channel) and one in the east (Northern Flank). Spawning occurred primarily in the months of September and October.

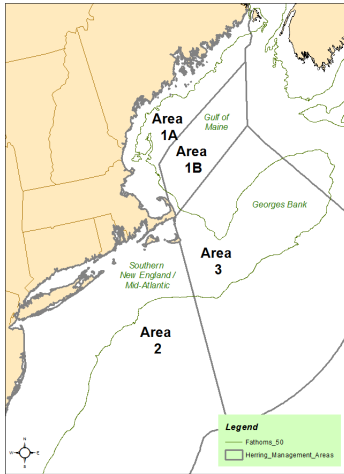
The investigators also interviewed fishermen and incorporated their comments into the report.

At left: All data sources used in the analysis were overlaid to build a consensus in identifying likely spawning ground locations. – NEFMC graphic





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On September 23 at the start of its four-day meeting in Gloucester, MA, the Council reviewed a [working draft](#) of the discussion document. Given the extensive amount of information available, the Council voted to initiate a framework adjustment to consider spawning protection measures in Area 3, Area 2, and Area 1B (see map at left) to explore the wide range of issues involved in this action. The Council chose not to be specific about the potential range of alternatives at this time. The discussion document will be finalized this fall. The Council will be working through 2020 to fully develop and analyze the alternatives for this action.

All herring-related documents used during this meeting are available at [September 2019 Herring Discussion](#)

Management Strategy Evaluation “Debrief” for ABC Control Rule in Herring Amendment 8

The Council also received an update on its debrief of the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process that was used to develop a range of alternatives in [Amendment 8](#) for an acceptable biological control (ABC) rule for herring. The Council had hoped that the process would provide greater upfront discussion of the objectives and weigh tradeoffs between alternatives.

That was the first time the Council used MSE in decision-making, so the Council now is taking a step back to identify the benefits and/or drawbacks of the MSE process and to talk about “lessons learned.” As part of the debrief, the Council developed a [Debrief Document](#) and solicited comments through early [August](#).

The update included input from the public and the Council’s Herring Plan Development Team, Advisory Panel, and Committee on whether the MSE process was useful and whether the purpose and need were clear, among other things. A final report will be presented to the Council in December.



Find Out More

- Visit the Council’s herring [webpage](#) for information on all herring actions.
- Contact Deirdre Boelke, the Council’s herring plan coordinator, at (978) 465-0492, ext. 105, dboelke@nefmc.org.



Above: Awaiting pump-out of Atlantic herring in New Bedford. – Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries photo. At left: Atlantic herring. – NOAA Fisheries graphic