



New England Fishery Management Council

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 22, 2020

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December 2020 Council Meeting Highlights: EBFM, Habitat, SBRM, Whiting, Dogfish, Herring, and More

The New England Fishery Management Council met [December 1-3, 2020](#) by webinar and covered a wide range of issues. In addition to its actions on [scallops](#), [groundfish](#), and [skates](#), here are a few highlights.

EBFM: The Council reviewed the history of its work on ecosystem-based fishery management (EBFM) and thoroughly debated its next steps. Following this discussion, the Council voted to keep EBFM on its [2021 list of priorities](#) and to:

- Maintain its [current approach](#) toward EBFM; and
- Conduct educational workshops to solicit stakeholder comments, recognizing that the workshops will not be scheduled until in-person gatherings can be held. These workshops will focus on the potential application of EBFM to a Georges Bank Ecosystem Production Unit. The Council has been referring to this as an [example Fishery Management Plan for Georges Bank \(eFEP\)](#).

The audio of the Council's EBFM discussion is posted [here](#) and all meeting materials can be found [here](#).

HABITAT: The Council approved new policies for [aquaculture](#) and [submarine cables](#). It also discussed a National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS/NOAA Fisheries) request for information on [Aquaculture Opportunity Areas](#) and agreed to draft a response, which is now available [here](#). In addition, the Council received an [aquaculture update](#) from the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) and a general update on offshore wind activities. Meeting materials for these and other habitat-related issues are available at [Habitat Report](#).

SBRM: The Council received a [presentation](#) on the [3-Year Review Report](#) for the Greater Atlantic Region's Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM). This methodology is used to monitor discards and allocate observer coverage in federal fisheries managed by the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery

What is Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management (EBFM)?

EBFM is a holistic approach to fisheries management that considers the physical, biological, economic, and social interactions between the various parts of the ecosystem related to fisheries. The process considers the diverse needs and pressures on fish, fish habitat, and the food web within a geographically specific area, while also accounting for the needs of fishermen, our communities, and the economy.



The Council is working with [Green Fin Studio](#) to develop public outreach materials like the clip above for use in educational workshops about EBFM. The Council previewed several infographics, brochures, presentations, and other outreach materials during its [September 2020 meeting](#). Also check out the Council's [EBFM webpage](#).



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Management Councils. Sea turtle bycatch is monitored as well. The SBRM year runs from July 1 through June 30 annually, and this latest 3-year report covers 2018, 2019, and 2020 under that cycle. The report concludes by stating two points: (1) that the “SBRM represents one of the most comprehensive programs for planning and executing observer monitoring coverage of federally managed fisheries”; and (2) the methodology currently being used to estimate discards in federally managed fisheries has utility while recognizing the real-world limitations of implementing an ideal system.

WHITING: The Council received an [overview](#) of the latest Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report for the small-mesh multispecies (whiting) fishery. The report covers the 2017-2019 fishing years for the following stocks:

- Northern silver hake;
- Southern silver hake and offshore hake, which together make up the southern whiting complex;
- Northern red hake and southern red hake.

The report estimates total catch by stock to determine if annual catch limits were exceeded, and it includes fishery performance information on, among other things:

- Permit and landing trends, bycatch, revenue and fishing ports, fishery dependence, and economic trends.

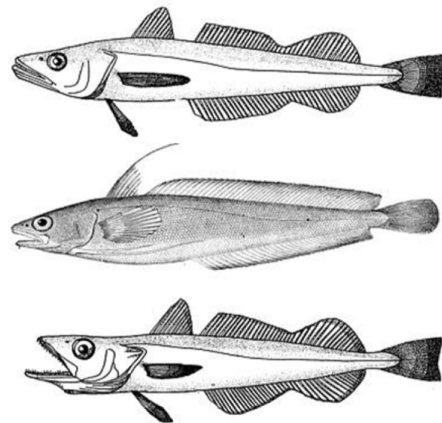
The Council is working on [2021-2023 specifications](#) for small-mesh multispecies. The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) presented its overfishing limit (OFL) and ABC [recommendations](#) for whiting and hake stocks during this December Council meeting.

The Whiting Plan Development Team (PDT) will analyze alternatives in the specifications document for final action during the Council’s [January 26-28, 2021](#) webinar meeting, including the following two additions that were approved for further consideration:

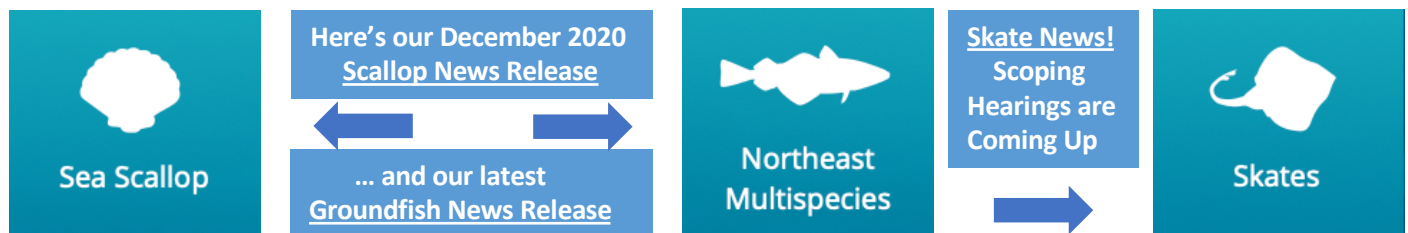
- Southern whiting possession limit changes based on mesh size; and
- Increasing the northern red hake total allowable landing (TAL) trigger from 37.9% to 90%. Once the trigger is reached, the possession limit is reduced to a much lower incidental limit.

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Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE Report) For the Small-Mesh Multispecies Fishery Fishing Years 2017-2019



A copy of the SAFE Report is available [here](#).





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ATLANTIC HERRING: The Council received a short update on the Herring Committee's [work plan](#) for the year ahead, which includes [Framework Adjustment 7](#), an action that is underdevelopment to protect spawning herring on Georges Bank. Among other projects, the committee will be working on a rebuilding plan for herring, which was declared overfishing in October 2020.

NROC, RODA: The Council viewed a [presentation](#) on a joint effort by the Northeast Regional Ocean Council, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean, and the Responsible Development Alliance to update commercial fisheries data on the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic Ocean Data Portals.

NORTH ATLANTIC RIGHT WHALES: The Council received a presentation on the preliminary [2019 population estimate for right whales](#), along with a 2020 update on ropeless fishing technology.

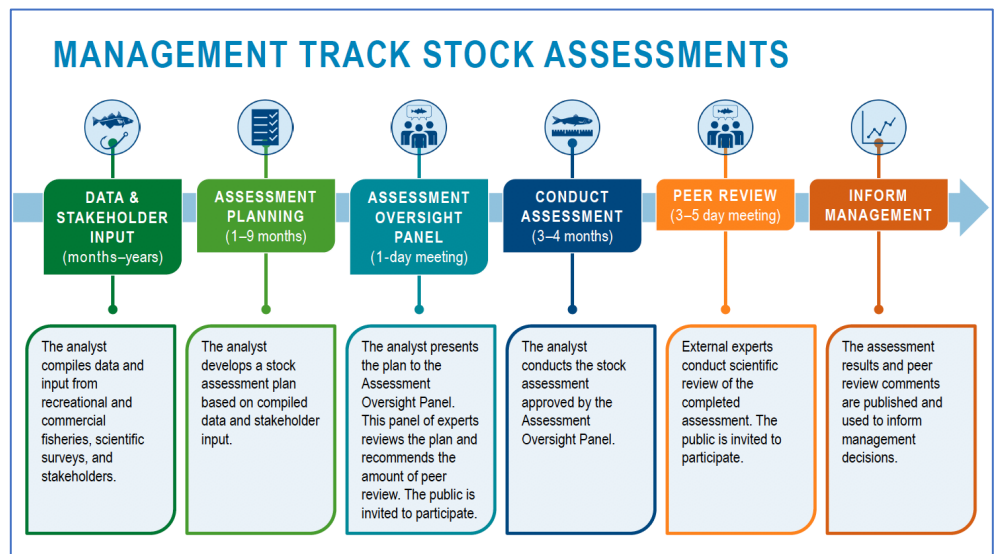
SPINY DOGFISH: Dogfish is managed jointly by the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils. Although the Councils previously set 2019-2021 specifications, the Mid-Atlantic Council, which has the lead on dogfish, recently adopted a revised risk policy that made it possible to provide an 8% quota increase in fishing year 2021. The New England Council supported the increase, as well as maintaining this quota for 2022. All related documents are posted [here](#).

GUIDANCE TO COUNCILS: NOAA General Counsel [briefed](#) the Council on the September 2020 [final rule](#) regarding guidance to fishery management councils on financial disclosures and voting recusals.

SSC: The SSC's groundfish, scallop, and whiting OFL/ABC reports are [here](#).



- **Revised 2021 Dogfish ABC:** 38.6 million pounds, up from 35.4 million pounds previously approved for 2019-2021 specifications.
- **Revised 2021 Commercial Quota:** 29.6 million pounds, up from 27.7 million pounds. This quota also will apply to 2022 if approved by NOAA.



The Northeast Fisheries Science Center presented results from the [Fall 2020 Management Track Stock Assessments](#), which covered Atlantic sea scallops and 13 large- and small-mesh Northeast multispecies stocks (groundfish and whiting/red hake). Learn more [here](#). – NOAA Fisheries graphic