



New England Fishery Management Council

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Council Discusses Scallops, Habitat, Climate Change, NTAP, Congressional Updates, and Ecosystem at April Meeting

The New England Fishery Management Council met [April 13-15, 2021](#) by webinar. Here are some highlights.

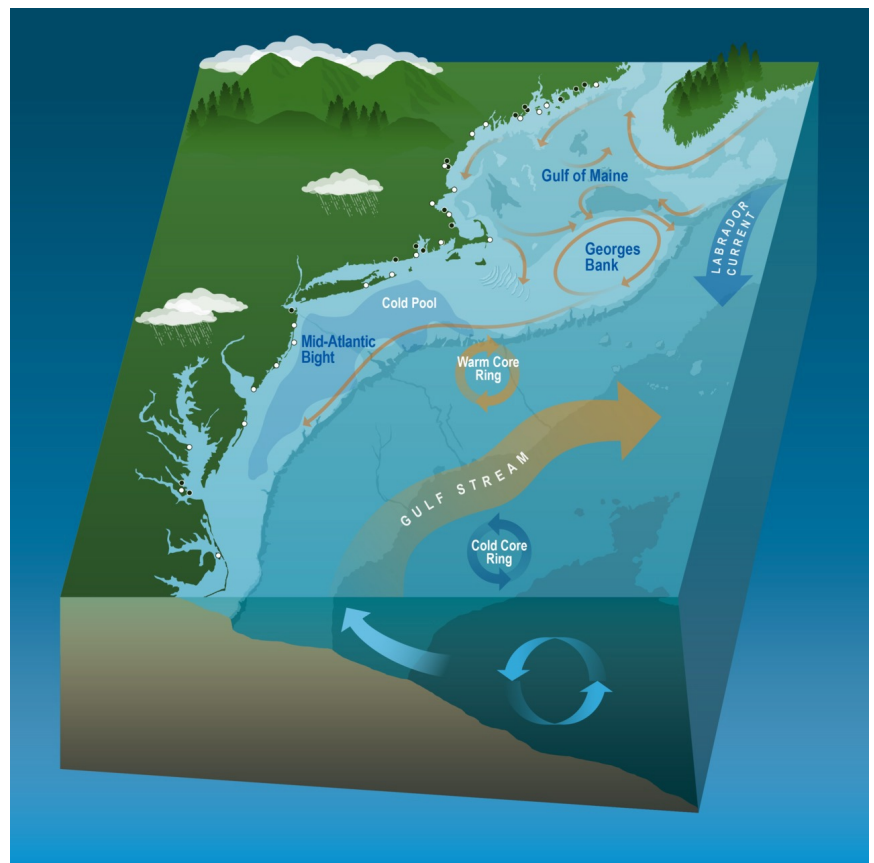
CLIMATE SCIENCE: The Council received a climate science [presentation](#) from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center that covered: observed changes on the Northeast Continental Shelf related to temperature, currents, and pH; NOAA's Climate Science Strategy; the Northeast Regional Action Plan; and more.

NRCC CLIMATE CHANGE PLANNING: The Northeast Region Coordinating Council (NRCC) is moving forward with an East Coast Climate Change Scenario Planning Initiative. The NRCC consists of leadership from the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils, the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The South Atlantic Council, although not an NRCC member, is participating in the climate change scenario planning initiative.

The Core Team supporting this work met for the first time on [March 11, 2021](#). During its April meeting, the New England Council received:

- A general [presentation](#) on the initiative, which is described in the [draft plan](#) being considered by the NRCC in May; and
- An overview of the six phases of work associated with the initiative and approximate timeframes for each phase.

Public workshops are planned as part of this work, possibly later in 2021. Here's the planning initiative [webpage](#).



Shown above, the U.S. Northeast Continental Shelf. A list of upcoming webinars in the NOAA Fisheries U.S. Northeast Climate-Fisheries Seminar Series is posted [here](#). – NOAA Fisheries graphic



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EXECUTIVE ORDER LISTENING SESSION: In conjunction with the New England Council's April meeting, NOAA Fisheries conducted a public listening session on Section 216(c) of [Executive Order 14008](#), Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad. This section relates to making fisheries and protected resources more resilient to climate change.

Council members and the public asked questions and provided comments on the Executive Order to NOAA Fisheries leadership. More information on how to provide further comments can be found [here](#).

The Council Coordination Committee (CCC), which is made up of the chairs, vice chairs, and executive directors of all eight of the nation's [regional fishery management councils](#), submitted comments on Section 216(a) of the Executive Order. This section refers to the goal of conserving at least 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030, often referred to as the 30x30 initiative. The CCC's letter can be found [here](#).

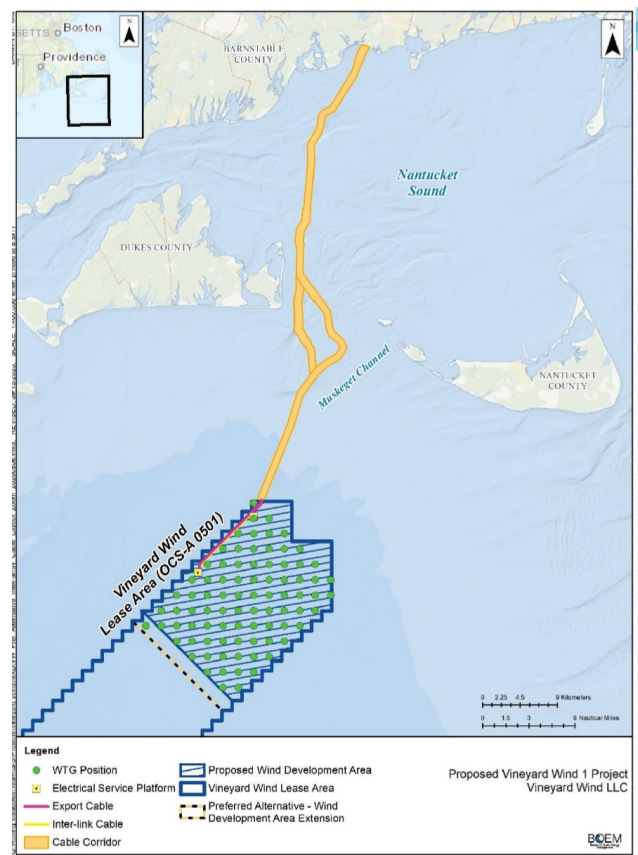
CONGRESSIONAL UPDATE: The Council also received an update on recent congressional activities, which covered: (1) a rundown of new leadership on key marine-related committees in Congress; and (2) an overview of newly introduced and potential bills that will or may be addressed by the current Congress.

HABITAT: Under this report, the Council received updates on three topics – habitat areas on the Northern Edge of Georges Bank, aquaculture, and offshore wind.

Northern Edge – Last fall, the Council approved a 2021 habitat priority to “assess the possibility of and, if possible, develop an action to revise Habitat Management Areas (HMAs) on the Northern Edge of Georges Bank.”

The Council's [Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment 2 \(OHA2\)](#), which became effective in April 2018, proposed revising the HMAs and Closed Areas on Georges Bank and included establishing two new Northern Edge HMAs. One would have been closed to fishing. The other would have been closed to mobile bottom-tending gears, except for groundfish vessels west of 67° 20' W longitude, but would have allowed scallop vessels to fish in a scallop rotational program under certain conditions.

NOAA Fisheries disapproved this portion of the amendment for reasons described in the [OHA2 final rule](#). Since that time, scallop industry members have been asking the Council to revisit the HMAs to investigate options to allow a limited amount of scallop fishing on the Northern Edge. The Council agreed to do so as a 2021 habitat priority, recognizing the undertaking would be a multi-year effort that would require input from many.



Above, the Vineyard Wind I Lease Area and Proposed Development Area. The cable corridor to shore is shown in yellow. – BOEM graphic



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At this point, the Habitat Plan Development Team (PDT) is in the early stages of developing a white paper to: (1) summarize available information; (2) identify issues of concern; and (3) assess the feasibility of revising the Northern Edge HMAs through a new action.

The Habitat PDT is consulting with other PDTs, the Habitat Committee, Habitat Advisory Panel, full Council, and science/management partners. The Council will continue to receive updates as the work progresses.

Aquaculture – The Council reviewed a draft plan outlining ways to better engage and coordinate with federal partners on aquaculture issues. Development of this [Aquaculture Coordination Plan](#) was another 2021 habitat priority. The plan will continue to be refined as needed by the Habitat Committee. Here is the Council's [Aquaculture Policy](#) and [Aquaculture Background Document](#).

Offshore Wind – The Council received an overview of ongoing offshore wind development activities in the Northeast Region and agreed to submit formal comments on the following projects: Ocean Wind LLC – New Jersey; the New York Bight Wind Energy Areas; and the Port Access Study for Northern New York Bight. The Council supported developing and submitting these comments jointly with the Mid-Atlantic Council if appropriate. The two Council maintain an informational [offshore wind webpage](#) and collaborate frequently on offshore wind issues. Maps of the above projects can be found in the meeting [presentation](#).

ATLANTIC SEA SCALLOPS: The Council received a brief progress report on the status of [2021 scallop work priorities](#) and an introduction to the new [Scallop Survey Working Group](#), which recently held its [first meeting](#). The group is looking into ways to facilitate collaborations for conducting scallop surveys. Documents associated with the Council's April meeting scallop discussion can be found [here](#).



Atlantic sea scallops caught during a UMass Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) research trip. – SMAST photo

New Biological Opinion (BiOp) for Scallop Fishery – It's About Turtles



NOAA Fisheries is on the homestretch of revising the 2012 Biological Opinion for the Atlantic sea scallop fishery, which focuses on turtle interactions. The Council received a [brief update](#) on the timeline associated with the new BiOp and is expected to receive a detailed overview during its June or September meeting after the Biological Opinion is completed. More specific information can be found in the [presentation](#) the Council received in April 2020 explaining the reasons why consultation on the BiOp was reinitiated.



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NORTHEAST TRAWL ADVISORY PANEL (NTAP) – The Council heard a short recap of NTAP’s [March 19, 2021](#) meeting. (1) NTAP is continuing to work on revisions to its existing [charter](#). The Council will receive more information on this initiative at a future meeting. (2) The Northeast Fisheries Science Center has funds available to support NTAP research. The Council agreed by consensus that these funds should be used to support a project titled “Quantifying the impact of a restrictor rope on the composition, rate, and size-distribution of catch derived from a bottom trawl survey.” More information is available in the [funding memo](#). The Mid-Atlantic Council also supported using the available funds for this project.

STATE OF THE ECOSYSTEM – The Northeast Fisheries Science Center presented the [2021 State of the Ecosystem Report for New England](#). Here is the [presentation](#).

The Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee reviewed the report during its March meeting and provided [recommendations](#) on possible revisions for incorporation into next year’s report. The SSC briefed the Council on these recommendations.

“Regime shifts and changes in how the multiple system drivers interact can result in ecosystem reorganization as species and humans respond and adapt to the new environment.”

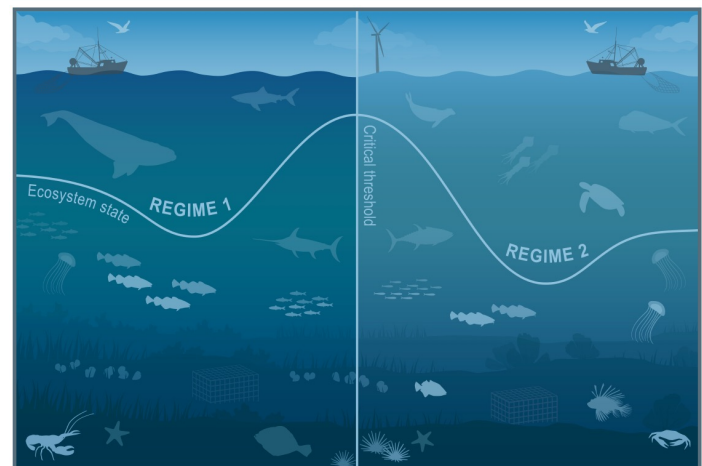
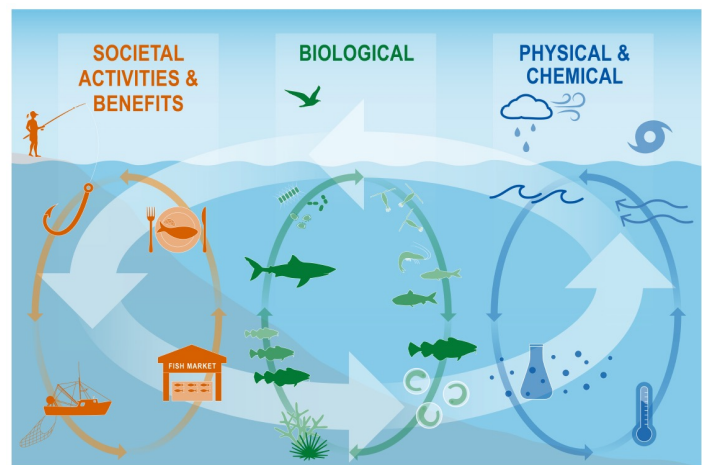
– 2021 State of the Ecosystem Report, New England

EBFM: The Council received a short update on a recent meeting of the Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management (EBFM) Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) Steering Committee, which now has [five new industry members](#).

The committee is developing guidance about how the Council should conduct public information workshops on EBFM using the example Fishery Ecosystem Plan ([eFEP](#)) for Georges Bank, science [communication tools](#), and tangible worked example [tools](#). Here is the [meeting summary](#).

MORE COMING: News on actions regarding herring, skates, and the party/charter recreational groundfish fishery will follow soon. Visit the [April 13-15, 2021 meeting webpage](#) for additional info.

Characterizing Ecosystem Change for Fishery Management



(1) Societal, biological, physical, and chemical factors comprise the multiple system drivers that influence marine ecosystems through a variety of different pathways. (2) Changes in the multiple drivers can lead to regime shifts — large, abrupt and persistent changes in the structure and function of an ecosystem. – Excerpt from 2021 report