



# New England Fishery Management Council

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## Council Discusses Skates, Atlantic Herring, Red Hake, EBFM, Habitat, and Research Priorities at June Meeting

The New England Fishery Management Council met June 23-25, 2020 by webinar. In addition to the news already released about [groundfish](#), [monkfish](#), and [scallops](#), here's an overview of the other issues the Council worked on during this meeting.

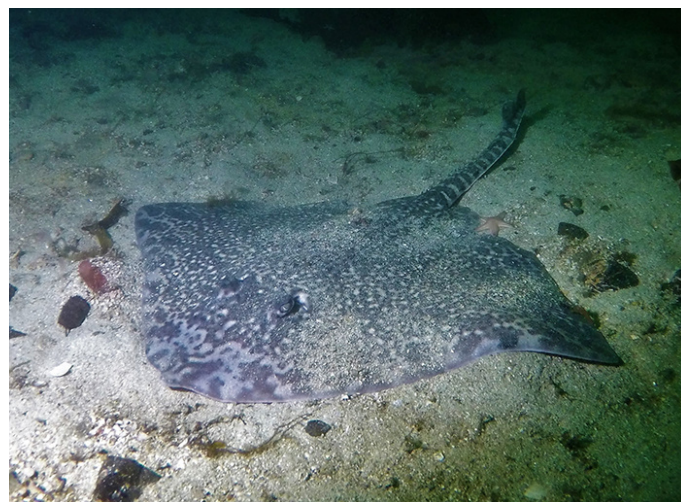
**Research Priorities:** After considering input from its various fishery-related committees and the Scientific and Statistical Committee, the Council agreed to submit an updated list of [Research Priorities and Data Needs for 2020-2024](#) to NOAA Fisheries.

**Skates:** At the end of last year, the Council tasked its Skate Committee with defining a clear problem statement, goals, and objectives for Draft Amendment 5 to the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The amendment is being developed to consider whether limited access is appropriate for the skate wing and/or skate bait fisheries. The committee worked on this task in late-March using additional data provided by the Skate Plan Development Team. The Council reviewed the new problem statement, along with an additional objective, and discussed whether it wanted to continue pursuing the development of a limited access program for skates. The Council did not approve the problem statement but agreed to have the committee continue to work on its initial tasking.

- All skate-related documents reviewed by the Council, including the Amendment 5 [discussion document](#) and [presentation](#), are available [here](#).
- The Skate Committee will meet on [Thursday, August 6, 2020](#) to continue its work.

**Atlantic Herring:** The Council discussed two actions under its Herring Committee report.

- **Framework Adjustment 8** – This action has two components: (a) specifications for the 2021-2023 fishing years; and (b) adjustments to the Atlantic Herring FMP that potentially inhibit the mackerel fishery from achieving its optimum yield.
- The specifications will be based on results from a new management track stock assessment for Atlantic herring that was peer reviewed on [June 22, 2020](#). The Council's Herring Committee,



*Winter skate, pictured above, is the primary species harvested for human consumption in the wing fishery. Seven species of skates are managed as a complex under a single fishery management plan.*

– NOAA Fisheries photo



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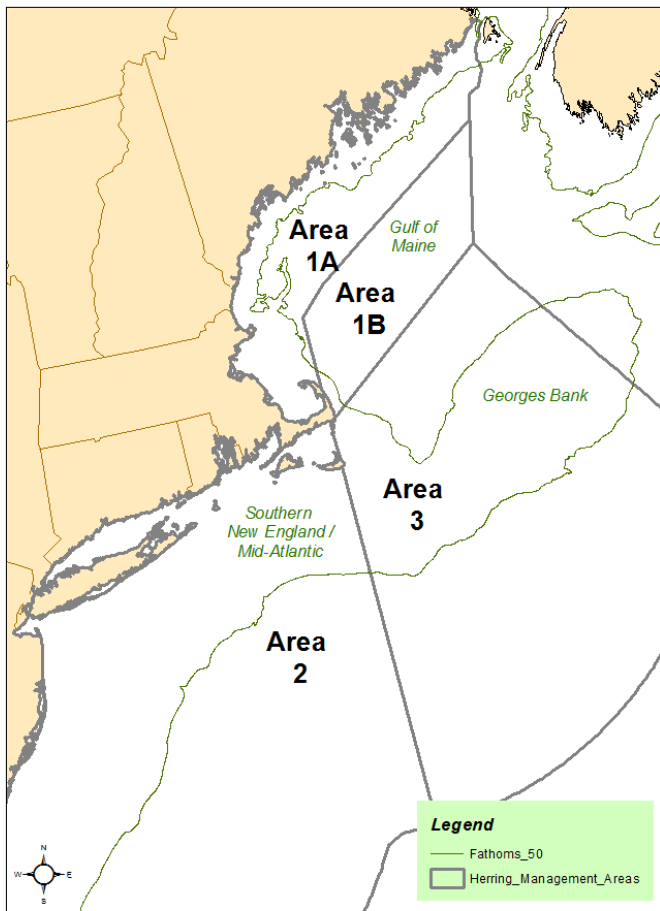
Advisory Panel, and Plan Development Team will work on specifications over the summer.

➤ The Council approved the range of mackerel-related alternatives that will be considered under [Framework 8](#). Currently:

- (a) when 92% of the sub-annual catch limit (sub-ACL) for a herring management area is estimated to be caught, a 2,000-pound incidental catch limit is implemented to effectively close the directed herring fishery in the impacted area (see map for area locations); and
- (b) when 95% of the total ACL for the herring fishery is estimated to be caught, the entire fishery closes in all areas and the 2,000-pound incidental catch limit is imposed.

This relatively low possession limit makes it challenging for vessels to target mackerel, especially in certain areas and seasons when herring and mackerel mix. To address the issue, the Council is considering:

- Increasing the herring incidental possession limit above the current 2,000 pounds to 40,000 pounds or somewhere between 5,000 pounds and 20,000 pounds under various sub-ACL trigger points for vessels fishing for mackerel; and
- Eliminating the current January-April seasonal closure in Area 1B to give vessels the opportunity to direct on herring and/or mackerel earlier in the year.



Atlantic Herring Management Areas 1A, 1B, 2, and 3. – NEFMC graphic

*The Council is scheduled to take final action on Herring Framework 8 during its September meeting.*

- **Framework Adjustment 7:** The Council is continuing to work on this action.
- The goal of the framework is to protect spawning adults of Atlantic herring and/or Atlantic herring egg mats to increase overall herring biomass.
- The objective is to consider similar measures that are in place in Area 1A for other spawning components of the herring resource on Georges Bank and Nantucket Shoals.

*All herring-related documents used during the Council's June meeting can be found [here](#).*



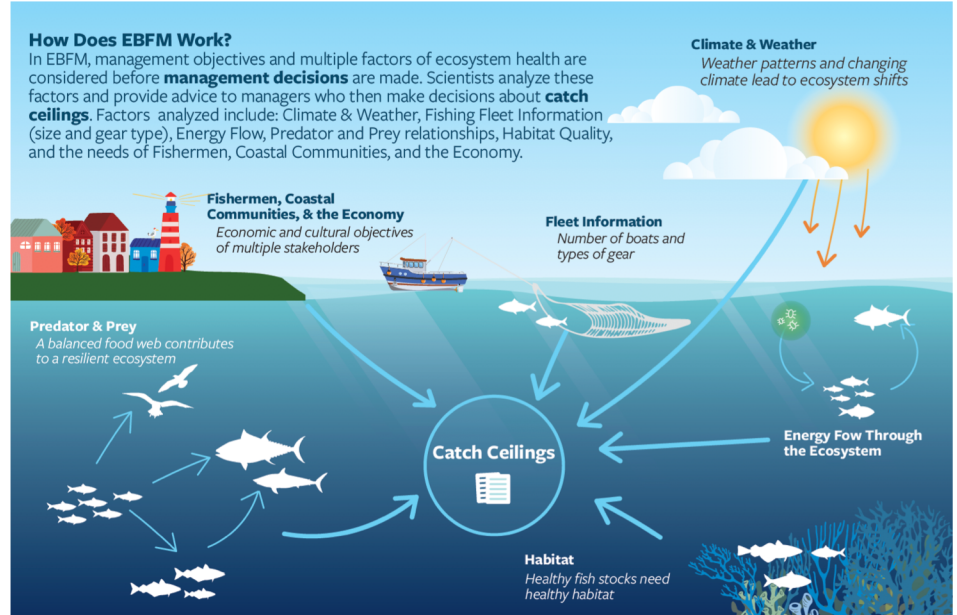
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**Southern Red Hake:** The Council approved Framework Adjustment 62 to the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) FMP. This framework was initiated to develop a rebuilding program for the southern stock of red hake, which is a small-mesh species. The stock was deemed to be overfished with overfishing occurring during a 2017 assessment that used data through 2016. As part of the framework, the Council voted to:

- Establish a five-to-10-year rebuilding schedule with five years being the minimum anticipated amount of time needed to rebuild the stock, seven years being the target, and 10 years being the maximum.
  - Reduce the acceptable biological catch (ABC) to 75% of the overfishing limit. The overfishing limit is the level of fishing that results in maximum sustainable yield (MSY). This reduction would occur for the duration of the rebuilding period or until the southern red hake biomass reaches its target. And,
  - Establish a 600-pound possession limit year-round for vessels fishing with small mesh and 1,000 pounds for vessels using large mesh or selective small-mesh gear. Selective gear includes: large-mesh belly panel trawls, raised footrope trawls, rope trawls, and other approved gears that will reduce red hake catch. The current in-season accountability measure would still apply, reducing the possession limit for all gears to 400 pounds when landings reach 40.4% of total allowable landings.
- The history of how this framework came to be is spelled out [here](#). Documents used during the Council's discussion are available under the [June 2020 Whiting Report](#).

## ASSESSMENT UPDATE

- A research track assessment on red hake stock structure was [peer reviewed in March](#).
- Northern and southern red hake, along with silver and offshore hake, are part of the [Fall 2020 Management Track Assessments](#). The peer review is scheduled for [September 14-18, 2020](#).
- Based on the results of these fall assessments, the Council will set small-mesh (whiting) specifications for the 2021-2023 fishing years in an action that is expected to be initiated in December and approved in January.



**Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management (EBFM):** Earlier this year, the Council contracted Green Fin Studio to develop user-friendly outreach materials to help explain EBFM to the public. Pictured above is an excerpt from one of the resulting infographics. At the June meeting, the Council reviewed the draft materials, which also included presentations



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and stakeholder profiles, and accepted them for use in EBFM outreach workshops that are on track to be held toward the end of this year.

In order to illustrate how EBFM could work, the Council developed an [example Fishery Ecosystem Plan \(eFEP\) for Georges Bank](#) and is now taking steps to roll out the eFEP to the public. The EBFM Plan Development Team (PDT) has been developing examples – known as “tangible worked examples” – for how an ecosystem plan might be carried out. These examples will be used as learning tools during the late-2020 public outreach workshops.

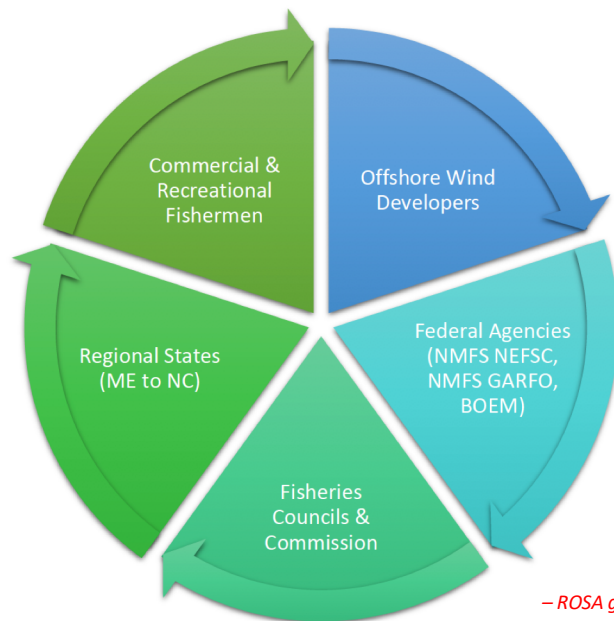
The Council will continue to work over the summer to: (a) complete other outreach products, including a second infographic, stakeholder-oriented brochures, an additional presentation, and a short introductory video; (b) further develop the tangible worked examples of the eFEP; and (c) develop an outline and focus for the upcoming public outreach workshops.

**Habitat:** The Council received updates from several presenters on issues related to habitat and offshore wind. In addition to ROSA’s presentation (see details at right), these included:

- An overview by staff on habitat policies the Council is developing for aquaculture, submarine cables, and floating offshore wind in order to educate the Council on these activities and help the Council comment effectively on future projects;
- A progress report on the [Northeast Regional Fish Habitat Assessment](#), which is characterizing estuarine, coastal, and offshore fish habitat distribution, abundance, and quality in the region; and
- A [presentation](#) from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) on the Vineyard Wind Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement ([SEIS](#)) and what was analyzed for commercial and for-hire fisheries.

All habitat-related documents used by the Council during its June 2020 meeting can be found [here](#).

## Responsible Offshore Science Alliance (ROSA)



The Council received a [presentation](#) from ROSA, which included an update on the alliance’s efforts to establish a 40-member advisory board to help guide the alliance in its mission. ROSA has asked the Council to provide one member and one alternate to serve on the board. ROSA also is seeking applications from [commercial](#) and [recreational](#) fishermen to join the advisory council. The deadline for applications is [July 15, 2020](#).



# South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

## News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 12, 2020

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### **Council Addresses Broad Range of Federal Fisheries Issues During Meeting Week**

*Best fishing practices; new stock assessments for King Mackerel, Red Porgy, and Greater Amberjack, Special Management Zones; and COVID-19 impacts top the agenda*

Members of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council held their quarterly June meeting this week via webinar due to COVID-19 and public health concerns. The meeting, originally scheduled to take place in Key West, Florida, began with a discussion of best fishing practices, emphasizing the Council's outreach campaign and new resources for fishermen now available from the [Council's website](#). Information includes proper handling techniques, identifying signs of barotrauma, how-to videos demonstrating effectiveness of descending devices, and an online tutorial. Links to state-level resources for the region are also available through the new webpage. Council members have consistently supported the use of best practices to help improve survival of released fish. In September 2019, the Council approved Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 29 requiring descending devices be onboard and readily available when fishing for snapper grouper species and other measures promoting best practices. NOAA Fisheries announced the [Final Rule for Regulatory Amendment 29](#) earlier today, implementing the best fishing practice measures effective July 15, 2020.

NOAA Fisheries recently announced the opening of the Red Snapper season for both recreational and commercial fishermen, with a recreational season scheduled for the weekend of July 10, 11, 12, and the following Friday, July 17, 2020. "We encourage fishermen to take advantage of instructional videos and other best fishing practices information available online prior to the opening of this year's Red Snapper season," explained Council Chair, Jessica McCawley. During the Council meeting state agency representatives provided updates on sampling efforts planned for the recreational opening, including carcass collections and dockside sampling, dependent upon restrictions in place for COVID-19.

### **COVID-19 Impacts**

The Council discussed the impacts of COVID-19 on fisheries and fishing communities after receiving input from its advisory panels, updates from state agencies, and public comment, most noting the detrimental effects on fishing-related businesses including for-hire and commercial fishermen. There was much discussion about the economic importance of the Red Snapper fishery and the benefit of additional fishing days. However, under the mandates of Magnuson-Stevens Act, the Council must adhere to the current annual catch limit and cannot simply add additional fishing days. The Council agreed to send a letter to the Secretary of Commerce addressing Red Snapper concerns and the effects of the pandemic, as well as expressing their willingness to work with NOAA Fisheries to expand access to the fishery.

In an effort to help mitigate some of the negative impacts of COVID-19, the Council will request that NOAA Fisheries take emergency action to increase the federal recreational bag limit for Atlantic King Mackerel to 4 fish per person/day off east Florida through the Mid-Atlantic and request emergency action to increase the

*(Continued)*

federal commercial trip limit for Vermilion Snapper to 1,500 pounds gutted weight. If approved, the emergency actions would be effective for 180 days and could be extended for an additional 185 days. It is anticipated the new regulations could be implemented within the next three months. The Council will consider requesting emergency action during its September meeting to allow the carry-over of unused annual catch limits from 2020 into 2021 after reviewing additional analyses.

### **Stock Assessments**

There was good news regarding Atlantic King Mackerel and Greater Amberjack stocks following recent assessments that found neither stock overfished nor undergoing overfishing. Council members received the results of recent stock assessments from NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center and recommendations from its Scientific and Statistical Committee during this week's meeting. Harvest has remained relatively consistent and both the King Mackerel and Greater Amberjack stocks have benefited from strong recruitment years (lots of fish born within the year). The Council will develop amendments to adjust catch levels and allocations as needed based on the recent assessments and recommendations.

The Red Porgy stock continues to face challenges. Despite a rebuilding plan being in place for almost 3 decades, the stock assessment finds Red Porgy remains overfished and is undergoing overfishing, with chronically low recruitment. The Council will begin work on an amendment to end overfishing and address rebuilding the stock.

### **Special Management Zones**

The Council approved the designation of specified artificial reefs in federal waters off the North Carolina and South Carolina coasts as Special Management Zones, addressing concerns from members of the Council's Law Enforcement Advisory Panel regarding how the circular shape of areas complicates enforcement. At the states' request, the Council approved Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 34 that would designate 30 artificial reef sites off of North Carolina and 4 sites off of South Carolina as Special Management Zones. The designations would limit fishing gear types when targeting snapper grouper species and restrict harvest by spear to recreational bag limits for the SMZs in North Carolina. In South Carolina, the harvest of snapper grouper species in the designated SMZs would be limited to recreational bag limits. The amendment must be approved by the Secretary of Commerce before implementation.

### **Other Business**

Council members continued to develop management actions for Dolphin and Wahoo through draft Amendment 10 to the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery Management Plan. The Council received fishing level recommendations for both species from its Scientific and Statistical Committee using recalibrated recreational fishing effort estimates from NOAA Fisheries' Marine Recreational Information Program. The new catch levels will be included in the amendment as the Council considers management actions that include modifications to accountability measures, allocations, and current vessel limits for Dolphin. The Council received numerous public comments from recreational fishermen and for-hire captains in South Florida and the Florida Keys expressing concerns about the decline of the Dolphin fishery in their area.

Additional information about this week's meeting, including a Story Map highlighting actions, Committee Reports, and Summary Motions are available from the Council's website at: <https://safmc.net/june-2020-council-meeting-details/>. The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for September 14-18, 2020 in Charleston, South Carolina.

**The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, one of eight regional councils, conserves and manages fish stocks from three to 200 miles offshore of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and east Florida.**