



New England Fishery Management Council

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PRESS CONTACT: Janice Plante
(607) 592-4817, jplante@nefmc.org

Council Receives Final Monkfish Fishery Performance Report and Framework 13 Update; Hears Skate Monitoring Report Recap

The New England Fishery Management Council discussed several items related to monkfish and skates during its [September 26-29, 2022](#) hybrid meeting in Gloucester, MA.

- The Council received the final [2022 Monkfish Fishery Performance Report](#), which was developed to help the Council better understand present conditions in the fishery.
- The Council also received an update on [Framework Adjustment 13](#) to the Monkfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP), which includes specifications for the 2023-2025 fishing years and other management measures. This portion of the discussion covered very preliminary outcomes from the latest monkfish stock assessment, which was peer reviewed the week before the Council meeting. And,
- The Council received an overview of the [2022 Skate Annual Monitoring Report](#), which covered the fishery and data through the 2021 fishing year and incorporated improvements recommended by the Skate Plan Development Team (PDT).

MONKFISH FISHERY PERFORMANCE REPORT: The Monkfish PDT, in collaboration with the Monkfish Advisory Panel, prepared the Monkfish Fishery Performance Report. The report provides an overview of the biology, stock condition, management system, and fishery performance for monkfish with an emphasis on the last few years. It's intended to help the Monkfish Committee, Scientific and Statistical Committee, and the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils better understand the fishery and interpret fishery data. Furthermore, the report is a valuable resource for helping stakeholders recognize trends in and relationships between landings and abundance.

The New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils jointly manage monkfish. The New England Council has the administrative lead for the FMP.



Young-of-the-year monkfish observed during a research trip.

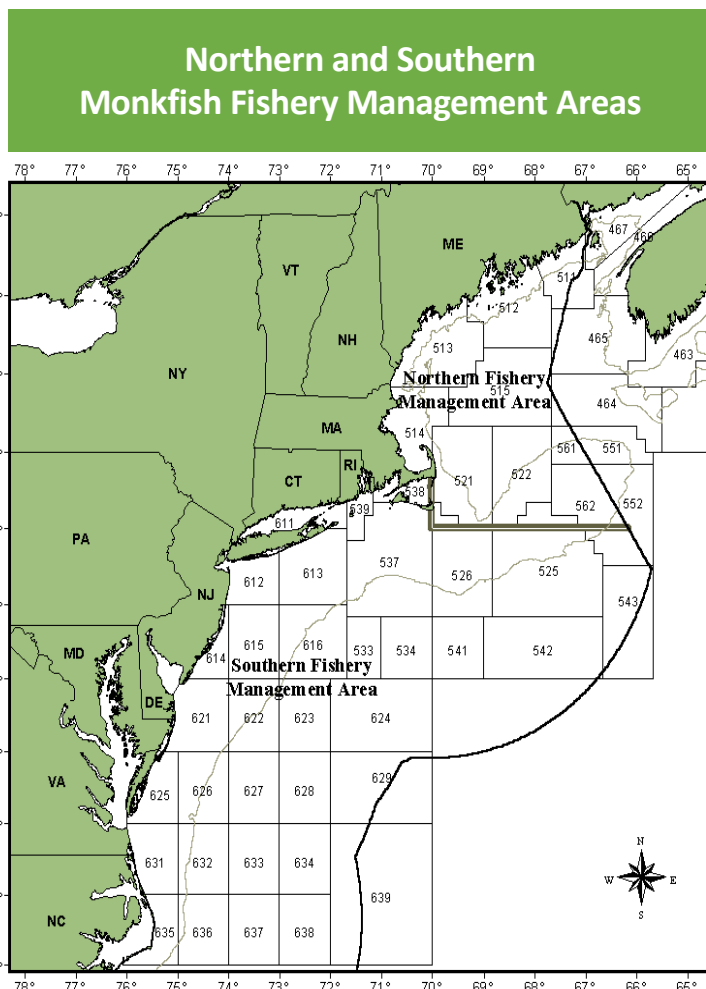
– Virginia Institute of Marine Science photo



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Here are some key points from the 2022 Monkfish Fishery Performance Report.

- The number of monkfish limited access permits has declined over the past decade from 670 to 562. Roughly 9% to 20% of those permit holders landed greater than 10,000 pounds of monkfish each year.
- A substantial amount of latent effort exists in the fishery. The number of monkfish days-at-sea (DAS) used is far below the number of DAS allocated.
- Recent discards as a percentage of catch are lower in the Northern Monkfish Fishery Management Area, ranging from 9% to 26%, versus the Southern Monkfish Fishery Management Area, where discards range from 36% to 62% (see map below for management areas).
- The Council's monkfish advisors consider low monkfish prices to be the main limiter of the fishery. Costs are increasing and wages are not competitive with shoreside employers.
- Advisors are concerned about the impacts of offshore energy development and potential restrictions regarding protected species. And,



- Advisors would like increased flexibility to fish more efficiently than current effort controls allow.

“The greatest number of active monkfish vessels fish out of New Bedford, Gloucester, Point Judith, and Montauk. Massachusetts accounts for the highest monkfish landings with 61% of the total. The highest revenue comes from New Bedford, Gloucester, and Boston.”

– 2022 Monkfish Fishery Performance Report

➤ Download a copy of the full report [HERE](#).

MONKFISH FRAMEWORK 13: The Council is developing Framework Adjustment 13 to the Monkfish FMP to establish specifications for the 2023-2025 fishing years. The specifications include total allowable landings (TALs) for both the Northern and Southern Monkfish Fishery Management Areas. The framework proposes other management measures as well. The fishing year for monkfish begins on May 1.



New England Fishery Management Council

The Council will be using the latest stock assessment information to set the new specifications. This spring and summer, a [2022 Management Track Stock Assessment](#) was conducted for monkfish. The assessment was peer reviewed [September 19-22, 2022](#), the week before the Council met in Gloucester. The peer review panel was still finalizing the report.

The Council will receive a detailed presentation on the assessment results during its December meeting. However, the Council was afforded some high-level preliminary results, which were helpful given the impact the assessment findings will have on the development of specifications in Framework 13. The Council expects the overfished and overfishing determinations coming out of the 2022 assessment will be classified as “unknown.”

Due to uncertainties with monkfish aging and growth, monkfish assessments since 2016 have been unable to estimate monkfish abundance and a fishing mortality rate. Instead, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center is using the recent trend in the trawl survey index for developing catch advice.

The Council was informed that the recent trawl survey index for monkfish is notably lower than it was during the 2019 assessment. This means total allowable landings likely will need to be reduced for the next three fishing years.

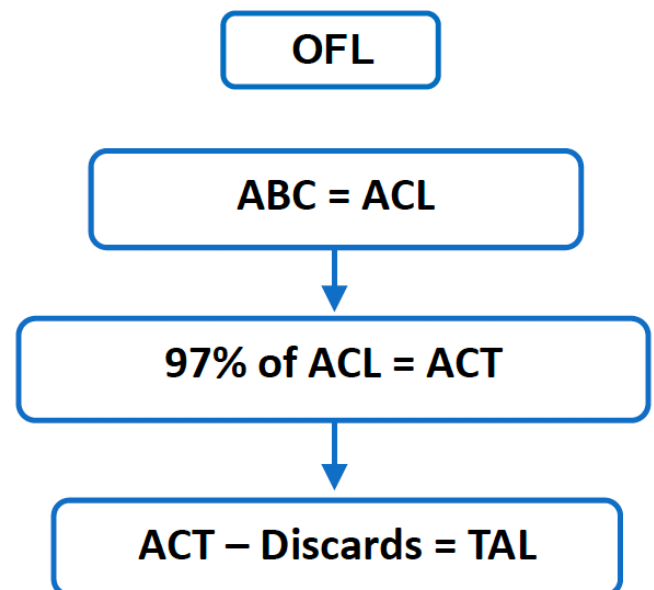
WHAT'S NEXT: The Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee will meet [October 26-27, 2022](#) to develop overfishing limit and acceptable biological catch recommendations for 2023-2025. The Monkfish PDT, Monkfish Advisory Panel, and Monkfish Committee also will meet before the Council takes final action on the framework at its December 6-8, 2022 hybrid meeting in Newport, RI.

Framework 13 includes several draft management measures. Recognizing that landing limits likely will be reduced in 2023-2025, the Council voted to move three of the framework’s proposals to “considered but rejected” because they potentially could increase effort and landings.

The rejected proposals focused on an increase in the days-at-sea overage adjustment in the north and south; and an increase in the southern incidental and limited access possession limits by 25%.

SKATE ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT: During the skate discussion, the Council received a [presentation](#) on the 2022 Skate Annual Monitoring Report, which covered the 2021 fishing year. The report was

How the Council Sets Monkfish Total Allowable Landings



KEY: Overfishing Limit (OFL), Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), Annual Catch Limit (ACL), Annual Catch Target (ACT), Total Allowable Landings (TAL)



New England Fishery Management Council

prepared by the Skate Plan Development Team. Under current skate regulations, the PDT is required to meet annually and include the following items in the report:

- Annual updates to survey indices, fishery landings, and discards;
- A reevaluation of stock status based on updated survey indices and the Northeast Skate Complex Fishery Management Plan’s overfishing definitions;
- A determination of whether any accountability measures (AMs) were triggered, which under current regulations means whether the skate wing and/or skate bait total allowable landings were exceeded by greater than 5% or if the annual catch limit was exceeded; and
- Changes to other fishery management plans that may impact skate stocks, along with a description of the anticipated impacts of those changes on the skate fishery.

The PDT addressed these points in the report. Also, in December 2021 when the Council adopted 2022 priorities, the Council tasked the Skate PDT with considering “improvements to the ABC calculation, specifications formula, and year-end catch accounting to better account for known sources of catch.” The PDT conducted this work and incorporated the results in the annual monitoring report.

The PDT noted that recreational catch of skates, which was non-existent when the Skate FMP was developed, has been increasing. Recreational catch has represented about 1% to 5% of the annual catch limit since fishing year 2017. As such, the PDT recommended that recreational catch be included in the update of survey indices and specifications.

The Council supported this recommendation, as well as all others included by the PDT in the annual monitoring report, by approving a consensus statement.

SKATE STATUS: The Skate FMP covers seven species of skates. Six of these – clearnose, little, rosette, winter, barndoor, and smooth skates – are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring on those species. Overfishing is not occurring on the seventh species either – thorny skates. However, this resource continues to be overfished and is at 3.6% of its biomass target. The Council is considering a 2023 priority to investigate potential approaches to support thorny skate rebuilding.


QUESTIONS? Contact Dr. Rachel Feeny, the Council’s [skate](#) and [monkfish](#) plan coordinator, at rfeeny@nefmc.org. At right, a little skate.

– NOAA Fisheries photo





**NORTHEAST SKATE COMPLEX
FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Annual Monitoring Report for Fishing Year 2021



August 23, 2022

Prepared by the
New England Fishery Management Council
In consultation with the
National Marine Fisheries Service

Download a copy of the 2022 Skate Annual Monitoring Report [HERE](#). The report covers fishing year 2021.