

Project Narrative

The purpose of this survey is to provide fishery-independent data on lobster and Jonah crab growth and abundance within Massachusetts State waters of statistical areas 514 and 538. MA DMF funds this lobster abundance survey through its commercial and recreational lobster license fees. This survey has occurred annually since 2006.

Each trawl consists of six traps, with three vented and three ventless traps alternated along the string. The escape vents in vented traps are standardized throughout all survey areas to one rectangular vent in the parlor, size 1¹⁵/₁₆" x 5³/₄" (Lobster Conservation Management Area 1 regulation sized vent). All gear would be Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan compliant and meet Federal protected-species related regulations. Survey traps would be tagged as "MA DMF Research Traps". At least one MA DMF scientist would be on board for the sampling trips. MA DMF personnel would not be on board when traps are baited and deployed. Exemptions would not substantively change vessel operations. Catch is expected to be low compared with the biomass and, aside from samples retained for research purposes, returned to sea alive. All catch during sampling trips would be retained temporarily to collect biological data. MA DMF staff may collect lobster and/or Jonah crab, including undersized, oversized, v-notched, and egg-bearing lobsters. Collected samples would be used for research projects on growth and maturity. No catch from the experimental traps would be landed for sale.

If approved, the applicant may request minor modifications and extensions to the EFP throughout the year. EFP modifications and extensions may be granted without further notice if they are deemed essential to facilitate completion of the proposed research and have minimal impacts that do not change the scope or impact of the initially approved EFP request. Any fishing activity conducted outside the scope of the exempted fishing activity would be prohibited.

(Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*)

Dated: April 8, 2026.

David R. Blankinship,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2026-07086 Filed 4-10-26; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

[RTID 0648-XF690]

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC); Public Meeting

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: The Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils will hold a public meeting of a Joint Blueline Tilefish Subcommittee.

DATES: The meeting will be held on Friday, May 1, 2026, from 9 a.m. until 12 p.m. For agenda details, see **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION.**

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held via webinar. Connection information, agenda items, and any additional information will be posted at <https://www.mafmc.org> prior to the meeting.

Council address: Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 800 N State Street, Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901; telephone: (302) 674-2331; <https://www.mafmc.org>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, telephone: (302) 526-5255.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils agreed to establish a Joint Blueline Tilefish Subcommittee to help determine the jurisdictional allocation of the blueline tilefish acceptable biological catch (ABC) north of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. During this kick-off meeting the joint subcommittee will meet to consider the various data sources available to evaluate potential jurisdictional allocations and review previous methods used to determine other regional allocations. The discussions from this initial meeting will serve as a foundation for future discussions, informing the subcommittee's allocation recommendations at subsequent meetings.

Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aid should be directed to Shelley Spedden, (302) 526-5251, at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: April 9, 2026.

Rey Israel Marquez,

Acting Deputy Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2026-07106 Filed 4-10-26; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

[RTID 0648-XF420]

Notice of Intent To Prepare a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Identification of Aquaculture Opportunity Areas in Alaska State Waters and Conduct Public Scoping Meetings

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of intent (NOI) to prepare a programmatic environmental impact statement; request for comments.

SUMMARY: In compliance with Section 7 of the Executive Order, "Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth" (May 7, 2020), NMFS intends to prepare a programmatic environmental impact statement (PEIS) to evaluate alternatives for identifying Aquaculture Opportunity Areas (AOAs) in state waters within the Gulf of Alaska. The PEIS will be prepared in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), NOAA Administrative Order 216-6A, and NOAA's Companion Manual. NMFS is the lead agency for this PEIS and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will act as cooperating agencies. The PEIS will evaluate the potential impacts of identifying one or more AOAs in state waters of the Gulf of Alaska and will discuss the potential impacts of siting aquaculture facilities in those locations. The proposed action is a planning initiative and does not propose any aquaculture facilities or authorize any permits. This notice initiates the public scoping process for the PEIS.

DATES: The 45-day public scoping period begins on April 13, 2026, and finishes on May 28, 2026. NMFS will

consider all written comments received by May 28, 2026.

Two virtual public scoping meetings will be held on:

- Wednesday, April 22, 2026, 2 p.m.–3 p.m. Alaska Time
- Tuesday, April 28, 2026, 9 a.m.–10 a.m. Alaska Time

ADDRESSES: You may submit written comments on this NOI identified by “NOAA–NMFS–2023–0113” using the following methods:

- **Electronic Submission:** Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to <https://www.regulations.gov> and type NOAA–NMFS–2023–0113 in the Search box. Click on the “Comment” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

- **Mail:** Submit written comments to Jon Kurland, Regional Administrator for Alaska Region, NMFS, Attn: Records Office, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802–1668.

Verbal comments will be accepted during the two virtual public scoping meetings described under **DATES**. Information on how to join these meetings is found at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/aquaculture/identifying-aquaculture-opportunity-areas-alaska>. The virtual meetings are open to the public and free to attend. Comments sent or provided by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered by NMFS. All public comments received are a part of the public record and may be posted for public viewing on <http://www.regulations.gov> without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address, etc.), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter “N/A” in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Alicia Bishop, Alaska Regional Aquaculture Coordinator, telephone: 323–366–5659; or email: alicia.bishop@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to apply a science-based approach to identify AOAs in state waters of the Gulf of Alaska. The goal of identifying AOAs is to promote American seafood competitiveness, food security, economic growth, and to support the

development of domestic commercial aquaculture, consistent with sustaining and conserving marine resources and applicable laws, regulations, and policies. The proposed action is needed to meet the directives of E.O. 13921 to address the increasing demand for seafood, facilitate long-term planning for marine aquaculture development, and address interests and concerns regarding marine aquaculture siting.

Preliminary Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

The proposed action is to identify one or more locations (referred to as AOAs) in state waters of the Gulf of Alaska that may be suitable for multiple future aquaculture projects. The PEIS will evaluate the potential impacts of identifying AOAs and of siting aquaculture projects in those locations. The PEIS will not consider finfish aquaculture, as it is prohibited by state law.

An AOA is a geographic area that has been evaluated to determine its potential suitability for commercial aquaculture. NMFS will use a combination of scientific analysis and public engagement to identify AOAs that may be environmentally, socially, and economically suitable for commercial aquaculture. AOAs identified through this process may be considered suitable for aquaculture for shellfish, seaweed, or a combination of these species. AOAs may only be identified by NMFS after completion of a final PEIS and issuance of a final decision document. The proposed action is a long-term planning effort. It is not a regulatory or permitting action, and does not propose to authorize any specific aquaculture-related activities or individual aquaculture projects.

Background Information

E.O. 13921 directs NOAA to lead a multi-agency planning effort to identify AOAs. NMFS published a request for information (RFI) on October 23, 2020, identifying the first two geographic areas for AOAs and asking the public to comment on what areas should be considered for future AOAs (85 FR 67519). NMFS received letters of support from individuals, industry, Alaska Native organizations, Alaska state agencies, and the Alaska state legislature to begin the AOA process in Alaska state waters. NMFS announced the beginning of the process to identify AOAs in Alaska state waters in partnership with the State of Alaska on June 1, 2023. On October 19, 2023, NMFS published a second RFI, specific to Alaska, and held public listening sessions on the identification of marine

spatial planning study areas, and requested data and analyses relevant to the AOA identification process in Alaska state waters (88 FR 72046). NOAA’s National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) in collaboration with NMFS and the State of Alaska, initiated a marine spatial planning process to aid agency decision makers in identifying areas that may be suitable as AOA options. NMFS, NCCOS, and the State of Alaska hosted a two-part workshop series to collect information for a marine spatial planning study (see August 14, 2024, workshop summary report at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/2024-08/Alaska-AOA-Spatial-Planning-Workshops-Report.pdf>). On April 23, 2025, NMFS published a Notice of Availability (90 FR 17051) requesting public comment on the preliminary results of a marine spatial planning study developed by NCCOS in collaboration with NMFS and the State of Alaska, including the identification of draft AOA options in Alaska (<https://cdn.coastalscience.noaa.gov/page-attachments/MSP/Report-for-Notice-for-Comment-for-Alaska-Draft-Final.pdf>). The notice requested public comment on the 97 draft AOA options that had high suitability scores relative to the planning goals to identify up to 4,000 acres (1,519 hectares) per study area for subtidal shellfish and seaweed aquaculture, and up to 100 acres (40.5 hectares) per study area for intertidal shellfish aquaculture. NMFS hosted two, public virtual listening sessions to explain the draft AOA options and receive comments.

NMFS, NCCOS, and the State of Alaska received new information through the public comment process which allowed NCCOS to make improvements to the spatial planning model before finalizing the results. NCCOS updated the model-based comments that highlighted missing, authoritative spatial data sources and information that supported improvements to scoring and data processing for existing data sets. NCCOS used this information to develop the Alaska Atlas—a technical document providing peer-reviewed geospatial planning information. NCCOS published the NOAA Technical Memorandum, An Aquaculture Opportunity Area Atlas for the Gulf of Alaska (Atlas), on February 19, 2026 (NOS NCCOS 365. Beaufort, NC. 986 pp.; available online at: <https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/72440>). The Atlas used a precision-siting, scoring, and ranking process to narrow the suitability analysis results to

77 final AOA options that have high potential suitability for an AOA across the 10 marine spatial planning study areas depicted in Figure 3.64 on page 10 of the Atlas. The final AOA options represented a 26 percent reduction in total acreage from the draft option areas in the marine spatial planning study. The 77 final AOA options resulted in 13,031 acres (5,273 hectares) identified across Southeast, Southcentral, and Southwest Alaska study areas. Southeast has a total of 53 AOA options (44 subtidal and 9 intertidal) depicted in Figure 3.131 on page 298 of the Atlas. Southcentral has a total of 9 AOA options (all subtidal) depicted in Figure 3.93 on page 238 of the Atlas. Southwest has a total of 15 AOA options (13 subtidal and 2 intertidal) depicted in Figure 3.65 on page 184 of the Atlas.

The Atlas may be used as one source of information to assist the agency in identifying one or more AOAs within state waters of the Gulf of Alaska. The Atlas does not reflect any agency decision to identify specific AOAs or foreclose the agency's ability to evaluate alternate locations for consideration as AOAs.

Alternative Framework

The PEIS will analyze and discuss the potential impacts of a no action alternative (Alternative 1) and the potential impacts of identifying one or more AOAs in Alaska state waters (Alternative 2). In Alternative 1 (No Action), NMFS would not identify AOAs in Alaska state waters. Aquaculture projects could still be sited in state waters of Alaska. The no action alternative will serve as the analytic basis (*i.e.*, baseline) for comparison of the proposed action. In Alternative 2, NMFS would consider identifying AOAs in one or more of the 77 AOA options described in the Atlas. NMFS will determine the number and scope of alternatives and areas explored and select the locations to be evaluated in the draft PEIS based on the comments received during this public scoping period.

Summary of Expected Effects

NEPA requires federal agencies to evaluate the potential environmental effects of any major planned Federal action, and to promote public awareness of the potential impacts, by preparing a detailed analysis of proposed actions that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. The PEIS will evaluate the potential impacts of identifying one or more AOAs in state waters of the Gulf of Alaska and will discuss the potential impacts of siting aquaculture in those locations, should

projects be proposed, as informed by the Atlas and best available information. The proposed action is a planning effort and does not propose to authorize or permit any specific aquaculture-related activities or individual aquaculture projects, however the PEIS will discuss the potential impacts of siting aquaculture in those locations as directed by E.O. 13921. The PEIS will consider potential impacts on the administrative environment, physical and biological environment, socioeconomic environment, and the cultural/historic environment.

The PEIS will consider potential stressors associated with shellfish and seaweed aquaculture or a combination of these types of farms, including stressors associated with pre-construction, construction, operations and maintenance, and decommissioning of shellfish and seaweed aquaculture. Biological and physical resources potentially considered may include: affected ecosystems, fish, invertebrates, aquatic vegetation, seaweeds, mammals, birds, and special status habitat. Potential impacts to these resources that may be considered include: potential physical disturbance and strike stressors, acoustic and light disturbance, ecosystem stressors, effluents and emissions, entanglement stressors, ingestion stressors, disease and pathogen transmission, and other changes in water quality. Socioeconomic resources potentially considered may include: existing aquaculture, fishing, seafood markets and regional food systems, transportation and navigation, aesthetic quality, tourism and recreation, community/regional infrastructure and ports/working waterfronts, energy and public services, and public health and safety. Cultural and historic resources potentially considered may include: Alaska Native resources, cultural practices, and archaeological resources.

Wherever possible and supported by the best available science, the PEIS may highlight potential mitigation strategies to address impacts associated with aquaculture siting and development in the proposed AOAs.

Anticipated Permits and Other Authorizations

The proposed action to identify AOAs is a planning process. Neither the final PEIS nor final decision document will authorize any specific aquaculture activities or approve any individual aquaculture projects. Any future aquaculture operations within an AOA would be required to comply with all applicable Federal and state laws and regulations, including but not limited to

the Clean Water Act, Rivers and Harbors Act, Endangered Species Act, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), Marine Mammal Protection Act, and National Historic Preservation Act. Compliance may include Endangered Species Act, Essential Fish Habitat (Magnuson-Stevens Act), and National Historic Preservation Act consultations, and Marine Mammal Protection Act authorizations. Additional NEPA analysis may be required as part of permitting and authorization processes. Cooperating agencies may adopt the PEIS and utilize the information to support their permitting decisions.

Schedule for the Decision-Making Process

The PEIS is expected to take two years from the date of this notice. The draft PEIS is tentatively scheduled for publication in winter 2027. The draft PEIS will be released for public comment, and all public comments will be considered before issuing a final PEIS. The final PEIS and associated final decision is tentatively scheduled for publication in spring 2028.

Public Scoping Process and Meetings

This notice initiates the scoping process, which guides the scope of environmental issues, potential impacts, alternatives, and potential mitigation measures that could be included in the draft PEIS. Comments will be accepted until May 28, 2026. Interested parties may submit public comments according to the instructions described in the **DATES** and **ADDRESSES** sections above.

Request for Identification of Potential Alternatives, Information, and Analyses Relevant to the Proposed Action

NMFS requests data, comments, views, information, analysis, alternatives, or suggestions on the proposed action from the public; affected Federal, State, Tribal, and local governments, agencies, and offices; the scientific community; non-governmental organizations; industry; and all other interested parties. Specifically, we are soliciting information and feedback on:

1. The scope of the NEPA analysis, including the range of reasonable alternatives and the number of and locations of areas that should be considered and evaluated.

2. The types of aquaculture (*e.g.*, species or gear) that are ecologically, economically, and socially of interest or concern, and could be analyzed in a proposed AOA location.

3. Information related to technologies and strategies that could increase opportunities for or mitigate risks of aquaculture development.

4. Potential impacts to biological, physical, and ecological resources, including potential interactions with marine mammals and other species protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act or Endangered Species Act, Essential Fish Habitat designated under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and other sensitive, managed, or protected habitats in the Gulf of Alaska.

5. Potential impacts to the social, economic, and cultural environment, including but not limited to fishing sectors and industries, and Alaska Native and coastal communities.

6. Current or planned activities in or near the areas highlighted in this notice and their possible impacts on aquaculture development or the impact of aquaculture developments on those activities.

7. Other topics relevant to the Proposed Action and its impacts on the human environment.

Authority: E.O. 13921.

Dated: April 7, 2026.

Danielle Blacklock,

Director, Office of Aquaculture, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2026-07063 Filed 4-10-26; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648-XF653]

New England Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of public meetings.

SUMMARY: The New England Fishery Management Council (Council) is conducting five scoping meetings to solicit comments on ideas for fishery improvements in the monkfish and skate fisheries. The scoping is designed to identify the challenges the monkfish and skate fishing sectors are grappling with and to identify possible management measures for the Council to address those challenges in the future. In June of 2026, the Council will consider comments received during scoping and in December of 2026, the Council will consider these comments when developing 2027 Council work priorities. Given monkfish is jointly

managed with the Mid-Atlantic Council, during its August 2026 meeting, the Mid-Atlantic Council will receive the same scoping summary and an update on any outcomes of the June 2026 New England Council meeting.

DATES: These meetings and webinar will be held between Monday, April 27, 2026 and Monday, May 11, 2026. See supplementary information for more details on specific dates and times.

ADDRESSES:

Council address: New England Fishery Management Council, 50 Water Street, Mill 2, Newburyport, MA 01950.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Cate O'Keefe, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council; telephone: (978) 465-0492.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

1. Monday, April 27, 2026 from 4–6:30 p.m. The Westin Portland Harborview Hotel, 157 High Street, Portland, ME 04101.

2. Wednesday, April 29, 2026 from 4–6:30 p.m. Fairfield Inn & Suites, 185 MacArthur Drive, New Bedford, MA 02740.

3. Thursday, April 30, 2026 from 4–6:30 p.m. Cornell Cooperative Extension Suffolk County, 423 Griffing Avenue, Riverhead, NY 11901.

4. Thursday, May 5, 2026 from 4–6:30 p.m. Stafford Township, 260 East Bay Avenue, Manahawkin, NJ 08050.

5. Monday, May 11, 2026 from 4–6:30 p.m. via webinar. Please register for the webinar here: <https://nefmc-org.zoom.us/j/9876543210>.

Public comments: The public comment deadline is on Monday, May 18, 2026. Mail to Cate O'Keefe, Executive Director, New England Fishery Management Council, 50 Water Street, Mill #2, Newburyport, MA 01950. Mark the outside of the envelope “Monkfish and Skate Fishery Improvements Scoping Comments.” Comments may also be sent via email to comments@nefmc.org—with “Monkfish and Skate Fishery Improvements Scoping Comments” in the subject line.

Agenda

Council staff will brief the public on prior monkfish and skate priority ideas, recent monkfish catch per unit effort (CPUE) project review information, and the Monkfish and Skate 2025 Joint Management Summary Report before receiving comments. Staff seek feedback on gear-type dynamics, skate fishery components, and the differences between the northern and southern monkfish components to help the Council articulate and prioritize management objectives for both

fisheries in the future. These meetings will begin promptly at the time indicated above. If all attendees who wish to do so have provided their comments prior to the end time indicated, the meeting may conclude early. To the extent possible, the Council may extend scoping meetings beyond the end time indicated above to accommodate all attendees who wish to speak.

Although non-emergency issues not contained on the agenda may come before this Council for discussion, those issues may not be the subject of formal action during this meeting. Council action will be restricted to those issues specifically listed in this notice and any issues arising after publication of this notice that require emergency action under section 305(c) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, provided the public has been notified of the Council's intent to take final action to address the emergency. The public also should be aware that the meeting will be recorded. Consistent with 16 U.S.C. 1852, a copy of the recording is available upon request.

Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Cate O'Keefe, Executive Director, at 978-465-0492, at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: April 9, 2026.

Key Israel Marquez,

Acting Deputy Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2026-07110 Filed 4-10-26; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648-XF678]

Marine Mammals; File No. 29014

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice; receipt of application.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that Erich Jarvis, Ph.D., The Rockefeller University 1230 York Ave, New York, NY 10065, has applied in due form for a permit to import marine mammal parts for scientific research.

DATES: Written comments must be received on or before May 13, 2026.