

landings would have a potential ex-vessel value of approximately \$425,700.

LAGC scallop vessels may dredge for scallops in the NGOM Management Area, the GB/SNE Scallop Dredge Exemption Area, and the Mid-Atlantic Exemption Area. In the NGOM and the GB/SNE Scallop Dredge Exemption Area, LAGC vessels are prohibited from possessing any fish species other than scallops and monkfish. This prohibition results in a high rate of regulatory discards of skate. The skate bait resource (landing whole skates less than 23 inches (58.4 cm) in total length for use as bait) is considered underutilized. This study would evaluate the feasibility of increasing utilization of the fishery by converting regulatory discards to landings.

Based on NMFS' annual monitoring reports for fishing years 2020–2024 and monitoring reports to date for fishing year 2025, the percentage of the bait skate quota used has ranged from 16 percent of the skate bait total allowable landings (TAL) in 2021 to 63 percent in 2024. Landings of bait skate in the 2025 fishing year so far have been lower than those recorded in 2024. The requested exemption would allow vessels fishing for scallops under an LAGC permit to land up to 1,419 lbs (644 kilograms (kg)) of whole skate, which is the trip limit for vessels with a federal skate permit that are not fishing under a monkfish, Northeast multispecies, or scallop day-at-sea (50 CFR 648.322(b)(4)). This EFP would authorize a maximum of 1,200 trips, which could result in a maximum increase in landings of 1,702,800 lb (772 metric ton (mt)) bait skate, or 15 percent of the fishing year 2025 bait skate TAL. Reaching 90 percent of the skate bait fishery seasonal quota or 80 percent of the annual skate bait fishery TAL would result in a trip limit reduction for the skate bait LOA fishery. However, in the last 5 years of the skate bait fishery, these additional landings would not have caused landings to reach the 80 percent of annual TAL threshold. This 1.7 million-lb (771 mt) increase in bait skate landings is also a ceiling; depending on seasonal variability of skate abundance, operators expect to catch between 200 and 800 lb (90.7 and 362.9 kg) of bait skate during experimental fishing trips, well below the 1,419-lb (644 kg) trip limit. This estimate aligns with bycatch estimates from observer data collected over the past 5 years of the LAGC fishery. For observed trips between 2020 and 2025, skate bycatch varied seasonally, with median skate bycatch ranging from 0 lb in April to 614 lb in September.

Participating vessels would record data on their fishing effort and location;

scallop and bait skate catch, landings, and discards; utilization of bait skate (*i.e.*, whether it was sold to a dealer, or retained for immediate or later use in the crab/lobster fishery); the ex-vessel value of landed and sold bait skate; and the vessel's home and landing port locations. CFRF would then use this data to evaluate the viability of a bait skate bycatch fishery for LAGC scallop vessels, which has the potential to increase economic resilience for small vessels while promoting efficient utilization of the historically underutilized skate bait quota.

All 12 participating LAGC vessels would follow effort, trip limit, and annual quota requirements under the current LAGC scallop fishery regulations with no gear modifications. All vessels would hold valid Federal skate permits and would be subject to all bait skate fishery regulations. This EFP would not authorize transfers-at-sea of bait catch between vessels. Allowing landings of skate bycatch that would normally be discarded is not expected to alter vessels' number or duration of trips.

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: May 1, 2026.

Kelly Denit,

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

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[RTID 0648–XF721]

New England Fishery Management Council; Public Meeting

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

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: The New England Fishery Management Council (Council) is scheduling a webinar of its Risk Policy

Working Group to consider actions affecting New England fisheries in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Recommendations from this group will be brought to the full Council for formal consideration and action, if appropriate.

DATES: This webinar will be held on Wednesday, June 3, 2026, at 1 p.m. EDT. Webinar registration URL information: <https://nefmc-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/k9dzsxYqTcy-OwOgDAaZOQ>.

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:

Agenda

The Risk Policy Working Group will meet to finalize recommended updates to the Risk Policy Concept document and appendices. They will consider use of the Risk Policy in 2026, including qualitative and quantitative approaches. The Working Group will prepare for a Council weightings exercise in June 2026. Other business will be discussed, if necessary.

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

This meeting is 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: May 1, 2026.

Anna Michelle Harrison,

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

[FR Doc. 2026–08814 Filed 5–5–26; 8:45 am]

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