



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council IRA Projects

SAFMC Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel

June 30, 2026

Kiley Dancy, Council Staff

Overview

MAFMC IRA1	An Operational Forecast to Reduce Bycatch of River Herring in the Mid-Water Trawl Fishery
MAFMC IRA 2	Collaborative Strategies to Adapt Scup GRAs to Changing Ocean Conditions
MAFMC IRA 3	3a: Improving Council Governance Structures and Processes 3b: Operationalizing Outcomes of MAFMC/GARFO Program Review
MAFMC IRA 4	Climate-Ready Updates to the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Source Documents: Life History and Habitat Characteristics for Federally Managed Fish in the Northeast
MAFMC IRA 5	Operationalizing Ecosystem and Habitat Indicators to Support Climate-Ready Fisheries Management in the Mid-Atlantic
MAFMC IRA 6	Evaluating Data Needs and Management Strategies to Support Climate-Ready Fisheries Management
MAFMC IRA 7	Developing a Framework and Indicators to Evaluate Stock Distribution Changes and Governance Issues
MAFMC IRA 8	Advancing Scenario Planning Outcomes: Strategizing for Complex Actions

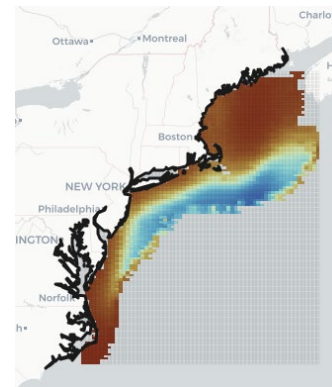
MAFMC IRA 1: An Operational Forecast to Reduce Bycatch of River Herring in the Mid-Water Trawl Fishery

Project Description

To assist the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils in monitoring and minimizing river herring and shad (RH/S) bycatch, this project will develop **short-term forecast maps identifying areas of high river herring bycatch risk**. These maps will be provided to industry as a voluntary bycatch avoidance tool to minimize impacts to both RH/S and directed fishing operations.

Objectives

1. Examine changes in and patterns of river herring bycatch in the midwater trawl fisheries.
2. Develop an advanced joint species spatial distribution model to predict areas river herring + Atlantic herring and Atlantic mackerel fisheries overlap.
3. Produce weekly forecast model maps of areas of high river herring bycatch risk.
4. Work with midwater trawl fleet to determine utility of bycatch risk maps and opportunities to reduce RH/S bycatch.



MAFMC IRA 1: An Operational Forecast to Reduce Bycatch of River Herring in the Mid -Water Trawl Fishery

Project Team

Contractor: Dr. Janet Nye,
University of North Carolina at
Chapel Hill

Project Oversight Team: Jason
Didden (staff lead), Jamie
Cournane (NEFMC), Katie Drew
(ASMFC), Brandon Muffley
(MAFMC)



Jun 2024 - Feb 2025

Initiation

Contractor selected; oversight team
formed

Jul 2024 - Oct 2025

Interviews and model development

Fishing industry interviews; initialize
joint species distribution models

Oct 2025 - Dec 2026

Outreach and model refinement

Additional industry outreach, model
refinement, short-term bycatch
forecasts

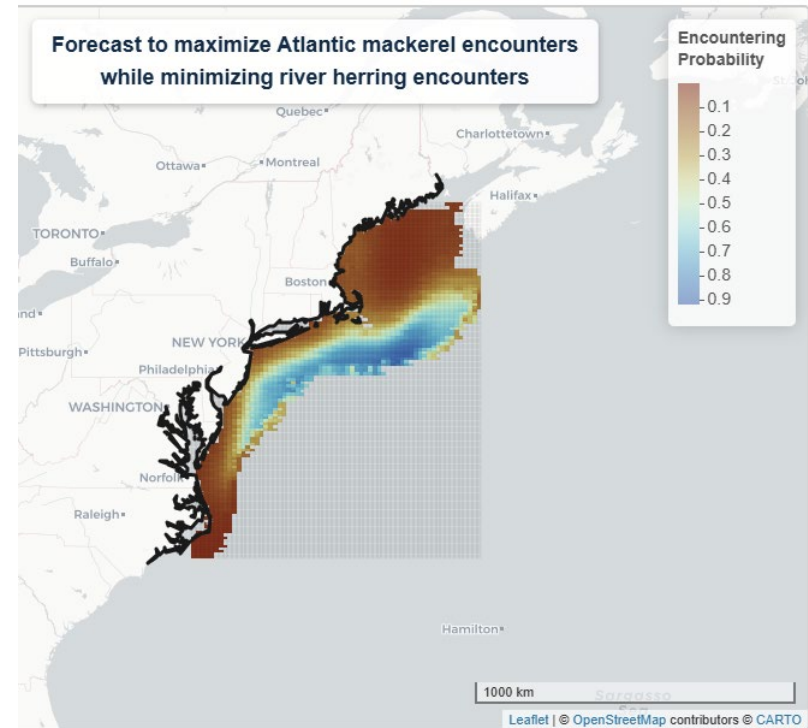
Jan - Feb 2027

Project completion

Final report; findings presented.

MAFMC IRA 1: An Operational Forecast to Reduce Bycatch of River Herring in the Mid -Water Trawl Fishery

- Web-based mapping portal (River Herring Avoidance Program Forecast, RHAPCAST - <https://www.rhapcast.org/>)
- Weekly forecast maps identifying hot spots of shad/river herring in relation to Atlantic Mackerel and Atlantic Herring
- Uses historical presence/absence data from NMFS bottom trawl surveys, historical environmental data, and forecasted sea surface temperature data
- Gathering feedback on accuracy and utility to drive improvements for 2027 fishing season



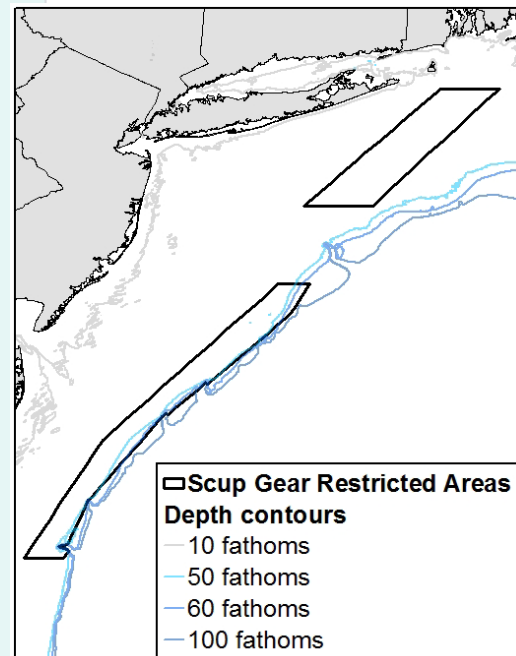
MAFMC IRA2: Collaborative Strategies to Adapt Scup GRAs to Changing Ocean Conditions

Project Description

Scup Gear Restricted Areas (GRAs) were implemented nearly 25 years ago to reduce juvenile scup discards in small mesh fisheries at certain times of year. Since then, the scup population has substantially increased while changing ocean conditions alter their spatial and temporal distribution. This project **investigates potential modifications to the current scup GRAs using fisheries and environmental data** along with fishing industry input.

Objectives

1. Identify scup bycatch/discard hotspots and spatial patterns.
2. Identify areas and times where changes in fishing effort could reduce impacts on juvenile scup.
3. Improve our understanding of the regulatory and economic drivers of scup discards and how the GRAs or other management strategies might influence fleet behavior.
4. Identify potential biological and socio-economic tradeoffs between management strategies to reduce scup bycatch and impacts on fishermen.



MAFMC IRA 2: Collaborative Strategies to Adapt Scup GRAs to Changing Ocean Conditions

Project Team

Contractors: Scott Curatolo-Wagemann and Emerson Hasbrouck, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and Dr. Patrick Sullivan, Cornell University

Project Oversight Team: Hayden Dubniczki (staff lead), Jason Didden (MAFMC), Hannah Hart (MAFMC), Tori Kentner (MAFMC), Sam Truesdell (NEFSC)

<https://ccesuffolk.org/marine/fisheries/scup-gra>



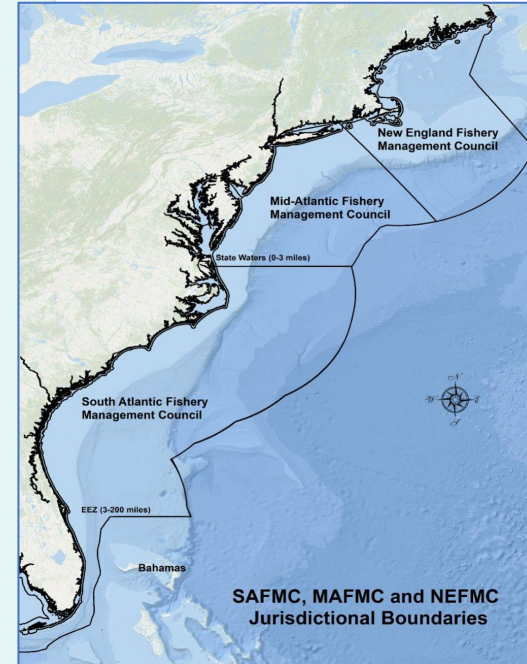
MAFMC IRA 3a: Improving Mid -Atlantic Council Governance Structures and Processes

Project Description

Changing species distributions increasingly pose challenges for East Coast marine fisheries governance and management structures. Complex management systems also pose challenges for nimbleness and adaptation to changing conditions. It is increasingly critical to ensure that representation on various management bodies remains fair and effective, and processes are efficient and adaptable. This project will **review existing governance and decision-making structures and identify ways to increase efficiency, transparency, responsiveness, and effective representation.**

Objectives

1. Review and document the Mid-Atlantic Council's existing representation, procedures, and use of its committees and other advisory bodies.
2. Work with stakeholders, staff, and management partners to develop recommendations to improve the structure, use, and representation of these groups.
3. Review and recommend improvements to joint and cooperative management agreements with the New England Council, South Atlantic Council, and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to enhance transparency, efficiency, and adaptability.



MAFMC IRA 3a: Improving Mid -Atlantic Council Governance Structures and Processes

Project Team

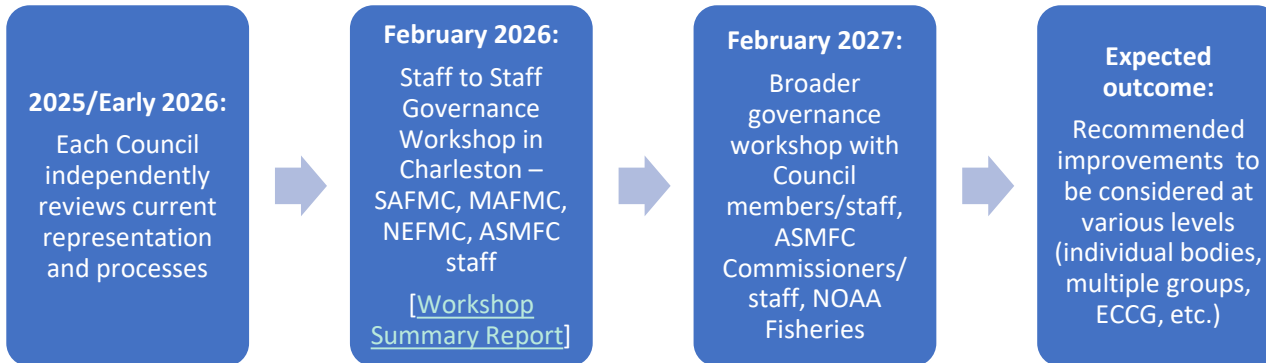
Contractors: Deirdre Boelke and Dr. Sean Lucey, Fisheries Insight Network, and Kimberly Gordon, Resource Logic

Project Oversight Team: Kiley Dancy (staff lead), Brandon Muffley (staff lead), Michelle Bachman (NEFMC), Bob Beal (ASMFC), Travis Ford (GARFO), Lara Klibansky (SAFMC)



MAFMC IRA 3a: Improving Mid -Atlantic Council Governance Structures and Processes

- All **3 East Coast Councils** working on IRA projects with overlapping governance themes:
 - Committee/Advisory Body structure, representation, and use
 - Joint management agreements
 - Process, efficiency, & coordination improvements
- Staff regularly communicating and working together via Project Oversight Team membership
- Some coordination via East Coast Core Team (staff level) and [East Coast Coordination Group](#) (leadership level):



Staff-to-Staff Governance Workshop Summary
May 2026

Introduction

The Staff-to-Staff Governance Workshop brought together a subset of staff members from the New England (NEFMC), Mid-Atlantic (MAFMC) and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils (SAFMC) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). The purpose of this workshop was to facilitate discussion and information sharing around fishery governance topics and generate ideas for improving the spectrum of governance structures (see Appendix A) and processes used for East Coast fisheries. The outcomes from this workshop are intended to support the development of a broader governance workshop among East Coast fishery management bodies, and feed into governance-related projects being undertaken by the three Councils.

The agenda for this workshop was developed in response to the workshop terms of reference (TOR) approved by the [East Coast Coordination Group](#) (ECCG). Specifically, the workshop agenda was designed to identify successes, challenges and opportunities for improvement within the following governance topics:

- Council committee representation and use (TOR 1)
- Advisory Body representation and use (TOR 2)
- Council-to-Council (& Council-to-Commission) relations (TOR 3)
- Joint, complementary and coordinated management arrangements (TOR 4)
- General coordination mechanisms and staff to staff communication (TOR 5)

This summary is organized around the governance topics outlined above in order of what received the most attention at the workshop, with the intent of providing a high-level overview of workshop discussions. Specific details around successes, challenges and opportunities for improvement are being considered by the workshop steering committee and will be integrated into more detailed reports being generated by Council governance projects. It is important to emphasize that many of the opportunities identified in this summary are already being applied to greater or lesser degrees by individual management organizations, but in some cases the implementation could be improved on or done more consistently throughout the region. This summary also includes a section highlighting several cross-cutting themes from workshop discussions, which will be further explored through the broader governance workshop and individual Council governance projects. The workshop agenda and terms of reference are included in Appendix B.

1

MAFMC IRA 3b: Addressing Outcomes of the MAFMC/GARFO Program Review (Not yet started)

Project Description

The Council completed a program review in 2024 which identified recommendations for process improvements to increase adaptability, efficiency and communication, with the aim of improving mission delivery, internal processes, and stakeholder engagement. This project will address recommendations from the program review by **producing internal and external communication products to increase transparency and consistency and improve stakeholder understanding** of Council processes.

Specific objectives, contractor, and project team TBD

- Request for proposals to be developed late 2026

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Program Review



JULY 2024

**THE PARNIN
GROUP**

MAFMC IRA 4: Climate-ready updates to the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) source documents

Project Description

EFH source documents are comprehensive documents describing fish species and their habitat requirements and provide support for EFH designations and other management needs. These documents have not been updated in ~20 years and are not available for newly managed species (e.g., blueline tilefish). This project will **update or create EFH source documents for all fishery council managed species in the Northeast** to include new information on life history and ecology, distribution, habitat requirements, and climate impacts.

Objectives

1. Develop 4 new and 38 updated EFH source documents for federally managed species of the Mid-Atlantic and New England Councils.
2. Develop and/or update all baseline, foundational life history and ecology information, including climate change effects, for all 42 species to facilitate uptake of climate information to support fisheries management needs.
3. Create an efficient update process to simplify future source document updates.



NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-NE-151

Essential Fish Habitat Source Document:

**Summer Flounder, *Paralichthys dentatus*,
Life History and Habitat Characteristics**

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
Northeast Region
Northeast Fisheries Science Center
Woods Hole, Massachusetts

September 1999

MAFMC IRA 4: Climate-ready updates to the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) source documents

Project Team

Contractor: Dr. Gavin Fay,
University of Massachusetts
Dartmouth

Project Oversight Team: Jessica Coakley (staff lead), Michelle Bachman (NEFMC), Tori Kentner (MAFMC), David Packer (NEFSC), Jim Vasslides (NEFSC), and David Stevenson (contracted)



Oct 2024- Feb 2025

Initiation

Contractor selected; oversight team formed

Mar 2025 – Feb 2026

Lit review & prototypes

Begin literature reviews; document prototyping; complete documents for half of species

Mar 2026 – Feb 2027

Document finalization

Continue literature review; complete source documents for remaining species

Feb 2027

Project completion

Final source documents

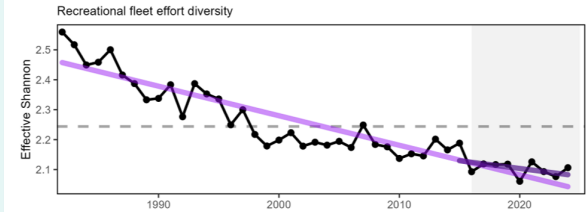
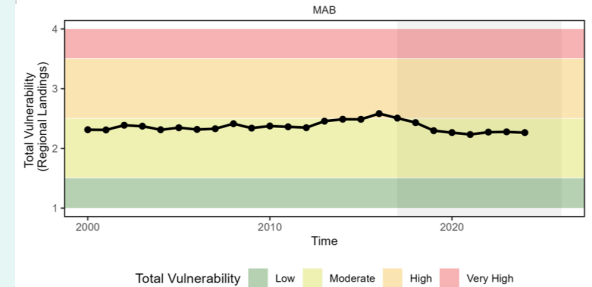
MAFMC IRA 5: Operationalizing Ecosystem and Habitat Indicators to Support Climate-Ready Fisheries Management in the Mid-Atlantic

Project Description

The Council regularly receives ecosystem and habitat indicator information through State of the Ecosystem reports, the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) risk assessment, and Ecosystem and Socioeconomic Profiles. While significant advancements have been made in ecosystem indicators, incorporating this information into fisheries management remains a challenge. This project seeks to **develop and test indicators to improve the integration of ecosystem and habitat indicators into Mid-Atlantic Council management processes and tactical decision making.**

Objectives

1. Review and assess existing ecosystem and habitat indicators in the Northeast and evaluate their utility to support management objectives.
2. Identify and develop priority indicators, including targets and thresholds, for decision making and identify specific management on-ramps for their use in Council decisions.
3. Create workflow and communication tools to support regular updates of indicators and enhance the usability of indicators in the management process.



MAFMC IRA 5: Operationalizing Ecosystem and Habitat Indicators to Support Climate-Ready Fisheries Management in the Mid-Atlantic

Project Team

Contractor: Dr. Sarah Gaichas, Hydra Scientific, and Dr. Gavin Fay, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

Project Oversight Team: Brandon Muffley (staff lead), Julia Beaty (MAFMC), Geret DePiper (Texas A&M), Julian Garrison (NEFMC), Scott Large (NEFSC)



Apr – Aug 2025

Initiation

Contractor selected; oversight team formed

Jul 2025 - Jan 2026

Indicator review & prioritization

Indicator review, prioritization, planning; workshop #1 to prioritize management decisions

Jan 2026 – Jun 2027

Indicator development

Indicator development, testing, visualization, and communication; identification of management on-ramps

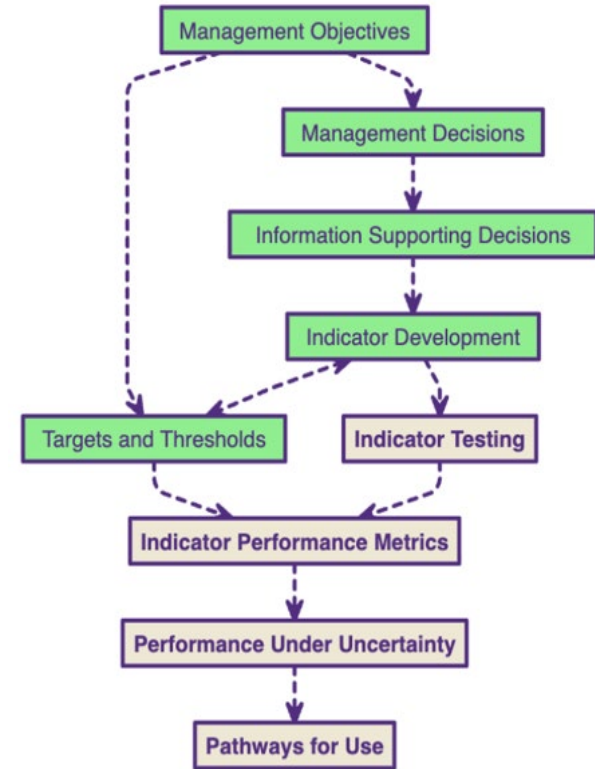
Jun 2027

Project completion

Finalize indicators report and present findings

MAFMC IRA 5: Operationalizing Ecosystem and Habitat Indicators to Support Climate-Ready Fisheries Management in the Mid-Atlantic

- Developing operational indicators starts with *Management Objectives* and *Management Decisions* then finding *Information Supporting Decisions*
- Developed with Council, AP members, Science Center, SSC, and staff
- **December 2025 Workshop** – priority management decisions identified
 - **Council Risk Policy and Catch/Quota Setting** – priority management decisions to be evaluated with indicators
- **March 2026 Workshop** – defined desirable and undesirable states and potential targets and thresholds
 - Indicators will be simulation tested using these metrics to evaluate how well they inform/support decisions
- **December 2026 Workshop** – review results of indicator testing



MAFMC IRA 6: Evaluating Data Needs and Management Strategies to Support Climate-Ready Fisheries Management

Project Description

Species are undergoing changes in their distribution, abundance, and productivity, and historical data may no longer accurately predict future conditions. Many important, long running federal data collection programs face significant challenges, resulting in fewer samples and increased uncertainty. This project seeks to **evaluate the levels of data collection needed under different climate scenarios to support robust stock assessments, and identify management tools and risk policies that can minimize both the risk of overfishing and the loss of fishing opportunities** under those scenarios.

Objectives

1. Synthesize challenges associated with changes in federal East Coast fishery independent and fishery dependent data collection programs from 2010-present.
2. Use management strategy evaluation to evaluate the performance of U.S. fisheries management strategies (e.g., harvest control rules and risk policies) in the context of climate change and data uncertainty.
3. Review MSE outcomes and develop sampling, assessment, and management recommendations that aim to support robust fisheries management in a changing ocean.



MAFMC IRA 6: Evaluating Data Needs and Management Strategies to Support Climate-Ready Fisheries Management

Project Team

Contractor: Dr. Lisa Kerr and Dr. Roger Brothers, University of Maine

Project Oversight Team: Brandon Muffley (staff lead), Katie Drew (ASMFC), Laurel Smith (NEFSC), Jamie Cournane (NEFMC), Lara Klibansky (SAFMC), Nikolai Klibansky (SEFSC)



Jul 2024 – Oct 2024

Initiation

Contractor selected; oversight team formed

Nov 2024 – Jul 2025

Synthesis of challenges

Summarize data collection challenges

May 2025 – Feb 2027

MSE development

MSE development and simulation testing; stakeholder workshop; development of recommendations

Apr 2027

Project completion

Finalize shiny app and technical report; present findings

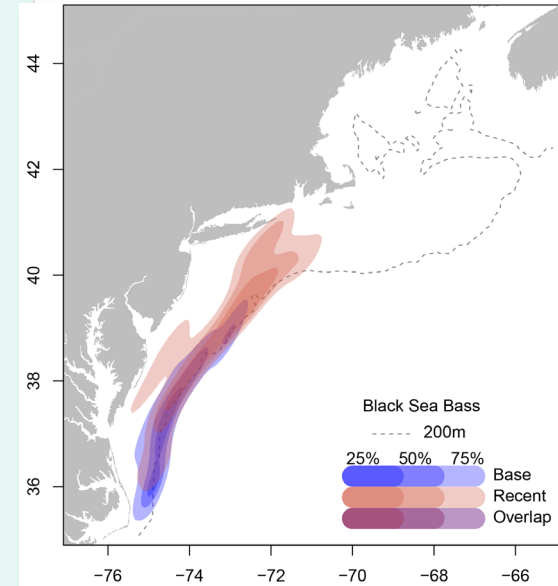
MAFMC IRA 7: Developing a Framework and Indicators to Evaluate Stock Distribution Changes and Governance Issues

Project Description

Climate-driven changes in species distribution create management challenges and uncertainties, particularly as species move across jurisdictional boundaries. These changes can also impact fishery behavior, fishing locations, and market/shoreside trends. As conditions change, understanding these dynamics will be critical. This project seeks to **evaluate changes in species and fishery distributions for all Mid-Atlantic Council managed stocks and develop a framework for using this information to support climate-ready fisheries management.**

Objectives

1. Review relevant data sources and develop a comprehensive characterization of stock and fishery distribution changes, with associated visualization tools for all Mid-Atlantic Council managed stocks.
2. Develop potential stock and fishery indicators and metrics that can inform fisheries management and governance decisions.
3. Recommend a policy framework for monitoring and responding to changes in stock and fishery distributions.

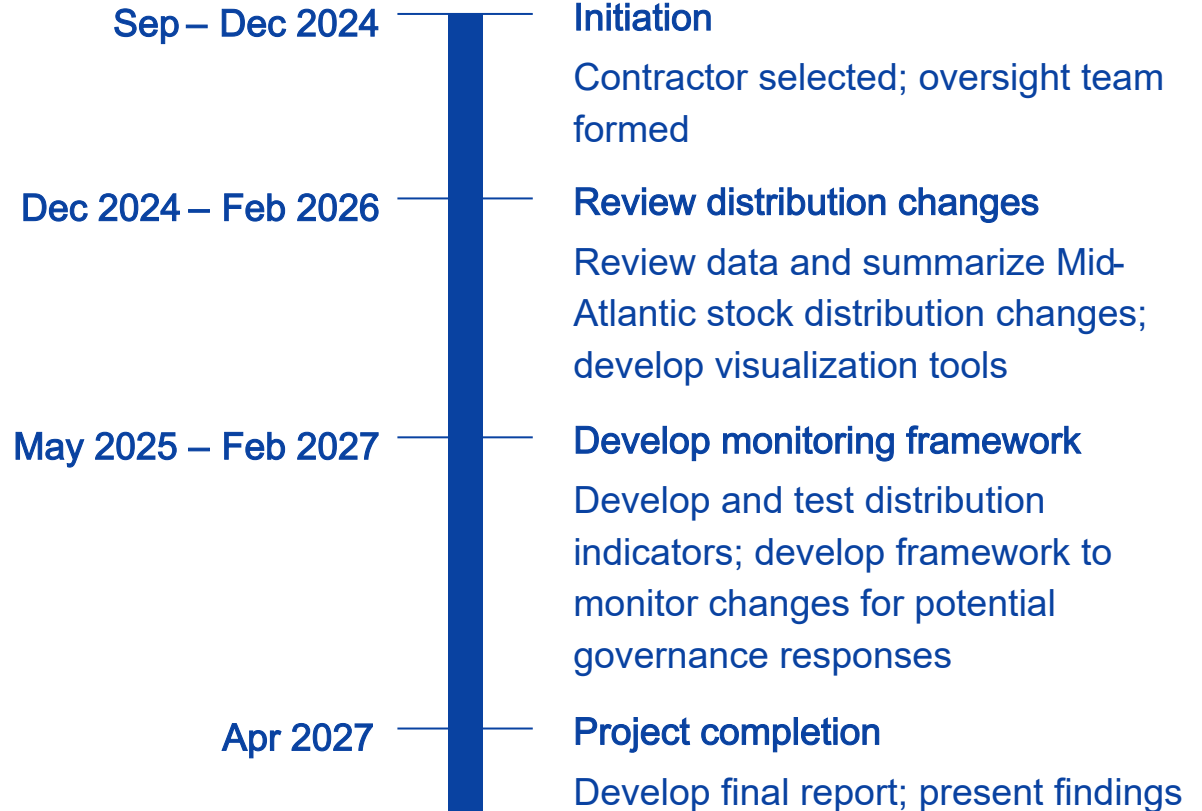


MAFMC IRA 7: Developing a Framework and Indicators to Evaluate Stock Distribution Changes and Governance Issues

Project Team

Contractor: Dr. Kathy Mills, Dr. Andrew Allyn, and Jonathan Labaree, Gulf of Maine Research Institute

Project Oversight Team: Kiley Dancy (staff lead), Michelle Bachman (NEFMC), Chris Haak (contracted), Kathleen Howington (SAFMC), Melissa Karp (NMFS)

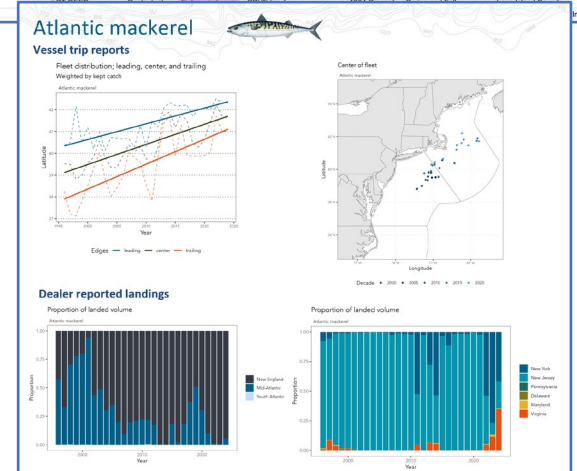


MAFMC IRA 7: Developing a Framework and Indicators to Evaluate Stock Distribution Changes and Governance Issues

- Developed a data catalogue and visualizations of distribution change
 - Fishery independent data (state & federal)
 - Fishery dependent data (commercial and rec – catch, value, effort)
- Developing indicators - center of gravity, leading/trailing edges, presence/absence/persistence, proportional distribution across management boundaries
- Case studies to evaluate indicator performance over time
- Integrating information into framework to monitor multiple indicators and determine when to take a closer look at distribution changes/governance implications

Data catalog

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
	Data set	Organization	Class	Data type	Data content	Time	Frequency	Spatial Footprint	Inshore/Off
1	NERS	NEFSC	Core	Fishery-dep...	Electronic logbook catch data	1996-Present	Continuous	Northeast U.S. LME	Offshore
2	ODBS (Observer)	NEFSC	Core	Fishery-dep...	CPUE targetbycatch species	1989-Present	Continuous	Northeast U.S. LME	Offshore
3	ODBS (At Sea Monitor)	NEFSC	Core	Fishery-dep...	CPUE targetbycatch species	2010-Present	Continuous	Northeast U.S. LME	Offshore
4	Dealer Database	GARFO	Core	Fishery-dep...	Landed port, volume, value	2004-Present	Continuous	Northeast U.S. LME	Offshore
5	VTR	GARFO	Core	Fishery-dep...	CPUE targetbycatch species	1994-Present	Continuous	Northeast U.S. LME	Offshore
6	NEMAP	VIMS	Core	Fishery-ind...	CPUE trawl	2006-Present	Spring and Fall	Mid-Atlantic Bight	Inshore
7	NOAA NEFSC Bottom Trawl	NEFSC	Core	Fishery-dep...	CPUE trawl	1963-Present	Spring and Fall	Northeast U.S. LME	Offshore
8	Study fleet	NEFSC	Supporting	Fishery-dep...	CPUE trawl, CTD	2006-Present	Continuous	Northeast U.S. LME	Both
9	Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada	DFO	Supporting	Fishery-ind...	CPUE trawl	1987-Present	Spring and Summer	Canada Maritimes	Both
10	Maine New Hampshire Inshore Trawl	MEDNR	Supporting	Fishery-ind...	CPUE trawl	2000-Present	Spring and Fall	Maine and New Hampshire	Inshore
11	Massachusetts Bottom Trawl	MADMF	Supporting	Fishery-ind...	CPUE trawl	1978-Present	Spring and Fall	Massachusetts	Inshore
12	New Jersey Ocean Stock Assessment	NJFW	Supporting	Fishery-ind...	CPUE trawl	1989-Present	5 surveys per year	New Jersey	Inshore
13	NOAA NEFSC Surfclam and Ocean Quahog S...	NEFSC	Supporting	Fishery-ind...	CPUE dredge	2012-Present	Biennial, subset annually	Northeast U.S. LME	Both
14	SMART Drop Camera Survey	SMART	Supporting	Fishery-ind...	CPUE camera	1999-Present	7	Georges Bank and Mid-Atlantic	Both
15	Gulf of Maine Longline Survey	NEFSC	Supporting	Fishery-ind...	CPUE hookline	2014-Present	Spring and Fall	Gulf of Maine	Offshore
16	SEMAP	SCDNR	Supporting	Fishery-ind...	CPUE trawl	1986-Present	Spring, Summer, and Fall	Southeast coast	Inshore
17	SEFSC Longline Survey	SEFSC	Supporting	Fishery-ind...	CPUE hookline	1995-Present	Summer	Southeast U.S. LME and Gulf of Me	Both
18	Marginal Coastal Bay Fisheries Investigation	MD DNR	Contextual	Fishery-ind...	CPUE trawl and seine	1989-Present	Monthly	Maryland	Inshore
19	ChesMAPP Trawl	VIMS	Contextual	Fishery-ind...	CPUE trawl	2002-Present	Quarterly	Chesapeake Bay	Inshore
20	Long Island Sound Trawl								Inshore
21	Delaware Bottom Trawl Survey								Inshore



MAFMC IRA 8: Advancing Scenario Planning Outcomes: Strategizing for Complex Actions (Not yet started)

Project Description (tentative – reduced scope from previous plans)

The East Coast Coordination Group was formed in 2023 to oversee implementation of actions associated with the East Coast Climate Change Scenario Planning Initiative. The leadership-level group is responsible for tracking progress toward implementation of those potential actions, coordinating priorities, estimating needed resources, and supporting collaboration and coordination. This project will aim to **help the Coordination Group, and the supporting East Coast Core Team, refine and clarify their processes, roles, and objectives to facilitate continued progress toward addressing scenario planning recommendations.**

Specific objectives, contractor, and project team TBD

- Request for proposals in development for release Summer 2026



2025 Potential Action Menu

Introduction

The U.S. East Coast Fishery Management Councils (Councils, New England, Mid-Atlantic, and South Atlantic), the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission), and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) conducted an East Coast Scenario Planning Initiative to explore jurisdictional, governance, and management issues related to climate change and fishery stock distributions. Representatives from these fishery management organizations have worked collaboratively and engaged diverse stakeholders to explore how changing ecosystems, socioeconomic conditions, and the regulatory environment will affect fishery management. This exploration was based on a multi-stage scenario planning process, where stakeholders generated several different possibilities for how changing conditions might affect east coast fisheries. This document builds on recommendations and actions developed at the February 2023 East Coast Scenario Planning Summit meeting. An overview of the scenario planning process and summit meeting can be found [here](#).

Role and Structure of Potential Action Menu

This potential action menu describes the actions identified through the scenario planning process, as well as [new recommendations based on fishery and ecosystem information evaluated annually](#). Most potential actions are relatively broad in scope, and each includes multiple specific next steps and possible relevant groups to take on the work.

The potential action menu is updated annually based on the recommendations of the East Coast Coordination Group (Coordination Group). The Coordination Group reviews all potential actions and prioritizations (high priority, medium priority, and parking lot) and recommends any modifications to the list of actions or their priority. A full list of potential actions by priority level can be found in the Appendix. The East Coast Core Team (Core Team) supports the Coordination Group by tracking progress of actions and associated next steps, highlighting actions that should be elevated in priority, or suggesting new actions based on changes in ecosystem conditions. This work is done annually.

The status of each of the actions and specific next steps for activities being addressed by the Coordination Group is tracked in a spreadsheet prior to the spring and fall Coordination Group meetings and is available at www.mafmc.org/east-coast-coordination-group. Some actions are likely being addressed by other entities and status is not captured here or in the tracking spreadsheet. If the Core Team learns that an action or specific next step has been completed, it will be listed in the section of this menu "Completed Actions."

High priority potential actions are those that could be quick wins and/or that the Coordination Group views as important issues to address in the near term. Some of these actions include next steps that are already underway. The medium priority potential actions (also referred to as the "watch list") are also important but could take more time or resources to address. These issues are viewed as

Additional Information

MAFMC IRA webpage: <https://www.mafmc.org/ira-projects> includes project descriptions, 1-page project briefs, and status updates provided at each Council meeting

Staff contacts:

Project 1: River herring bycatch forecasts	Jason Didden
Project 2: Scup GRAs	Hayden Dubniczki ; Hannah Hart
Project 3a: Improving Governance Structures and Processes	Brandon Muffley / Kiley Dancy
Project 3b: Addressing Program Review Outcomes	Brandon Muffley / Kiley Dancy / Mary Sabo
Project 4: EFH Source document updates	Jessica Coakley
Project 5: Operationalizing ecosystem and habitat indicators	Brandon Muffley
Project 6: Evaluating data needs to support climate-ready fisheries management	Brandon Muffley
Project 7: Process and indicators to evaluate stock distribution changes	Kiley Dancy
Project 8: Advancing Scenario Planning Outcomes	Kiley Dancy / Brandon Muffley
General IRA project questions	Kiley Dancy / Brandon Muffley