

# Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

## Winter Flounder Management Board

February 3, 2026  
11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

### Draft Agenda

The times listed are approximate; the order in which these items will be taken is subject to change; other items may be added as necessary.

1. Welcome/Call to Order ( <i>B. Hyatt</i> )	11:15 a.m.
2. Board Consent	11:15 a.m.
• Approval of Agenda	
• Approval of Proceedings from January 2023	
3. Public Comment	11:20 a.m.
4. Review 2025 Management Track Assessments for Gulf of Maine and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Stocks of Winter Flounder ( <i>P. Nitschke/T. Wood</i> )	11:30 a.m.
• Consider Management Response, If Necessary <b>Possible Action</b>	
5. Set 2026-2028 Specifications ( <i>T. Bauer</i> ) <b>Final Action</b>	11:50 a.m.
• Review Technical Committee Recommendations ( <i>R. Balouskus</i> )	
• Review Advisory Panel Report	
6. Consider Fishery Management Plan Review and State Compliance for the 2024 Fishing Year ( <i>T. Bauer</i> ) <b>Action</b>	12:05 p.m.
7. Elect Vice-Chair <b>Action</b>	12:10 p.m.
8. Other Business/Adjourn	12:15 p.m.

This meeting will be held at The Westin Crystal City (1800 Richmond Highway, Arlington, VA; 703.486.1111) and via webinar; click [here](#) for details

## MEETING OVERVIEW

**Winter Flounder Management Board**  
**February 3, 2026**  
**11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.**

Chair: William Hyatt (CT)	Technical Committee Chair: Rich Balouskus (RI)	LEC Representative: Keith Williams
Vice Chair: Vacant	Advisory Panel Chair: Bud Brown	Previous Board Meeting: January 31, 2023
Voting Members: ME, NH, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, NMFS, USFWS (9 votes)		

### 2. Board Consent

- Approval of Agenda
- Approval of Proceedings from January 2023

**3. Public Comment** – At the beginning of the meeting public comment will be taken on items not on the agenda. Individuals that wish to speak at this time should use the webinar raise your hand function and the Board Chair will let you know when to speak. For agenda items that have already gone out for public hearing and/or have had a public comment period that has closed, the Board Chair may determine that additional public comment will not provide additional information. In this circumstance, the Board Chair will not allow additional public comment on an issue. For agenda items that the public has not had a chance to provide input, the Board Chair may allow limited opportunity for comment. The Board Chair has the discretion to limit the number of speakers and/or the length of each comment.

### 4. Review 2025 Management Track Assessments for Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder (11:30 – 11:50 a.m.) Possible Action

- The Gulf of Maine and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder Management Track Assessments were completed and peer-reviewed in Fall 2025.
- The Gulf of Maine winter flounder stock biomass status remains unknown and not experiencing overfishing. The Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder stock is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing.

#### **Presentations**

- 2025 Management Track Assessment for Gulf of Maine winter flounder by P. Nitschke
- 2025 Management Track Assessment for Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder by T. Wood

#### **Board Actions for Consideration**

- Consider management response, if necessary

### 5. Set 2026-2028 Specifications (11:50 a.m.– 12:05 p.m.) Final Action

- In January 2023, the Winter Flounder Management Board (Board) set status quo specifications for state waters for the 2024-2025 fishing years.
- In December 2025, the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) took final action on 2026-2030 fishing years specifications in Framework Adjustment 72, which includes the Gulf of Maine (GOM) and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) winter flounder stocks.

- Although the NEFMC approved specifications for 2026-2030 fishing years for the GOM and SNE/MA winter flounder stocks, the Commission's Addendum III to Amendment 1 of the Winter Flounder Fishery Management Plan only allows specifications to be set for up to three years.
- The Technical Committee (TC) met on January 6<sup>th</sup> to review the GOM and SNE/MA stock assessments, recent fishery performance, and federal specifications approved by the NEFMC. After reviewing these items, the TC recommended no changes to the state water specifications for the 2026-2028 fishing years (**Briefing Materials**).
- The Advisory Panel (AP) met on January 12<sup>th</sup> to discuss current management issues and provide input on state water specifications for the 2026-2028 fishing years. The AP also recommended no changes to the state water specifications for the 2026-2028 fishing years (**Briefing Materials**).

**Presentations**

- Overview of NEFMC 2026-2030 Fishing Years Specifications, Current State Waters Management Measures, and Advisory Panel Summary by T. Bauer
- Technical Committee Summary by R. Balouskus

**Board Actions for Consideration**

- Consider GOM and SNE/MA winter flounder specifications for the 2026-2028 fishing years

**6. Consider Fishery Management Plan Review and State Compliance for the 2024 Fishing Year (12:05 – 12:10 p.m.) Action**

- Winter flounder state compliance reports are due on December 1.
- The Winter Flounder Plan Review Team (PRT) has reviewed state reports and compiled the annual FMP Review. New Jersey has requested continued *de minimis* status for their commercial fishery (**Briefing Materials**).

**Presentations**

- 2024 FMP Review for Winter Flounder by T. Bauer

**Board Actions for Consideration**

- Consider approval of the 2024 FMP Review, state compliance reports, and New Jersey's *de minimis* request for their commercial fishery

**7. Elect Vice-Chair**

**8. Other Business/Adjourn**

## **Winter Flounder Technical Committee Task List**

**Activity Level: Low**

**Committee Overlap Score: Low**

### **Committee Task List**

- There are no on-going tasks for this Winter Flounder TC at this time
- Annual state compliance reports are due December 1

### **TC Members**

(Richard Balouskus, RI DEM – Chair), Tony Wood (NEFSC), Paul Nitschke (NEFSC), Dr. Robert Pomeroy (UCONN), Tara Dolan (MA DMF), Jared Lamy (NHFG), Tyler Harris (NJ DEP), Paul Nunnenkamp (NYS DEC), David Ellis (CT DEEP), Joseph Myers (ACCSP)

**DRAFT PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION  
WINTER FLOUNDER MANAGEMENT BOARD**

**The Westin Crystal City  
Arlington, Virginia  
Hybrid Meeting**

**January 31, 2023**

These minutes are draft and subject to approval by the Winter Flounder Management Board.  
The Board will review the minutes during its next meeting.

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## INDEX OF MOTIONS

1. **Approval of agenda** by Consent (Page 1).
2. **Approval of Proceedings from February 2, 2021** by Consent (Page 1).
3. **Move to approve status quo commercial and recreational Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic and Gulf of Maine winter flounder measures for the 2024-2025 fishing years.** (Page 9). Motion by Conor McManus; second by Justin Davis. Motion approved by unanimous consent (Page 9).
4. **Move to approve the Winter Flounder FMP Review for the 2021 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* status for New Jersey commercial fisheries** (Page 10). Motion by Emerson Hasbrouck; second by Eric Reid. Motion approved by unanimous consent (Page 10).
5. **Move to approve Allan Butler of MA to the Winter Flounder Advisory Panel** (Page 10). Motion by Dan McKiernan; second by Justin Davis. Motion approved by unanimous consent (Page 10).
6. **Move to adjourn** by Consent (Page 10) .

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## ATTENDANCE

### Board Members

Megan Ware, ME, proxy for P. Keliher (AA)	David Borden, RI (GA)
Steve Train, ME (GA)	Eric Reid, RI, proxy for Sen. Sosnowski (LA)
Sen. Cameron Reny, ME, proxy for Rep. Hepler (LA)	Justin Davis, CT (AA)
Renee Zobel, NH, proxy for C. Patterson (AA)	Willian Hyatt, CT (GA)
Doug Grout, NH (GA)	Jesse Hornstein, NY, proxy for B. Seggos (AA)
Dennis Abbott, NH, proxy for Sen. Watters (LA)	Emerson Hasbrouck, NY (GA)
Dan McKiernan, MA (AA)	Joe Cimino, NJ (AA)
Raymond Kane, MA (GA)	Adam Nowalsky, NJ, proxy for Sen. Gopal (LA)
Rep. Sarah Peake, MA (LA)	Peter Clarke, NJ, proxy for T. Fote (GA)
Conor McManus, RI, proxy for J. McNamee (AA)	Jay Hermsen, NMFS

**(AA = Administrative Appointee; GA = Governor Appointee; LA = Legislative Appointee)**

### Ex-Officio Members

Richard Balouskus, Technical Committee Chair

Keith Williams, Law Enforcement Representative

### Staff

Robert Beal	Kristen Anstead
Toni Kerns	Tina Berger
Madeline Musante	Kurt Blanchard

Pat Campfield
Emilie Franke

### Guests

Pat Augustine, Coram, NY
Alan Bianchi, NC DENR
Colleen Bouffard, CT DEEP
Michael Brown, ME DMR
Jeff Brust, NJ DEP
Alan Butler
Mike Celestino, NJ DEP
Matt Cieri, ME DMR
Heather Corbett, NJ DFW
Jamie Cournane, NEFMC
Jessica Daher, NJ DEP
Tara Dolan, MA DMF
Peter Fallon, Maine Stripers
Glen Fernandes
Angela Forristall, NEFMC
Robin Frede, NEFMC
Lewis Gillingham, VMRC
Willy Goldsmith

Melanie Griffin, MA DMF
Rep. Allison Hepler, ME (LA)
Carol Hoffman
Kiana Kekoa, Ofc. Sen. Reed
Kris Kuhn, PA F&B
Jared Lamy, NH F&G
Mike Luisi, MD DNR
Jeff Mercer, RI DEM
Steve Meyers
Paul Nitschke, NOAA
Will Poston, ASGA
Cheri Patterson, NH (AA)
Nicole Pitts, NOAA
Craig Pugh, Leipsic, DE
Lenny Rudow
Tara Scott, NOAA
Jason Seman
Phillip Sheffield

David Sikorski, CCA MD
Ethan Simpson, VMRC
Renee St. Amand, CT DEEP
Amanda Small, MD DNR
Davud Stormer, DE DFW
ElizaBeth Streifeneder, NYS DEC
Kevin Sullivan, NH F&G
Rachel Sysak, NYS DEC
Michael Toole
Beth Versak, MD DNR
Mike Waine, ASA
Ben Whalley
Steven Withuhn
Anthony Wood, NOAA
Chris Wright, NOAA
Erik Zlokovitz, MD DNR

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The Winter Flounder Management Board of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission convened in the Jefferson Ballroom of the Westin Crystal City Hotel, Arlington, Virginia, via hybrid meeting, in-person and webinar; Tuesday, January 31, 2023, and was called to order at 1:45 p.m. by Chair Bill Hyatt.

#### **CALL TO ORDER**

**CHAIR BILL HYATT:** Good afternoon, folks. This meeting of the Winter Flounder Management Board is called to order. My name is Bill Hyatt; I'm the Governor's appointee from Connecticut, and the current Chair of this Board.

#### **APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND APPROVAL OF PROCEEDINGS**

**CHAIR HYATT:** The first two items of business are Approval of the Agenda and Approval of the Proceedings from February, 2021.

Does anybody have any edits to either of those items? Seeing none; both the agenda and the proceedings from February, 2021 are approved by consent.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

**CHAIR HYATT:** Next item on the agenda is Public Comment. Is there anybody in the room who would like to make a comment on something that is not on the Winter Flounder agenda for today? Seeing no hands; is there anybody online? Allan Butler, go ahead.

**MR. ALLAN BUTLER:** No, I'm good.

#### **REVIEW OF THE 2022 MANAGEMENT TRACK ASSESSMENT FOR GULF OF MAINE AND SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND/MID-ATLANTIC STOCKS OF WINTER FLOUNDER**

**CHAIR HYATT:** The next item on the agenda is Review of the 2022 Management track Assessment for Gulf of Maine and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Stocks of Winter Flounder. We'll have a presentation that is by

Paul Nitschke and a presentation by Tony Wood. Paul, I believe you're first, going ahead with the Gulf of Maine.

#### **GULF OF MAINE**

**MR. PAUL NITSCHKE:** Good afternoon. I'll be giving a quick summary of the Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder Management Track Assessment, which was reviewed this last September. This was a Level 2 assessment. Keep in mind this is an empirical approach now for Gulf of Maine, based on 30 plus centimeter Survey Area-Swept estimates, so it's a fairly simple approach.

Quick overview here. As I said, it's a Level 2 assessment. Stock status is unknown for overfished, because this method doesn't really have a way of evaluating that. Overfishing is not occurring. The stock is not in the rebuilding plan, since this stock was never declared overfished.

In terms of uncertainties, there are uncertainties with the missing 2020 surveys, due to COVID. This is a bigger uncertainty here, because this assessment now is 100 percent based on the surveys. This uncertainty around the survey Qs. The Qs here are basically the efficiency estimates for the surveys for the Area-Swept calculations. There is more uncertainty around the state surveys, since we don't really have any experiments on efficiency for state survey gear. There is uncertainty around the rejected analytical model, which based from the past just basically says that we don't really understand a lot of the population dynamics for this stock, due to the failure of that model.

This continues somewhat into the empirical approach as we build up this time series. It still doesn't seem to be responding as we would expect it, so there are no big questions around the population dynamics. In terms of review of comments, the reviewers suggested that you use the 75 percent of the exploitation rate, at 40 percent for catch advice, using the average of the

2021 fall 21, 2021 spring and 2022 spring surveys. That's basically where the catch advice came from.

In terms of changes, there was a revision done to the survey Q, based on updated information from Miller et al. He re-estimated the Qs and some updated modeling. The Qs efficiency estimate was revised up from 0.71 to 0.81 in the fall survey, and from 0.62 to 0.7 in the spring. Keep in mind the efficiency increases, that means the biomass estimate will decline.

The Gulf of Maine stock was historically the smallest of the three-winter flounder stock. I'm not sure if that is no longer the case, things have changed a bit since early on in the time series. The Gulf of Maine stock is mostly located in Area 514 off Massachusetts; Cape Cod Bay, Mass Bay, Stellwagen Bank are important fisheries.

Over 95 percent of the stock is in this small area. This is a longstanding slide, just showing some of the history here. Just to remind everyone, analytical models failed in GARM III, also at SARC 52, due to the retrospective pattern. There is a large conflict, basically between the large reduction in the catch over time, with little change in the survey indices and little change in the size of the age structures.

We don't really understand the dynamics of what is going on with this stock. That seems to have continued with a simple approach as we build up this time series. Here are the survey trends, the raw survey trends. On top is the Northeast Fishery Science Center Bottom Trawl Survey. In the middle is the Mass DMF Survey, and on the bottom is the Maine/New Hampshire Survey. You can see that the indices are relatively flat in all over the longer time series.

They did bounce around quite a bit, but overall, there is not much real change over the decades. Perhaps more recently, there is a little bit of a hint of an increase. This is a positive sign. Hopefully that trend continues, but we're

probably too early to make a strong judgment on that. Here are the trends in catch over time. You can see there has been a very large reduction in catch. The recreational fishery was a major component of the removals in the 1980s.

That declined very quickly into the 1990s. The commercial catch was more of a gradual decline, and more recently over the last three years were down near record lows, in terms of catch. Catch is very low. This assessment is now just simply based on the 30 plus Area-Swept to calculate biomass. We have to use three different surveys, because we don't have a single survey that covers the entire stock. We basically use three surveys with nonoverlapping strata. The new survey covers the offshore strata in parts of Massachusetts inshore, and Maine/New Hampshire covers the inshore area for the north, and the Mass DMF covers the shallow square that the Bigelow can't sample off the coast of Massachusetts. The exploitable biomass is now defined as the 30 plus centimeter biomass index per tow, multiplied by this expansion factor, which is simply the total survey area divided by the total footprint times Q.

Q here you can think of as efficiency of the gear. Exploitable biomass is sensitive to this assumption, so it's an important assumption to make. But exploitation rate then is simply the catch over that 30 plus centimeter biomass estimate. The biological reference points are based on the yield per recruit analysis, some at elect ratio recruit bio or F40. (NOTE FROM TRANSCRIBER: Audio unclear.)

Here is some work that Tim Miller updated, in terms of the efficiency experiment. This was based on the twin trawl study comparing the relative catches of the Bigelow versus a more efficient flat net, done on a vessel that can tow both nets at the same time. We can get some idea of that relative efficiency of the Bigelow gear. Tim updated the calculations of Q, of the efficiency taking into account the day/night differences, and also length effects. You can see the day/night effects are pretty different. Then during the day, you can see there was a length effect.

Here are the estimates from the spring on top and the fall on the bottom. Different colors represent the proportion in each survey. In the spring you can see there is a greater proportion of the stock in the inshore areas in the state surveys, since more of the stock is inshore spawning during that time.

Originally, we had more confidence in the fall estimates, because there were some concerns that fish could be inside the estuaries, and you could be missing those fish in the spring. Also, we have better information on the Bigelow efficiency. There was a little more confidence in the fall. However, regardless about those facts, both estimates are very similar between the spring and fall.

Here basically, the lines here are the total estimates from the bar graph. You can see that the spring/fall estimates are very similar. More recently there is an increase, those last three points at the end here in the biomass estimates, and we are basically using the average of those three points for the catch advice.

There are some signs of hope here, and hopefully this continues into the future, and perhaps there is a response to the low catches at this point. Here are the Area-Swept estimates over time on the left. This is from the fall survey. You can see that it doesn't really correspond to the exploitations on the right. The exploitation rates have been far below the overfishing definition, which is that dotted line on the top, for the entire time series. It doesn't seem to be responding overall to what we think as low exploitation rates.

But, perhaps here at the end of the time series there is the beginning of a response. Hopefully that continues and it's just not a year effect going forward. Here is another way of looking at that response. You can see how the response has been going in the wrong direction under low exploitation rates from the beginning of the time series. More recently, things have turned around and it seems like biomass is

increasing. But perhaps that is due to where the catches are and where the exploitation rates are at the end of the time series. This is the time series for the catch advice coming out of this, mostly this in empirical approach, you can see how the catch advice does bounce around when assessments come in. However, all the catch advice has been relatively high compared to the catches.

You can see the catch trend over time has been declining, and is far below the catch advice. It doesn't appear that quotas are very constraining for the stock, as the catches continue to decline, even though the quotas have been higher. I don't know if you want me to answer questions now.

CHAIR HYATT: Thank you, Carl, thank you for that presentation. Yes, we would take a few questions now before we roll into the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic presentation. Any questions for Paul? I've got one, Emerson.

MR. EMERSON C. HASBROUCK: Thank you, Paul, for your presentation. I had a question on the Q estimates. Each of those three different gear types, I'm guessing, has a different catchability, right? Were they averaged together? When I say the three different gear types I mean the three different surveys.

I guess it's a two-part question. One is, for those three surveys, each of those trawl gears have their own catchability, and if it is different from the others, then the Q that you presented, is that an average of the three, or how did you compute that Q, the catchability?

MR. NITSCHKE: I mean that is one of the major sources of uncertainty. We only have efficiency estimates on the Bigelow gear type from the experiment. We don't have any information on what the equivalency is for Mass DMF survey gear and the Maine/New Hampshire survey gear.

With the lack of that information, we're basically assuming the same Qs from the Bigelow on those surveys. Even though those survey gears are different. That's one of the reasons why I have a

little more confidence in the fall estimates, when a greater proportion of the population is in the Offshore NMFS Survey. Does that answer your question?

MR. HASBROUCK: Thank you.

#### **SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND/MID-ATLANTIC**

CHAIR HYATT: Okay, we have no other questions in the room and none online, so at this point we'll move on to the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Stock Management Track Assessment. Tony Wood.

MR. ANTHONY WOOD: Thanks very much. I just want to confirm that people can hear me still okay.

CHAIR HYATT: Great. This is a review of the Southern New England Winter Flounder Assessment from last year. This stock went through the spring management track schedule, so it was reviewed in June, a little earlier than Gulf of Maine. Just a little history. The last assessment for this stock was the 2020 management track updates, the multispecies groundfish updates. The current model at that time was the statistical catch at age, Ages 1 through 7 plus, and years through 2019. The reference points at that time, the one I would like to point out here and just note. The biomass reference point of about 12,000 metric tons. That is going to come back a little later. The stock status at the time, it was overfished, but overfishing was not occurring.

For data that goes into the assessment there, the data structure, model structure, model type, nothing in that regard changed for this update. It was a very straightforward update. The major changes for this management track, and what caused it to be a Level 3 assessment, were changes to how the reference points were calculated, but again, I will get to that later.

But everything else was consistent with how the operational assessments have been run for the

past decade or so. Commercial landings for this assessment. From 1981 to 2019 came from our AA tables, and from 2020 to 2021 from our new catch accounting and monitoring system. These are stratified by market category quarter, or half year.

Commercial discards are based on our standardized bycatch reporting methodology, and the recreational information that goes into this assessment comes from MRIP. Again, the 2020 and 2021 commercial landings are from our new catch accounting and monitoring system, and the rest comes from our old AA table algorithm, 2020 landings were 120 metric tons, and 2021 landings were 87 metric tons.

These are the lowest in the time series, and are down around the levels of when there was a bit of a moratorium for the species in 2009 to 2012. The time series average for commercial landings is 2,800 metric tons. A lot of these plots are similar to what you've seen in the Gulf of Maine. Things seem to have fallen off the cliff.

Commercial discards are mainly from trawl and scallop drudge fisheries, 2021 commercial discards were 122 metric tons, with a time series average of about 400 metric tons. For recreational information, the recreational component for this stock used to be pretty important. Now it's almost nonexistent.

Two thousand Twenty-One recreational landings were 5.1 metric tons, they were well below the time series average. But these two recreational plots I have the old MRIP information, so the uncalibrated information prior to the MRIP calibration proposed in 2017-ish, and the blue is the new information.

The blue is the information that is currently going into the assessment. For recreational discards, 2021 recreational discards were 1.1 metric tons, again, very much lower than they used to be, and much lower than the time series average. For total catch the 2021 total catch was 216 metric tons. The total catch components here are mostly made up of commercial landings and commercial discards

now, with the two recreational components much reduced from historical levels. For survey information going into this assessment, we have the Northeast Fishery Science Center Surveys, winter, spring and fall. The NEAMAP spring, Mass DMF spring, Rhode Island and Connecticut spring surveys, New Jersey Ocean and River Trawl Survey, URI Graduate School of Oceanography Trawl Survey, and then two Age 0 recruitment surveys from Massachusetts and Connecticut. These are the regional surveys. The Science Center Surveys and the NEAMAP Surveys, scaled to their means, showing fairly similar trends in decline from the late nineties, early 2000s to now. This one is kind of a jumble, but again, they all show generally the same trend, but the catch has shown drastic declines from historical levels.

These are all of the local state trawl surveys that are in the assessment. Then for the two Age 0 survey indices, they're both pretty flat, except for the Connecticut, which has really dropped off in the past decade or so. The biological information is consistent with what came out of the last benchmark in 2011 for this stock.

Natural mortality is set at 0.3. Maturity information comes from Massachusetts DMF spring survey maturity data. And again, it's carryover from the last benchmark. These input values were retained for this, and previous operational assessments. For a final model configuration, we have a single fleet going into the model, with commercial and recreational landings and discards.

There are three selectivity blocks, with a fourth flat top selectivity on the selectivity block. Twelve survey indices, and then a single penalty on the numbers in the first year. Two thousand Twenty-One biomass estimates, 4,600 metric tons for total biomass, and about 3,300 metric tons for spawning stock biomass.

Two thousand twenty-one F, 0.061, almost the lowest in the time series. Recruitment has been

pretty low, and much lower than historical levels for the past decade and a half, 2021 recruitment was at 4.4 million fish. For retrospective patterns, the retrospective bias has actually decreased a little bit since the previous operational assessment, and it's considered a minor retrospective, so there is no retro adjustment going into stock status determination for this stock.

Reference points, our SPR 40 percent, but F 40 percent is 0.265, based on yield per recruit SPR analyses. This is where the major change was for this go around. The current biomass reference point methodology uses recruitment from the entire time series, or prior to this assessment it did. Based on comments from the Commission, the Councils, SSCs et cetera, and just realizing that current productivity of this stock is probably not able to match historical productivity levels.

We decided to move to a more recent stanza for recruitment that is more reflective of the current stock productivity. You can see looking at the median values for different subsets of the time series, previously being fed into the projections, to determine that biomass reference point, the median from the entire time series is 15,000 metric tons. If we switch to some more recent stanza, a 20 year and a 10 year, we drastically lower that median of the recruitment values that are being used in the projections.

Trying to find some support for making this decision, we looked at research that Rich Bell and I have done, looking at estuarine winter water temperatures, and how the mean of the index that we came up with has moved above a 5-degree level, which is a level that has been shown in the literature to be detrimental to recruitment events in a given year, if an estuary has a temperature at or above this level. In the past 10 years the index that we came up with has traveled above this level 4 times. In the past 20 years it's traveled above this level about 6 times. But you can just see the general trend of warming from this temperature index over time, and how it's potentially effecting the productivity in this stock. The final thing that we looked at, which I didn't show here, it gets

pretty technical. But a quantitative analysis using a recursive partition regression tree did end up splitting our productivity time series and our recruitment time series at about the 20-year mark.

The temperature index has crossed over the 5-degree level 6 times in the past 20 years, 4 times in the past 10. It is possible if we see some stable or cooler winter temperatures, we could achieve some of those middle levels of recruitment from the early 2000s. For this assessment we proposed and did use the last 20 years of recruitment for the biomass reference point projection.

For updated reference points, the fishing mortality in 2021 was 0.61, and the SSB in 2021 was 3,300 metric tons. Our new fishing mortality reference point at 40 percent is 0.265, and our SSB and MSY reference point is 3,300 metric tons, down from what I pointed out earlier at about 12,000 metric tons.

Half of that is our threshold, and then MSY is currently sitting at about 1,000 metric tons. We're currently at 101 percent of the target biomass, realizing that we have not changed our perception of the stock, we've just moved the goalpost. Our status has changed. The stock is now not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. There is no retrospective adjustment necessary. I think that's it. Are there any questions?

CHAIR HYATT: Thank you, Tony. Any questions for Tony specific to the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic stock of winter flounder? There are no hands in the room, is there anybody online? Nobody online, so great, we'll move on to the next item on the agenda. Paul, Tony, thank you for those excellent presentations, excellent although not exactly encouraging, but thank you very much.

## SET SPECIFICATIONS FOR 2024-2025

CHAIR HYATT: Next item on the agenda is to set the 2024/25 specifications. Tracey is going to provide an overview, then we'll go into review the Technical Committee recommendations, review the Advisory Panel Report, then we'll have some opportunity for questions. Then there is a motion that's been prepared by staff that will be put up for your consideration. Tracey, why don't you take it away.

MS. TRACEY BAUER: Good afternoon, everyone. I will be reviewing a couple of items under this agenda item. First, I will be taking you through an overview or summary of the New England Fishery Management Council Winter Flounder Specifications for Fishing Year 2023 through 2025. Then I will be moving into a little brief summary of the Addendum III specifications process. Then I will hand over the presentation to Rich, the TC Chair, who will give a summary of the TC recommendations.

Then I will provide the AP report summary, and lastly, we'll move into Board action. After the two management track stock assessments that Tony and Paul just reviewed were accepted for management use, the Council met this past December to set specs for federal waters for fishing years 2023 through 2025, through the approval of Framework 65. There is a tentative date of May 1st for implementation for this Framework 65. I have a table here which displays the total ACL and the groundfish set ACL for this past year, 2022, and the upcoming ACL for fishing years 2023 through 2025 as set in Framework 65, so you can compare the two. The total ACL increased by 60 percent for the Gulf of Maine stock, and 37 percent for the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic stock compared to the previous year.

They were adjusted up as a reflection of the results of the 2022 management track stock assessments. Moving into the state subcomponents, this table displays the state subcomponents for each of the stocks that can be found in Framework 65. The

state subcomponent is comprised of both the recreational and commercial catch.

The commercial portion of the state subcomponent is caught by vessels that do not hold federal northeast multispecies permits, and the recreational portion is based off of MRIP estimates of recreational catch. The state subcomponent is an estimate of catch that was accepted in the upcoming years from state waters, and is determined by the average catch from the most few recent years.

The state subcomponent is not an allocation, and so there is no accountability measures associated with the state waters subcomponent, meaning there is no pound for pound payback if the state water subcomponent is exceeded. Looking at the table, you can see that the 2023 through 2025 Gulf of Maine and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic state subcomponents were revised downwards from the 2022 value, to reflect recent fisheries trends.

In both cases the five-year average of catch was used to determine what the state subcomponent would be. They used the five-year average as opposed to two-year average, just to better account for the variability in landings in recent years, as at least the past couple years, as you saw from the previous presentation, they've been very low.

Moving into a little summary, or a reminder about the Addendum III step process. It's been a couple of years since you guys have looked at this. I think it was back in 2021. As a reminder, Addendum III, which was approved in 2013, to revise the state specs setting process, so that recreational and commercial measures may be set for up to 3 years. This was to better align with the federal waters step process. The Commission measures that are subject to change.

As you can see up on the screen are trip limits, trigger trip limits, size limits, season, area

closures. Then the rec measures, size limit, bag limits and seasons. I'll have slides of these later if you want to see it again, but this is a table showing the commercial winter flounder regulations as they are today, and they have not been changed since 2014. You can see the differing regulations between the Gulf of Maine winter flounder and the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder through the stock unit column.

Here we have the current recreational winter flounder regulations listed by state for both the Gulf of Maine stock and the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic stocks, with their differing creel limits of 8 for Gulf of Maine and 2 for Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic, a net size limit across the board of 12 inches. Then you can see in a lot of the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic they have seasonal closures. I think we're going to move past this here, is that correct, Mr. Chair. Yes, so we're going to jump right into the Technical Committee meeting summary, if Rich is available.

## TECHNICAL COMMITTEE REPORT

MR. RICHARD BALOUSKUS: I'm Rich Balouskus; I'm a biologist for the state of Rhode Island. I work on winter flounder, and I've taken over the Chair this year for the TC from Paul Nitschke, who has been running this for quite some time. But as he has ten other stocks to work on, we thought we would give him a break on this.

The TC met last week, or a couple weeks ago on the 11th, and we started off the conversation by acknowledging this increase in federal catch advice through the New England Fishery Management Council, as well as that change in stock status for the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic stock from overfished to not overfishing.

Honestly, you know we started the conversation thinking that at least there was a possibility that we may be discussing potential increases in the mix as we go on. That said, it was equally noted that for the change in stock status, first up in New England, that despite those changes, as Tony said, we really

have no change in our perception of how that stock looks overall.

You know on that note, these surveys across the board for both stocks have seen either declines, or are really remaining honestly near detection levels. You know we have those couple slight increases most recently in the Gulf of Maine stock, but certainly not enough data to suggest a trend of any sort to recovery.

As was noted, even with the extraordinarily low rates of fishing mortality that we've had for quite some time, we've not really seen a measurable rebound in either of the stocks. It's pretty well understood that climate and natural mortality might be hindering that recovery. We chatted on this topic for quite some time, and worked our way to unanimous agreement for status quo for both stocks moving forward, for both commercial and recreational limits as they stand now.

There was some discussion moving forward about how we'll go about potentially figuring out decreases moving forward. But as of now, status quo felt like the right move. Then finally, the group as a whole was thinking about this, as well as in consultation with Tony and Paul that status quo is probably our best technical advice moving forward, as a bridge to the 2026 research track stock assessment, where we plan to incorporate a significant amount more of climate data into modeling.

That is very hopefully going to give us some more insights into the trends for both Gulf of Maine and Southern New England stock moving forward. The summary, it was a very productive meeting, a lot of back and forth, but as noted the TC is recommending status quo for both stocks, commercial and recreational.

#### **ADVISORY PANEL REPORT**

MS. BAUER: Thanks, Rich. I will be taking over the AP meeting summary. Bud Brown was not able to make it today due to a work obligation.

I'll be covering that for him. Four AP members met on January 12, a day after the TC met to discuss some of the same things. They looked at the specifications from the New England Fishery Management Council, current fishery management issues, and provided some research recommendations. I will start off with the recommendations related to the specs, and then management measures specifically. One advisor recommended a moratorium in the Gulf of Maine and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic stocks. One advisor recommended allowing at least some catch for the following benefits that he listed on where it minimizes dead discards, and allows for biological data to continue to be collected on catch, which is something we wouldn't really have if there was a moratorium.

Then another advisor saw merits to both recommendations. One advisor commented that the winter flounder fishing season in the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic region should be limited again. The Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic region's recreational season was expanded by Board action in 2014. It used to be a 60-day recreational open season before that.

In addition, these two advisors said there should be some, well two advisors expressed support for all states in the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic and Gulf of Maine region to adopt a commercial and recreational spawning season closure. They had also recommended that this closure be consistent among states, in terms of dates, and that all states adopt this.

Moving into some more general concerns and recommendations that they discussed. There were some general concerns, of course, about the continued low abundance of winter flounder in the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic and Gulf of Maine regions. One advisory commented on that the low rates of reproduction may not be able to overcome the high rate of natural mortality that winter flounder is currently experiencing.

The AP also had a few research recommendations. Two advisors were concerned that the way stock

assessments are currently conducted aren't capturing the potential differences between localized sub stocks, and recommended further research into the genetic structure of winter flounder. Another AP member expressed concern that discards from observer data are being misreported, and recommended that discard and discard mortality in state waters should be further investigated.

Winter flounder discards in state waters are currently calculated for only federal observer data, and so these data are more uncertain than federal discard numbers. This advisor had recommended that states should not only rely on the federal observer program to calculate the discards, but instead invest in other systems that calculate discard and discard mortality. With that I think we can take any questions.

CHAIR HYATT: Thank you, are there any questions, any questions on the overview, any questions on the Technical Committee recommendations or the Advisory Panel report? No hands in the room, any hands online? We have no questions, and at this point in time I believe we've got a prepared motion that we can put up that reflects the Technical Committee's recommendation.

We'll put that up for consideration and see if anybody is willing or interested in making that motion. Okay, so here is a motion prepared by staff. Is there anybody on the Board who is willing to make that motion? Conor, do we have a second? Justin. Okay, Conor, would you like to speak to the motion, please?

DR. CONOR McMANUS: Yes, I think the rationale the Technical Committee has put forth is pretty sound that our perception on the stock has not quite changed, even with the changes in the reference points, and how the projections have been done. I think the status quo approach is warranted for the time being. Thanks.

**CHAIR HYATT: Justin, do you have anything to add? All set, so we've got a motion. Move to approve status quo commercial and recreational Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic and Gulf of Maine winter flounder measures for the 2024 – 2025 fishing years.** Motion by Dr. McManus, second by Dr. Davis. Is there any discussion? Emerson.

MR. HASBROUCK: I will support this motion. I mean all we did really was we changed the reference points, and therefore we have instant underfishing, even though spawning stock biomass has not really changed. For that reason, I would support this motion.

CHAIR HYATT: Thank you, Emerson, is there any other comments? **Anything online or anything from the public? Seeing none; is there any objection to this motion? Any abstentions? The motion passes by unanimous consent.**

#### **CONSIDER THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW AND STATE COMPLIANCE FOR THE 2021 FISHING YEAR**

CHAIR HYATT: Next item on the agenda is to Consider the Fishery Management Plan Review and State Compliance for the 2021 Fishing Year. Tracey.

MS. BAUER: I will be presenting on the Winter Flounder FMP Review for the 2021 fishing year. Fishery performance and the assessment for all the information were already touched on by Paul and Tony, so I'm not going to rehash any information. I'm going to keep this short and sweet. This is the abbreviated presentation of the recommendations of the PRT.

Generally waiting for things to the plan requirements under Amendment 1. Under Amendment 1 the states of Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New York are required to conduct annual surveys of juvenile recruitment, to develop an annual juvenile abundance index for winter flounder. In addition, the states of Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut and New Jersey are

required to conduct annual trawl surveys, to develop an index of spawning stock biomass.

All states except for New Jersey have resumed normal operation of their sampling programs by 2021. New Jersey did not conduct their ocean trawl program sampling in 2021, due to COVID protocols, but normal operations resumed in 2022. Overall, survey indices, as you saw, with the previous presentations, remain below average in those Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic area.

For state compliance, no inconsistencies were found among the states, with regard to the FMP requirements. The PRT recommends approval of state compliance reports and *de minimis* status for New Jersey's commercial fishery, which they requested this year. Any research recommendations can be found in the FMP review document, or in the stock assessment reports. Like I said, short and sweet. Are there any questions?

CHAIR HYATT: Any questions for Tracey? Seeing none in the room, any online? None online, and so once again we do have a motion that's been prepared by staff, a motion to approve the fishery management plan review, if we can have that up there and see if anybody on the Board is interested in making the motion. Emerson.

MR. HASBROUCK: Yes, I'll make the motion, do you want me to read it into the record?

CHAIR HYATT: Yes, please.

MR. HASBROUCK: **Move to approve the Winter Flounder Fishery Management Plan Review for the 2021 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* status for New Jersey commercial fisheries.**

CHAIR HYATT: Do we have a second? Eric Reid. We've got a motion by Mr. Hasbrouck, a second by Mr. Reid. Move to approve the Winter Flounder Fishery Management Plan Review for

the 2021 fishing year, state compliance reports, and *de minimis* status for New Jersey commercial fisheries. Is there any discussion? Nothing online.

**Is there any objection to this motion, any abstentions? Motion passes by unanimous consent.**

#### **REVIEW AND POPULATE THE ADVISORY PANEL**

CHAIR HYATT: item that we have on the agenda is Review and Populate the Advisory Panel. We have a nomination from Tina.

MS. TINA L. BERGER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I present for your consideration and approval the nomination of Allan Butler from Massachusetts. He's a recreational angler to the Winter Flounder Advisory Panel.

CHAIR HYATT: **We have a motion made by Dan McKiernan, second by Justin Davis** Thank you, do we have a second? Any discussion. New motion, yes. Sorry, Justin seconds it. Okay, thank you. Do we have any discussion? Nothing in the room, anything online? Move to approve Allan Butler of Massachusetts to the Winter Flounder Advisory Panel.

**Is there any objection? Are there any abstentions? Motion passes by unanimous consent.** At this point that brings us to the end of the agenda.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

CHAIR HYATT: Is there any other business to come before the Winter Flounder Management Board? Seeing none; meeting is adjourned. Thank you.

(Whereupon the meeting adjourned at 2:35 p.m. on Tuesday, January 31, 2023)

*draft working paper for peer review only*



## Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder

### *2025 Management Track Assessment Report*

U.S. Department of Commerce  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
Northeast Fisheries Science Center  
Woods Hole, Massachusetts

Compiled 08-29-2025

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This assessment of the Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder (*Pseudopleuronectes americanus*) stock is a management track assessment of the existing 2022 area-swept management track assessment (NEFSC, 2022). Based on the previous assessment the biomass status is unknown but overfishing was not occurring. This assessment updates commercial and recreational fishery catch data, research survey indices of abundance, and the area-swept estimates of 30+ cm biomass based on the fall NEFSC, MDMF, and MENH surveys.

**State of Stock:** Based on this updated assessment, the Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder (*Pseudopleuronectes americanus*) stock biomass status is unknown and overfishing is not occurring (Figures 1-2). Retrospective adjustments are not possible with this area-swept assessment. Biomass (30+ cm mt) in 2024 was estimated to be 4,537 mt (Figure 1). The 2024 30+ cm exploitation rate was estimated to be 0.044 which is 19% of the overfishing exploitation threshold proxy ( $E_{MSY}$  proxy = 0.23; Figure 2).

Table 1: Catch and status table for Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder. All weights are in (mt) and  $E_{Full}$  is the exploitation rate on 30+ cm fish. Biomass is estimated from survey area-swept for non-overlapping strata from three different fall surveys (MENH, MDMF, NEFSC) using an updated  $q$  estimate of 0.79 based on the wing spread from the sweep study (Miller et al., 2023).

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<i>Data</i>						
Recreational discards	2	1	1	1	1	0
Recreational landings	42	51	43	39	61	23
Commercial discards	8	7	15	16	13	14
Commercial landings	102	79	118	85	117	161
Catch for Assessment	155	138	177	142	192	198
<i>Model Results</i>						
30+ cm Biomass	2,672	NA	5,195	5,469	4,714	4,537
$E_{Full}$	0.058		0.034	0.026	0.041	0.044

Table 2: Comparison of reference points estimated in an earlier assessment and from the current assessment update. An  $E_{40\%}$  exploitation rate proxy was used for the overfishing threshold and was based on a length-based yield per recruit model from the 2011 SARC 52 benchmark assessment.

	2022	2025
$E_{MSY}$ proxy	0.23	0.23
$B_{MSY}$	Unknown	Unknown
MSY (mt)	Unknown	Unknown
Overfishing	No	No
Overfished	Unknown	Unknown

**Projections:** Projections are not possible with area-swept based assessments. Catch advice was based on 75% of  $E_{40\%}$  (75%  $E_{MSY}$  proxy) using the most recent two year average (2023 and 2024) of the fall area-swept estimates assuming  $q=0.79$  based on the wing spread which was updated using the average efficiency from 2009-2024 from the sweep experiment (Miller et al., 2023). Note that the 2022 management track assessment used the average of 2021 and 2022 spring and fall 2021 fall 30+ cm area-swept biomass to develop catch advice since the 2020 surveys were not available due to disruptions in sampling related to the COVID pandemic. However, catch advice (OFLs and ABCs) from the 2020 management track assessment were based on the average of the last two years of the fall surveys to make better use of the available new information and to help stabilize the catch advice. This management track returns to this approach. Updated 2023-2024 two-year fall 30+ cm area-swept average biomass

(4,626 mt) implies an OFL of 1,064 mt based on the  $E_{MSY}$  proxy and a catch of 798 mt for 75% of the  $E_{MSY}$  proxy.

### Special Comments:

- What are the most important sources of uncertainty in this stock assessment? Explain, and describe qualitatively how they affect the assessment results (such as estimates of biomass, F, recruitment, and population projections).

*The largest source of uncertainty with the direct estimates of stock biomass from survey area-swept estimates originate from the survey gear catchability (q). Biomass and exploitation rate estimates are sensitive to the survey q assumption. However, this 2024 update does incorporate the use of a re-estimated q through an average estimate of efficiency from 2009-2024 fall and 2009-2025 spring (q=0.79 fall and q=0.71 spring) from the sweep study for the NEFSC survey. This updated q assumption (0.79) results in a slightly higher estimates of 30+ biomass (4,537 mt in 2024) relative to the 2022 estimate q=0.81 assumption (4,453 mt in 2024) for the fall surveys. More uncertainty is associated with the efficiency in state surveys due to the lack of sweep studies. Therefore, higher confidence is given to the fall survey estimates which possess a higher proportion of the stock in the more offshore NEFSC survey. Another major source of uncertainty with this method is that biomass based reference points cannot be determined and overfished status is unknown.*

- Does this assessment model have a retrospective pattern? If so, is the pattern minor, or major? (A major retrospective pattern occurs when the adjusted SSB or  $F_{Full}$  lies outside of the approximate joint confidence region for SSB and  $F_{Full}$ )

*The model used to determine status of this stock does not allow estimation of a retrospective pattern. An analytical stock assessment model is not currently available for Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder. The previous analytical model was determined to be no longer valid to be used for stock status determination at SARC 52 (2011) due to concerns with a strong retrospective pattern. Models for this stock have difficulty reconciling the apparent lack of a relationship between a large decrease in the catch with little change in the indices and age and/or size structure over time.*

- Based on this stock assessment, are population projections well determined or uncertain? If this stock is in a rebuilding plan, how do the projections compare to the rebuilding schedule?

*Population projections are not available for area-swept assessments and stock biomass status of Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder is unknown. This stock was never declared as overfished. Catch advice from area-swept estimates tend to vary with interannual variability in the surveys. A two-year average of the most recent fall surveys is used to help stabilize the biomass estimates and catch advice. The fall survey is also thought to be a better estimate of the exploitable biomass due to concerns of missing fish within the estuaries during the spawning late winter/early spring season.*

- Describe any changes that were made to the current stock assessment, beyond incorporating additional years of data and the effect these changes had on the assessment and stock status.

*The assumption on q changed from 0.81 to 0.79 for the fall and from 0.70 to 0.71 for the spring using information from the updated average q's from the NEFSC surveys (Miller et al., 2023).*

- If the stock status has changed a lot since the previous assessment, explain why this occurred.

*The overfishing status of Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder has not changed. Overfished status remains unknown.*

- Provide qualitative statements describing the condition of the stock that relate to stock status.

*Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder has relatively flat survey indices with little change in the size structure over time. There have been large declines in the commercial and recreational removals since the 1980s. This large decline over the time series does not appear to have resulted in a clear response in the stock's size structure within the catch and surveys nor has it resulted in a change in the survey indices of abundance. However, there have been some general more recent increases in the fall and the spring area-swept biomass estimates. If increasing biomass trends continue then perhaps this is the beginning of a response to time series lows in exploitation rates.*

- Indicate what data or studies are currently lacking and which would be needed most to improve this stock assessment in the future.

*Direct area-swept assessments could be improved with additional studies on state survey gear efficiency. Quantifying the degree of herding between the doors and escapement under the footrope and/or above the headrope for state surveys is needed to improve the area-swept biomass estimates. Studies quantifying winter flounder abundance and distribution among habitat types and within estuaries could improve the biomass estimate. However, development of state space analytical models that incorporate process error which can account for conflicting data trends may ultimately be needed to improve our understanding and more appropriately quantify the stock population dynamics.*

- Are there other important issues?

*The general lack of a response in survey indices and age/size structure are the primary sources of concern with catches remaining far below the overfishing level. However, recent increases in the overall biomass (2021-2024) could perhaps be the beginning of a response to removals being at record lows over the last few years (2019-2024 average = 167 mt). If recent increases in biomass is a response to the low catches then continuation of keeping the catch near recent levels may result in further increases in biomass.*

#### **References:**

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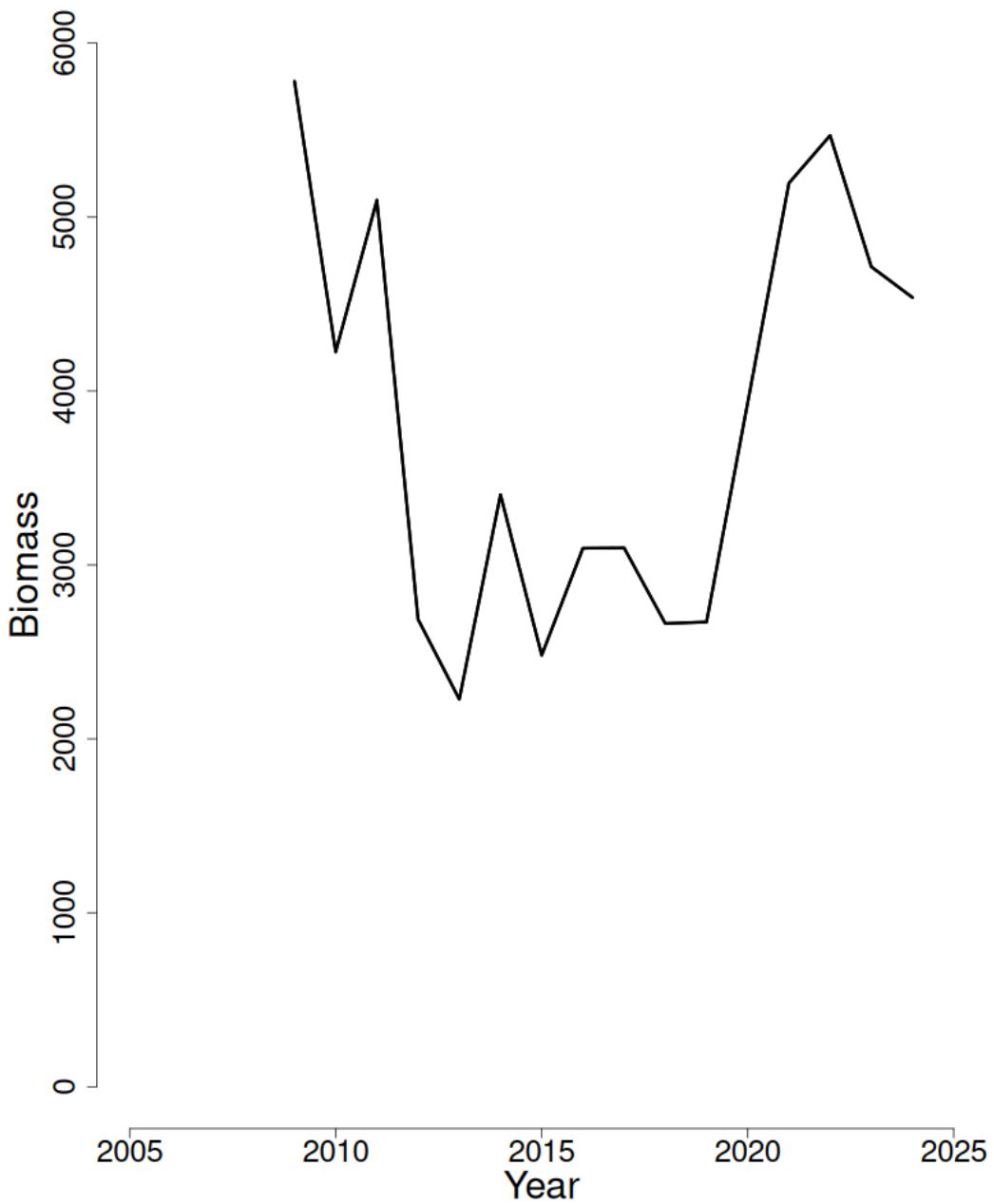


Figure 1: Trends in 30+ cm area-swept biomass of Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder between 2009 and 2024 from the current assessment based on the fall (MENH, MDMF, NEFSC) surveys.

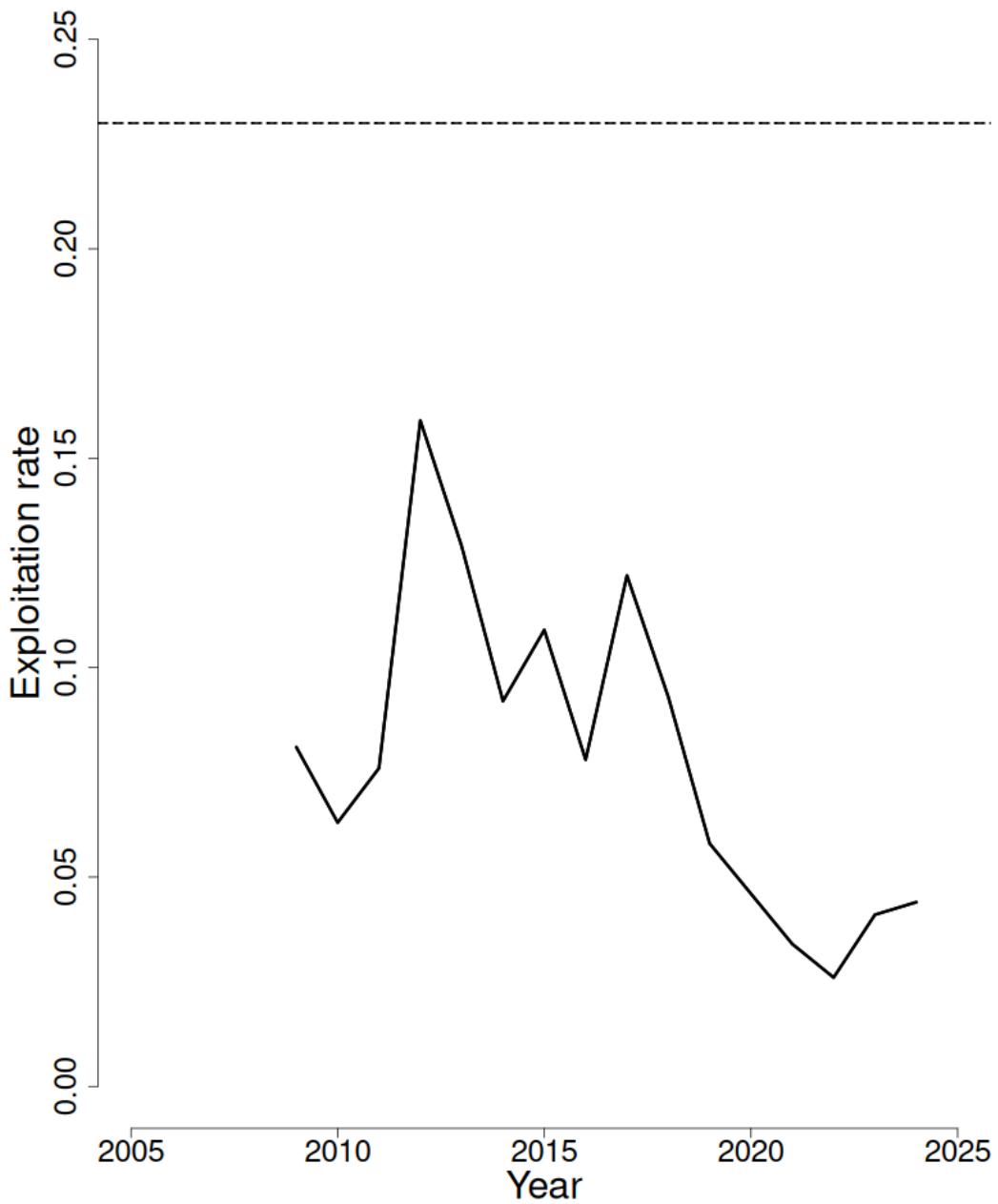


Figure 2: Trends in the exploitation rates ( $E_{Full}$ ) of Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder between 2009 and 2024 from the current assessment based on the fall (MENH, MDMF, NEFSC) surveys and the corresponding  $F_{Threshold}$  ( $E_{MSY}$  proxy=0.23; horizontal dashed line).

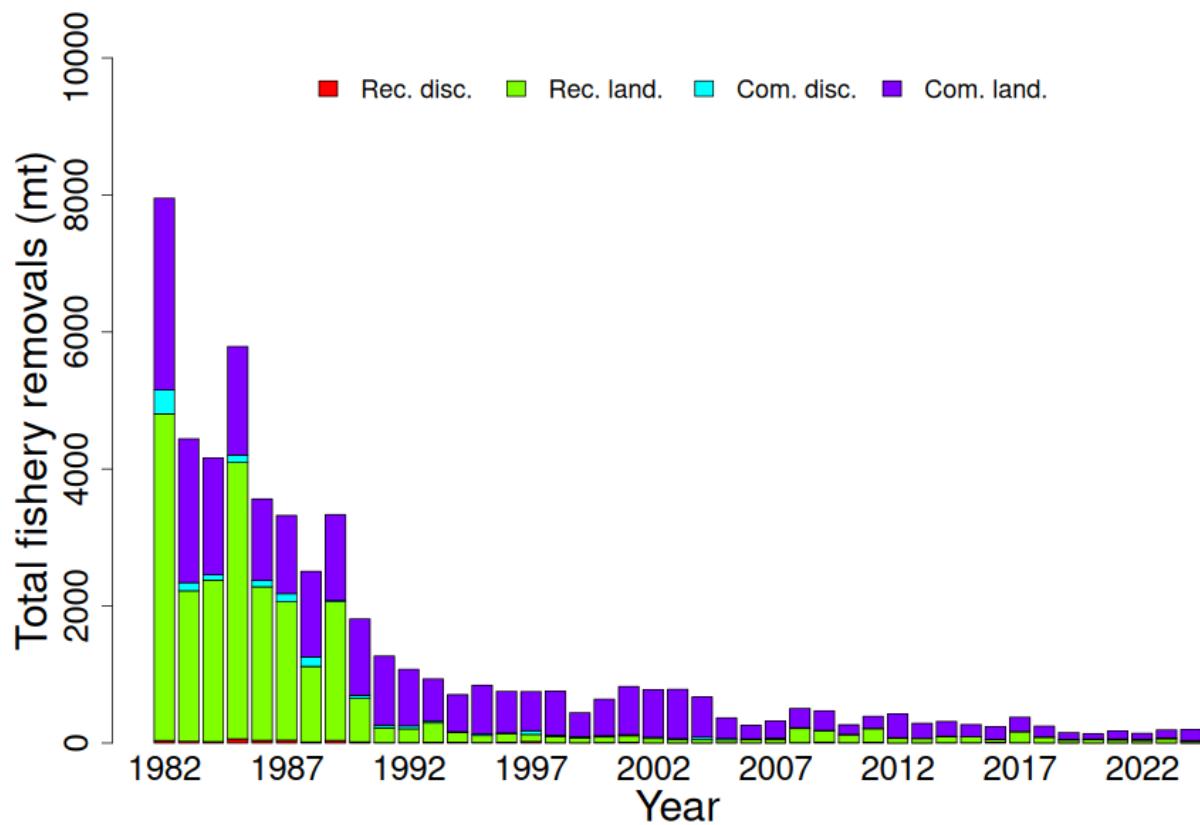


Figure 3: Total catch of Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder between 2009 and 2024 by fleet (commercial and recreational) and disposition (landings and discards). A 15% mortality rate is assumed on recreational discards and a 50% mortality rate on commercial discards.

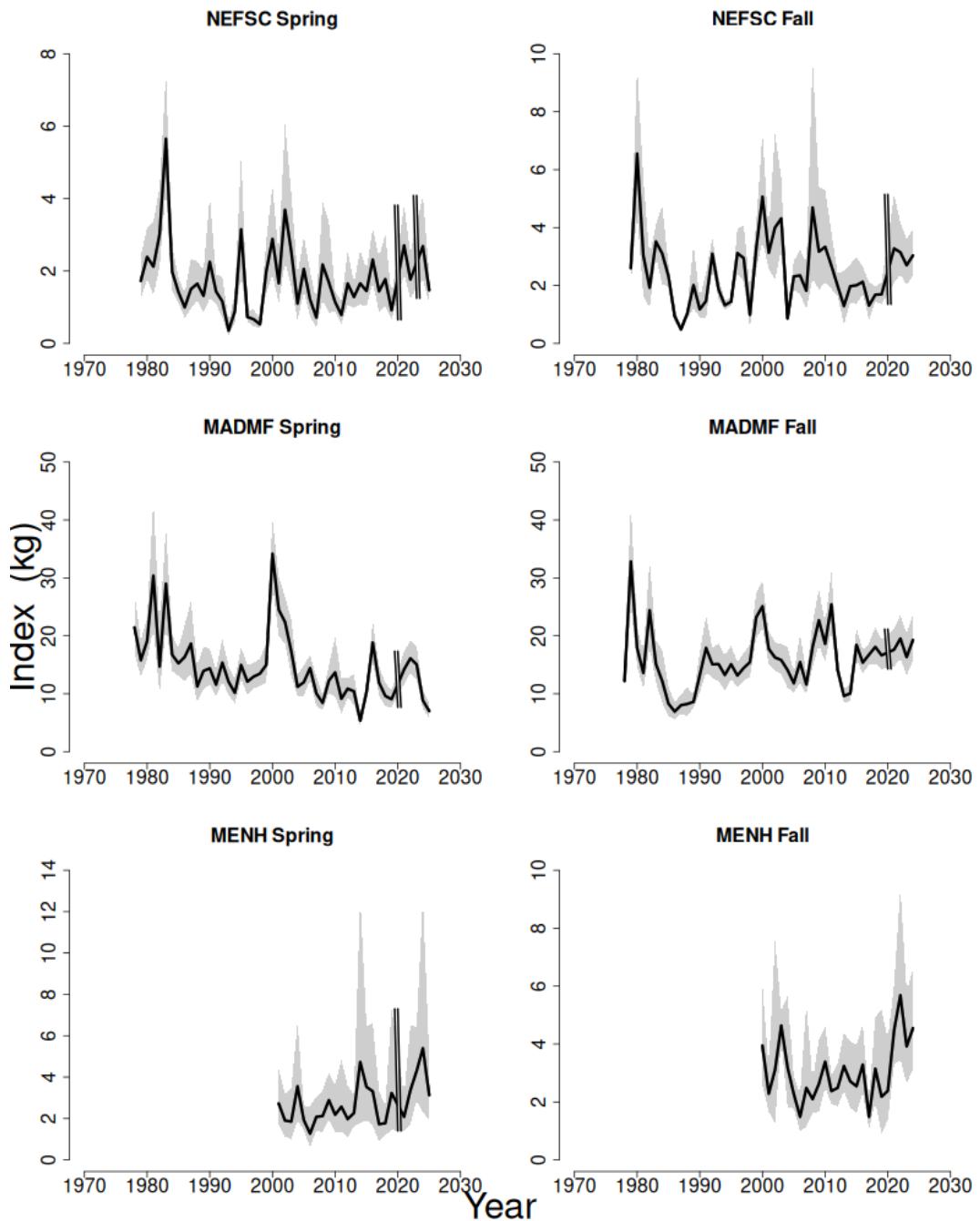


Figure 4: Indices of biomass for the Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder between 1978 and 2025 for the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC), Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MDMF), and the Maine-New Hampshire (MENH) spring and fall bottom trawl surveys. NEFSC indices are calculated with gear and vessel conversion factors where appropriate. The approximate 90% lognormal confidence intervals are shown.

*draft working paper for peer review only*



## **Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder**

### ***2025 Management Track Assessment Report***

U.S. Department of Commerce  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
Northeast Fisheries Science Center  
Woods Hole, Massachusetts

Compiled 09-30-2025

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This assessment of the Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder (*Pseudopleuronectes americanus*) stock is a management track assessment update of the existing benchmark assessment (NEFSC 2011), and follows management track updates in 2015, 2017, 2020, and 2022. In each assessment since the benchmark, except for 2022, the stock was overfished, but overfishing was not occurring (NEFSC 2015, 2017, 2020, 2022). In the 2022 management track, stock status changed to not overfished due to a change in the recruitment stanza used to calculate biological reference points. The current assessment updates commercial fishery catch data, recreational fishery catch data, research survey indices of abundance, and the analytical ASAP assessment models and reference points through 2024. Additionally, stock projections have been updated through 2028.

**State of Stock:** Based on this updated assessment, the Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder (*Pseudopleuronectes americanus*) stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring (Figures 1-2). Retrospective adjustments were not made to the model results. Spawning stock biomass (SSB) in 2024 was estimated to be 2,787 (mt) which is 89% of the biomass target (3,114 mt), and 179% of the biomass threshold ( $SSB_{Threshold} = 1557$  (mt); Figure 1). The 2024 fully selected fishing mortality was estimated to be 0.048 which is 21% of the overfishing threshold ( $F_{MSY} = 0.233$ ; Figure 2).

Table 1: Catch and status table for Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder. All weights are in (mt), recruitment is in (000s), and  $F_{Full}$  is the fishing mortality on fully selected ages (ages 4 and 5). Model results are from the current updated ASAP assessment.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<i>Data</i>										
Recreational discards	13	3	2	4	2	3	1	3	3	2
Recreational landings	39	61	10	10	0	9	5	33	16	2
Commercial discards	82	125	101	108	127	47	117	98	83	89
Commercial landings	654	519	515	337	212	120	87	84	35	76
Catch for Assessment	787	708	629	460	342	179	210	219	136	169
<i>Model Results</i>										
Spawning Stock Biomass	5,289	4,471	4,035	3,906	3,615	3,486	3,566	3,203	2,747	2,787
$F_{Full}$	0.145	0.155	0.147	0.115	0.086	0.045	0.059	0.066	0.043	0.048
Recruits	4,633	4,462	2,718	3,995	2,284	2,334	2,517	3,394	4,553	6,211

Table 2: Comparison of reference points estimated in the 2022 management track assessment and from the current assessment update.  $F_{40\%}$  was used as a proxy for  $F_{MSY}$  and an  $SSB_{MSY}$  proxy was calculated from a long-term stochastic projection drawing from the cumulative distribution function of empirical recruitment from 2002 to 2024. Recruitment estimates are median values of the time-series from 2002 to 2024. 90% CI are shown in parentheses.

	2022	2025
$F_{MSY}$ proxy	0.265	0.233
$SSB_{MSY}$ (mt)	3,314	3,114 (2,180 - 4,515)
MSY (mt)	1,025	910 (642 - 1,317)
Median recruits (000s)	4,752	4,633
<i>Overfishing</i>	No	No
<i>Overfished</i>	No	No

**Projections:** Short term projections of biomass were derived by sampling from a cumulative distribution function of recruitment estimates from 2002 to 2024. The annual fishery selectivity, maturity, and mean weights at age used in the projection are the most recent 5 year averages. Catch in 2025 was estimated at 194 (mt) by the NEFMC

Groundfish Plan Development Team. The model exhibited a minor retrospective pattern in  $F$  (Mohn's rho = -0.11) and SSB (Mohn's rho = 0.09) so retrospective adjustments were not applied in the projections.

Table 3: Short term projections of total fishery catch and spawning stock biomass for Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder based on a harvest scenario of fishing at  $F_{MSY}$  proxy between 2026 and 2028. Catch in 2025 was estimated to be 194 (mt). 90% CI are shown in parentheses next to SSB estimates.

Year	Catch (mt)	SSB (mt)	$F_{Full}$
2025	194	2,991 (2,478 - 3,549)	0.049

Year	Catch (mt)	SSB (mt)	$F_{Full}$
2026	961	3,456 (2,839 - 3,963)	0.233
2027	922	3,243 (2,773 - 3,799)	0.233
2028	902	3,128 (2,630 - 3,940)	0.233

#### Special Comments:

- What are the most important sources of uncertainty in this stock assessment? Explain, and describe qualitatively how they affect the assessment results (such as estimates of biomass,  $F$ , recruitment, and population projections).

*One important source of uncertainty is the estimate of natural mortality based on longevity, which is not well studied in Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder. Natural mortality affects the scale of the biomass and fishing mortality estimates. Natural mortality was adjusted upwards from 0.2 to 0.3 during the last benchmark assessment (2011), assuming a maximum age of 16. Since the 2011 benchmark, numerous fish older than 16 have been sampled by the NEFSC survey, as old as age 20. There is still uncertainty in the true max age of the population and the resulting natural mortality estimate. A full re-evaluation of natural mortality, including testing model estimation within a state-space model framework, is on-going as part of a graduate research project.*

*Other sources of uncertainty include the length distribution of the recreational discards. The recreational discards are a small component of the total catch, but the assessment suffers from very little length information used to characterize the recreational discards. For this assessment a cumulative discard length distribution over all years was used to characterize the recreational discards. Reduced sampling of recreational fishery information could be an issue for this assessment moving forward.*

*The population projections are sensitive to the recruitment model chosen, as well as the temporal period selected from which recruitment estimates are drawn. In addition, recruitment and natural mortality are both likely to be dependant on environmental conditions, which can not be explored within the ASAP framework. Investigations of environmental covariates within a state-space model framework are ongoing.*

- Does this assessment model have a retrospective pattern? If so, is the pattern minor, or major? (A major retrospective pattern occurs when the adjusted SSB or  $F_{Full}$  lies outside of the approximate joint confidence region for SSB and  $F_{Full}$ )

*The retrospective patterns for both  $F_{Full}$  (Mohn's rho = -0.11) and SSB (Mohn's rho = 0.09) are minor and a retrospective adjustment in 2024 was not required.*

- Based on this stock assessment, are population projections well determined or uncertain? If this stock is in a rebuilding plan, how do the projections compare to the rebuilding schedule?

*Population projections for Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder are uncertain, and*

project higher than realized SSB from the model.

*The stock was recently in a rebuilding plan with a rebuild date of 2023. The projections and BRP calculations for the 2022 assessment update used a truncated stanza for recruitment, incorporating values from 2002-2021 (last 20 years). Previous assessments had used the entire time-series of recruitment, with historical recruitments that were well beyond the current productivity of the stock. The truncated recruitment stanza used in the 2022 management track led to a much reduced biomass target and as a result the overfished status of the stock changed. While the perception of the stock did not change, the stock was considered rebuilt by the 2023 deadline.*

- Describe any changes that were made to the current stock assessment, beyond incorporating additional years of data and the effect these changes had on the assessment and stock status.

*No changes were made to the data structure, model settings or assumptions for this assessment. Data were updated through 2024 and the model was run.*

- If the stock status has changed a lot since the previous assessment, explain why this occurred.

*The stock status of Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder has not changed since the previous management track update.*

- Provide qualitative statements describing the condition of the stock that relate to stock status.

*The Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder stock shows an overall declining trend in SSB over the time series, with the current estimate (2,787 mt) at the second lowest in the time series. Estimates of fishing mortality have been declining since 2015 and the current value (0.048) is among the lowest of the time-series. Recruitment has remained low and steady over the past decade with a slight increase at the end of the time series. The 2024 estimate of 6.2 million fish is slightly above the average since 2002 (6.1 million).*

- Indicate what data or studies are currently lacking and which would be needed most to improve this stock assessment in the future.

*The Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder assessment could be improved with additional studies on maximum age, as well as improved recreational discard length information. In addition, further investigation into the localized structure and genetics of the stock is warranted. Finally, a future shift to WHAM could provide the ability to model environmental factors that may influence recruitment and mortality, and help develop more informed population projections.*

- Are there other important issues?

*During the 2022 management track assessment, an important and impactful change was made to the stanza of recruitment used in the projections. The new recruitment stanza used the last 20 years of estimates (2002-2021) for both short term projections, and to estimate the biomass target ( $SSB_{MSY}$ ) from a long term (100 year) projection. This was a shift from previous assessments that used the entire time-series of recruitment (1981-present), which included historical recruitment estimates that were overly optimistic for the recent stock size and productivity. Some of the early recruitment estimates are 20 times the levels seen in recent years. This adjustment was supported by guidance from previous peer review panels, with the main recommendation from the 2020 management track review being:*

*'The Peer Review Panel notes, as had been done in previous reviews, that recruitment had been declining throughout the period and was currently very low. As for several other stocks under the purview of the NEFSC it would be helpful to evaluate if the previously observed high recruitment are possible; i.e., is it simply a matter of building back SSB and recruits will follow, or are there other factors at play. If the productivity of the resource(s) has decreased, it would be helpful to adjust reference points accordingly. This would be unlikely to change fisheries yield much but would be more realistic in terms of setting expectations.'*

*It is also important to recognize that extensive work has been carried out to evaluate the effects of the environment on recruitment for Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder. Two assessment models that include environmental covariates have been developed: an environmental ASAP model (Bell et al.*

2018) and the transition of this environmental model into the state space Woods Hole Assessment Model (WHAM). Research should continue to move to one of these alternative models for management. To help bridge the gap until environmentally linked reference points can be developed, a time-series of winter mean estuary temperature is being used as support to select an appropriate time period of recruitment for the projections and reference points.

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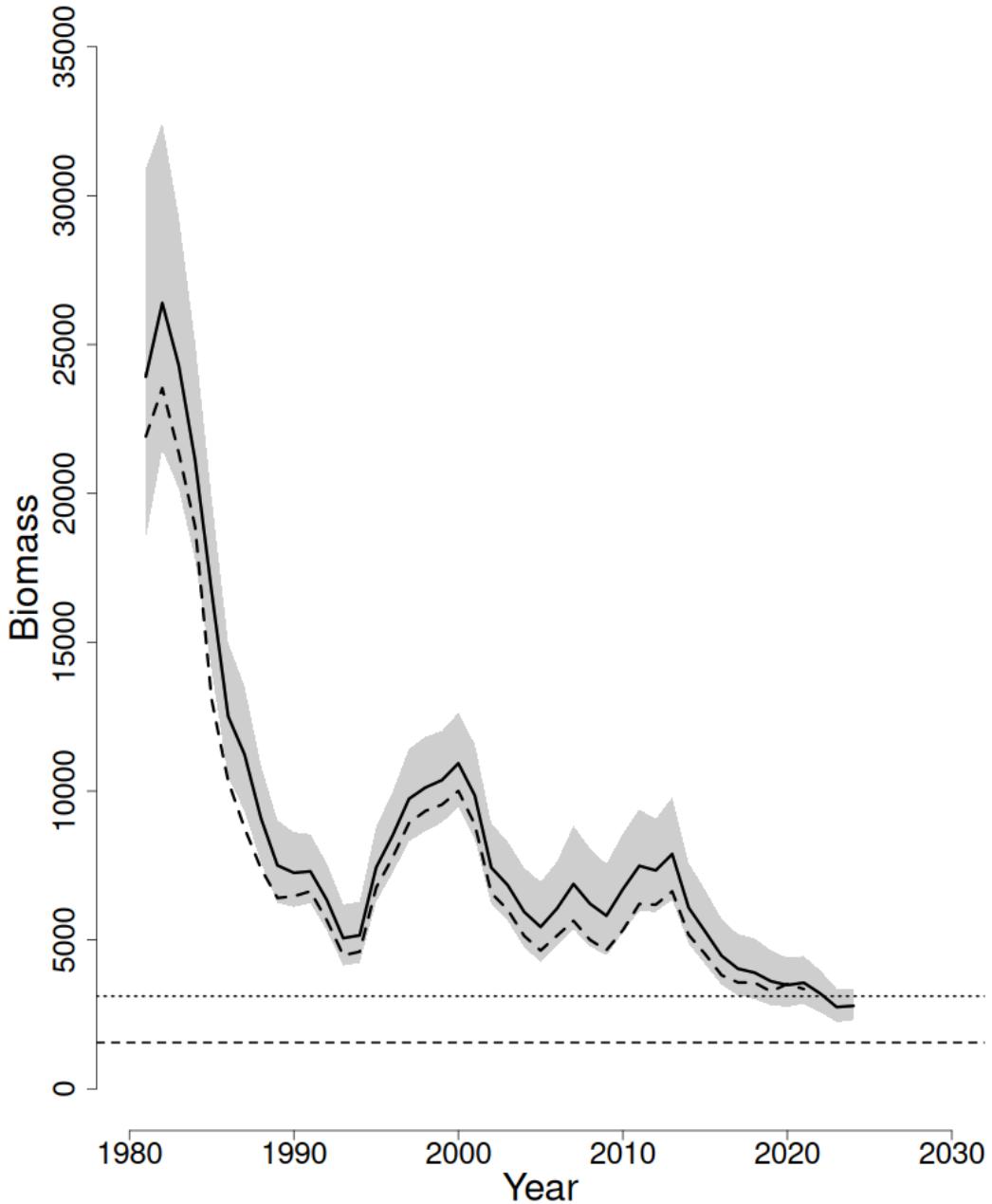


Figure 1: Trends in spawning stock biomass of Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder between 1981 and 2024 from the current (solid line) and previous (dashed line) assessment and the corresponding  $SSB_{Threshold}$  ( $\frac{1}{2} SSB_{MSY}$  proxy; horizontal dashed line) as well as  $SSB_{Target}$  ( $SSB_{MSY}$  proxy; horizontal dotted line) based on the 2025 assessment. The approximate 90% lognormal confidence intervals are shown.

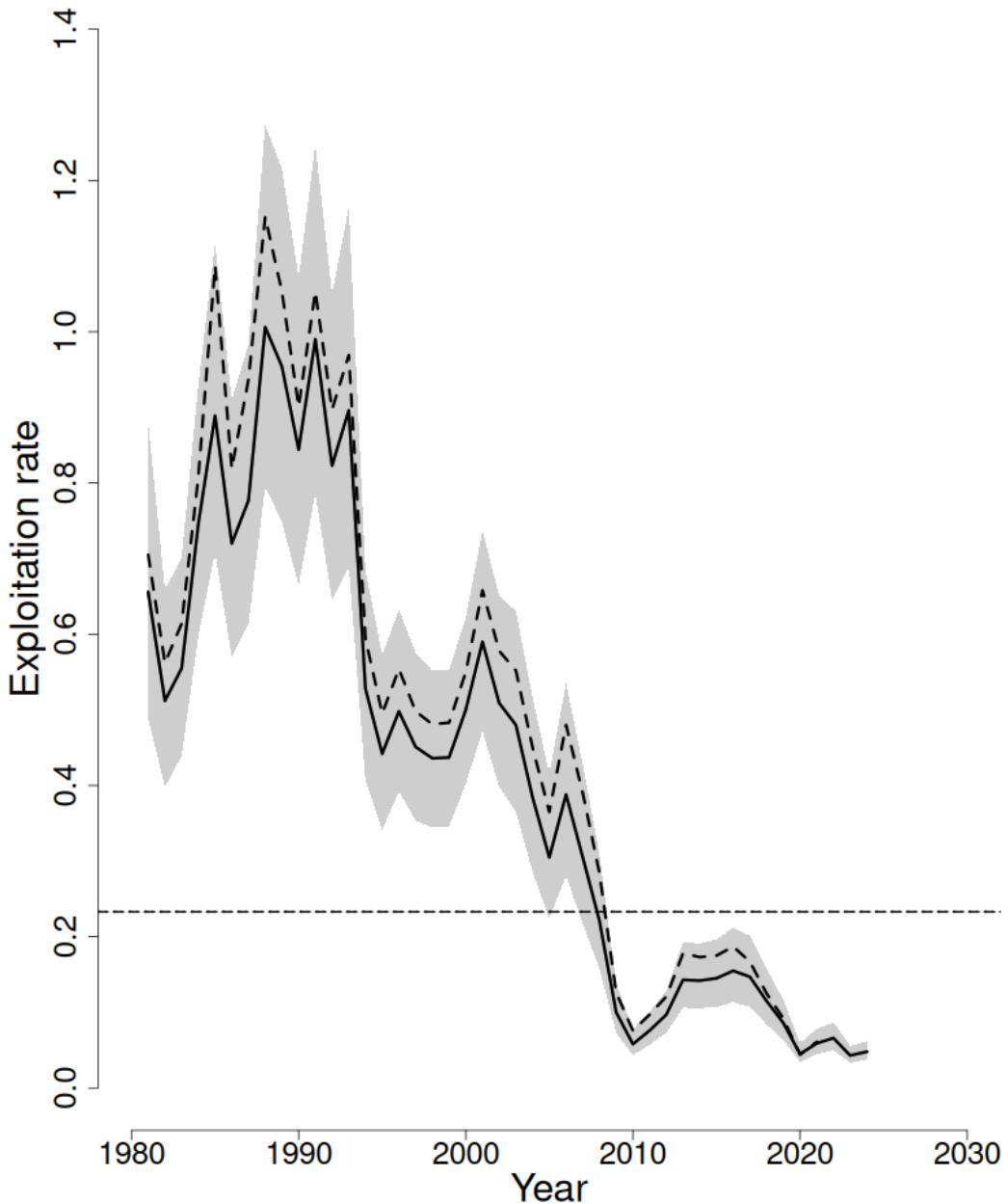


Figure 2: Trends in the fully selected fishing mortality ( $F_{Full}$ ) of Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder between 1981 and 2024 from the current (solid line) and previous (dashed line) assessment and the corresponding  $F_{Threshold}$  ( $F_{MSY} = 0.233$ ; horizontal dashed line) based on the 2025 assessment. The approximate 90% lognormal confidence intervals are shown.

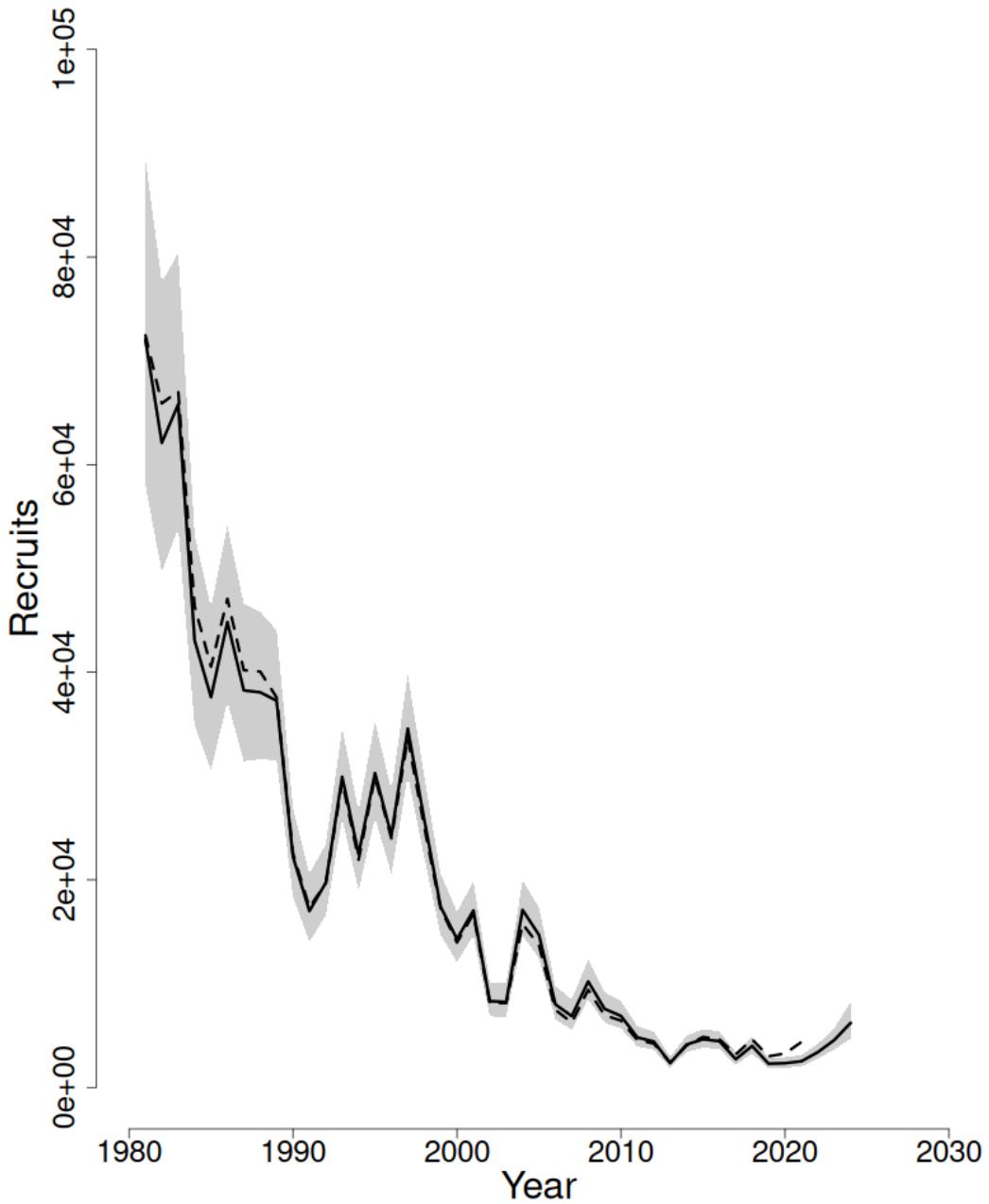


Figure 3: Trends in Recruits (000s) of Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder between 1981 and 2024 from the current (solid line) and previous (dashed line) assessment. The approximate 90% lognormal confidence intervals are shown.

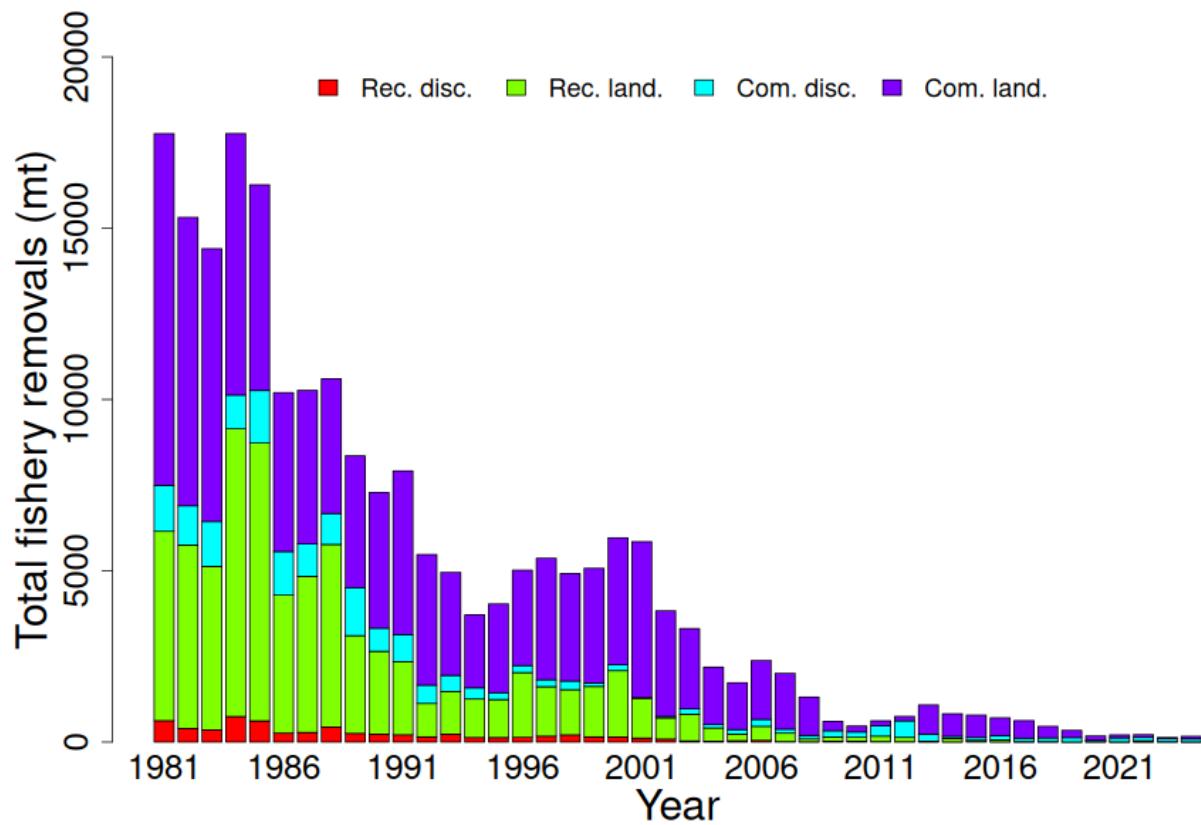


Figure 4: Total catch of Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder between 1981 and 2024 by fleet (commercial, recreational) and disposition (landings and discards).

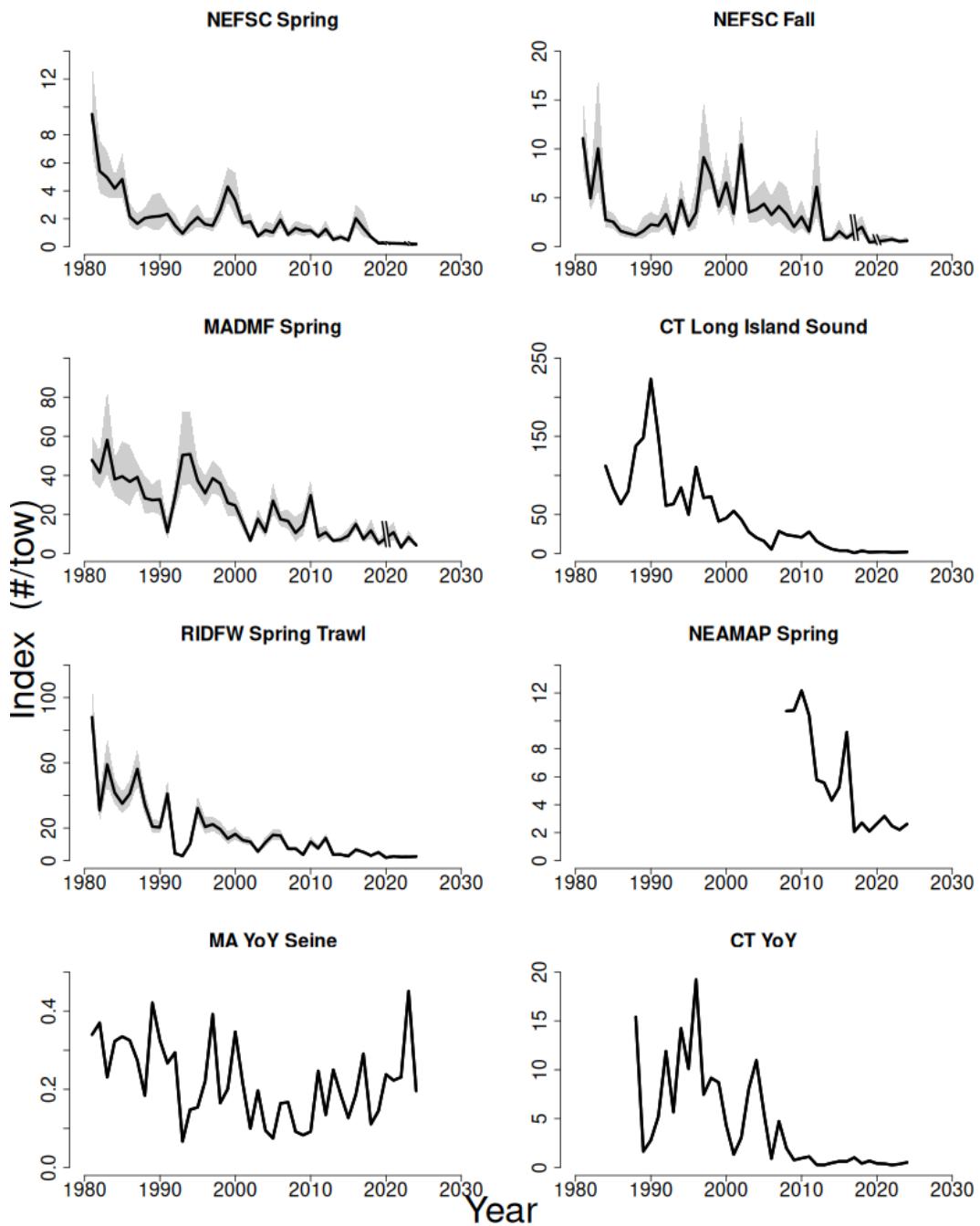


Figure 5: Indices of biomass for the Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder between 1981 and 2024 for the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) spring and fall bottom trawl surveys, the MADMF spring survey, the CT LISTS survey, the RIDFW Spring Trawl survey, the NEAMAP Spring Trawl survey, and two young of the year (YoY) surveys from MADMF and CTDEEP. Where available, the approximate 90% lognormal confidence intervals are shown. Slashes through the solid line indicate a hole in the survey time series.



# Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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## Winter Flounder Technical Committee Meeting Summary

Webinar  
January 6, 2026

**Technical Committee Members:** Rich Balouskus (Chair, RI), Paul Nunnenkamp (NY), Tony Wood (NEFSC), Ben LaFreniere (ME), Tyler Harris (NJ), David Ellis (CT), Paul Nitschke (NEFSC), Tara Dolan (MA)

**ASMFC Staff:** Tracey Bauer, Joe Myers

The Winter Flounder Technical Committee (TC) met via webinar to review the Gulf of Maine (GOM) and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) stock assessments, commercial and recreational fishery trends, and federal specifications for fishing years 2026-2030 approved by New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC). Addendum III to Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for the Inshore Stocks of Winter Flounder allows the Winter Flounder Management Board to set specifications for up to 3 years at a time. Therefore, the Winter Flounder Technical Committee focused on recommendations for management measures for fishing years 2026-2028.

### Fishery Performance and Stock Status

The Winter Flounder TC began by reviewing fishery performance and stock status information for both the GOM and SNE/MA stocks. Both the GOM and SNE/MA winter flounder catch (commercial and recreational landings and discards) remained low through 2024.

Based on the 2025 assessment, the GOM stock biomass status is unknown and overfishing is not occurring. Biomass (30+ cm mt) in 2024 was estimated to be 4,537 mt. The 2024 30+ cm exploitation rate was estimated to be 0.044 which is 19% of the overfishing exploitation threshold proxy (0.23). Overall, indices of GOM winter flounder abundance have not demonstrated any positive response to the large declines in commercial and recreational removals since the 1980s. However, there has been some more recent increases in the fall and the spring area-swept biomass estimates, which may be the beginning of a response to time series low in exploitation rates.

The SNE/MA stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring in 2024. The SNE/MA stock biomass (SSB) in 2024 was estimated to be 2,787 mt which is 89% of the biomass target (3,114 mt), and 179% of the biomass threshold (1,557 mt) for an overfished stock. This change in stock status is due to a change in the years of recruitment estimates that were used to complete the projections to estimate biological reference points. Instead of drawing upon the entire time series of recruitment estimates, the projections now only use recruitment estimates since 2002

(2002-2024). The winter flounder stock is most likely not capable of achieving the high levels of recruitment prior to 2000; therefore, using a truncated recruitment time series better reflects the current state of the stock. Despite a change in stock status, the perception of the stock has not changed; trends in survey indices and model estimates all continue to indicate the stock is in poor condition.

#### **Federal Specifications Approved by the NEFMC**

Table 1 displays the sub-ACLs and corresponding state sub-components for both the GOM and SNE/MA stocks that were approved in Framework Adjustment 72 by the NEFMC at their December 2025 meeting. A comparison of the 2025 to the 2026 fishing year federal groundfish sub-ACLs reveals that the GOM sub-ACL was adjusted up by 9% and the SNE/MA sub-ACL was adjusted down by 14% to reflect the results of the 2025 management track stock assessments. The state sub-component is an estimation of what the state recreational and commercial fisheries will harvest each year based on status quo state regulations; it is not an allocation. The commercial portion of the state sub-component is caught by vessels that do not hold federal Northeast multispecies permits, and the recreational portion is based on calibrated Marine Recreational Information Program catch estimates. There are no accountability measures associated with the state waters sub-component, meaning there is no payback if the state waters sub-component is exceeded. The federal output control system requires an assumption of state water catches to estimate the sector quotas. Table 1 displays the state sub-components for both the GOM and SNE/MA stocks were adjusted to reflect average catch for the years 2022-2024. In the case of the GOM state sub-component this represents a 7% decrease, and for the SNE/MA state sub-component this represents a 2% increase.

**Table 1. GOM and SNE/MA Specifications and State Sub-component Average Catch.**

Stock	Sub-ACLs				
	FY26 (mt)	FY27 (mt)	FY28 (mt)	FY29 (mt)	FY30 (mt)
<b>GOM</b>	660	660	660	660	660
<b>SNE/MA</b>	381	399	417	417	417

Stock	State Sub-component					
	FY26 (mt)	FY27 (mt)	FY28 (mt)	FY29 (mt)	FY30 (mt)	2022-2024 average catch (mt)
<b>GOM</b>	96	96	96	96	96	94.4
<b>SNE/MA</b>	25	27	28	28	28	25.5

#### **Technical Committee Recommendations**

The TC did not recommend any changes to the state waters specifications for the 2026-2028 fishing years. The commercial and recreational measures listed in Tables 2 and 3 have been in place since 2014. The TC discussed whether any adjustments were needed to regulations for the GOM and SNE/MA stocks separately. However, it was noted the most recent 2025 management tracks did not change our perception of the two stocks from the last assessment in 2022.

### GOM Winter Flounder Stock

The TC expressed no concern with commercial and recreational measures remaining status quo. Massachusetts recently implemented (as of September 2024) a conservation equivalency program that allows participants to possess and land up to 1,000-lb of GOM winter flounder caught over two consecutive fishing days with each day subject to the 500-lb per day limit. The TC briefly discussed the uncertainty of how this program could incentivize targeting of winter flounder and impact Gulf of Maine commercial catch. Massachusetts is continuing to monitor participation in this program, and will be reporting results in their annual compliance reports. It was noted no analysis has been completed to estimate how much catch may increase as a result of this program.

### SNE/MA Winter Flounder Stock

The TC agreed to recommend status quo commercial and recreational management measures. TC members from all the SNE/MA states highlighted continued low utilization rates in their respective states and low abundance in all surveys. Several TC members also noted they had not heard any interest to liberalize measures from commercial or recreational fishermen in their states.

The TC spent time discussing how 223% and 133% of the state sub-component was caught in 2022 and 2023, respectively; however, in 2021 and 2024, only 34% and 29% of the state sub-component was caught. The TC discussed why catch has been so highly variable, largely due to highly variable MRIP data with high PSEs. However, as the state sub-component catch has consistently remained a very small portion of the overall ABC for SNE/MA winter flounder, it is currently not concerning if catch exceeds the amount allocated in the state sub-component. Additional discussion by the TC on the inherent issues with estimating state sub-component catch can be found under the last section, “Other Comments”.

Lastly, a TC member noted the TC previously recommended management of the SNE/MA stock should remain status quo until results are available from the research track assessment. However, the winter flounder research track has been put on hold for the foreseeable future, so now there will be no new information to evaluate whether changes are needed to winter flounder management as previously planned for.

### Other Comments

In addition to the above recommendations, the TC would like to remind the Board the challenges of the current management system of both SNE/MA and GOM winter flounder, and encourages discussion of this issue by the Board and Council.

Currently, the federal output control-based management requires accounting for all removals, including assumptions of state water removals, to estimate the ACLs in the federal groundfish fishery. The NEFMC’s Groundfish PDT makes an initial estimate what state water fishery catch is likely to be in the future (state sub-component) for the specifications. However, the Groundfish PDT does not know what potential changes ASMFC will make since their call is held well before

the Board meeting, so they have been basing their recommendations on the average of recent catches in state waters with the underlining assumption that there will be little to no change in current state waters measures. As a result, the state sub-component has continued to decline with declining state waters harvest, regardless of any increases in the sub-ACL on the federal side due to recent management track assessment results. In addition, if the TC ever recommends and the Board approves a liberalization of measures for either winter flounder stock in the future, the process for how the NEFMC might incorporate the Board's decision into their previously approved sub-ACLs is unclear, and has not yet been established.

The TC encourages future discussion on whether adjustments need to be made to the current state waters specifications process to improve the communication and collaboration for the management of these two winter flounder stocks.

**Table 2. Commercial Fishery Winter Flounder Regulations.**

State	Stock Unit	Size Limit	Trip Limit	Seasonal Closure (dates inclusive)	Min. Mesh Size
Maine	GOM	12"	500 lbs	May 1 – June 30	6.5"
New Hampshire	GOM	12"	500 lbs	April 1 – June 30	6.5"
Massachusetts	GOM	12"	500 lbs	Open all year	6.5"
	SNE/MA	12"	50 lbs	Open all year	6.5"
Rhode Island	SNE/MA	12"	50 lbs	Open all year	6.5"
Connecticut	SNE/MA	12"	50 lbs or 38 fish	March 1 – April 14	6.5"
New York	SNE/MA	12"	50 lbs	June 14 – Nov 30 (for all gear besides fyke nets, pound and trap nets)	6.5"
New Jersey	SNE/MA	12"	38 fish	June 1 – Nov 30 (all gear except for fyke nets) Feb 20 – Oct 31 (Fyke net)	6.5"

**Table 3. Recreational Fishery Winter Flounder Regulations.**

State	Stock Unit	Creel Limit	Size Limit	Seasonal Closure (dates inclusive)
Maine	GOM	8	12"	Open all year
New Hampshire	GOM	8	12"	Open all year
Massachusetts	GOM	8	12"	Open all year
	SNE/MA	2	12"	January 1- February 28
Rhode Island	SNE/MA	2	12"	January 1 – February 28
Connecticut	SNE/MA	2	12"	January 1 – March 31
New York	SNE/MA	2	12"	May 31 – March 31
New Jersey	SNE/MA	2	12"	January 1 – February 28
Federal Waters	GOM & SNE/MA	Unlimited	12"	Open all year



# Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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## Winter Flounder Advisory Panel Meeting Summary

Webinar  
January 12, 2026

**Advisory Panel Members:** Allan Butler (MA), Art Defrancisco (CT), David Goethel (NH), Charles Witek (NY)

**ASMFC Staff:** Tracey Bauer

**Public:** Paul Rollinson, Paul Nitschke, Tara Dolan, Tyler Harris, Michael Keller, Vinny Makfinsky, Tony Wood, Steve

The Winter Flounder Advisory Panel (AP) met via webinar on January 12, 2026 to review the Gulf of Maine (GOM) and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) stock assessments, provide recommendations for fishing years 2026-2028 specifications for state waters, and to comment on any other current fishery management issues of concern.

### Specifications Recommendations

Two advisors recommended status quo commercial and recreational management measures for FY2026-2028 based on the available information. It was noted that managers and the AP would be able to reassess winter flounder regulations in only three years if any changes are needed. Several advisors agreed recreational fishermen are no longer targeting winter flounder, particularly in the SNE/MA area, so any changes to the recreational regulations may not matter. In New York, shops have stopped carrying bait in April, most party boats are no longer targeting them, and most anglers aren't putting their boats in the water until May. For Gulf of Maine winter flounder, biomass estimates have been generally stable in the last 10 years, potentially indicating the stock has stabilized after years of overexploitation, which matched an advisor's on-the-water observations. The advisor from Massachusetts noted that anglers in Cape Cod Bay have had the most success recently, but it was difficult to find winter flounder on the North Shore this past spring.

### General Comments & Research Recommendations

- One advisor, who is also a member of the Northeast Trawl Advisory Panel, noted there have been recent improvements in estimating catchability in the NEFSC's Northeast Trawl Survey; the improved estimates of catchability were incorporated in the 2025 management track for Gulf of Maine winter flounder. The advisor recommended similar work be conducted to update the catchability estimates of the state surveys used in the Gulf of Maine winter flounder assessment.

- An advisor shared his observations of an expansion of Gulf of Maine winter flounder size classes, especially larger fish. The advisor noted this may not necessarily mean the age structure is also expanding, but does potentially indicate something within their environment may be changing, such as increased prey, leading to increased growth rates.
- The AP discussed different types of natural mortality which may be impacting winter flounder's, particularly SNE/MA winter flounder, ability to recover. For example, the AP raised concerns about the impacts predation by birds, seals, and striped bass may be having on the population. The AP expressed interest in additional research to incorporate ecosystem approaches in winter flounder management and to improve estimates of natural mortality, especially changes through time.
- The AP discussed recent research that found that the number of young-of-year winter flounder which survive their first year is very low, and lower than estimates from previous studies. Advisors expressed general frustration with the lack of answers on how to ensure winter flounder survive to maturity, and continued low biomass.
- An advisor reiterated his recommendation from the AP's January 2023 meeting that managers need take a second look into stocking as a potential path forward for winter flounder. The AP discussed considerations to increase the success of any future stocking efforts, such as location of and size at release.
- The AP also discussed the need for an assessment specific to winter flounder in Long Island Sound.

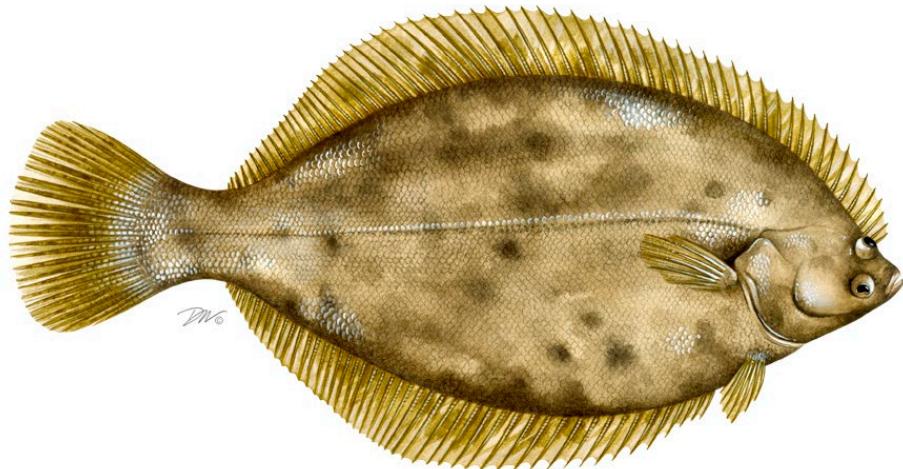
# DRAFT FOR BOARD REVIEW

## ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

### REVIEW OF THE INTERSTATE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

#### FOR WINTER FLOUNDER (*Pseudopleuronectes americanus*)

#### 2024 FISHING YEAR



Prepared by the Plan Review Team  
January 2026



*Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries*

# DRAFT FOR BOARD REVIEW

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# DRAFT FOR BOARD REVIEW

## I. Status of Fishery Management Plan

<u>Date of FMP Approval</u>	Original FMP (October 1988)
<u>Amendments</u>	Amendment 1 (November 2005)
<u>Addenda</u>	Addendum I (May 1992) Addendum II (February 1998) Addendum I to Amendment 1 (May 2009) Addendum II to Amendment 1 (October 2012) Addendum III to Amendment 1 (May 2013)
<u>Management Units</u>	Three stocks units: Gulf of Maine (GOM), Southern New England/ Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA), and Georges Bank (GBK). Commission participates in management of GOM and SNE/MA stocks.
<u>States with Declared Interest</u>	Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey
<u>Active Boards/Committees</u>	Winter Flounder Management Board, Advisory Panel, Technical Committee, Plan Review Team

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) and the New England Fishery Management Council (Council) manage winter flounder in state and federal waters. The Commission participates in the management of two inshore winter flounder stocks: 1) the Gulf of Maine (GOM) stock, which consists of waters north of Cape Cod; and 2) the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) stock, which consists of waters south of Cape Cod to the Delaware-Maryland border. The decision to consider only inshore stocks of winter flounder was based upon the Commission's focus on fisheries in state waters, and the differences in biological characteristics from the offshore stock in Georges Bank.

### Interstate Fishery Management Plan (1988)

The Commission authorized development of the first Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Winter Flounder (*Pseudopleuronectes americanus*) in October 1988. The purpose of the plan was to: 1) address management of inshore stocks of winter flounder; and 2) prominently consider habitat and environmental quality as factors affecting the condition of the resource. The original FMP and Addendum I called for reductions in fishing mortality on winter flounder. It allowed states the flexibility to achieve those reductions based on the life history characteristics of the particular stocks inhabiting each region. Implementation of the plan required cooperation between state fishery management agencies, NOAA Fisheries, the Council, and the Commission.

# DRAFT FOR BOARD REVIEW

Although all states submitted plans that were approved by the Winter Flounder Management Board (Board), results from a 1995 stock assessment concluded that none of the states achieved a fishing mortality rate corresponding to  $F_{30}$ . Subsequent analyses in early January 1997 indicated that fishing mortality on a coastwide basis was slightly higher than the  $F_{30}$  target for the SNE/MA stock complex. Fishing mortality in the GOM stock was presumed to be higher than in the SNE/MA stock, and the spawning stock biomass was estimated to be at a low level, indicating that the GOM unit might be in greater need of rebuilding than the SNE/MA unit.

In February 1998, the Board approved Addendum II to the FMP. Addendum II adjusted the implementation schedule for management measures by the participating states and called for plans to reach the target fishing mortality goal for rebuilding ( $F_{40}$ ).

## **Amendment 1 (2005)**

In May 1999, the Board acknowledged that it was necessary to update the Interstate FMP for Inshore Stocks of Winter Flounder through an amendment. The original plan and addenda did not prove successful in rebuilding inshore winter flounder populations. In addition, the FMP did not reflect the goals and objectives of the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (ACFCMA), which was established in 1993 after the original FMP was approved. The Board further noted that an upcoming stock assessment would likely provide new information on the status of winter flounder stock complexes. After the assessment was completed in late 2002, the Commission began development of Amendment 1 in February 2003.

Amendment 1 to the Interstate FMP for Inshore Stocks of Winter Flounder, approved in November 2005, replaced all previous Commission management plans. It focused on joint management of winter flounder between the Commission and Council, and was designed to rebuild and maintain spawning stock biomass at or near target biomass levels. In addition, Amendment 1 prioritized restoration and maintenance of essential winter flounder habitat.

Amendment 1 required a minimum size limit of 12 inches for commercial and recreational fisheries for both GOM and SNE/MA stock units. Recreational creel limits were ten (10) fish in the SNE/MA stock area and eight (8) fish in the GOM. There were no required closed recreational seasons in the GOM, while a closed season of 20 days during March and April was required in SNE/MA. The 60-day open season for recreational winter flounder fishing could be split into no more than 2 blocks. States were required to implement a minimum size of 6.5 inches square or diamond mesh for the cod-end in both GOM and SNE/MA inshore waters. Additionally, a 100-pound trip limit was required if smaller mesh was being used in the SNE/MA. This “mesh trigger” was intended for the landing of a small amount of winter flounder as bycatch in small-mesh fisheries.

## **Addendum I to Amendment 1 (2009)**

Addendum I was approved in May 2009, following the 2008 GARM III stock assessment which indicated that the SNE/MA spawning stock biomass was only 9% of the target and the GOM stock was likely to be overfished and experiencing overfishing. For the GOM commercial

# DRAFT FOR BOARD REVIEW

fishery, Addendum I established a maximum possession limit of 250 pounds per vessel. This limit was estimated to reduce 2006-2007 harvest levels by 31% for state water fishing vessels. For the GOM recreational fishery, Addendum I required states to implement regulations to reduce fishing mortality by 11% from the average of 2006-2007 levels. This 11% reduction was estimated to reach  $F_{MSY}$ . States were allowed to achieve reductions through possession limits, seasons, or a combination of both, and also had the option to submit conservation equivalency proposals to achieve the necessary reductions through alternative management measures, subject to approval by the Board.

For SNE/MA, Addendum I's management measures were designed to reach the lowest fishing mortality (F) rate possible with minimal economic and social impacts. The Addendum also sought to reduce dead discards and prevent an influx of effort into state waters. Non-federally permitted commercial vessels were allowed to possess a maximum of 50 pounds of winter flounder. This F rate was projected to reduce harvest by 65%, and was intended solely to allow for bycatch. Recreational fishermen were permitted to possess a maximum of two (2) winter flounder from inshore waters of the SNE/MA stock area. This bag limit was established with the expectation that it would reduce harvest by 46%.

## ***Addendum II to Amendment 1 (2012)***

In response to updated stock status information and federal action to substantially increase the GOM winter flounder state waters subcomponent, the Board initiated Addendum II to Amendment 1 of the Winter Flounder Interstate FMP. This Addendum changed commercial and recreational management measures for the state waters component of the GOM stock only. Specifically, it increased the maximum possession limit for non-federally permitted commercial vessels to 500 pounds. It also removed the 11% reduction in F for the recreational fishery and allowed states the option to open their recreational fishing season year-round.

## ***Addendum III to Amendment 1 (2013)***

Addendum III established an annual specification process to set commercial and recreational management measures for the GOM and SNE/MA fisheries. Each year, with advice from the Winter Flounder Technical Committee, the Board can adjust trip limits, size limits, and seasons for the commercial fishery; the Board can also adjust size limits, bag limits, and seasons for the recreational fishery. The Addendum enables the Commission to quickly respond to federal actions and changes in the winter flounder fishery.

## **II. Status of Stocks**

The most recent peer reviewed stock assessment for all three winter flounder stocks was conducted by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center in 2025. These management track stock assessments included data through 2024.

### **Gulf of Maine**

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The 2025 management track stock assessment determined that GOM winter flounder stock biomass status is unknown and overfishing is not occurring. 2024 biomass (30+ cm) was estimated to be 4,537 metric tons (mt) and the exploitation rate was estimated to be 0.044, which was 19% of the overfishing exploitation threshold proxy (Figures 1 & 2). The assessment noted that there have been significant declines in commercial and recreational removals since the 1980's. As catches continue to remain far below the overfishing level, the general lack of a response in survey indices and age/size structure has been a primary source of concern. However, recent increases in the overall biomass (2021-2024) could potentially be the beginning of a response to record low removals. Significant sources of uncertainty include the reliance of estimates of stock biomass on survey gear catchability and that biomass-based reference points cannot be determined. This 2025 management track did however incorporate a re-estimated catchability based on a sweep study for the NEFSC survey. (Source: [Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder 2025 Assessment Update](#))

## **Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic**

The SNE/MA management track assessment indicates the stock not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. However, spawning stock biomass has shown an overall declining trend in SSB over the time series, with the current estimate (2,787 mt) at the second lowest in the time series (Figure 3). The current SSB is 89% of the biomass target and 179% of the biomass threshold (Figure 4). Estimates of fishing mortality have been declining since 2015, and the current value (0.048) is among the lowest of the time series. Recruitment, an important indicator of the stock's ability to rebuild, has remained low and without trend in the last decade, with a slight increase at the end of the time series (Figure 5). During the 2022 management track assessment, the recruitment stanza was changed to use only the recruitment estimates since 2002 instead of the entire time series to make projections. The current stock size and productivity mean many of the historic recruitment estimates are nearly impossible to achieve, making the adjusted recruitment stanza more realistic. The lower median recruitment estimate from this shortened recruitment stanza in the long term biological reference point projection results in a much-reduced biomass target. While stock status has changed, the perception of the stock has not, and model results, continued low harvest, and fishery independent survey indices all reveal a poor stock condition for SNE/MA winter flounder. (Source: [Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder 2025 Assessment Update](#))

## **III. Status of the Fishery**

### **Stockwide**

Across all stocks (GOM, SNE/MA, and GBK), the winter flounder fisheries are a fraction of their historic productivity. Specifically, commercial and recreational landings have declined since the early 1980s (Table 1, Figure 6). Landings are reported for the 2024 calendar year unless otherwise stated.

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**Commercial landings** peaked at 18,279 mt (40.3 million lbs) in 1981, the highest since 1950, but have generally declined throughout the 1990's and 2000's. In 2024, commercial landings were 859.7 mt (1.89 million lbs), a 130% increase from 2023 landings of 372.9 mt (0.82 million lbs). A majority of the landings were taken in Massachusetts (98%; Table 2). It is important to note that management action has impacted yearly landings as annual catch limits increased in 2011 and 2012, and a moratorium was in place for the SNE/MA stock between May 2009 and April 2013. (Landings source: NMFS, State Compliance Reports)

**Recreational harvest** was 25.2 mt (0.055 million lbs) in 2024, a 66% decrease from 2023 harvest of 75.2 mt (0.16 million lbs; Table 1). These recent recreational harvest values represent a significant decrease from the 17,535 mt (38.6 million lbs) caught in 1981. In 2024, Massachusetts comprised the majority of coastwide recreational winter flounder landings, at 77.1%. Generally, the percentage standard error (PSE) values around each state's recreational data are very high (>50) and indicate very imprecise estimates (Landings source: MRIP).

## Gulf of Maine

**Commercial landings** of GOM winter flounder have substantially declined since the early 1980s, with recent landings being roughly 10% of harvest levels in the 1980s. From 1964 through the mid-1970s, commercial landings were near 1,000 mt. Productivity peaked at nearly 2,793 mt in 1982, and steadily declined to 141 mt in 2010 and has remained low. In 2024, commercial landings in the GOM winter founder stock were 161 mt. The 2024 estimate for total commercial discards is 14 mt (Source: NEFSC 2025).

**Recreational landings** have declined significantly since their peak in the 1980s. During 2024, the estimate for recreational harvest in the GOM was 23 mt. Recreational dead discards make up a small portion of catch and were estimated at 0 mt for 2024 (NEFSC 2025).

## Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic

**Commercial landings** of SNE/MA winter flounder generally declined throughout the time series from 1964 to 2024, with periodic peaks and dips. After reaching a historical peak of 11,977 mt in 1966 and then declining through the 1970s, total U.S. commercial landings again peaked at 11,176 mt in 1981. After 1981, SNE/MA commercial landings declined to 2,159 mt in 1994 and then increased to 4,672 mt in 2001. Commercial landings have decreased since the 2001 peak. Landings in 2024 were 76 mt, and total commercial discards was estimated to be 89 mt (Source: NEFSC 2025).

**Recreational landings** of SNE/MA winter flounder peaked in 1984 and have declined substantially since. During 2024, the estimate for recreational harvest in the SNE/MA stock was 2 mt. Recreational discards in 2024 were estimated at 2 mt (NEFSC 2025). The principal mode of fishing is private/rental boats, with most recreational landings occurring during May and June (Source: MRIP).

## IV. Status of Research and Monitoring

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Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Winter Flounder requires the following research and monitoring activities by certain states:

- Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New York are required to conduct annual surveys of juvenile recruitment to develop an annual juvenile abundance index.
- Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Jersey are required to conduct annual trawl surveys to develop an index of spawning stock biomass.

In 2024, states with a declared interest in the winter flounder FMP conducted the fisheries-independent surveys summarized below.

## Maine

Maine Department of Marine Resources (MEDMR) conducts spring and fall bottom trawl surveys in cooperation with the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department (NHFG). The Maine-New Hampshire (MENH) Inshore Trawl Survey collects length, weight, maturity stage, and age samples for winter flounder. In 2024, 4,081 winter flounder were caught with 357 taken for maturity samples during the spring survey. There has been an increasing trend in winter flounder mean catch and weight in the spring survey, with mean weight at its highest index to date, almost tripling since 2021. In 2024, the analysis of a backlog of 7,585 winter flounder otoliths that had been collected since 2002 was completed. Age-length keys and other ageing statistics are in the process of being created, with hope of publishing findings in 2026. In the fall survey, 4,034 winter flounder were caught, but none were taken for maturity samples. Winter flounder mean catch and weight have varied over time, but indices have remained greater than the time series average since 2021, particularly in terms of weight.

## New Hampshire

NHFG conducts an annual seine survey of juvenile fish in its estuaries from June through November. Winter flounder encountered in the survey during 2024 ranged in size from 2.3 to 18.9 cm total length with a mean of 6.23 cm total length. The survey produces an index of relative abundance for each species encountered using a geometric mean catch per seine haul. The 2024 index value (0.65) for winter flounder increased from 2023 but is below the average (1.08) since 1997; the index has been highly variable. In addition, NHFG has worked with MEDMR since the fall of 2000 to conduct an inshore trawl survey off Maine and New Hampshire. Winter flounder are regularly caught in this survey.

## Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF) has conducted a biannual trawl (spring and fall) survey covering MA territorial waters since 1978, except for in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For the GOM, fall survey abundance and biomass increased from 2023 to 2024, and percent occurrence remained the same at 100%. However, spring survey biomass and abundance decreased from 2023 to 2024, while percent occurrence remained the same. All indices were above their time series mean except spring biomass and abundance. The spring

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GOM indices depict a declining trend through about 2010, followed by an increasing trend since then. The fall indices' trends are more variable around the mean but show a steadily increasing trend post-2000. Percent occurrence of winter flounder in the GOM surveys is very high; routinely 100% with few exceptions in the spring and generally 90-100% in the fall.

For SNE, all indices decreased from 2023 to 2024 except for percent occurrence in the spring. All 2024 indices were still below their time series means. The spring indices depict a steadily declining SNE stock since the beginning of the time series, while the fall indices' trends have generally declined but are more variable around the mean. Percent occurrence of winter flounder in the SNE surveys is much lower than the GOM, with the spring averaging 83% and the fall only 36%, and both showing overall declining trends. Typically, the spring indices are thought to be more representative for inshore surveys when winter flounder undertake seasonal migrations to spawn.

From June 12 – July 3, 2024, MA DMF conducted the 49<sup>th</sup> Nantucket Sound Estuarine Winter Flounder Young-of-the-Year (YOY) Seine Survey. The survey covers six Nantucket Sound estuaries on the south side of Cape Cod: Great Pond, Waquoit Bay, Cotuit Bay, Lewis Bay, Bass River and Stage Harbor. The 2024 pooled (all estuaries combined) winter flounder YOY index (0.201 YOY / m<sup>2</sup>) is a decline from 2023 and below the timeseries mean of 0.245 YOY/m<sup>2</sup>.

To enhance habitat understanding, DMF continued its eDNA research in 2024, building on an initial 2021–2022 pilot study with the Gloucester Marine Genomics Institute (GMGI). To build on the initial pilot study, a dual eDNA-fyke net survey was initiated in Waquoit Bay in 2023 and continued in 2024 to provide eDNA validation and direct observation of winter flounder spawning status. Four fyke nets were monitored weekly from December to April, with all flounder measured, assessed for reproductive status, tagged if above 12 inches, and released alive. Biweekly water samples were collected from 13 stations for eDNA analysis by GMGI. Catch peaked in January–February, aligning with active spawning, but sharply declined in March–April. In summer 2024, DMF collected eDNA samples during its YOY seine survey in Waquoit Bay in July, archiving samples for later analysis. eDNA analysis of 2024 Waquoit Bay samples and submission of a manuscript detailing the initial eDNA pilot study are both planned for 2025.

In 2024, DMF Fisheries Research and Monitoring continued to track movements of adult winter flounder and document immigration, emigration, and residence time inside the Boston Harbor estuary and movements around northern Massachusetts state and federal waters. Adding to the 151 tagged Boston Harbor winter flounder, researchers conducted two tagging trips on Gloucester and Scituate Massachusetts-based commercial fishing vessels and tagged an additional 98 winter flounder. A 19-receiver array in Boston Harbor and a 40-receiver costal array was maintained throughout the year. This array, along with Marine Fisheries Large Pelagic Program's array, provided comprehensive coverage of Massachusetts state waters and was instrumental in tracking year-round movements of adult winter flounder. This information will also be valuable to help inform future winter flounder time of year restrictions and will be used as leverage to obtain future funding.

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## **Rhode Island**

Rhode Island Division of Marine Fisheries (RI DMF) conducts five surveys to monitor juvenile and adult winter flounder in its state waters; spring and fall seasonal trawl surveys, a monthly trawl survey, a Narragansett Bay juvenile finfish seine survey, a coastal pond seine survey, and a coastal pond winter flounder spawning stock survey. The seasonal demersal trawl survey samples 42 fixed and random stations in the spring and fall. The spring seasonal trawl survey had a 2024 catch per unit effort (CPUE) of 2.55 winter flounder per tow. The survey's values remain very low and well below the time series median. The fall seasonal trawl survey had a 2024 CPUE of 0.34 winter flounder per tow, which is the lowest value of the time series thus far. The monthly demersal trawl survey samples 13 fixed stations each month. CPUE from this survey in 2024 was 0.83 winter flounder per tow; the index remains very low and well below the time series median. The Narragansett Bay juvenile finfish seine survey samples 18 stations once a month from June through October. The 2023 CPUE was 0.3 winter flounder per seine haul, which was the lowest index value in the time series. The coastal pond seine survey samples 24 stations in 8 coastal ponds from May through October. The 2024 survey had a CPUE of 5.6 winter flounder per seine haul. The survey index remains low and below the time series median. The coastal pond winter flounder spawning stock survey samples 6 stations with fyke nets from January to May in Potter and Ninigret Pond. The 2024 survey had a CPUE of 4.0 winter flounder per fyke set, which is a slight increase from 2023, and near the time series median. The overall trend in winter flounder abundance for all surveys indicates continued low abundance of this species in Rhode Island waters.

## **Connecticut**

Winter flounder have been monitored through the Long Island Sound Trawl Survey (LISTS) since 1984. Spring and fall surveys are conducted each year. The 2024 LISTS spring (April-May) index (geometric mean fish/tow) for all ages of winter flounder was 2.18, the fifth lowest value in the 40-year time series (lowest value = 0.76 in 2017). Similarly, the 2024 spring index for age-4+ winter flounder was 0.41, the fourth lowest value in the time series. Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection also conducts a fall estuarine seine survey that provides an index of abundance for young-of-year winter flounder. The geometric mean fish/tow in 2024 was 0.53, which increased 47.2% from the previous year.

## **New York**

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has been conducting a small mesh trawl survey targeting juvenile finfish since 1987. The weekly survey runs from May through October in Peconic Bay using a small mesh sixteen-foot semi-balloon shrimp trawl. In 2024, the YOY CPUE of winter flounder from June through July was 1.29, the highest CPUE of YOY since 2011. Two age-1 winter flounder were caught in 2024. No age 2+ winter flounder were caught during 2024.

The Department also conducts a seine survey in western Long Island bays, which has been ongoing since 1986, using a 200-foot  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch mesh seine. Sampling is conducted at multiple stations twice a month within Jamaica Bay, Manhasset Bay, Little Neck Bay, Hempstead Harbor,

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and Oyster Bay from May through October. Winter flounder catch per seine for all ages, aggregated for all 5 bays, was 3.816 for 2024. 846 of the total 851 winter flounder caught were YOY, and 5 were age-1+.

## **New Jersey**

The Bureau of Marine Fisheries has conducted an Ocean Trawl program in nearshore ocean waters since 1988. Winter flounder are most abundant in New Jersey during April, and data from this survey cruise are used to develop an index of relative abundance in New Jersey waters. Otolith samples have been collected from the Ocean Trawl Survey's April cruise from 1993 to 2018, and all cruises since 2022. Age structures were collected from 112 winter flounder in 2024.

## **V. Status of Management Measures and Issues**

The Winter Flounder Management Board set status quo specifications for the 2023-2025 fishing years. The recreational and commercial regulations listed in Tables 3 and 4 have remained consistent since 2014. The TC's 2018 commercial measures analysis indicates the SNE/MA region is essentially a bycatch fishery. Any further restriction in measures would likely increase regulatory discards and have a limited impact on fishing mortality. The Board intends to continue to work collaboratively with the Council to determine the best path forward in improving understanding of the biology of the winter flounder stock and determining the right management approach for this depleted stock.

## **Conservation Equivalency**

There is currently one conservation equivalency plan in effect, for the Massachusetts GOM commercial winter flounder fishery, which was approved by the Board in 2024. Massachusetts' Groundfish Consecutive Daily Trip Limit Pilot Program, initiated in September 2024, allows participants to possess and land up to 1,000-lb of GOM winter flounder caught over two consecutive fishing days with each day subject to the 500-lb per day limit, with the goal of improving the economic viability of the state groundfish fisheries in this area. The program requires fishermen to hold a limited entry state waters groundfish permit and an annually issued Letter of Authorization (LOA). Other program requirements include no more than one limit is taken in a single day, and completion of a DMF-issued logbook of trip level catch. The FY2024 program had a requirement that catch from the first day must be stored in a container sealed shut with a DMF-issued tag; however, starting in FY2025, conditions were slightly modified to no longer require each day's catch to be sealed with a DMF issued tag but still to be clearly and accurately labeled. The Winter Flounder Plan Review Team will continue to monitor and evaluate this program through Massachusetts' annual compliance reports.

## **VI. Implementation of FMP Compliance Requirements and *De Minimis***

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## **De Minimis**

Amendment I allows a state to be granted *de minimis* status if their fishery constitutes less than 1% of the coastwide commercial or recreational landings for the preceding three years for which data are available. A state that qualifies for *de minimis* status based on their commercial landings will qualify for exemptions in the commercial fishery only, and a state that qualifies for *de minimis* based on their recreational landings will qualify for exemptions in their recreational fishery only. States that apply for and are granted *de minimis* status are exempted from biological monitoring/sub-sampling activities for the sector for which *de minimis* has been granted.

## **Request for *de minimis* status**

New Jersey has requested *de minimis* status for its commercial fishery. New Jersey commercial landings have remained well below 1% of coastwide landings for the years 2022-2024, which meets the *de minimis* criteria.

## **State Compliance**

All the states with a declared interest in the management of winter flounder have implemented commercial and recreational regulations that are consistent with ASMFC's Winter Flounder FMP (Tables 3 and 4).

## **VII. Research and Monitoring Recommendations**

The 2025 Management Track Stock Assessments noted several data needs that would improve future population estimates.

### **Gulf of Maine**

- Additional studies on state survey gear efficiency
- Additional studies quantifying winter flounder abundance and distribution among habitat types, especially within estuarine environments
- Consider applying year specific catchability estimates instead of averaging the full time series
- Develop a state space analytical model to incorporate process error

### **Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic**

- Additional studies on maximum age
- Improved recreational discard length information
- Investigation of localized structure/genetics of the stock
- Shift to the state space Woods Hole Assessment Model (WHAM) could provide the ability to model environmental influences on recruitment and mortality, and help develop more informed population projections

## **VIII. Plan Review Team Comments and Recommendations**

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- The PRT finds that all states implemented regulations consistent with the Winter Flounder FMP.
- The PRT recommends several questions be added to the winter flounder compliance report template for all states to help the PRT track how often overages occur on commercial trips:

## *Gulf of Maine*

- [Insert State] commercial fisherman reported landing winter flounder on [x number of trips] trips, with [x number of trips] trips catching exactly 500 pounds of winter flounder in 2025.
- [Insert State] commercial fisherman reported landing more than 500 pounds of winter flounder on [x number of trips] trips, with a combined overage of [x] pounds in 2025.
- No commercial fishing trips in [Insert State] exceeded 500 pounds of winter flounder in 2025.

## *Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic*

- [Insert State] commercial fisherman reported landing winter flounder on [x number of trips] trips, with [x number of trips] trips catching exactly 50 pounds of winter flounder/38 fish in 2025.
- [Insert State] commercial fisherman reported landing more than 50 pounds of winter flounder/38 fish on [x number of trips] trips, with a combined overage of [x] pounds/fish in 2025.
- No commercial fishing trips in [Insert State] exceeded 50 pounds of winter flounder/38 fish in 2025.

- The PRT has the following comments and/or recommendations regarding Massachusetts' CE program:

- The PRT recognizes the FY2024 Massachusetts compliance report only reports on the performance of the program for a portion of year, as the program was not implemented until September 2024, so there is interest on how it will perform in its first full year.
- In the future, it may be useful to consider the types of socioeconomic data that could be gathered to evaluate a CE program's performance. For example, socioeconomic data could be helpful to determine if Massachusetts' CE program is meeting the goals and objectives put forward by Massachusetts in their CE proposal. The proposal stated: "DMF is making this request as a Conservation Equivalency proposal on socio-economic and fleet greening grounds. The intent of the pilot program is not to increase landings, such as a trip limit increase would achieve, but to allow the fleet to achieve the current level of landings more efficiently, both from a cost and emissions standpoint."
- The PRT expressed some concern with Massachusetts dropping FY2024's requirement for each day's catch to be sealed with a DMF issued tag, instead requiring each day's catch to be "clearly and accurately labeled". Following the meeting, Massachusetts clarified why the change was being made and that they did not anticipate additional enforcement issues resulting from this change. Daily

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limits can still be adequately monitored and enforced through segregation, labeling, and review of logbook information.

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National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Commercial Fisheries Statistics Tool.  
Access: <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/commercial-fisheries/commercial-landings/annual-landings/index>

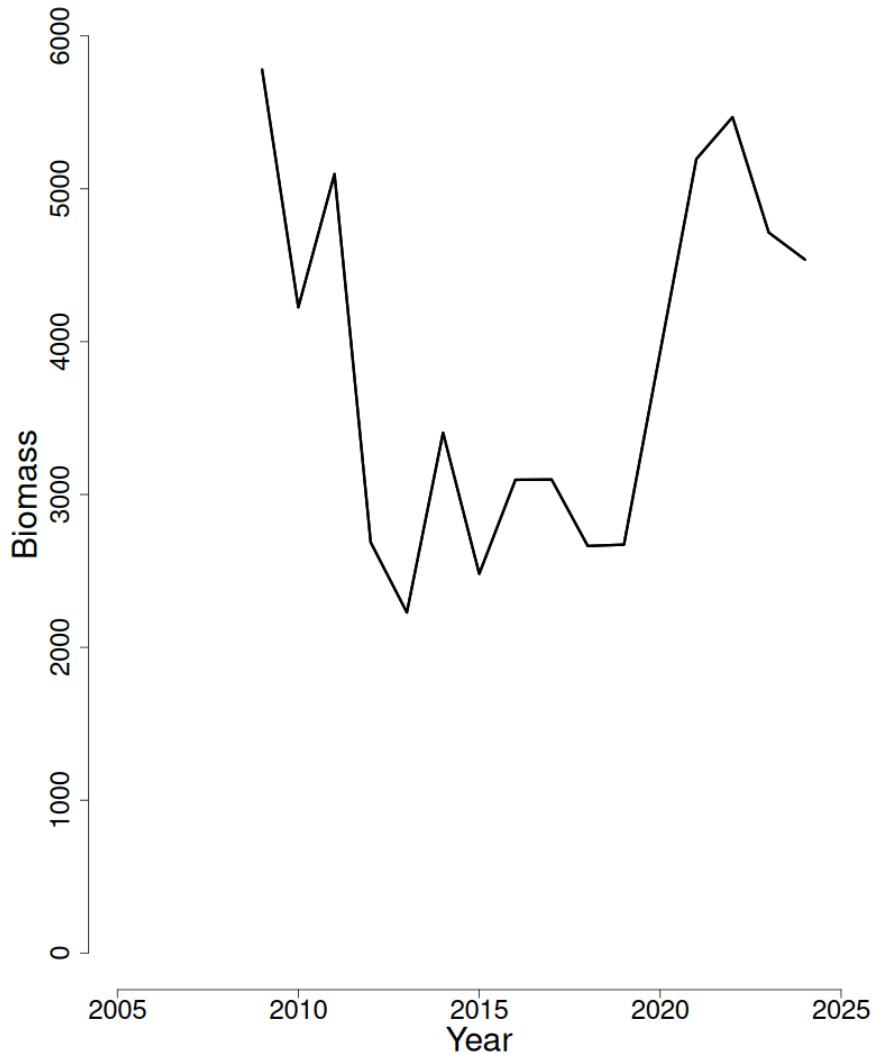
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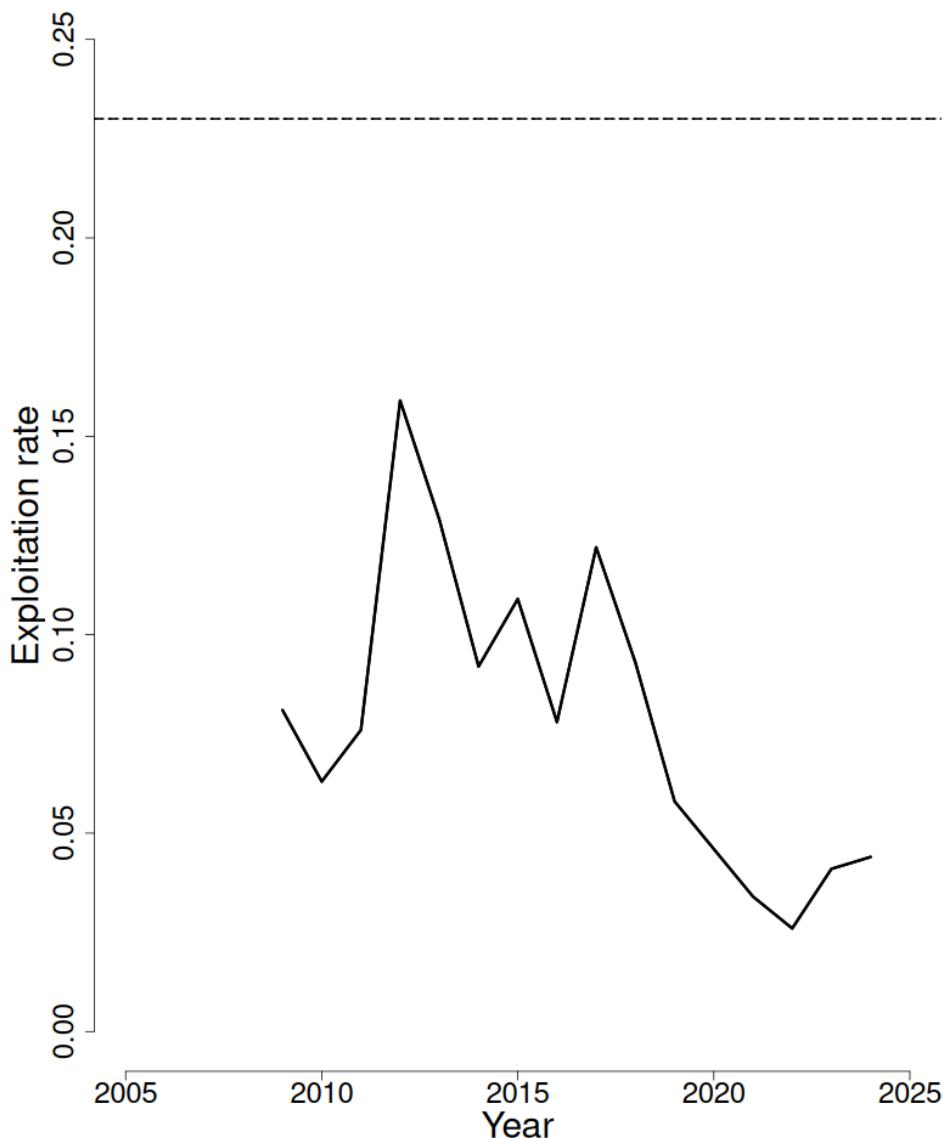
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## Figures and Tables



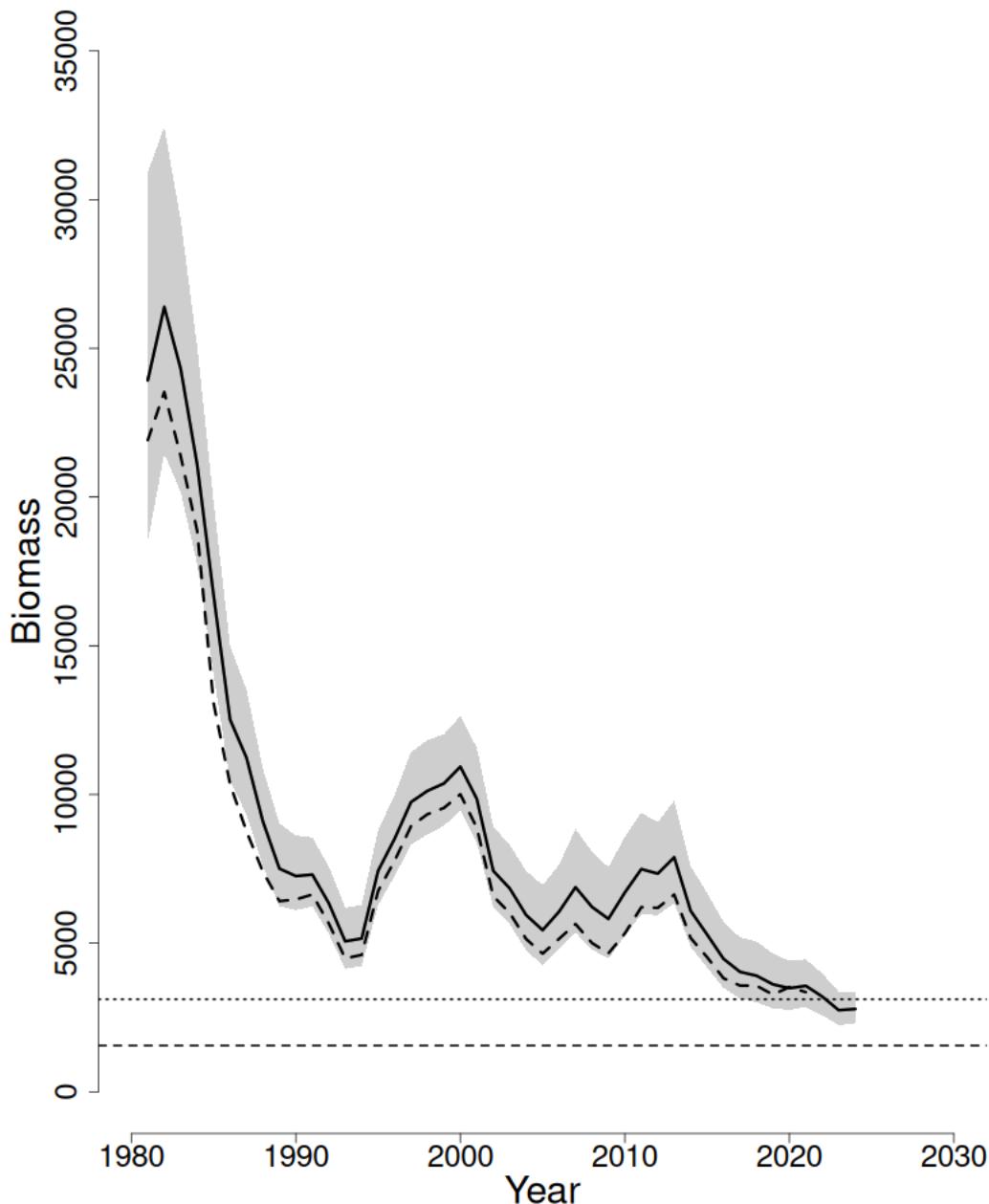
**Figure 1.** Estimates of exploitable biomass (30+ cm) for Gulf of Maine winter flounder between 2009 and 2024 as estimated from the fall MENH, MDMF, and NEFSC trawl surveys. (Source: 2025 Assessment Update of Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder)

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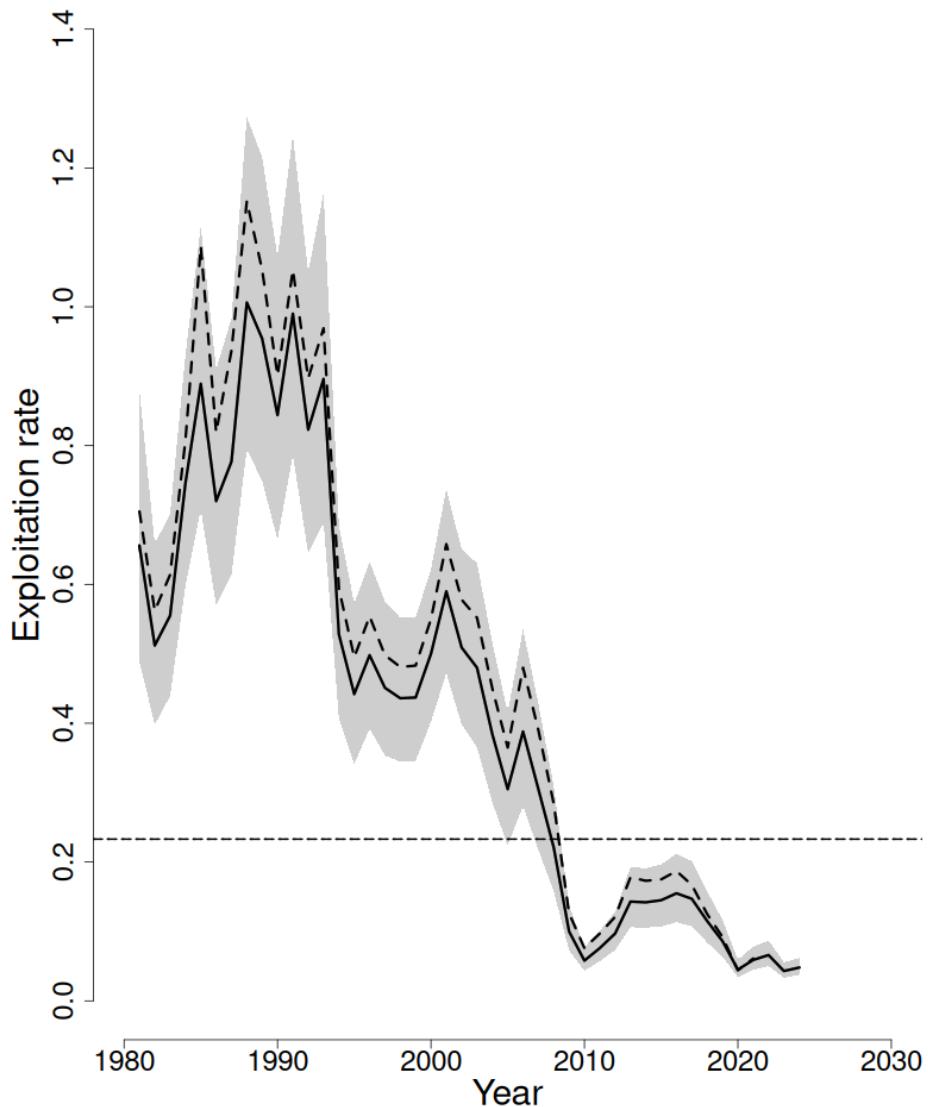
**Figure 2.** Gulf of Maine winter flounder exploitation rate between 2009 and 2024. The dashed line represents the corresponding F-Threshold from the 2025 assessment. (Source: 2025 Assessment Update of Gulf of Maine Winter Flounder)

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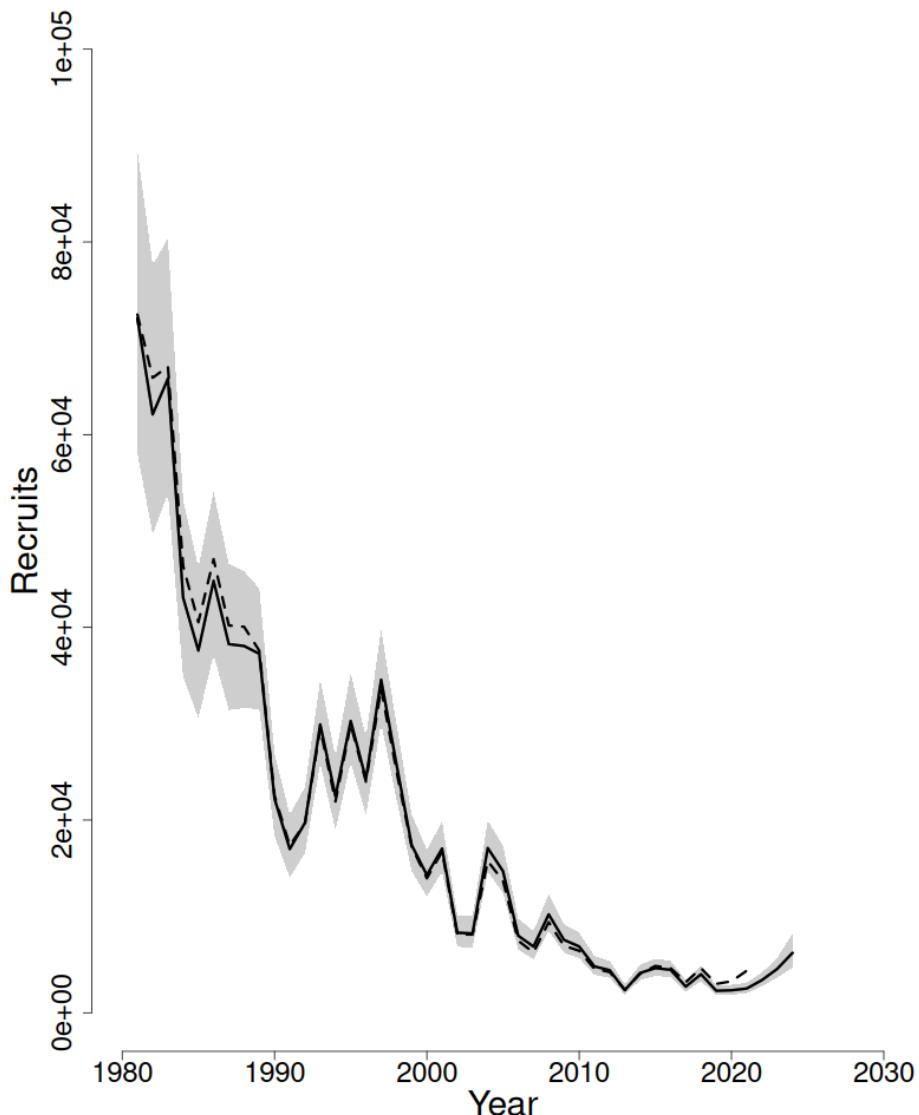
**Figure 3.** Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder spawning stock biomass between 1981 and 2024. The solid line represents results of the current assessment and the dashed line represents results from the previous assessment. The horizontal dotted line is the SSB-target and the horizontal dashed line is the SSB-threshold based on the 2025 assessment. The 90% confidence intervals are shown in grey. (Source: 2025 Assessment Update of Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder)

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**Figure 4.** Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder fishing mortality between 1981 and 2024. The solid line represents results of the current assessment and the dotted line represents results from the previous assessment. The horizontal dashed line is the F-threshold based on the 2025 assessment. The 90% confidence intervals are shown in grey. (Source: 2025 Assessment Update of Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder)

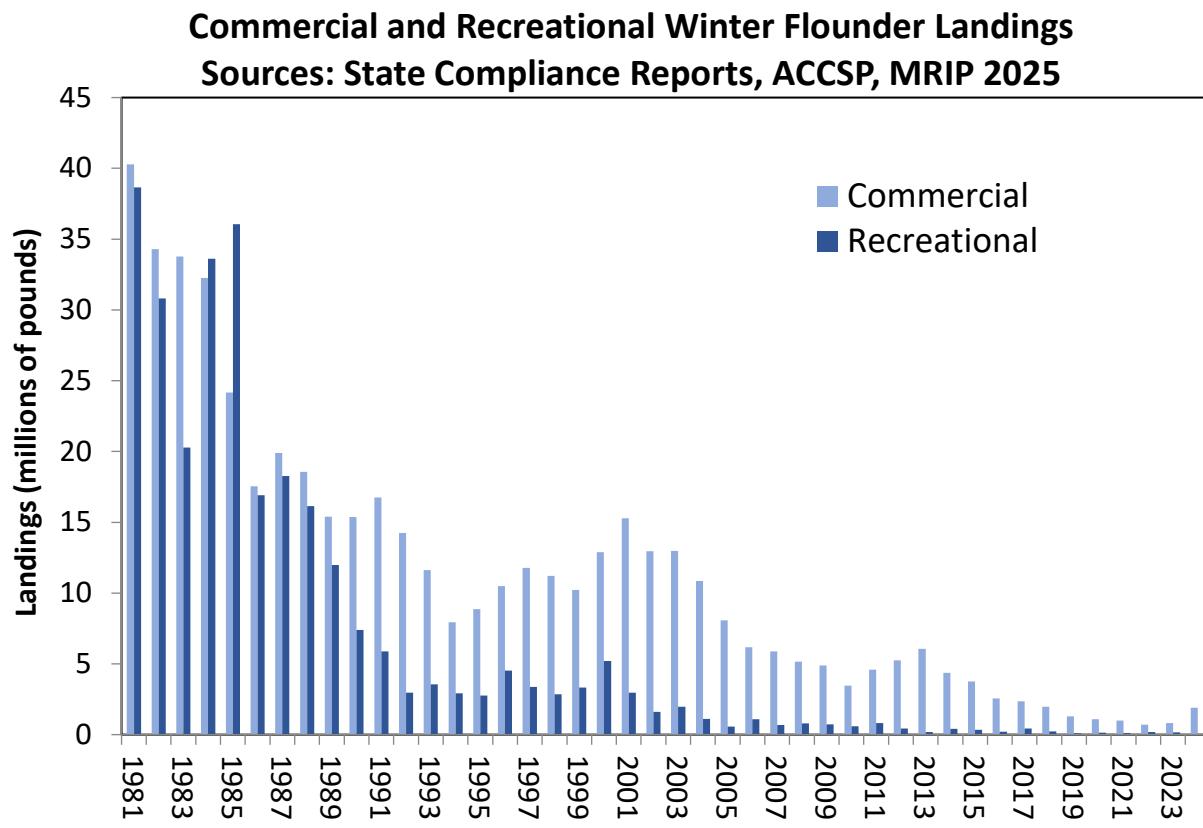
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**Figure 5.** Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder trends in recruits (000s) between 1981 and 2024. The solid line represents results of the current assessment and the dotted line represents results from the previous assessment. The 90% confidence intervals are shown in grey. (Source: 2025 Assessment Update of Southern New England Mid-Atlantic Winter Flounder)

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**Figure 6.** Commercial and recreational winter flounder landings.



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**Table 1. Coastwide commercial and recreational landings of winter flounder.**

Source: ACCSP, MRIP.

Year	Commercial Landings (lbs)	Recreational Landings (lbs)	Total Harvest (lbs)
1981	40,281,800	38,658,240	78,940,041
1982	34,287,800	30,800,886	65,088,685
1983	33,762,300	20,270,442	54,055,083
1984	32,259,500	33,619,053	65,878,553
1985	24,169,500	36,044,271	60,236,129
1986	17,551,600	16,910,804	34,462,404
1987	19,900,600	18,267,160	38,263,989
1988	18,558,400	16,152,719	34,724,190
1989	15,403,400	11,984,077	27,388,876
1990	15,375,295	7,388,964	22,764,259
1991	16,755,114	5,879,856	22,634,970
1992	14,232,802	2,952,663	17,185,467
1993	11,618,074	3,556,271	15,184,307
1994	7,934,950	2,918,614	10,855,524
1995	8,869,168	2,752,809	11,621,978
1996	10,489,726	4,533,524	15,023,249
1997	11,774,996	3,369,650	15,164,882
1998	11,213,153	2,861,094	14,077,436
1999	10,219,341	3,323,925	13,543,267
2000	12,876,176	5,190,358	18,066,533
2001	15,274,384	2,961,872	18,236,255
2002	12,955,503	1,611,635	14,567,138
2003	12,986,593	1,967,619	14,954,212
2004	10,854,383	1,118,236	11,972,618
2005	8,074,650	575,650	8,650,300
2006	6,149,946	1,087,320	7,237,266
2007	5,882,975	677,000	6,559,975
2008	5,158,100	787,911	5,946,010
2009	4,877,566	715,732	5,593,298
2010	3,452,445	600,397	4,052,841
2011	4,593,883	805,448	5,399,331
2012	5,238,701	427,191	5,665,892
2013	6,054,017	191,785	6,245,801
2014	4,375,270	415,101	4,790,371
2015	3,752,672	336,896	4,089,568
2016	2,561,793	203,185	2,764,978
2017	2,347,429	428,764	2,776,587
2018	1,976,173	223,355	2,199,529
2019	1,286,817	87,074	1,373,891
2020	1,078,525	140,609	1,219,134
2021	991,501	112,676	1,104,177
2022	692,503	178,908	871,411
2023	822,502	165,969	988,471
2024	1,895,633	55,668	1,951,321

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**Table 2. 2024 Winter flounder commercial landings and recreational harvest (A + B1) by weight (lbs) by state. “C” denotes confidential landings. (Source: State compliance reports, ACCSP, and MRIP)**

State	Commercial		Recreational		
	Pounds	Percent	Pounds	PSE	Percent
<b>Maine</b>	C	C	4,793	75.3	8.6%
<b>New Hampshire</b>	2,377	0.13%	2,420	57.9	4.3%
<b>Massachusetts</b>	1,858,478	98.04%	42,941	68.4	77.1%
<b>Rhode Island</b>	26,988	1.42%	170	62.7	0.3%
<b>Connecticut</b>	2,782	0.15%	797	103.9	1.4%
<b>New York</b>	1,842	0.10%	1,594	82.9	2.9%
<b>New Jersey</b>	C	C	2,953	57.8	5.3%
<b>Maryland</b>	C	C	0	-	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	1,895,633		55,668		

# DRAFT FOR BOARD REVIEW

**Table 3. Commercial winter flounder regulations.**

State	Stock Unit	Size Limit	Trip Limit	Seasonal Closure (dates inclusive)	Recruitment Assessment	SSB Assessment	Min. Mesh Size	<i>De minimis Request</i>
Maine	GOM	12"	500 lbs	April 1 – June 30	N/A	N/A	6.5"	No
New Hampshire	GOM	12"	500 lbs	April 1 – June 30	N/A	N/A	6.5"	No
Massachusetts	GOM	12"	500 lbs	Open all year	N/A	Bottom Trawl Survey (May, Sept)	6.5"	No
	SNE/MA	12"	50 lbs	Open all year	YOY Seine Survey (June)	Bottom Trawl Survey (May, Sept)	6.5"	No
Rhode Island	SNE/MA	12"	50 lbs	Open all year	Narragansett Bay Juvenile Finfish Survey	Bottom Trawl Surveys	6.5"	No
Connecticut	SNE/MA	12"	50 lbs or 38 fish	March 1 – April 14	YOY Fall Estuarine Seine Survey	Long Island Sound Trawl Survey	6.5"	No
New York	SNE/MA	12"	50 lbs	June 14 – Nov 30 (for all gear besides fyke nets, pound and trap nets)	Small Mesh Trawl Survey, Seine Survey	N/A	6.5"	No
New Jersey	SNE/MA	12"	38 fish	June 1 – Nov 30 (all gear except for fyke nets) Feb 20 – Oct 31 (Fyke net)	N/A	Ocean Trawl Survey	6.5"	Yes

# DRAFT FOR BOARD REVIEW

**Table 4.** Recreational winter flounder regulations.

<b>State</b>	<b>Stock Unit</b>	<b>Creel Limit</b>	<b>Size Limit</b>	<b>Seasonal Closure (dates inclusive)</b>
<b>Maine</b>	GOM	8	12"	Open all year
<b>New Hampshire</b>	GOM	8	12"	Open all year
<b>Massachusetts</b>	GOM	8	12"	Open all year
	SNE/MA	2	12"	January 1- February 28
<b>Rhode Island</b>	SNE/MA	2	12"	January 1 – February 28
<b>Connecticut</b>	SNE/MA	2	12"	January 1 – March 31
<b>New York</b>	SNE/MA	2	12"	May 31 – March 31
<b>New Jersey</b>	SNE/MA	2	12"	January 1 – February 28

**From:** [ASMFC](#)  
**To:** [Comments](#)  
**Subject:** [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Winter Meeting  
**Date:** Wednesday, January 7, 2026 7:33:35 PM

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## 2026 Winter Meeting

<b>Action Title</b>
2026 Winter Meeting
<b>Action URL</b>
<a href="https://asmfc.org/events/2026-winter-meeting/">https://asmfc.org/events/2026-winter-meeting/</a>
<b>Name</b>
STEVE Haasz
<b>Email</b>
<a href="mailto:shaasz@comcast.net">shaasz@comcast.net</a>
<b>State</b>
New Jersey
<b>Comment</b>
When are we going to be allowed to fish for more winter flounder you will never know how many fish there are in the sandy hook nj raritan bay nj area if you leave it at only 2 fish. not to many people would fish for 2 I think we should bring it back up to at least 5 fish per person.not only that but I think this is why are fisheries for summer flounder has been depleting in this area.we go out in march for winter flounder putting in chum log which atracks multiple species of fish.ever since you dropped it down to 2 fish knowone is putting chum in the water.which is keeping fluke,weakfish bluefish and other fish from coming in to these areas,to prove my point when the peanut bunker had a massive die off about 8yrs ago when they needed 2 40yd dumpsters to cleanup keansburg beach .directly after that the fluke followed the dead peanut to the area and the fluke where all over the place.at this point we are loosing fluke in these bays and and rivers not only that but now spearing and killies are dis appearing. I geuss if you feed the fish they will come .not chum no fish.thus is what I believe is destroying the Raritan Bay sandy hook bay and shrewsbury area fishing.just remember you wouldn't go to a restaurant that has no food so why would fish go where there's no food

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**From:** [ASMFC](#)  
**To:** [Comments](#)  
**Subject:** [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Winter Meeting  
**Date:** Thursday, January 15, 2026 11:47:57 AM

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## 2026 Winter Meeting

<b>Action Title</b>
2026 Winter Meeting
<b>Action URL</b>
<a href="https://asmfc.org/events/2026-winter-meeting/">https://asmfc.org/events/2026-winter-meeting/</a>
<b>Name</b>
STEVE Haasz
<b>Email</b>
<a href="mailto:shaasz@comcast.net">shaasz@comcast.net</a>
<b>State</b>
New Jersey
<b>Comment</b>
Bring winter flounder 5 fish per person in nj you have no real evaluation of what's going on if knowone is fishing for them

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