

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

American Eel Management Board

May 6, 2026
12:30 – 1:15 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 (*J. Hornstein*) 12:30 p.m.
2. Board Consent 12:30 p.m.
 - Approval of Agenda
 - Approval of Proceedings from February 2026
3. Public Comment 12:35 p.m.
4. Technical Committee Report (*K. Bonvechio*) **Possible Action** 12:45 p.m.
 - Review of Florida Young-of-Year Survey
5. Review Preliminary 2025 Yellow Eel Landings (*C. Starks*) 1:05 p.m.
6. Elect Vice-Chair **Action** 1:10 p.m.
7. Other Business/Adjourn 1:15 p.m.

The 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

American Eel Management Board

May 6, 2026

12:30 – 1:15 p.m.

Chair: Jesse Hornstein (NY) Assumed Chairmanship: 10/25	Technical Committee Chair: Kim Bonvechio (FL)	Law Enforcement Committee Rep: Rob Beal (ME)
Vice Chair: VACANT	Advisory Panel Chair: Mitch Feigenbaum (PA)	Previous Board Meeting: February 3, 2026
Voting Members: ME, NH, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, PA, DE, MD, PRFC, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL, DC, NMFS, USFWS (19 votes)		

2. Board Consent

- Approval of Agenda
- Approval of Proceedings from February 2026

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 must sign-in at the beginning of the meeting. 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 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. Technical Committee Report (12:45-1:05 p.m.) Possible Action

Background

- Florida submitted a proposal to discontinue the young-of-year (YOY) sampling survey. In October 2025, the Board tasked the TC with evaluating the utility of continuing the Florida glass eel survey and its contribution to the Commission’s management and assessment.
- The TC met several times to discuss these tasks and develop recommendations to the Board. The TC also requested input from the Stock Assessment Subcommittee on the utility of the FL YOY survey and other available datasets provided by FL (**Briefing Materials**).

Presentations

- Technical Committee Report by K. Bonvechio

5. Review Preliminary 2025 Yellow Eel Landings (1:05-1:10 p.m.)

Background

- Addendum V recommends the Board review preliminary commercial yellow eel landings from the previous year by the ASMFC Spring Meeting (**Supplemental Materials**).
- Addendum VII, adopted in April 2024, set the coastwide yellow eel harvest cap to 518,281 pounds.

Presentations

- Preliminary 2025 Yellow Eel Landings by C. Starks

6. Elect Vice Chair (1:10 p.m.) Action

7. Other Business/Adjourn (1:15 p.m.)

American Eel

Activity level: Medium

Committee Overlap Score: Medium (SAS overlaps with BERP, Atlantic herring, horseshoe crab)

Committee Task List

- TC – July 2026 review of Maine’s aquaculture proposal
- SAS – Summer 2026: Begin work for 2027 Stock Assessment Update
- TC – September 1st: Annual compliance reports due

TC Members: Kimberly Bonvechio (FL, TC Chair), Alexis Park (MD), Bradford Chase (MA), Caitlin Craig (NY), Casey Clark (ME), Chris Adriance (DC), Chris Wright (NOAA), Ellen Waldrop (SC), Ingrid Braun (PRFC), Jennifer Pyle (NJ), Jordan Zimmerman (DE), Jim Page (GA), Kevin Molongoski (USGS), Mike Porta (PA), Patrick McGee (RI), Robert Atwood (NH), Sheila Eyler (USFWS), Tim Wildman (CT), Todd Mathes (NC), Troy Tuckey (VIMS), Caitlin Starks (ASMFC), Samara Nehemiah (ASMFC)

**DRAFT PROCEEDINGS OF THE
ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION
AMERICAN EEL MANAGEMENT BOARD**

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

February 3, 2026

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

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1. **Approval of agenda** by consent (Page 1).
2. **Approval of Proceedings of October 2025** by consent (Page 1).
3. **Move to adjourn** by consent (Page 6).

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ATTENDANCE

Board Members

Megan Ware, ME, proxy for C. Wilson (AA)	Loren Lustig, PA (AA)
Steve Train, ME (GA)	John Clark, DE (AA)
Rep. Allison Hepler, ME (LA)	Roy Miller, DE (GA)
Renee Zobel, NH (AA)	Craig Pugh, DE, proxy for Rep. Carson (LA)
Doug Grout, NH (GA)	Carrie Kennedy MD, proxy for K. Charbonneau (AA)
Dennis Abbott, NH, proxy for Sen. Watters (LA)	Ethan Simpson, VA, proxy for J. Grist (Acting AA)
Dan McKiernan, MA (AA)	Chris Batsavage, NC, proxy for K. Rawls (AA)
Ray Kane, MA (GA)	Rep. Brian Turner (LA)
Phil Edwards, RI, proxy for J. McNamee (AA)	Ross Self, SC, proxy for B. Keppler (AA)
David Borden, RI (GA)	Malcolm Rhodes, SC (GA)
Eric Reid, RI, proxy for Sen. Sosnowski (LA)	Robert Boyles, SC, proxy for Sen. Cromer (LA)
Matt Gates, CT (AA)	Doug Haymans, GA (AA)
Bill Hyatt, CT (GA)	Spud Woodward, GA (GA)
Robert LaFrance, CT, proxy for J. Gresko (LA)	Jeff Renchen, FL, proxy for J. McCawley (AA)
Jesse Hornstein, NY, proxy for M. Gary (AA)	Gary Jennings, FL (GA)
Emerson Hasbrouck, NY (GA)	Daniel Ryan, DC, proxy for R. Cloyd
Heather Corbett, NJ, proxy for J. Cimino (AA)	Ron Owens, PRFC
Adam Nowalsky, NJ, proxy for Sen. Gopal (LA)	Chris Wright, NMFS
Kris Kuhn, PA, proxy for T. Schaeffer (AA)	Rick Jacobson, US FWS

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

Ex-Officio Members

Kim Bonvechio, Technical Committee Chair	Rob Beal, Law Enforcement Committee Rep.
Mitch Feigenbaum, Advisory Panel Chair	

Staff

Bob Beal	Caitlin Starks	James Boyle
Toni Kerns	Tracey Bauer	Katie Drew
Tina Berger	Emilie Franke	Jeff Kipp
Madeline Musante	Chelsea Tuohy	Samara Nehemiah

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The American Eel 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, February 3, 2026, and was called to order at 2:30 p.m. by Chair Jesse Hornstein.

CALL TO ORDER

CHAIR JESSE HORNSTEIN: I would like to call the American Eel Board to order. My name is Jesse Hornstein, and I am Proxy to the Administrative Commissioner from New York; and I am the current Chair of this Board. It's an honor to be here. Sitting next to me is Caitlin Starks of ASMFC. We also have our TC Chair online, Kim Bonvechio and our AP Chair, Mitch Feigenbaum. I guess I will turn it to Toni for Commissioners online.

MS. TONI KERNS: First, I would like to welcome the esteemed Robert Boyles back to the table. It may be brief, but we are happy to have you. I just wanted to let you know that I am going to be extremely disappointed that if I don't get a Robert Boyle "ism" at some point this week, I will walk away this week sad. Put you on warning, thank you.

I'm going to do my best to capture everybody that is online for this meeting. We have Steve Train from Maine, Carrie Kennedy from Maryland, Brian Turner and Chris Batsavage from North Carolina, Malcolm Rhodes from South Carolina, Spud Woodward from Georgia, Heather Corbett from New Jersey, Emerson Hasbrouck from New York, Joe Gresko from Connecticut, and Chris Wright from NOAA Fisheries. I think that is everyone.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Before I get started, I just wanted to thank our outgoing Chair, Kris Kuhn for his leadership the last couple of years as the Chair of this Board.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: With that, move on to the first item, approval of the agenda. Are there any changes to the agenda? Seeing none; the agenda is approved by consent.

APPROVAL OF PROCEEDINGS

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Next item is approval of the proceedings from the October 2025 meeting. Are there any modifications to those proceedings? Seeing none.

PUBLIC COMMENT

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: This next item is public comment for any items not on the agenda. Is there anybody wants to make public comment in the room or online? Seeing none.

UPDATE ON CONVENTION ON THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE OF ENDANGERED SPECIES

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Move on to the next item, which is we'll get an update on the CITES meeting that occurred in late 2025, and the proposal that would have listed American eel in Appendix II, and Toni Kerns is going to give that update.

MS. KERNS: As everybody knows, all eel species were being proposed to be listed under CITES Appendix II at the November CITES past meeting in Uzbekistan. I was told it was a very unique vote. The proposal did not pass and it was very heavily not favored. Very uniquely, all of the African countries voted as a block. I have been told that that has never happened before. But there was a resolution that was passed. There were some small modifications to the resolution that we did provide input through our partners at AFWA. We're going to pause until we don't have the feedback.

We were able to provide feedback to the resolution through our partners at AFWA to Fish and Wildlife Service and the changes that were made to the resolution I think were positive changes not anything that we would have had great concerns with. I've already reached out to Japan and our

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partners at AFWA to work on some aspects of the resolution that we think will be easy wins. We will continue to do that in order to make progress on conservation of eel across the board, and keep this fishery healthy. I'll take any questions.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Thanks, Toni, certainly positive news for our U.S. eel fisheries. Any questions for Toni? Megan Ware.

MS. MEGAN WARE: I just wanted to actually say thank you to Toni, you've really gone above and beyond on the CITES eel topic, including traveling to Uzbekistan, which I can't imagine what that was like. I surely like that you've been a real leader in keeping this on the forefront and working with AFWA and I just wanted to thank you on behalf of the Maine elver fishermen that probably don't know how much work you put into this, but are very appreciative of the results, so thank you.

MS. KERNS: Thanks, Megan, and I really appreciate the work that Caitlin and Deidre did in preparing me to go there and all the work that was put in leading up to this, as well as our partners at AFWA. They were super helpful when I was there.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Any other questions for Toni? Seeing none.

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON BOARD TASKS

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: We will move on to the next item on the agenda, which will be a report from the Technical Committee on their Review of the Aquaculture Plan Provisions and the review of the Florida Young of the Year Survey and its potential to be discontinued. In this we'll go to Kim Bonvechio, and you can take it away.

MS. KIM BONVECHIO: Just going to give an update on the key board tasks that were given to the Technical Committee. These tasks were

specific to, the first one on Addendum V and referring to the site selection language and how we should interpret those. I'm going to provide some guidance.

Then the second one it was looking at the request to eliminate the Florida glass eel survey, and to discuss its contribution and utility to the management of that stock. The Technical Committee met twice to address these Board tasks, first on December 15, and then again on January 6. I want to also provide a quick update also regarding Virginia's Young of Year Survey at Gardy's Millpond. I'm going to also provide a quick update on that as well.

REVIEW OF AQUACULTURE PLAN PROVISIONS

MS. BONVECHIO: The aquaculture harvest site criteria are the first task. The language specifically that we discussed is highlighted here in yellow, and that is this language that helps provide some guidance for locations for harvest. Those criteria are the first. Just as a recap, to choose sites that have established or proposed glass eel monitoring, the second that are favorable to law enforcement and the third that have watershed characteristics that are prone to relatively high mortality rates. I'll go into that definition next, but I just want to say we're going to talk about the first and third. We did not believe as a Technical Committee that Number 2 warranted and changes or updates.

Currently on the guidance that is provided is that watersheds known to have features, some examples provided there that would be expected to cause lower eel productivity or higher glass eel mortality would be preferred targets. That is specifically what we addressed in our committee meeting.

Overarching, we did not believe as a committee that we needed to make any addenda to this fishery management plan provision for aquaculture plans. Instead, we just wanted to provide some specific guidance wo interpret those site selection criteria. The first is the consideration of glass eel monitoring efforts.

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Site selection can vary depending on whether a particular site also has a commercial glass eel harvest. There was some concern that that commercial glass eel harvest could influence the monitoring. Believe that that needed to be that the selection should be dependent upon, in some cases, that there should be an operative location at the exact site where the commercial glass eel harvest is occurring.

The second is that the watershed characteristics, in addition to what is currently in the language, also to talk about some other characteristics that would provide relatively high mortality, or where the watershed is unlikely to produce larger numbers of adult eels. That includes steep gradients, multiple dams or a small drainage area, so that additional language and description.

The third, the Aquaculture Proposal should describe how the criteria are considered and prioritized. But one thing to just kind of keep in mind is that the language does say preference for, which means that not all of the criteria need to be met, but all of them should be considered and used to inform any Technical Committee recommendations.

REVIEW OF FLORIDA YOUNG OF YEAR SURVEY

MS. BONVECHIO: Task 2 is looking at the utility and use of Florida Young of Year Survey. Currently Florida has a single Young of Year Survey site, it's at Guana River Dam, which is in northeast Florida. They have tried over decades to find alternatives using these different views and different locations, and have not been successful.

Currently at the site there is persistently low and going near 0 catches at this point. Although this may on the surface look like recruitment failure, other monitoring data that have been collected in the state do not support that this is actually occurring. FWC also addressed the fact that the cost of sampling is extremely high, on

the upwards of \$700.00 per eel that is collected and counted.

FWC has asked to prioritize other monitoring that potentially could be more useful for the management of eels. This task is not complete. We felt as a committee that we need additional discussion and input from our Stock Assessment Subcommittee, as well as to look at some of the other data that Florida can provide and has offered. The specific discussion points that were brought up, there was some concern about losing the southernmost young of the year monitoring site, and it has been ongoing for several decades. There is concern that discontinuing this without gaining some other kind of information on the recruitment could be problematic.

Florida did acknowledge that there are other data, including electrofishing and age data that are available and that they are willing to continue to provide. The Florida Young of the Year Survey performed well in assessment power analysis. There was some concern because of that longevity of that time series, even though catches have gone to near zero, there is the concern of removing something that is statistically a good time series.

There is also some discussion about, should we use the assessment criteria for accepting fishery independent datasets to evaluate the young of the year survey? There are several criteria that are offered in our stock assessment document and peer review document that kind of go into some of those things. We wanted to look high to assess those criteria and where this survey fits into those.

Then noted that young of the year survey is currently used to understand those are recruitment trends that are not currently used for the management of the stock. The next steps that were suggested from the Technical Committee was to gather additional input, like I said, from the Stock Assessment Subcommittee.

This would include looking at the young of the year survey in terms of that power and variability over time into those and other surveys. The impacts of

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not using this survey data for future assessments, also looking into this reasoning why the electrofishing and age data were not included in the last assessment.

There was some uncertainty as to why those data were not included, including potential gear issues or other things like that. Then the potential for using electrofishing and age data in the future to assess recruitment, and if that could be done to help improve the survey that would be useful for the management in future stock assessments.

Then also to kind of go into that criterion for what time series to include or not, to kind of address the utility of these time series was to look at the proportion of zero catches of American eels in that survey. Then this last one is the Gardy's Millpond Young of the Year Survey. What happened there was a Dam Breach.

Where there was one entry point now there are two spillways to glass eels, and Virginia had asked the Technical Committee for guidance on how to proceed with that. The Technical Committee members suggested looking for keeping that monitoring site, but look at the two entry site dynamics, and look for that with historical data.

They recommended putting eel ramps at both of the current spillways and kind of monitor the young of the year eels at both of those locations. Then just monitor those making note obviously that there are changes to the system and potential survey impacts when comparing it to historical data. Keep this location intact, add another eel ramp to the other spillway, keep the monitoring ongoing. With that we'll open the floor for any questions.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Thank you, Kim, for your presentation. Anyone have any questions for Kim? Go to John Clark first.

MR. JOHN CLARK: Thank you for the presentation, Kim. I guess going back to the aquaculture provisions, I was just trying to remember why we had that criteria one in there about a site that already had established glass eel monitoring, because I know from the site that we monitor, we wouldn't want anybody taking glass eels out of that while we were monitoring, because it could affect the samples. I'm sure that must have come up years ago and again in the discussions with the TC. But just wondering how that was approached.

MS. BONVECHIO: Yes, there was some discussion concerning that, and there was really what had come up was that if there is an opportunity to collect more information in areas maybe where there is not a lot of information, that it provided kind of an opportunity to get additional data. That was one part of that also. But people did recognize kind of some of the issues that we had talked about earlier, but also that you mentioned.

One of the recommendations well with the state is kind of keep it within jurisdictions. If the state is already doing monitoring, then maybe nothing additional needs to be done. I think that is why there was, I think strong support for keeping it as a preference not a mandatory thing, but just to have some discussion in the proposals. Talking about why things are prioritized a certain size and certain actions. Then if Caitlin would like to add more to that.

MS. CAITLIN STARKS: Yes, thanks, Kim. I just want to note that the Technical Committee did talk about the need to have some either spatial or temporal difference between where that monitoring is occurring and where the harvest is occurring. If the monitoring is occurring downstream of where the harvest is occurring then hopefully that harvest wouldn't be impacting the numbers on an annual basis of glass eels coming into the system.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: We'll go to Ross Self.

MR. ROSS L. SELF: I've got a question about the aquaculture set aside as well. We seem to forget from time to time how this applies. But does the

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200-pound aquaculture set aside or allocation count against or towards the 750-pound trigger for life history survey?

MS. BONVECHIO: I am going to let Caitlin answer that.

MS. STARKS: I believe it counts toward it. I can definitely go back in the addenda and verify. But I believe it does count towards the 750.

MR. SELF: We would appreciate a clarification on that, just so we are applying it appropriately in our fishery.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Any other questions for Kim or Caitlin? John Clark.

MR. CLARK: As you can tell, I like eels. I'm just curious, I guess it would be more of a Board discussion about the glass eel surveys. I mean I certainly understand why Florida, you know at \$700.00 per glass eel that is expensive sampling. I hope that their electrofishing survey could be used. But I know in the assessments that the glass eel surveys that all the states are doing have been kind of a limited use. I'm just wondering if that would be like a task for a stock assessment committee to look at whether we should maybe have a different number of surveys rather than glass eel, maybe some glass eel survey, some yellow eel survey.

You know just making sure that every state does something, because I know this was, I think the first plan that required each state that actually do some amount of field sampling. Just wanted to know whether that would be worth discussing with the Stock Assessment Subcommittee. Thanks.

MS. SAMARA NEHEMIAH: I'll answer that, I'm Samara, I'm the Stock Assessment Scientist at the Commission for Eel. One of our next tasks related to the Florida Survey is we wanted, I'd say for the SAS, but it is not that active right now, to kind of touch base, understand what we need from Florida to better understand their

electrofishing survey. We are going to put in a data request back to Kim at the TC so that we can get the necessary information to evaluate that.

I touched base with them to sort of understand why it wasn't included. There is not a lot of information I have right now to understand those decisions that were made when I wasn't part of this group. But we're trying to get all that information. Then our hope is, so we have an update coming up in the next couple of years and though obviously with a stock assessment update we're bound to the data that was approved for the benchmark.

What we can do as part of this process is just do a super dive into the data inputs, including the young of year surveys, and sort of better describe or just write down, I guess, the utility for potentially using 2% for this assessment. All that to say, the SAS is aware that this is kind of on our plate right now. We're hoping to have more information in the coming year or so with how to best tackle these data sources.

MR. CLARK: Thanks, Samara, that's great and I'm glad to hear that.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Any other questions? Jeff.

MR. JEFFRY RENCHEN: Florida, you know we're kind of hoping for some guidance on a request here, because it is really going to affect how we move forward on beginning the survey or not. Just to point out a couple things from our most recent benchmark stock assessment. It states that only surveys that operate during the time and place where American eels are available for capture should be considered.

Well, within the last three years there has been almost 0 glass eels, 99% of our surveys had 0 glass eels at this location. We've worked for a long time trying to find other viable locations and cannot find other locations in Florida, just due to the geography and due to the lack of constriction points for freshwater outflow.

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We're in a very unique situation with Florida. I do agree with John that I think we could look at the utility of a glass eel survey moving forward, but waiting longer does not really help Florida's issue right now. We were hoping to have a little bit more guidance or discussion. I know there are even some people here that were part of the SAS for eel that we could maybe have a discussion here to kind of get some resolution on our request.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: I'm going to turn to Caitlin.

MS. STARKS: I did just want to note that during the Technical Committee discussion and decision to have another meeting with the SAS to look more deeply into the datasets. It was noted that we do want to get an answer back to you all by the next meeting.

Just noting that the timing of your survey is currently ongoing, if I'm remembering correctly, this winter, and that it is being conducted albeit at a lower level of effort by University of North Florida. We do; the TC and SAS do intend to get full recommendation response back by the next meeting. I did want to note that.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Any further questions? Not seeing any; any further discussion on either of these topics. That brings us to other business. Is there any other business to come before this Board? Not seeing any; John Clark.

MR. CLARK: Sorry, me again. I saw that Mr. Feigenbaum was on the call, and I was just wondering. I saw that American Unagi was sold, and I was just wondering. I know Mitch was. Oh Megan, you have? I was just going to ask like what will happen to that facility, because it said the bank actually took it. Just wondering what is happening there.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Mitch, if you can answer that question feel free to chime in.

MR. MITCH FEIGENBAUM: I can give a brief answer to the question. I am aware that the

bank did in fact buy the assets of American Unagi in the bankruptcy process. That is sort of like an interim step. The bank is trying to market those assets. I know that there are commercial eel companies that are involved in discussions with the bank about those assets.

But I'm not in a position to give any kind of report as to the nature of that discussion. I know there are a lot of people in Maine that are working and trying to figure out a plan to keep an eel farm in place. But there seems to be uncertainty too. That's really all I could offer today, John.

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Thank you, Mitch.

ADJOURNMENT

CHAIR HORNSTEIN: Any other business? Seeing none; is there any opposition to adjourning? Seeing none; we are adjourned. You made my first meeting really easy. Thank you.

(Whereupon the meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 3, 2026)

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Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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MEMORANDUM

TO: American Eel Management Board
FROM: American Eel Technical Committee & Stock Assessment Subcommittee
DATE: April 20, 2026
SUBJECT: Review of Florida Young of Year Survey

At its October 2025 meeting, the American Eel Board (Board) tasked the Technical Committee (TC) with evaluating the utility of continuing the Florida glass eel (YOY) survey and its contribution to the Commission's management and assessment of the American eel stock, and reporting back to the Commission at the next American Eel Management Board meeting so the Board can consider exempting Florida from the glass eel survey compliance requirement.

After discussing the YOY survey and an alternative electrofishing survey presented by Florida, the TC also asked the Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) to provide input on 1) the significance of the Florida YOY survey for the stock assessment; and 2) evaluation of the Florida electrofishing survey, including why it was not considered for use in the last assessment and potential for use in future assessments.

This memo summarizes the input provided by the TC and SAS on the FL YOY survey and possible alternatives for assessing recruitment trends. Summaries from previous TC meetings on this issue are attached for background and additional detail on the Committee discussions.

1. Utility of the FL YOY Survey for the Stock Assessment

The TC had some concerns about potentially losing this survey as it is the most southern survey along the Atlantic coast and because the survey performed well in the power analysis during the last benchmark assessment. Additionally, the TC discussed that low catches may highlight population trends in that sampling area rather than poor performance of that survey. However, other TC members noted the high cost of the survey and recognized the difficulty in maintaining a survey that isn't producing catch. The TC expressed concern with discontinuing the YOY survey without gaining any other information.

The SAS discussed the utility of the FL YOY survey for future stock assessments. The SAS noted that although the FL YOY survey had relatively high power compared to other surveys, power analyses can be misleading because it is likely picking up on monotonic trends through time, rather than true observed recruitment trends. Additionally, there were some concerns with the FL YOY survey methodology. This survey is the only YOY survey that uses dip nets (rather than fyke nets or other sampling gears) which requires different effort and is therefore an outlier compared to other YOY surveys. Additionally, the FL YOY survey showed poor correlation between surveys (YOY and adult) and, when significant correlation was observed, these were

M26-32

not geographically relevant (i.e., neighboring states) and instead were fairly random. Finally, Florida noted significant changes in lake management related to water quality, stormwater, and waterfowl priorities at the Guana River site, which may impact catchability or habitat conditions and may not be reflective of true recruitment trends across the state. The SAS noted that the decline in the YOY index could reflect changes in catchability rather than changes in the population, which would be enough justification to drop surveys from stock assessments for other species.

Overall, the SAS did not feel that losing the FL YOY survey would be detrimental for future analysis due to management concerns and the limited signals it gives for population trends. However, the SAS noted that recruitment surveys could serve as a warning signal of stock-wide recruitment failure. While losing a single survey may not impact the assessment extensively, the loss of more YOY surveys could have negative consequences in the future because the assessment would not be able to catch early warning signs of coast-wide recruitment failure. The SAS also noted that the YOY surveys have only been conducted while the stock has been in a depleted state, so there is little information on YOY indices under good stock conditions. Therefore, it is hard to fully quantify the utility of the YOY surveys at this time.

2. Utility of the FL YOY Survey for Management

The FL YOY Survey is not used to determine any management measures. Florida does not have any glass eel harvest, and the yellow eel fishery is not limited by state-specific quotas, but rather a coastwide harvest cap for yellow eel is imposed (Addendum VII). The current cap is 518,281 pounds and is established using I_{TARGET} , an index-based method that provides management advice based on yellow eel abundance indices and catch information, as well as management goals specified by the Board. Florida's yellow eel landings have averaged about 1.2% of the coastwide total from 2020-2024.

3. Evaluation of FL Electrofishing Survey for Assessing Recruitment Trends

To evaluate whether the FL electrofishing data could be used as suggested by FL, the TC agreed that it would be helpful to ask for input from the SAS. The SAS requested data from FL including indices of abundance, raw sampling data, age data, and other methodological descriptions. FL provided all components of the data request in March 2026.

The SAS discussed the use of the FL Electrofishing survey in past assessments and evaluated its potential use in future assessments. The SAS noted that during the 2022 benchmark, there were questions surrounding the methodology of the FL electrofishing survey including whether there were changes to the protocol over time and which river systems were included. FL noted that prior requests included data from all river systems on the east and west coasts of FL, that were collected using multiple gears and sampling designs. However, the 2026 data request for the SAS only included systems in the St. Johns River Basin that are part of a standardized long-term monitoring program. The SAS noted that the survey was well designed and appreciated seeing abundance trends in multiple river and lake systems. The SAS noted that these indices could be combined in the future to document a single trend for FL. The SAS also noted that age data is useful to track recruitment through the population, but it may not be a priority unless

the stock assessment moves to an age structured model, which is unlikely. The SAS recommended that FL continue to collect age data as they have the capacity to do so. The SAS recommended that the FL electrofishing survey be brought forward in the next benchmark assessment for consideration.

4. *Additional Comments*

The TC raised concerns about the implications of coastwide monitoring requirements if the TC decided to roll back a survey in one state. The SAS shared these concerns and noted that it was difficult to evaluate one YOY survey without considering all of the YOY surveys at the same time. An American eel stock assessment update is scheduled for 2027, which the SAS will begin efforts on later this year. While the YOY surveys are not currently considered in the eel assessment to inform management decisions, as part of the update process, the SAS plans to describe the utility of all of the YOY surveys for their use in future stock assessments. An approximate timeline of the stock assessment update is included below.

Table 1. Approximate 2027 American Eel Assessment Update Timeline

Milestone	Date
2026 Compliance Report Submission Deadline	September 1, 2026
TC planning call	Fall 2026
2025 Data Submission Deadline	October-November 2026
TC/SAS call to review data submission, assign tasks	October-November 2026
SAS kick off call	December 2026
Model runs complete	July 2027
Rough draft of assessment report complete	August 1, 2027
SAS call to review/approve draft assessment report	August, 2027
Draft assessment report distributed to the TC	September 2027
TC call to review/approve draft assessment report	September 2027
Final assessment report to Board materials	October 2027
Assessment update presented to Board	October 2027



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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American Eel Technical Committee Meeting

December 15th, 2025

1:00 pm – 3:00 p.m.

Technical Committee Attendance: Kim Bonvechio (FL), Ingrid Braun-Ricks (PRFC), Brad Chase (MA), Casey Clark (ME), Caitlin Craig (NY), Sheila Eyler (USFWS), Corinne Flora (NY), Shakira Goff (VA), Matt Lee (NH), Todd Mathes (NC), Pat McGee (RI), Kevin Molongoski (USGS), Jim Page (GA), Alexis Park (MD), Eddy Perri (USFWS), Mike Porta (PA), Jen Pyle (NJ), Troy Tuckey (VIMS), Ellen Waldrop (SC), Tim Wildman (CT), Chris Wright (NOAA), Jordan Zimmerman (DE)

Commissioners in Attendance: Erika Burgess (FL), Jesse Hornstein (NY, Board chair)

AP Member Attendance: Mitch Feigenbaum (AP Chair)

Staff: Caitlin Starks (FMP Coordinator), Samara Nehemiah (stock assessment scientist)

Discussion of Aquaculture Plan Criteria

The Board tasked the Technical Committee (TC) with reviewing the criteria for selecting aquaculture harvest sites in Addendum V. In reviewing the Maine aquaculture plan in July 2025, the TC felt some of these criteria were not met and that some of the language should be reviewed. C. Clark of ME suggested that some of the language of the criteria as written may not apply to Maine because there is already a commercial glass eel fishery in place. ME noted that as a state they would still want to see recommendations kept coastwide but made some suggestions on the criteria.

C. Starks noted that there are two options for addressing any concerns with the current Addendum V language: 1) modify the language in the addendum, which would require a new addendum, would be a longer process, and may not be necessary at this stage; or 2) develop a TC memo that outlines how the TC recommends these criteria be evaluated in various scenarios. There was large support for a memo instead of an addendum process, and the TC agreed to draft a memo that clarifies the interpretation of the criteria in the addendum for the Board to consider at its February meeting.

Criterion 1

ME recommended that criterion 1 (establish glass eel monitoring) be removed entirely for all proposals for consistency. The TC discussed this suggestion and S. Eyler and B. Chase expressed opposition to removing criterion 1. S. Eyler noted that this was an important criterion for evaluating NC's aquaculture harvest and that it provides an opportunity to collect more information in scenarios where there is not a lot of information already. She suggested allowing for caveats but not to remove this criterion entirely. B. Chase noted that the language of

'preference' in Addendum V was intended to allow for exemptions and highlighted the need for monitoring if states want to establish new harvest.

S. Eyster suggested that the criterion could note that glass eel monitoring should occur in the jurisdiction covered by an aquaculture plan. So, if the state is already doing monitoring, then nothing additional needs to be done.

There was also some discussion on what indices could be used for monitoring. M. Lee asked if harvest in a system could be used in lieu of monitoring program to understand effects of aquaculture. C. Clark thinks it could potentially be done but would require some further thought and discussion. In the case of ME, most harvest for aquaculture is taken after the commercial harvest, so there may not be a direct relation.

Criterion 2

ME recommended criterion 2 remain as is. This was generally supported and the TC did not have much discussion on this criterion.

Criterion 3

ME suggested the following language for criterion 3: "Watershed characteristics that are prone to relatively high mortality or that otherwise make the watershed unlikely to produce large numbers of adult eels. Characteristics could include steep gradient, multiple dams, or small drainage area." This language suggests that high mortality of glass eels would lead to fewer adult eels.

It was also noted that they see a lot of mortality through cannibalism in ME. B. Chase agreed with the suggestions for criterion 3 put forth by C. Clark. He also noted that it could be worthwhile to include language to suggest that one or two of these criteria can be relaxed if a plan can demonstrate that harvest won't have future impacts on stock recruitment.

T. Mathes provided an example for NC's previous proposal, which was initially held to strict criteria. In their proposal, they provided information on water quality and distance of water bodies, among other variables. T. Tuckey suggested that future proposals be clear on why there are high mortality rates in that system.

Other discussion

TC members also discussed the utility of YOY monitoring across states including the management decisions that are made due to the YOY samples. J. Zimmerman asked whether there is any information or support that can be put in the memo that help the Board and the TC understand how monitoring helps drive management decisions. C. Clark suggested that fishery-independent monitoring helps ME understand the bigger picture regarding eel population more than harvest information. He suggested it helps inform seasonal changes (e.g., temperature) and how that may affect glass eels at specific locations, and helps understand harvest impacts through comparisons of locations with and without harvest. Overall, C. Clark noted ME's

monitoring program is representative of the entire state dynamics, but that these programs could be site-specific depending on the conditions of the system they operate in.

B. Chase noted that MA's YOY surveys are fit into sampling for other surveys so that there is no additional cost. He thought their survey did have value as a signal of recruitment failure and has become an index of abundance in stock assessment. T. Tuckey also noted that in many of the years throughout most surveys' time series, programs have been monitoring eels under very low abundance regime. Therefore, we do not have information about what recruitment looks like when abundance is high and this should be kept in mind for long-term monitoring. Additionally, the stock assessment shows that recruitment is highly variable along the coast and there is value to having numerous sites along the coast to be able to understand coast wide trends.

Some members expressed interest in developing clarification on the monitoring requirements going forward. Additionally, M. Feigenbaum noted that if the TC should have conversations about the viability of the YOY surveys, the AP would like to participate in those conversations.

Consider Florida Proposal to Discontinue Young-of-year Sampling

K. Bonvechio gave a presentation on FL's proposal to discontinue the YOY sampling. FL has only one sampling site in NE FL (Guana River) that is free flowing at high tide, and she noted they only collect glass eel with active gears (e.g., dip netting every 30 min) rather than passive gears. FL had some concerns with the utility of this sampling program as they typically catch much fewer eels than other states (<20 eels a year). Therefore, it was suggested that their catch rates may not provide an accurate estimate of recruitment. Due to the high costs per eel, FL has prioritized funding sampling efforts for other eel life stages that could potentially be more useful for management. They noted that the University of North Florida (UNF), who conducts the survey, did secure outside funds for the 2026 sampling season but this is not a guaranteed funding source.

FL noted that they conduct other surveys (e.g., electrofishing surveys) that target other life stages, which are provided to the stock assessment subcommittee annually, but their surveys have not previously been considered in the stock assessment. E. Burgess added that there is a strong financial strain right now and FWC's evaluation is that there are better ways to invest their money in eel monitoring.

There were some concerns raised about potentially losing this survey as it is the most southern YOY survey along the coast. B. Chase noted that the index from this survey performed well in the power analysis during the last benchmark but also recognized there is a high cost to FWC to continue. A. Park would like to see the survey continued because of location of the survey and because it could reflect more trends that are affecting this region that should be explored.

The TC also recognized that there are some reasons to discontinue the survey. Some TC members recognized that it is difficult for a state to justify continuing a survey that isn't producing significant results. Additionally, members recognized that the high cost per eel may be unsustainable without understanding the utility of the survey. GA noted that they also had a survey that was ineffective, which they decided to discontinue for a more productive survey. However, S. Eyler noted that surveys that see 0's in their catches are not necessarily

unproductive and could highlight a trend in the area. J. Zimmerman was concerned about the implications of coastwide monitoring requirements if the TC were to support ending a survey in one state. TC members were interested in how FL's electrofishing surveys could be used to replace information lost by the YOY survey.

Overall, TC members felt they needed more time to evaluate FL's data given that it performs well in the power analysis. Members suggested that the TC should look at the stock assessment contributions and management use of Florida's surveys compared to all coastwide YOY surveys. B. Chase suggested the TC evaluate the stock assessment report to evaluate the impacts of the coastwide surveys. Additionally, TC members suggested a data prioritization exercise to help states better prioritize their sampling efforts going forward.

The TC decided to meet again to continue the discussion on this task and develop a recommendation on FL's YOY survey. Thus, the TC noted that it will not have a recommendation at the February meeting.

Discuss Sampling Changes at Gardy's Millpond

T. Tuckey discussed changes to YOY sampling at Gardy's Millpond after a dam breach. The pond now has two entry points for the glass eels. T. Tuckey asked for guidance on how to continue sampling at this site as they have 25 years of data and wanted suggestions on whether they should seek out another site along the Potomac River. However, it was noted that finding an alternative site would be difficult.

The TC discussed the benefits of retaining this site, given the long time series. TC members suggested looking for correlations of new two-entry site dynamics with historical data. It was also suggested to install eel ramps below both "spillways". Overall, there was consensus to maintain the data stream at this location, but to make note of the changes to the system and potential survey impacts.

Elect TC Chair and Vice Chair

The TC elected K. Bonvechio as Chair with no opposition. K. Bonvechio will serve in this role until the end of 2027.

There were no nominations for Vice Chair. C. Starks will follow up with TC members regarding nominations for this position.

Next Steps

C. Starks will schedule a follow-up meeting in January 2026 to look at FL data and YOY surveys. At this meeting the TC will look at the data considered in benchmark assessment, how data sources were used in the assessment, how surveys rank compared to other YOY surveys, and how similar YOY surveys are to other surveys in the region.

The TC will develop a memo regarding the aquaculture criteria. C. Starks will draft the memo and send it to the group with a meeting summary. The TC will aim to have edits back by January 9th.



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American Eel Technical Committee Meeting

January 13th, 2026

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Technical Committee Attendance: Kim Bonvechio (Chair, FL), Alexis Park (MD), Brad Chase (MA), Caitlin Craig (NY), Casey Clark (ME), Chris Adriance (DC), Chris Wright (NOAA), Eddie Perri (FWS), Jen Pyle (NJ), Jim Page (GA), Jordan Zimmerman (DE), Kevin Mongoloski (USGS), Matt Lee (NH), Mike Porta (PA), Pat McGee RI, Shakira Goffe (VA), Sheila Eyler (FWS), Todd Mathes (NC), Wendy Morrison (NOAA)

Commissioners in Attendance: Erika Burgess (FL)

Staff: Caitlin Starks (FMP Coordinator), Samara Nehemiah (stock assessment scientist)

Public: Jason Dotson, Jeff Renchen

The Technical Committee (TC) met via webinar to continue addressing a Board task. The Board directed the TC to evaluate the utility of continuing the Florida glass eel survey and its contribution to the Commission's management and assessment of the American eel stock, and report back to the Commission at the next American Eel Management Board meeting so the Board can consider exempting Florida from the glass eel survey compliance requirement.

Discussion of Florida YOY Survey

After reviewing information on the Florida YOY survey available from the 2023 stock assessment, the TC asked questions about the survey to better understand the site suitability, issues, and limitations, as well as other sampling efforts in the state that capture American eel.

FL noted that they have made extensive efforts to improve the YOY survey by trying other gears, searching for alternative sites, but there are not any other viable options. They also commented that sampling and collecting age data in other areas across the state is showing a healthy age composition for yellow eels, which does not align with the trends in the YOY survey showing very low numbers of recruits for a number of years. While the persistent low catches in the YOY survey are suggestive of recruitment failure, other monitoring efforts do not agree with that, which raises concerns about the ability of the YOY survey to accurately capture trends in recruitment. FL expressed that they believe the long-term statewide electrofishing efforts combined with age data would provide a better understanding of eel recruitment than the YOY survey.

The TC discussed that the FL electrofishing data were reviewed for the stock assessment, but not used for analysis due to sampling issues, but it was not clear what those issues were. To evaluate whether these data could be used as suggested by FL, the TC agreed that it would be helpful to

ask for input from the Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS). FL noted that they have a standardized protocol for the sampling, and additional years of data that may improve the usefulness of the dataset, along with age data.

One TC member pointed out the criteria for determining whether fishery independent data can be used in the stock assessment, which include that surveys should operate with gear that is capable of catching American eel, and only surveys that operate during a time and place where American eels are available for capture should be considered. The criteria also note that examining the precision or proportion of zero catches of American eels in a survey can be tools for evaluating this. Thus, the TC recommended that the YOY survey be analyzed for the proportion of zero catches to compare it to this criterion.

Ultimately, the TC expressed concern with discontinuing the YOY survey without gaining any other information. The TC agreed the following next steps should be completed before a decision is made as to whether the YOY survey should be discontinued:

- Gather input from the SAS on the Florida surveys, including
 - Utility of the FL YOY survey in terms of variability and power, and in comparison to other surveys
 - Impacts of not having the FL YOY survey data for future assessments
 - FL electrofishing and age data and why they were not used in the recent assessment
 - Whether electrofishing data and age data can be used in the future to assess recruitment; what could be done to improve the survey for eel assessment use
- Analyze the YOY time series to calculate the proportion of zero catches of American eels

It was noted that the YOY sampling will occur this season, conducted by the University of North Florida (UNF). UNF has agreed to follow the state's monitoring protocol for consistency, but the amount of effort may be reduced. It was also noted that a stock assessment update is scheduled for 2027, and as part of that process the SAS could do a deeper investigation of all YOY datasets and develop recommendations for how they could be considered in the next benchmark stock assessment.

While YOY surveys are evaluated in the stock assessment and used to understand local trends in recruitment, they are not currently used for the development of fishery regulations in the Commission's management program.

Elect Vice Chair

The TC elected Jen Pyle as Vice Chair with no opposition.

Next Steps

S. Nehemiah will work with the SAS to complete a data request to Florida for their full YOY and electrofishing datasets for eel. C. Starks will schedule a meeting with the SAS to review the FL data and comment on possible methods for evaluating recruitment or abundance at other life stages.