



New England Fishery Management Council

50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492 | FAX 978 465 3116
Eric Reid, *Chair* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

Proposal for Workgroup to Improve the Monkfish Research Set-Aside Program

DATE: March 31, 2023
TO: Libby Etrie, Peter Hughes (Monkfish Committee Chair and Vice-Chair)
FROM: Jenny Couture, NEFMC staff
SUBJECT: **Monkfish Research Set Aside Program Review, Formation of Work Group**

Introduction

The New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) approved a 2023 work priority to review recommendations from the 2019 Research Set Aside (RSA) program review. This work involves developing measures to improve the Monkfish RSA program’s effectiveness through establishment of a work group of fishermen, NOAA and Council staff, Monkfish Committee members, etc. to discuss the Monkfish RSA program and to identify potential improvements. The Council selected this as a 2023 work priority because the Monkfish RSA program has seen limited use for some time. The Council was also interested in evaluating the possibility of flipping to a directed RSA DAS while at sea.

A work group is necessary to review the findings and recommendations from the RSA program review to identify any suggestions that are still applicable and that should be further explored for consideration. In November 2022, the Advisory Panel wanted to prioritize formation of a working group to ensure the RSA and other research are being used in the assessment process.

Working Group Goal:

The working group will provide recommendations for improvements to the Monkfish RSA program that might be undertaken through a future Council action or via Regional Administrator authority.

Working Group Objectives:

The working group, working under the direction of the Executive Committee, will:

1. Evaluate the findings and recommendations of the [2019 Monkfish RSA Program](#) to determine which, if any, should be further considered.
2. Develop recommendations to the Council for a range of potential improvements to the Monkfish RSA program, focused on:

- a. Improving the feasibility and logistics of the program. For example, evaluate of the possibility for fishermen to be able to use and flip to an RSA DAS while at sea.
- b. Ensuring that RSA research outcomes can inform the science and management of monkfish (e.g., future stock assessments).
3. Provide an opportunity for stakeholders of the monkfish fishery to provide greater input on the RSA program than typically is possible at NEFMC and MAFMC Council meetings, in an environment that supports constructive and open dialogue between users of the resource, scientific experts, fishery managers, and other interested members of the public.

Note: Any ideas for future research priorities can be included in the final report but are not the focus of this working group.

Working Group Composition:

The working group will be composed of 10 members, including one chair.

1. Monkfish Committee member, to serve as chair of the work group
2. One NEFMC staff member, to serve as work group coordinator
3. Three to four Monkfish Advisory Panel (AP) members representing the northern and southern monkfish fisheries and a mix of trawl and gillnet gear and directed and incidental monkfish fishing
4. Two Monkfish Committee members: NEFMC representative, MAFMC representative
5. One GARFO Sustainable Fisheries Division representative
6. One GARFO RSA representative
7. One MAFMC staff member

The working group will convene public meetings (in-person and/or webinars) and work via correspondence, at the discretion of the chair.

Timeline:

Work will begin in spring 2023 with work group meetings occurring in late spring through the summer, with final recommendations presented to the NEFMC and MAFMC during their September and October meetings, respectively (Table 1). This target date was selected so that any work group recommendations can be considered for the 2024 work priority discussions.

Progress and the final report will be reported directly to the Councils.

Table 1. Timeline of meetings and deliverables for improvements to the Monkfish RSA program.

Month	Deliverable description
March - April	Staff draft work plan in consultation with Monkfish Committee Chair and Vice-Chair
April NEFMC, MAFMC Meetings	Provide update to the Councils
April - May	Establish work group
May	Work group meeting
June NEFMC, MAFMC Meetings	Provide progress update to the Councils
July	Work group meeting
August	Work group meeting
Late August/early September	Present recommendations to AP and Committee. Committee to recommend if any findings are appropriate for a 2024 Council work priority.
September/October NEFMC, MAFMC Meetings	Present recommendations to Councils
December	Finalize 2024 work priorities
<i>Note: A Monkfish Committee meeting would not be held prior to the April Council meeting and likely not before the June Council meeting.</i>	

For additional information, contact Jenny Couture (jcouture@nefmc.org; 978-465-0492 x 111).