



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[RTID 0648-XF489; Docket No. 260702-0161]

Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; 2026 Chub Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fishery Specifications

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

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: NMFS approves and implements specifications for the Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP), as recommended by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council). This action sets the 2026 and projects the 2027-2028 specifications for the chub mackerel and *Illex* squid fisheries and reaffirms the previously projected 2026 specifications for the longfin squid and butterfish fisheries. These final specifications are intended to establish allowable harvest levels that will prevent overfishing, consistent with the most recent scientific information.

DATES: Effective [*insert date 30 days after date of publication in the FEDERAL REGISTER*].

ADDRESSES: A Supplemental Information Report (SIR) was prepared for this action. Copies of the SIR and other relevant environmental documentation are available upon request from Dr. Christopher M. Moore, Executive Director, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Suite 201, 800 North State Street, Dover, DE 19901. The SIR is also accessible via the Internet at: <https://www.mafmc.org/supporting-documents>.

Copies of the small entity compliance guide are available from Michael Pentony, Regional Administrator, NMFS, Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, 55 Great

Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930-2298, or available on the internet at:

<https://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Maria Fenton, Fishery Policy Analyst, (978) 281-9196.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the Atlantic mackerel, chub mackerel, *Illlex* squid, longfin squid, and butterfish fisheries pursuant to the FMP in consultation with the Council. In 2024, the most recent year for which complete revenue data are available, this FMP supported commercial fisheries producing an overall \$45.2 million in revenues. Regulations implementing the FMP appear at 50 CFR part 648, subpart B.

Section 302(g)(1)(B) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act; 16 U.S.C. 1852(g)(1)(B)) states that the Scientific and Statistical Committee for each regional fishery management council shall provide its council with ongoing scientific advice for fishery management decisions, including recommendations for acceptable biological catch (ABC), preventing overfishing, ensuring maximum sustainable yield, and achieving rebuilding targets. The ABC is a level of catch that accounts for the scientific uncertainty in the estimate of the stock's defined overfishing limit (OFL).

The mackerel, squid, and butterfish specifications regulations at § 648.22 require the Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Monitoring Committee (Monitoring Committee) to meet annually to develop specifications recommendations for each species managed under the FMP, as well as recommendations for additional management measures to assure that the specifications will not be exceeded. Specifications may be recommended for a period of up to 3 years, subject to annual review. The Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish Committee (Committee) will review the Monitoring Committee's recommendations, as well as any public comment received on them, and develop

recommendations for the Council. The Council will review the Committee's suggestions, as well as any public comments received on them, and recommend to the Regional Administrator specifications and additional measures necessary to assure that those specifications will not be exceeded.

During its June 2025 meeting, the Council finalized its recommendations for the 2026 and the projected 2027-2028 chub mackerel fishery specifications, and recommended reaffirming the previously projected 2026 longfin squid and butterfish fishery specifications without changes. During its August 2025 meeting, the Council finalized its recommendations for the 2026 and the projected 2027-2028 *Illex* squid fishery specifications. Specifications for Atlantic mackerel were developed separately as part of Framework Adjustment 17 to the FMP, which was implemented by an interim final rule on April 27, 2026 (91 FR 22457).

Through this final rule, NMFS approves and implements the Council's recommended 2026 chub mackerel and *Illex* squid fishery specifications, projects the 2027-2028 chub mackerel and *Illex* squid fishery specifications, and reaffirms the previously projected 2026 longfin squid and butterfish fishery specifications. Additional background information regarding the development of these specifications was provided in the proposed rule (91 FR 12545, March 16, 2026) and is not repeated here. This rule is being issued pursuant to section 305(d) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which authorizes the Secretary to implement management measures necessary to carry out an approved fishery management plan. In a previous action taken pursuant to section 304(b) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, NMFS approved the process in the FMP by which specifications are developed through a rulemaking process distinct from that of section 304(b) (76 FR 60606; Sept. 29, 2011); see the mackerel, squid, and butterfish specifications regulations at § 648.22.

Final 2026 and Projected 2027-2028 Chub Mackerel Fishery Specifications

Relative to the 2025 rollover specifications that are currently in effect, the final 2026 and projected 2027-2028 chub mackerel fishery specifications will remain status quo (table 1).

Table 1 – 2025, Final 2026, and Projected 2027-2028 Chub Mackerel Fishery Specifications (in metric tons (mt))

Specification	2025	Final 2026	Projected 2027-2028
ABC	2,300	2,300	2,300
Annual catch limit (ACL)	2,262	2,262	2,262
Annual catch target (ACT)	2,171	2,171	2,171
Total allowable landings (TAL)	2,041	2,041	2,041

Final 2026 and Projected 2027-2028 *Illex* Squid Fishery Specifications

Relative to the 2025 rollover specifications that are currently in effect, the final 2026 and projected 2027-2028 *Illex* squid fishery specifications will remain status quo (table 2).

Table 2 – 2025, Final 2026, and Projected 2027-2028 *Illex* Squid Fishery Specifications (mt)

Specification	2025	Final 2026	Projected 2027-2028
OFL	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
ABC	40,000	40,000	40,000
Commercial discard set-aside	1,369	1,369	1,369
Commercial discard set-aside (%)	3.42	3.42	3.42
Initial optimum yield (IOY)	38,631	38,631	38,631
Research set-aside (RSA)*	0	0	0
Domestic annual harvest (DAH) / Domestic annual processing (DAP)	38,631	38,631	38,631

*The Council's RSA program has been suspended since 2014.

Reaffirmed 2026 Longfin Squid Fishery Specifications

Relative to the 2025 rollover specifications that are currently in effect, the reaffirmed 2026 longfin squid fishery specifications will remain status quo (tables 3 and 4).

Table 3 – Reaffirmed 2026 Longfin Squid Fishery Specifications (mt)

Specification	2025	Reaffirmed 2026
OFL	Unknown	Unknown
ABC	23,400	23,400
Commercial discard set-aside	506.3	506.3
Commercial discard set-aside (%)	2.16	2.16
IOY	22,893.7	22,893.7
RSA*	0	0
DAH/DAP	22,893.7	22,893.7

*The Council's RSA program has been suspended since 2014.

Table 4 – Reaffirmed 2026 Longfin Squid Quota Trimester Allocations

Trimester	Percent of Quota	mt
I (January-April)	43	9,844.3
II (May-August)	17	3,891.9
III (September-December)	40	9,157.5
Total	100	22,893.7

Reaffirmed 2026 Butterfish Fishery Specifications

The majority of the reaffirmed 2026 butterfish fishery specifications are lower than the 2025 rollover specifications that are currently in effect. Specifically, the ABC, ACL, and ACT are reduced by 19 percent, and the domestic annual harvest (DAH) is reduced by 29 percent. However, in recent years commercial butterfish landings have been well below the DAH and catch has been well below the ACL, so these reductions in butterfish fishery specifications are not expected to be limiting for the fishery. During 2019-2024, only 6.2-24.5 percent of the DAH and 16.8-32.3 percent of the ACL was harvested annually, which resulted in annual landings ranging from 718 to 3,442 mt and annual catch ranging from 3,874 to 5,394 mt (tables 5 and 6).

Table 5 – Reaffirmed 2026 Butterfish Fishery Specifications (mt)

Specification	2025	Reaffirmed 2026
OFL	17,587	14,224
ABC/ACL	17,115	13,842
ACT buffer	0	0
ACT buffer (%)	0%	0%
ACT	17,115	13,842
RSA*	0	0
Total allowable level of foreign fishing	0	0
Butterfish cap in longfin squid fishery	3,884	3,884
Assumed other discards	1,907	1,907
Total discard set-aside (all sources)	5,791	5,791
DAH/DAP	11,324	8,051

Closure threshold (amount caught)	10,324	7,051
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*The Council's RSA program has been suspended since 2014.

Table 6 – Reaffirmed 2026 Allocation of the Butterfish Mortality Cap

Trimester	Percent	Metric Tons
I (January-April)	43	1,670
II (May-August)	17	660
III (September-December)	40	1,554
Total	100	3,884

Comments and Responses

NMFS published a proposed rule on March 16, 2026 (91 FR 12545), and the public comment period ended on April 15, 2026. We received one comment from a member of the public during the comment period, but it did not mention anything specific to the measures contained in the action.

Changes From the Proposed Rule

There are no changes from the proposed rule.

Classification

NMFS is issuing this rule pursuant to section 305(d) of the Magnuson Stevens Act (16 U.S.C. 1855(d)). In a previous action taken pursuant to section 304(b) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (16 U.S.C. 1854(b)), the FMP and implementing regulations created the process by which specifications are developed through a NMFS rulemaking process distinct from that of 304(b) (76 FR 60606; Sept. 29, 2011). See the mackerel, squid, and butterfish specifications regulation at § 648.22. The NMFS Assistant Administrator has determined that this final rule is consistent with the FMP, other provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and other applicable laws.

This final rule is exempt from review under Executive Order (E.O.) 12866.

This rule is not an E.O. 14192 regulatory action because this rule is not significant under E.O. 12866.

NMFS has determined that this action would not have a substantial direct effect on one or more Indian Tribes, on the relationship between the Federal Government and Indian Tribes, or on the distribution of power and responsibilities between the Federal Government and Indian Tribes; therefore, consultation with Tribal officials under E.O. 13175 is not required, and the requirements of section (5)(b) and (c) of E.O. 13175 also do not apply. A Tribal summary impact statement under section (5)(b)(2)(B) and (c)(2)(B) of E.O. 13175 is not required and has not been prepared.

The Chief Counsel for Regulation of the Department of Commerce certified to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration during the proposed rule stage that this action would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. The factual basis for this certification was published in the proposed rule and is not repeated here. No comments were received regarding this certification. As a result, a final regulatory flexibility analysis was not required and none was prepared.

This final rule contains no information collection requirements under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: July 6, 2026.

Samuel D. Rauch III,

Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs,

National Marine Fisheries Service.