

East Coast Fishery Management Organizations Release Suite of Potential Actions to Help Managers Respond to the Effects of Climate Change on Marine Fisheries

July 2023



Over the past two years, marine fishery management organizations along the U.S. East Coast have been exploring governance and management issues related to climate change and fishery stock distributions. This effort recognizes the profound impact that climate change is having on our ocean ecosystems and coastlines and the need to plan for how fishery management organizations and coastal communities can best adapt to these changes in a thoughtful and deliberate way.

Throughout the multi-stage scenario planning process, hundreds of stakeholders helped generate four distinct “scenarios,” each describing a possible future for East Coast fisheries, coastal communities, and fisheries management. The capstone to this initiative was a Scenario Planning Summit, held in February 2023, which brought together representatives from the three East Coast Regional Fishery Management Councils, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and NOAA Fisheries. During the Summit, participants used the scenarios as a platform from which to develop a set of potential governance and management actions that could help prepare fishery management organizations for future challenges related to climate change.

Scenario Planning Outcomes

The main themes and potential actions that emerged during this process are summarized in two documents: the [Summit Report](#) and a [Potential Action Menu](#). The Summit Report summarizes the discussions that occurred at the Summit, while the Potential Action Menu builds upon the Summit Report by suggesting possible next steps for the management organizations to consider as they plan for the future. The Potential Action Menu is organized around three overarching themes: (1) cross-jurisdictional governance; (2) managing under increased uncertainty; and (3) data sources and partnerships. Each theme’s potential actions are prioritized, with high priority given to those that could be quickly or easily implemented or that the fishery management organizations viewed as important issues to address in the near-term. The table on the following page provides a summary of high priority potential actions under each theme.

The Potential Action Menu is intended to be an evolving document, used as a planning tool to guide development of priorities and a place to capture future issues and ideas. Over the next several months, fishery management organizations will meet individually and collectively to discuss how best to integrate the high priority items into actions.

Overarching Themes and High Priority Potential Actions

Theme	High Priority Potential Actions
<p>Cross-Jurisdictional Governance Refers to ways in which governance structures and processes may need to be modified to address changes in species distribution.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate Council committee structure, use, and decision-making • Evaluate Advisory Panel representation • Develop joint management agreements to clarify roles and increase efficiency • Improve coordination across NOAA offices and regions
<p>Managing Under Increased Uncertainty Environmental changes may mean that historical conditions can no longer be used to predict the future, increasing uncertainty in management.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify ecosystem-level contextual information that can be considered in management to incorporate climate information into decisions • Streamline fishery management plan documentation and rulemaking
<p>Data Sources and Partnerships Coordination of accurate and timely data between all stakeholders and partners will play a large role as we adapt to changing conditions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand study fleet, include recreational fisheries, and ensure data are used • Use survey mitigation around offshore wind to transition to industry-based surveys or other survey platforms • Improve the use of existing data

Next Steps

Two new groups are being formed to help support the implementation of scenario planning outcomes.

- *The East Coast Climate Coordination Group* will be responsible for tracking progress toward implementation of potential actions, promoting prioritization of actions (jointly or by individual management organizations), estimating resources needed, and supporting coordinated implementation.
- *The Climate Innovation Group* will track information and changes relevant to East Coast fisheries, identify ideas that are worthy of consideration by the Coordination Group, and identify possible actions to undertake.

Scenario Planning Toolkit and More Information

A [Scenario Planning Toolkit](#) has been created to support ongoing conversations about how climate change is affecting fisheries. The toolkit consists of materials to provide guidance to other stakeholders who may wish to undertake their own scenario work, with resources including a set of overview slides, worksheet templates, draft agendas for various types of sessions, guidance on different scenario approaches, and guidelines for facilitators.

Additional information about the East Coast Climate Change Scenario Planning Initiative, including contact information for current core team members, is available at <https://www.mafmc.org/climate-change-scenario-planning>.