

# NEFSA

New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association

May & June 2026

## A New Chapter for America's Commercial Fishermen

*By Dustin Delano, NEFSA Chairman & Chief Strategist*

This spring marked a historic moment for America's fishing industry with the official opening of the USDA Office of Seafood, the first office of its kind dedicated to ensuring commercial fishermen, seafood producers, and processors have direct access to USDA programs and support systems. The announcement represents more than just another federal office; it signals long-overdue recognition that America's fishermen are essential food producers and a critical part of our nation's food security.

For generations, commercial fishermen have operated without many of the tools and opportunities available to traditional agriculture. While farmers have long benefited from USDA loans, disaster programs, marketing assistance, infrastructure investments, and risk-management tools, commercial fishermen were often left navigating a complicated federal system without a seat at the table. The creation of the USDA Office of Seafood changes that conversation in a meaningful way.

The new office will coordinate across USDA agencies and work alongside the Department of Commerce and other federal partners to strengthen domestic seafood production, improve processing capacity, promote American seafood products, and help revitalize working waterfronts and coastal economies.

In my capacity as Fisherman in Residence, I had the privilege of attending the roundtable discussion surrounding this historic announcement. Sitting at the table with Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick, Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins, Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum, National Economic Council Director Kevin Hassett, Senator Dan Sullivan, Congresswoman Kat Cammack of Florida, and fishing industry leaders from Maine to Alaska was both humbling and encouraging.

What stood out most was the growing recognition in Washington that commercial fishermen are not simply stakeholders in environmental policy. We are producers who feed the nation. There was broad agreement around the table that American seafood harvesters deserve the same consideration, support, and economic opportunities afforded to other domestic food producers.

It was also my honor to speak during the press conference alongside Secretary Rollins and Secretary Burgum as we announced to the American people that, for the first time in a long time,

our nation's political leadership is giving commercial fishermen something many of us have not felt in years: hope. Hope that our government finally understands the importance of preserving working waterfronts, rebuilding domestic seafood production, and protecting the livelihoods of the men and women who harvest America's seafood.

For many of us in the industry, this moment has been years in the making. Coastal communities across the country have struggled under burdensome regulations, rising operating costs, foreign competition, and aging infrastructure. Yet despite those challenges, America's fishermen continue to provide some of the safest, most sustainable, and highest-quality seafood in the world.

The USDA Office of Seafood will not solve every challenge overnight, but it does create new opportunities for fishermen to access financing, infrastructure support, market development programs, disaster relief, and other tools that can help keep family fishing operations viable for future generations.

Perhaps most importantly, this office acknowledges something fishermen have known all along: seafood is food security, and America's fishermen are indispensable to the nation's future.

As conversations continue around domestic seafood competitiveness and rebuilding America's maritime economy, it is critical that working fishermen remain directly involved in shaping policy. The voices of harvesters, processors, and fishing communities must continue to guide these efforts so that the future of commercial fishing remains strong, independent, and sustainable.

This is an important first step, and one that gives many in the industry renewed optimism that commercial fishermen are finally being recognized not only for our heritage, but for our vital role in America's future.



# When Science Recalibrates: What the IPCC's Shift Could Mean for America's Fisheries

*By Dustin Delano, NEFSA Chairman & Chief Strategist*

For years, commercial fishermen across New England have lived under a growing mountain of regulations justified by increasingly extreme climate projections. Those projections shaped biological opinions, stock assessments, habitat restrictions, and sweeping management decisions that directly impacted working fishermen and coastal communities.

Now, the global climate science conversation is beginning to shift.

Recent developments surrounding the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) indicate that some of the most extreme warming scenarios, particularly the widely used RCP8.5 and SSP5-8.5 models, are no longer considered plausible by many scientists and policy experts.

That matters enormously for fisheries policy.

For decades, federal agencies and environmental advocacy groups relied heavily on worst-case climate scenarios to justify increasingly restrictive biological opinions and regulatory actions. These models were often treated not as hypothetical upper-bound possibilities, but as expected outcomes. Fisheries managers incorporated them into projections about species migration, habitat collapse, stock productivity declines, and ecosystem disruption.

The problem is that many of these assumptions may have overstated future impacts.

A major fisheries-focused climate review published in the ICES Journal of Marine Science concluded that the most extreme emissions scenarios “seem implausible” and warned they should only be used with “clear rationales and caveats.” The same paper noted that these high-end scenarios had become the dominant foundation for fisheries and aquatic conservation research despite growing doubts about their realism.

This is not a minor academic debate. It strikes directly at the foundation of many federal biological opinions that affect America's fishermen.

When agencies rely on exaggerated climate assumptions, the downstream consequences become very real:

- reduced catch limits,
- expanded closed areas,
- burdensome permitting,
- severe restrictions on vessel operations,
- and economically devastating management measures for coastal communities.

In New England, fishermen have repeatedly watched regulators use speculative long-term climate forecasts to justify immediate restrictions on fisheries that families have depended on for generations. While adaptation and conservation absolutely matter, management must remain grounded in realistic science, not politically amplified scenarios designed around theoretical extremes.

The IPCC's evolving position does not mean climate change is fake or irrelevant. Oceans are changing. Fishermen see environmental variability firsthand every season. Water temperatures fluctuate. Species distributions shift. Storm patterns evolve.

But acknowledging environmental change is very different from accepting catastrophic assumptions as unquestioned truth.

Science is supposed to refine itself. Models are supposed to be challenged. Assumptions are supposed to be tested against reality.

That process now appears to be happening within the broader climate science community itself. Reports indicate the IPCC's upcoming assessment frameworks are moving away from the most extreme emissions trajectories because actual technological, economic, and energy trends no longer support those assumptions.

For fisheries, this could represent an important turning point.

If regulators begin reassessing biological opinions using more balanced and realistic climate pathways, several positive outcomes could follow:

## 1. More Credible Fisheries Science

Management decisions should reflect observable data and realistic probability ranges, not speculative extremes. Using more moderate and evidence-based projections would improve scientific credibility and public trust.

## 2. Better Economic Stability for Fishing Communities

Coastal economies cannot survive endless precautionary restrictions built on worst-case assumptions. Rationalized climate projections may help stabilize regulatory environments and preserve working waterfronts.

## 3. Improved Collaboration Between Fishermen and Scientists

Many fishermen have grown skeptical of management institutions because they feel predetermined conclusions drive policy. A more transparent and balanced scientific process could help rebuild cooperation between industry and regulators.

## 4. Stronger Conservation Through Practical Management

Effective conservation works best when stakeholders trust the science behind it. Policies rooted in realistic environmental expectations are more likely to gain long-term compliance and support.

The danger moving forward is not climate science itself. It is the politicization of science.

When science becomes a tool to justify predetermined policy outcomes, public confidence erodes. That has happened in fisheries management for years. Fishermen have often been portrayed



as obstacles to sustainability instead of partners in stewardship, despite generations of firsthand ecological knowledge and responsible harvesting practices.

NEFSA believes conservation and commercial fishing can coexist. In fact, they must coexist.

America's fishermen are among the first to notice changes in the marine environment because our livelihoods depend on healthy oceans. But sustainability must be based on sound science, transparent assumptions, and balanced policymaking, not fear-driven narratives.

The emerging reassessment of extreme IPCC climate scenarios

## **A Balanced Approach to Shellfish Aquaculture in State Waters**

*By Bonnie Brady, NEFSA Director of Policy*

Shellfish aquaculture has long been part of the heritage of coastal communities throughout the United States. Recognizing both the history of shellfish aquaculture and the longstanding presence of wild harvest fisheries in state waters, the New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association (NEFSA) has established a policy framework centered on balanced use, defined leasing structures, and protection of existing resource users.

Some of our NEFSA members participate in shellfish aquaculture, while others depend entirely upon wild harvest fisheries. Our on-the-water perspective recognizes both the opportunities and the challenges that can arise when projects are not properly planned or located, so our policy is built around balanced use, defined leasing structures, and protection of all resource users.

We support responsible shellfish aquaculture conducted within state waters where projects are properly sited, appropriately scaled, and developed through transparent public processes. As states, counties, and towns establish lease areas and consider new shellfish aquaculture proposals, those decisions must fully account for existing wild harvest fisheries and the fishermen who depend upon those waters for their livelihoods. Shellfish aquaculture should coexist with commercial fishing, not create conflicts that displace traditional fishing activity or restrict access to public waters.

State waters already support multiple longstanding commercial fishing uses, including lobstering, finfishing, clamming, oystering, worm digging, and elver fishing. Navigational safety and vessel transit are essential to working waterfront communities and domestic seafood production. These are active working waters, not vacant space available for unlimited development.

The primary issue is not whether shellfish aquaculture should exist, but where it is located, how large it becomes, and whether it interferes with existing users. A project may be appropriate where surrounding activity is limited and compatibility with existing uses can be demonstrated. A project is not appropriate where it restricts access to productive fishing grounds, interferes with gear deployment or retrieval, creates navigational

should encourage fisheries managers, regulators, and policymakers to revisit how biological opinions are developed and applied.

If the foundational assumptions change, the regulations built upon them deserve scrutiny too.

For too long, fishermen have carried the economic burden of speculative forecasting. Perhaps now we can begin restoring balance to fisheries management, with science that reflects reality rather than ideology.

America's fishing communities deserve nothing less.

hazards, or contributes to congestion within heavily used working areas.

NEFSA believes shellfish aquaculture proposals should demonstrate compatibility with existing uses before permits are approved. That requires accurate mapping of fishing activity, transit routes, harvesting areas, and seasonal use patterns, along with meaningful engagement with affected fishermen early in the process. Addressing concerns before projects move forward helps reduce conflict, improve transparency, and strengthen confidence in the permitting process.

Commercial fishermen possess generations of practical knowledge regarding tides, currents, navigation, bottom conditions, weather, and fishing activity. That experience matters. Responsible shellfish aquaculture policy must recognize the realities of working waters and ensure that projects are developed in a manner that allows existing fisheries and shellfish aquaculture operations to operate together safely and fairly.

The goal should not be to divide those who participate in shellfish aquaculture and commercial fishing into opposing camps. Both are part of the broader seafood economy and working waterfront culture. With proper siting, meaningful engagement, and balanced decision-making, shellfish aquaculture and wild harvest fishermen can co-exist and operate in a way that maintains shared use and stewardship of public waters while allowing all to operate safely and productively.



## NEFSA welcomes Tim Smith as Operations Manager

*By Shelley Wigglesworth, NEFSA Administrative Assistant*

The New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association is pleased to announce that Tim Smith has been hired as operations manager.

Tim was born in New Jersey and grew up in Maine where he graduated from Gorham High School. He was educated at Mars Hill University for Business Administration and Psychology, and New Hampshire Institute of Art for UX/UI Design.

Tim spent 5 years in the tech industry working for Apple before moving on to a career in training and workforce development at the nonprofit Woodfords Family Services.

"At Apple, I learned how to design and implement systems that are intuitive, efficient, and built around the needs of real people. At Woodfords Family Services, I worked in training and workforce development, helping staff grow and supporting an organization through the day-to-day complexity of mission-driven work. Together, those experiences gave me a deep respect for operational infrastructure," he said.

As the Operations Manager, Tim will be focused on day-to-day operations, memberships, budgets, logistics, events, fundraising and more. "I'm not coming in to reinvent the wheel; I'm here to

listen, learn, and make everyone's job a little easier wherever I can. I look forward to engagement with the fishing community; that's exactly what drew me to this role. Commercial fishing is one of the hardest, most under-appreciated jobs in America, and the people who do it deserve an organization running at its best on their behalf. I want to help make that happen," he said.

You can reach Tim at: [tim.smith@nefishermen.org](mailto:tim.smith@nefishermen.org), (207) 615-1962, or swing by the NEFSA office. <https://nefishermen.org/>



## Welcome NEFSA board member Suzannah Raber

*By Shelley Wigglesworth, NEFSA Administrative Assistant*

Suzannah Raber was born in Cordova, Alaska and grew up with a close involvement in her family's fishing operations.

Early on Suzannah was introduced to complex, large-scale, commercial fishing/processing/distribution operations working for her father, Walt Raber, who owned five large-scale fishing operations which included work on carrier/processor/freezing vessels that produced pollock, black cod, and more for consumption worldwide. She worked with her father on the 365' freezer Processor Atlantic Frost in Fall River MA, as well as on three other 100 + foot midwater trawlers in New England until his death in 2004 .

Throughout her career, she has served in every capacity imaginable in a fishing operation – deckhand, bookkeeping, billing/collections, cash flow management, creditor/bank/lease financing, regulatory reporting, clerical/administrative management, balancing inter-company accounts, oversight over NMFS fishing license leases agreements and more.

Today she is the operations manager, co-owner & operator, of New England Fish Company and the F/V Providian alongside her brother Ryan Raber, and she is also a successful licensed Real Estate Broker in Southern Maine. She serves on the board of the Maine Fishermen's Forum and the Herring Advisory panel for NEFMC.

A single mother of three, when she is not working, she keeps busy with her children and their football, horse showing, basketball

and lacrosse interests. In her free time, she enjoys water activities, collecting rare tropical plants, and reading.

She had this to say about joining the NEFSA board. "I like to give back to the community, and I believe in the mission of NEFSA and want to help continue it along. I believe it's very important for fisherman to work together for a solution and be united. Together we rise but separate we will crumble. I deeply respect the fact that NEFSA is for all fisherman and not just one group. I admire the amount of work they have accomplished. I care about all fisheries and deeply want every American fisherman to succeed. Regulations have threatened to, and have collapsed so many family business, and generational fisherman, and deterred newcomers to the industry- this is something we need to change, together."



## A Note from NEFSA's Operations Manager Tim Smith

Hey everyone, my name is Tim Smith and I'm the new Operations Manager at the New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association. I want to take a moment to introduce myself and share a little about where I'm coming from and where I hope we're headed together.

My background is a bit of an unusual path to fisheries work. I spent years in tech and nonprofit workforce development. I also have a background in design and went to school for business administration and human interface design, which transferred into my web design and development business. When I found NEFSA and saw the work they were doing, I wanted to be part of that support system for the folks doing the real work: New England fishermen.

Since coming on board, I've been heads-down getting oriented diving into our membership records and getting a handle on where things stand, sitting in on conversations with members and politicians to understand what's working and what isn't, and

## SAVE THE DATE for the 4th annual NEFSA at the Nor'Easter to be held in Northeast Harbor, Maine on July 18, 2026!

*By Shelley Wigglesworth, NEFSA Administrative Assistant*

The NEFSA at the Nor'easter yearly dinner is one of our most anticipated and successful fundraising events. Each year community members, fishermen, and distinguished guests who support the American commercial fisheries come together for an evening celebrating and raising funds to support the American commercial fishing industry.

The evening begins with a cocktail hour, Hors d'oeuvres & live music while attendees browse and bid on fabulous silent auction items including art, jewelry, gift certificates, gift bags and more. A 5-course formal dinner featuring locally sourced seafood, and a distinguished guest keynote speaker will follow. Past speakers have included NEFSA board member Captain Linda Greenlaw, U.S. Senator Susan Collins, and Maine DMR commissioner Carl Wilson.

NEFSA at the Nor'easter will take place July 18, 2026, from 5:30-9PM at the Nor'Easter Pound & Market in Northeast Harbor, Maine. Updates with more information and the announcement of this year's speaker along with a link to register, are coming soon.

If you would like to sponsor the event, or donate to the silent auction, please reach out to Shelley at: [shelley.wigglesworth@nefishermen.org](mailto:shelley.wigglesworth@nefishermen.org)

*By Tim Smith, NEFSA Operations Manager*  
getting a deeper understanding of the industry through conversation and getting out on the ocean. These are the early days, but I'm already getting a clearer picture of what this organization is capable of.

For NEFSA, my vision is straightforward: I want this organization to be running at its absolute best for the people we serve. That means tightening up operations, building out our membership, making events run smoother, and making sure every fisherman who interacts with NEFSA walks away feeling like they've got real advocacy in their corner. There's a lot of potential here, and I'm genuinely excited to be part of it.

I'm not going anywhere, and I'm not in a rush. I'd rather do this right than do it fast. If you've got thoughts, ideas, gripes, or stories, tips, tricks, etc, I want to hear it all. You can always reach me at [tim.smith@nefishermen.org](mailto:tim.smith@nefishermen.org), (207) 615-1962, or swing by the office. I'm looking forward to the work ahead.





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## **NEFSA Director of Advocacy Jason Joyce Weighs in on commercial fisheries issues in DC**

*By Shelley Wigglesworth, NEFSA Administrative Assistant*

In support of Maine's Commercial fishermen, Senator Collins invited NEFSA Director of Advocacy Jason Joyce to attend a roundtable discussion on April 15th with USDA Secretary Rollins, Commerce Secretary Lutnick, Interior Secretary Bergum and other dignitaries to discuss the future role of USDA's Office of Seafood. Joyce was part of a roundtable of fisheries representatives from across America bringing issues to the forefront.

He highlighted lobstermen's concerns over life threatening ropeless gear and contributed to the discussion concerning tactics used by foreign seafood shippers who are "port-shopping" using loopholes to allow seafood that fails FDA inspection into the USA.

Secretary Rollins graciously offered a follow-up discussion to include Secretary Kennedy and leadership from FDA to further discuss the need to eliminate ropeless gear and to shut down contaminated imported seafood loopholes.

Joyce has returned to visit the Office of Seafood twice in the ensuing weeks to keep the ball moving forward on these

and other items of interest to fishermen such as programs directed to help with financial assistance and restoring our nations seafood processing infrastructure.

NEFSA's Jason Joyce will be at the Bass Harbor Lobsterboat Races June 28 for discussions about fisheries!

