



New England Fishery Management Council

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 22, 2017

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Scallops: Council Approves IFQ Program Review, 2018-2019 RSA Research Priorities; Votes Down LAGC Control Date

The New England Fishery Management Council took several actions related to Atlantic sea scallops during its June 20-21 meeting in Portland, ME. In summary, the Council:

- Approved the Limited Access General Category (LAGC) Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program Review for fishing years 2010-2015;
- Approved priorities for the 2018-2019 Scallop Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program;
- Voted *against* establishing a control date to address movement between LAGC Northern Gulf of Maine (NGOM) permits and LAGC incidental permits; and
- Voted to request the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Regional Administrator use his authority to “expand the Great South Channel scallop dredge exemption area to encompass all or part of the Georges Bank regulated mesh area, not including habitat closed areas or year round closed areas except when allowed under the Scallop Access Area Program.”

The Council also received a progress report on Framework Adjustment 29 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan (FMP), which will include: (1) fishery specifications for the 2018 fishing year and default specifications for 2019; (2) flatfish accountability measures for the scallop fishery; (3) NGOM Management Area modifications; and, potentially (4) modifications to scallop access areas, consistent with pending habitat area revisions.

The Council’s Scallop Plan Development Team, Scallop Committee, and Scallop Advisory Panel will work on these Framework 29 measures through the fall using 2017 survey results and updated scallop biomass estimates. Final action is scheduled for December.



– Coonamessett Farm Foundation photo



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Limited Access IFQ Program Review

The LAGC IFQ Program was established through Amendment 11 to the Scallop FMP. The primary goal was to control capacity and mortality in the general category scallop fishery and prevent overfishing. Amendment 11 transitioned the general category component of the scallop fishery from open access to limited access.

This IFQ Program is defined as a Limited Access Privilege Program (LAPP) under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. By law, LAPPs are subject to periodic review.

The New England Council completed a three-year fishery review in 2014. This latest review covers the 2010-2015 scallop fishing years and addresses whether or not the LAGC IFQ Fishery has:

- Controlled capacity, controlled scallop mortality, and promoted fishery conservation and management;
- Preserved the ability for vessels to participate in the general category fishery at different levels and prevented accumulation of excessive shares;
- Resulted in biological, economic, and social benefits to the nation; and
- Promoted safety, compliance, and enforcement.

The report contains extensive responses to each point and numerous analyses. A copy of the document can be downloaded from the Council's website at: <http://www.nefmc.org/library/june-2017-scallop>.

2018 and 2019 Scallop Research Set-Aside Program Priorities

The Council also approved a list of research priorities for the next round of Scallop RSA Program projects. NMFS and the Council will be sending out notices to solicit proposals for 2018-2019 projects that “enhance



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the understanding of the scallop resource or contribute to scallop fishery management decisions.”

Applicants are strongly encouraged to address the Council's priorities, which are summed up as follows.

HIGHEST – Survey-related research remains the Council's highest priority. Four categories are involved: (1a) an intensive industry-based survey of each relevant scallop access area likely to be considered under the rotational area management program in 2018; (1b) an intensive industry-based survey of “areas of importance” such as bottom with high scallop recruitment or closed areas that may open to fishing;



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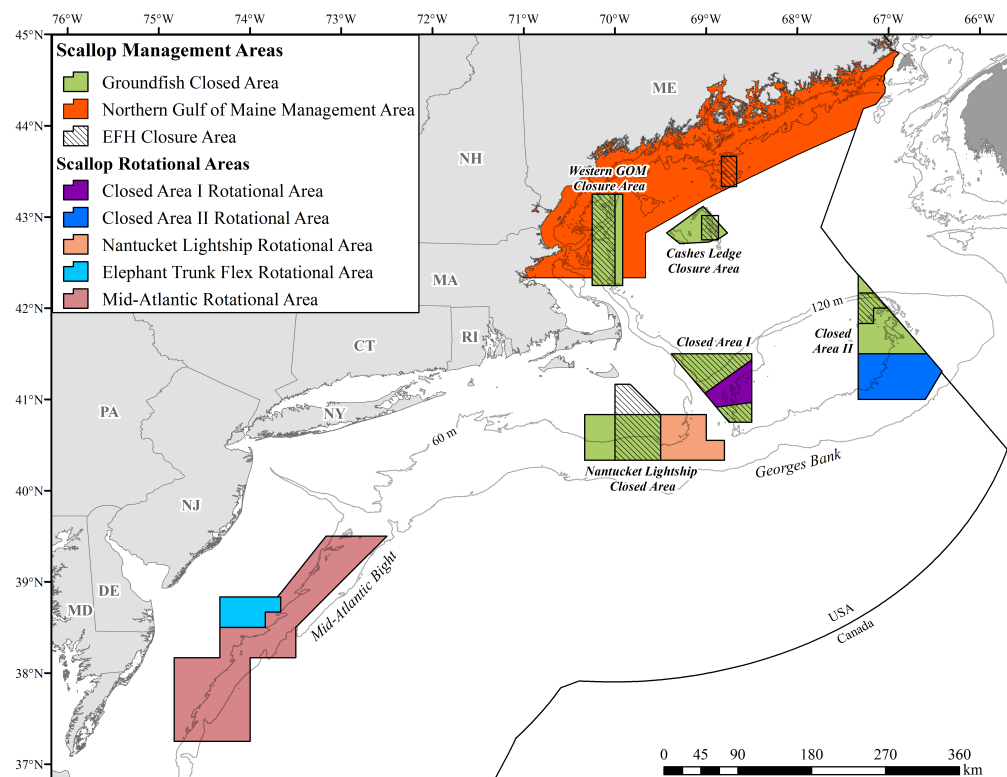
(1c) a resource-wide survey of scallops within Georges Bank and/or Mid-Atlantic resource areas (NOTE – a broad, resource wide industry-based dredge survey of the Mid-Atlantic resource, including the Delmarva, Elephant Trunk, and Hudson Canyon areas, was funded for 2018 through the 2017-2018 scallop RSA process); and (1d) a resource wide industry-based survey of scallops within the Gulf of Maine. This fourth survey has a slightly lower priority than the first three.

- **HIGH PRIORITIES** – In order of importance, these are: (2) scallop meat quality research, including projects aimed at describing the occurrence of disease and parasites, mechanisms and processes that affect product quality (e.g. life cycle, distribution and transmission, relationship to turtles); the impact of density dependence, and research on natural mortality such as predation; and (3) bycatch research to reduce impacts on small scallops and non-target species.
- **MEDIUM PRIORITIES** – In order of importance, these are: (4) research to support the investigation of turtle behavior and its potential impact on the scallop fishery in the Mid-Atlantic and on Georges Bank; and (5) research related to scallop biology, including studies aimed at better understanding recruitment processes, seasonal growth patterns, and scallop spat/seeding impacts.

- **OTHER PRIORITIES** – An extensive list of additional possible research projects falls under the “other” category, including projects that pertain to: variability in dredge efficiency; habitat characterization;

environmental stressor impacts on scallop reproduction/growth; major sources of management uncertainty; social and economic impacts and consequences of area rotation; non-harvest mortality; and more.

A notice soliciting 2018-2019 proposals will be released later this summer.



Visit <http://www.nefmc.org/library/june-2017-scallop> for more information.



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Council Votes Down Control Date

Back in March, the Council's Scallop Committee voted to ask the Council to establish a control date to address movement between LAGC permit categories. The Council then took up the committee's motion on June 21.

A control date can be used to establish eligibility criteria for determining levels of future access in a fishery. Currently, in the scallop fishery, permit holders may move between the LAGC NGOM and LAGC incidental permit categories annually, and LAGC IFQ permit holders are allowed to make a one-time transition from IFQ to NGOM/incidental permits.

After listening to public comment and further deliberating the issue, the Council voted *against* taking action. The Council reviewed information related to the total number of potentially impacted permits, incidental landings, and recent activity in the NGOM fishery during the discussion.

In December, the Council will adopt its 2018 work priorities and is likely to consider further action for the Northern Gulf of Maine Management Area beyond what it does in Framework 29.

General Category Scallop Dredge Exemption Area

Following up on a request from industry, the Council voted to ask the NMFS regional administrator to use his authority to expand the Great South Channel scallop dredge exemption area to encompass all or part of the Georges Bank regulated mesh area, not including habitat closed areas, or year round closed areas except when allowed under the Scallop Access Area Program.

NMFS officials said they already were discussing the issue internally. A modification is within the regional administrator's authority, as long as certain criteria are met. The exemption must not jeopardize fishing



– SMAST photo

mortality targets. Also, the status of rebuilding stocks must be considered, and recent recruitment should be taken into account. Reliable data must show that groundfish bycatch in the exemption area is less than 5% by weight of the total catch.

NMFS communicated some initial concerns to the Council though a June 13 letter about the dredge exemption request. As a result of the June 21 discussion in Portland, the Council will formally respond to some of these concerns in its own letter reflecting its vote.

For more information about the New England Council's scallop actions or Scallop FMP, visit the Council website at <http://www.nefmc.org/management-plans/scallops> or contact Scallop Plan Coordinator Jonathon Peros at (978) 465-0492, ext. 117, jperos@nefmc.org.