DECISION DOCUMENT

for

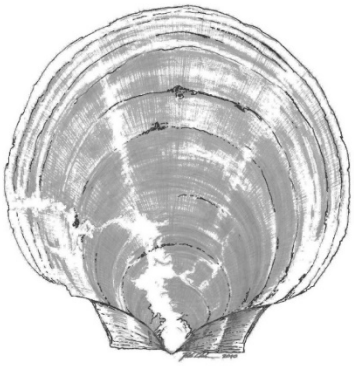
the development of

FY 2027 and 2028 Specifications

to the

Atlantic Sea Scallop FMP

Scallop AP & Committee Copy (11/17/26)



November 17, 2026

Scallop AP & Committee Meeting

Fishing Year (FY) 2027 and 2028 (default) Specifications

An action to set fishery specification for FY 2027 and FY 2028 (default) was initiated at the June 2026 Council meeting and currently includes the following measures: scallop fishery specifications for FY 2027 and default measures for FY 2028, specifically ABC/ACLs, days-at-sea (DAS), access area allocations for limited access (LA) and Limited Access General Category (LAGC), total allowable landings (TAL) for Northern Gulf of Maine (NGOM) management area, target-TAC for LAGC incidental catch and set-asides for the observer and research programs.

Anticipated outcomes for and the November 17th AP and Committee meeting:

1. Select the *preferred alternative* for measures to include in specifications action, including:
    a. Overfishing limit and acceptable biological catch
    b. Fishery allocations for FY 2027 and FY 2028 (default), including access area and DAS allocations.
    c. Seasonal closures of a potential Nantucket Lightship Access Area.
    d. Northern Gulf of Maine total allowable landings in FY 2027 and FY 2028 (default).
2. Consider bycatch estimates developed by the Scallop PDT, *if available*. If warranted, discuss possible measures and future work plan items that could be used to mitigate impacts on flatfish stocks.

During the December 8-10 Council meeting, a motion to submit 2027 Specifications Action to NOAA Fisheries is also anticipated.

1. Overfishing Limit and Acceptable Biological Catch

Action 1 – Overfishing Limit and Acceptable Biological Catch *Choose one alternative.*		**Preferred by**		
		PDT	**AP**	**CTE**
Alternative 1	No Action (default OFL and ABC for FY 2027 from Framework 40)			
Alternative 2	Updated OFL and ABC for FY 2027 and FY 2028.	✓		
Decisions/Questions/Information to Consider				
Action 1 considers updating OFL and ABC estimates using the most recent survey information and updated reference points from the 2025 scallop research track assessment. The SSC recommended updated OFL and ABC values for FY 2027 and 2028 (default) at its meeting on Oct. 7, 2026. The Atlantic sea scallop stock is below target biomass, but is not overfished, and overfishing is not occurring.				
Other important Considerations				

2. Fishery Specifications for FY 2027, including access area and DAS allocations, LAGC IFQ access area trip allocations, and default measures for FY 2028

Action 2 – Fishery Specifications *Choose one alternative.*		**Preferred by**		
		PDT	**AP**	**CTE**
No Action	No Action (27 DAS, Area II and NLS (South + North closed *Default measures from Framework 40*			
Alternative 2	No Access Area fishing			
Alternative 2 – Select DAS allocation between 32 and 42 DAS				
Option 1 – Lower Bound	32 DAS			
Option 2 – Status Quo	36 DAS	✓		
Option 3 – Upper Bound	42 DAS			
Alternative 3	9,000 lb allocation in the Nantucket Lightship (North + South) Access Area			
Alternative 3 – Select DAS allocation				
Option 1 – Lower Bound	32 DAS			
Option 2 – Status Quo	36 DAS			
Option 3 – Upper Bound	42 DAS			
Alternative 4	12,000 lb allocation in the Nantucket Lightship (North & South) Access Area			
Alternative 4 – Select DAS allocation				
Option 1 – Lower Bound	32 DAS	✓		
Option 2 – Status Quo	36 DAS			
Option 3 – Upper Bound	42 DAS			
Alternative 5	15,000 lb allocation in the Nantucket Lightship (North & South) Access Area			
Alternative 5 – Select DAS allocation				
Option 1 – Lower Bound	32 DAS			

Option 2 – Status Quo	36 DAS			
Option 3 – Upper Bound	42 DAS			

Decisions/Questions/Information to Consider

The options represent a matrix of the three access area trip limits for Nantucket Lightship (North & South) and a no access area allocation option, with the range of 32 – 42 DAS. Final preferred options can be selected within the specified bounds of 0 – 15,000 lb access area allocation and 32 – 42 DAS or No Action or Status Quo. The Nantucket Lightship Extension and Area II would remain closed under all options.

On November 5th, the PDT did not reach consensus around a single preferred option and instead were supportive of two options: 36 DAS and no access area allocation, or 32 DAS and a 12,000 lb trip to the NLS access area (North & South). Area II and the NLS-Extension would remain closed. The PDT recommends no transit through the NLS access area if it were opened for rotational fishing. The PDT's rationale for both perspectives are characterized below under "Other Important Considerations".

Default measures for FY 2028 are 75% of FY 2027 DAS and no access area trip allocation unless otherwise specified. For specifications options that allocate harvest in the NLS access area, the LAGC IFQ access area allocation is 5.5% of the total allocation defined in 800 lb trip units. On October 27th, the Scallop Committee did not consider proposed measures to allow RSA compensation fishing to occur in areas beyond those accessible on a Scallop Day-at-Sea (e.g. Nantucket Lightship (North + South) access area) in FY 2027.

Other Important Considerations

Regarding DAS, trip limit, and access area specifications, the PDT did not reach consensus and generally viewed the decision to allocate the Nantucket Lightship (South & North areas) as a policy tradeoff between maximizing future yield through an additional year of closure and allowing limited access area fishing in FY 2027. The PDT discussion reflected two primary perspectives on access area allocations for the Nantucket Lightship (North & South). Many preferred keeping the area closed for another year, emphasizing that much of the biomass remains relatively small and slower-growing, the discard and handling mortality on these thin-shelled scallops could be substantial if the area is opened prematurely, and allowing additional growth may maximize future yield and allow for continuous access area harvest until the recent recruitment event in Area II becomes exploitable (i.e., the next potential access area, likely no sooner than FY 2029). A PDT member noted a possible concern of the low-energy, fine-sediment bottom substrate and the risk of dredge activity leading to incidental smothering of scallops. Projected fishing mortality under all analyzed scenarios is relatively low and that open-area fishing opportunities appear sufficient without needing to rely on the Nantucket Lightship region. Others supported a limited opening of the area with a small trip limit, a delayed opening or seasonal closure to maximize yield, and the closure of the Nantucket Lightship Extension. The Nantucket Lightship area contains a substantial amount of exploitable biomass, that the allocations under consideration would harvest only a small portion of that biomass, and that delaying harvest carries its own risks given uncertainty about future natural mortality and resource conditions. Proponents of this view suggested that a small spatial opening with smaller trip limits, particularly if paired with continued closure of the Nantucket Lightship Extension and seasonal restrictions, could provide harvest opportunities while being appropriately conservative.

3. Seasonal Closure of Nantucket Lightship Access Area for FY 2027

Seasonal Closure of Nantucket Lightship Access Area		Preferred by		
		PDT	AP	CTE
Alternative 1	No Action – Any harvest allocations to a Nantucket Lightship Access Area may be fished beginning on April 1.			
Alternative 2	Implement a seasonal closure in the Nantucket Lightship Access Area. *Nantucket Lightship Access Area would be closed from April 1 through May 31, and from October 1 through May 31 (7-month closure).*			

PDT recommendation	Implement a delayed opening in FY 2027 of the Nantucket Lightship Access Area on May 15, 2027, and a seasonal closure of the Nantucket Lightship Access Area from October 1 through December 31. The delayed opening would be in place for FY 2027 only, and the seasonal closure would be in place until modified through future management action.	✓		
Decisions/Questions/Information to Consider				
The PDT's recommendation is for two separate closures that accomplish different goals. A delayed opening from April 1 until May 15 for the first year of potential harvest would allow for additional spring growth, while the seasonal closure from October 1 until January 1 would prohibit harvest in the area during the season of poorest yield. Maximizing growth and meat yield would increase the economic value of these scallops while simultaneously decreasing fishing mortality, discarding and incidental mortality, and area swept and associated impacts to protected and non-target species and EFH.				
Other important Considerations				

4. FY 2027 and FY 2028 (default) NGOM TAL and Set-Aside values

Northern Gulf of Maine Management (NGOM) Area and TAL Setting *If Alternative 2 is selected, choose one target F option (Option 1 or Option 2)*		**Preferred by**		
		PDT	**AP**	**CTE**
Alternative 1	No Action *FW40 Default NGOM Set-Aside set at 212,986 pounds.*			
Alternative 2	*Set NGOM TAL, with set-asides to support research, monitoring, and a directed LAGC fishery*			
Alternative 2 – Select Target F rate for NGOM TAL				
Option 1	*Set NGOM TAL at F=0.21 (Status Quo) using all open NGOM areas* TAL= 434,311 pounds, NGOM Set-Aside 384,657 pounds FY 2028 Default: 192,329 pounds	✓		
Option 2	*Set NGOM TAL at F=0.23 using all open NGOM areas* TAL= 469,585 pounds, NGOM Set-Aside 419,931 pounds FY 2028 Default: 209,966 pounds			
Decisions/Questions/Information to Consider				
The PDT recommends a fishing mortality rate no higher than status quo (F=0.21) due to greater uncertainty in survey biomass estimates and declines in the exploitable scallop biomass on Stellwagen Bank. The PDT notes that the majority of biomass in the Stellwagen region appeared to be located off the bank, in an area that was not covered by optical survey effort. There was agreement that, while fishing effort in FY 2027 would likely be more dispersed than in previous years, it would likely still be highest on Stellwagen Bank within the NGOM.				
Other important Considerations				