



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**  
Office of National Marine Sanctuaries  
Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary  
175 Edward Foster Rd Scituate, Massachusetts 02066

September 15, 2022

Tom Nies  
Executive Director  
New England Fishery Management Council  
50 Water Street, Mill 2  
Newburyport, MA 01950

Re: NEMFC 2023 Priorities

Dear Tom:

NOAA's Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary (SBNMS) appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the Council's 2023 Priorities Discussion. Recent research at SBNMS found that peak larval sand lance settlement on Stellwagen Bank occurs in April. This is also a critical time for adult sand lance, as their ability to successfully forage and accumulate lipids coincident with the Gulf of Maine spring bloom directly impacts their survival, reproduction, and availability as forage species. April also coincides with the start of the scallop fishery on Stellwagen Bank. In light of these findings, I ask that you add the following language to your list of management priorities for 2023:

1) Develop seasonal measures for the directed scallop fishery on Stellwagen Bank that mitigate negative impacts for sand lance population (key forage fish).

The reason for this request is increased knowledge of the life cycle of sand lance as detailed in a recent report my staff has been working on entitled "Assessing the biological and oceanographic processes that drive fisheries productivity in New England sand shoals and the potential for dredging-related disruption."<sup>1</sup> This report represents the single most important source of information on sand lance life cycle in the Northeast U.S. and should be used to inform management measures that benefit both the scallop fishery and sand lance populations, which are a key forage fish on Stellwagen Bank. My staff presented key findings of the report at the Scallop Research Share Day hosted by the Scallop PDT on May 6th, 2022.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wiley DN, Silva TL, Thompson MA, Baumann H, Kaufman L, Llopiz JK, Suca JJ, Valentine P. 2021. Assessing the biological and oceanographic processes that drive fisheries productivity in New England sand shoals and the potential for dredging-related disruption. Sterling (VA): U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. 267 p. Contract No.: IA M17PG00019/P00002. Report No.: BOEM 2022-041.

<sup>2</sup>See <https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/may-5-6-2022-scallop-research-share-day-plan-development-team-webinar>



While the focus of this report is on dredging of offshore sand deposits for beach nourishment, much of it can be applied to impacts to sand lance populations from the scallop fishery.

Our report and related publication (Suca et al. 2022)<sup>3</sup> demonstrated spatial connectivity between northern and southern Stellwagen Bank in terms of sand lance larval transport and retention. Currently, northern and southern Stellwagen are managed separately in the scallop fishery. Based on this within Bank ecological connectivity, I suggest that Stellwagen Bank be managed within a single management area to mitigate potential impacts to sand lance settlement and recruitment from the scallop fishery.

I would be happy to have my staff assist with this work if it is prioritized.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this input, please feel free to contact me at 781-635-0163 or at [pete.decola@noaa.gov](mailto:pete.decola@noaa.gov).

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

Captain Peter DeCola  
U.S. Coast Guard (retired)  
Superintendent  
Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary

Enclosure: As stated

cc: Mike Pentony, NOAA Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office  
Jon Hare, NOAA Northeast Fisheries Science Center

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<sup>3</sup> Suca JJ, Ji R, Baumann H, Pham K, Silva TL et al. 2022. Larval transport pathways from three prominent sand lance habitats in the Gulf of Maine. Fisheries Oceanography 31:333-352 <https://doi.org/10.1111/fog.12580>

