



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEETING SUMMARY

Scallop Committee

Webinar

September 15, 2025

The Scallop Committee (Committee) met via webinar on September 15, 2025 at 9:00AM to: 1) Review results of 2025 scallop surveys, and preliminary projections and develop input on the range of potential specification alternatives for FY2026 and FY2027; 2) Discuss social and wellbeing outcomes in catch share programs; 3) Discuss Scallop Work Priorities including the Long-Term Strategic Plan, the LAGC IFQ review, and 2026 work priorities; 4) Discuss other business as necessary.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Melanie Griffin, MA (Chair), Michelle Duval, John Pappalardo, Togue Brawn, Melissa Smith, Travis Ford, Jake Wiscott, Matt Gates, Ted Platz, Eric Hansen

Council Staff: Connor Buckley, Chandler Nelson, Jonathon Peros, Dr. Naresh Pradhan

Scallop Advisory Panel: Jim Gutowski (Advisory Panel Chair), Thomas Coley

Several members of the public were also in attendance.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- Regarding Framework 40 (FW40): The Committee passed several motions directing the PDT to develop SAMS runs and additional analyses for consideration in Fishing Year (FY)2026/2027 specifications. These included:
 - Analyzing whether sub-area closures within ET, NYB, HCS, and LI could protect small scallops while allowing harvest of larger animals.
 - Analyzing a single 12,000 lb trip to Area I, or reverting the area to open bottom.
 - Exploring separate DAS allocations for Georges Bank and the Mid-Atlantic, using the 71°W line as a boundary.
 - Analyzing the TAL for the NGOM at F=0.22 and F.25 using only Stellwagen and at F=0.18 using all areas in NGOM excluding Stellwagen.
- On the Scallop Strategic Plan, the Committee provided feedback on evaluation criteria, the frequency of progress reviews, and the prioritization of strategies.
- The Committee received a presentation on Social and Wellbeing Outcomes in Catch Share Programs.
- The Committee passed a motion recommending that the Council send a letter to NOAA headquarters urging the immediate publication of the 2026 RSA NOFO.

AGENDA ITEM #1: WELCOME AND UPDATES

The meeting opened with a moment of memoriam for the late Kirk Larson, a longtime and valued member of the Scallop Advisory Panel (AP). Council staff then provided several updates. On the Scallop RSA program, staff explained that there has been no publication of the 2026 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). Without it, there will be no 2026 Scallop RSA grant competition or awards beyond those already issued.

Staff also provided a follow-up on compliance concerns raised in the Northern Gulf of Maine (NGOM) fishery at the June 2025 Council meeting. The PDT had worked with NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) to develop a data request to better understand the scope of the issues, but database and staffing limitations prevented NOAA OLE from fulfilling the request. While the data request could not be completed, NOAA OLE acknowledged the Council's concerns and agreed to work toward developing a data structure that would allow for more useful fine-scale compliance monitoring in the scallop fishery in the future.

Discussion: On the 2026 NOFO issue, there was a question about what could be done at the state level to assist in the progress of this issue. While Council staff could not advise on this issue, it was agreed that there could be value in getting the involvement of local representatives. Questions also arose surrounding the issue of un-awarded Research Set-Aside (RSA) pounds if the NOFO is not published. Council staff responded that multi-year awards rely on RSA set-aside from upcoming years and do not entirely use RSA set-aside from the current fishing year. They added that, if there were not a 2026 grant cycle, there could be an alternative in the Framework to reduce RSA set-aside to a minimum amount required to fund the current multi-year awards. Committee members followed up by asking what the deadline would be for this kind of Framework adjustment. They were informed that this could possibly be a last minute adjustment.

Regarding compliance concerns in the NGOM, Committee members questioned what the next steps would be in addressing the issue. Council staff informed that the next steps could involve the Council's Enforcement Committee. Staff added that the primary challenge in NOAA OLE completing the data request was a lack of resources and the Committee agreed that this is an issue to stay aware of as they progress forward in addressing the NGOM concerns. One Committee member asked whether NOAA OLE was the only entity who would be able to do the data management necessary to provide a report. Council staff was unsure but noted it was likely that Council staff could provide a report if given access to the data.

AGENDA ITEM #2: FRAMEWORK 40

2025 Scallop Survey Results

The Committee received a presentation from staff on the 2025 survey results and discussed spatial management for fishing year 2026. The presentation centered on the state of the scallop resource based on 2025 survey results, which indicated a continued decline in overall biomass. Georges Bank saw an increase in the Nantucket Lightship South (NLS-S) but declined in Area I (CAI, CAI-N) and Area II (CAII-S, CAII-Ext). In the Mid-Atlantic, biomass increased overall, driven by growth in the Elephant Trunk (ET) & Hudson Canyon South (HCS-S), and recruitment in New York Bight (NYB) and Long Island (LI). Due to limited survey coverage in some areas, paired with sporadic hot spots with high densities of recruits, there is substantial uncertainty in the biomass estimates for areas of Georges Bank. Surveys and L-F plots suggest there will likely be few opportunities for rotational access in FY2026 on Georges Bank, although recruitment was observed in the NLS-S, Southern Flank (SF), CAII-Ext, CAII-

North (HAPC), and Northern Flank (NF). In the Mid-Atlantic, surveys observed higher survival in the southern areas, continued growth in the ET and HCS, and recruitment in the NYB region

Discussion: A Committee member asked whether biomass calculations were done using the Research Track Assessment (RTA) shell-height/meat-weight (SH/MW) equations and whether it made a significant difference. Council staff replied that the PDT had to revise the RTA equation, so the estimates provided are from the final PDT approved SH/MW equation. As far as the difference in results, Council staff responded that this model still suggests a reduced weight-at-size on Georges Bank relative to the SARC 65 equation. However, this was consistent across each iteration of the SH/MW equation for Georges Bank.

One Committee member asked if nearly half of all scallops were concentrated in NLS-S, and Council staff confirmed this was the case. The Committee supported keeping the area closed, and another Committee member asked where additional recruitment was observed. Staff responded that Georges Bank had small hotspots on the SF and NF, while the Mid-Atlantic showed recruitment in the NYB and off LI. One suggestion for protecting these high-density areas without closures was to use a VMS geo-fence notification to alert vessels to the presence of small animals, with early messaging to the fleet also recommended. This idea received support, with an additional suggestion for a small closure if necessary. When asked about the Council's role in implementing geo-fencing, staff clarified that such measures are handled by GARFO, though language for a notification could be developed with Council input.

Discussion then turned to Area I. Committee members observed that 2025 survey biomass looked low overall, but there were still moderate densities of exploitable scallops. Staff emphasized that while densities of exploitable scallops were present, yield was poor, and natural mortality was likely high due to sea star predation. Council staff added that Area I has historically had poor yield and high densities of sea stars. Some Committee members echoed concerns about sea star predation and urged harvesting before the scallops were lost to natural mortality. Some Committee members asked whether delaying the transition of Area I to open bottom by one year could help protect recruitment, though staff cautioned that high natural mortality in the area might reduce harvest if access were postponed. A Committee member echoed this concern and supported harvesting in this area. Council staff then confirmed that if Area I were opened under Framework 40, the timing would follow the carryover period, reopening May 15 after the delayed opening and then reverting to open bottom after 60 days. In response to questions about recent harvest, staff estimated that around 900,000 pounds remained available in Area I. Regarding Area II, staff reported that the Northern Edge saw a decline in larger scallops, and surveys observed higher densities of incoming recruits, averaging around 64 mm shell-size. In CAII-Extension, one to two year classes were present at around 80–90 mm, but declines in larger animals were also apparent.

Finally, Committee members asked whether the Committee needed to draft a motion on adding an alternative considering modifications to the Scallop ABC control rule to allow the SSC to deviate from it when recommending Scallop OFLs and ABCs. Staff responded that the issue could and should wait until the October 22 Committee meeting.

Public Comment:

- **John Quinn (Fisheries Survival Fund)** raised concerns about the major biomass declines tied to the SH/MW equation change. Staff explained that declines were due both to the revised equation and to survey results, with area-specific differences. Dr. Quinn asked whether last year's equation could be applied to this year's data to show the difference, but staff cautioned this would not meet the best available science standard and would delay the process.
- **Drew Minkiewicz (Sustainable Scalloping Fund)** noted the challenges created by the lack of a base run for comparison and emphasized the importance of transparency in how the SH/MW

equation change affects biomass estimates. He stressed that the Magnuson Act standard is to use the “best available science,” which does not always mean the most recently developed approach. Mr. Minkiewicz also commented that the 2025 survey results do not clearly identify strong access area opportunities and suggested that, under these uncertain conditions, management may benefit from greater reliance on DAS allocations. He added that keeping areas such as the Sliver open as bottom could provide more flexibility for the fleet.

- **Tom Coley (Scallop PDT)** Supported opening Area I as open bottom and asked about the <35 mm recruitment event on the Northern Flank. Council staff replied that overall numbers had declined there, and the PDT had not flagged it as an exceptional event, though hotspots existed and could be reviewed if the Committee wished.

AP Chair Report

Scallop Advisory Panel Chair Jim Gutowski provided a brief summary of the previous day’s AP meeting. There was one question from a Committee member on the decision to use 72° 30’ as the dividing line between Georges Bank and the Mid-Atlantic. It was agreed that 71° may be a more appropriate delineation.

Initial SAMS Runs

1. MOTION: HANSEN/BRAWN

Task the PDT to analyze ET, HCS, NYB, LI and refine an area to protect recent scallop settlement.

Rationale: The current areas were designed to protect a different cohort and the survivability of the larger scallops currently protected is uncertain.

Discussion: A Committee member asked if the intent was to capture recruitment hotspots within these areas while still maintaining access to mature scallops. The maker of the motion confirmed that was the objective. Another Committee member asked if there were additional areas that should be included in the analysis, but the Committee agreed to defer any expansion of the list to a later motion.

Public Comment: None

MOTION #1 PASSED BY UNANIMOUS CONSENT

2. MOTION: PLATZ/PAPPALARDO

Task the PDT to analyze the NF and SF to better ascertain size distribution and biomass density distinctions between the two areas to refine an area to protect scallop settlement.

Rationale: The NF has a higher density of pre-recruited animals relative to the SF, which 2025 surveys suggest hold a greater proportion of fully-recruited scallops.

Discussion: None

Public Comment:

- **Ron Smolowitz** voiced support but cautioned that unprecedented mortality levels in 2025 mean the analyses should incorporate a risk factor to account for rapid change on the water.

MOTION #2 PASSED BY UNANIMOUS CONSENT

3. MOTION: HANSEN/GATES

Task the PDT to perform a SAMS run including one, 12,000 lb. trip to Scallop Access Area 1 for the LA fleet, and the corresponding historical percentages to the LAGC and part-time fleet.

Rationale: There is enough biomass currently in this area to support harvest and delaying would jeopardize survival due to the heightened presence of starfish and other predators.

Discussion: During discussion, one Committee member noted that Area I is already open under a 12,000-lb trip and asked about the success rate so far. Council staff responded that while they had not heard reports of incomplete trips, yields have not been excellent, with many trips landing 20s or 30s rather than full loads. Concern was expressed that recent trip limits had not consistently been met in the past two years and cautioned that harvesting in Area I could lead to incidental mortality of younger scallops. It was suggested that a lower trip limit, such as 8,000 or 10,000 lbs, may be more appropriate. The Committee was reminded that, at the current stage in the framework specifications process, these motions are for analysis and can be adjusted later on.

Public Comment:

- **Drew Minkiewicz** supported the motion. He explained that even though there is hesitation around access areas, a broad range of analyses is necessary to give decision-makers the best possible information.
- **John Quinn** supported the motion and stressed that Area I faces unprecedented predation pressures. Mr. Quinn stated that regardless of the approach, scallops in Area I should be harvested before they are lost to natural mortality.

MOTION #3 PASSED BY UNANIMOUS CONSENT

4. MOTION: HANSEN/PAPPALARDO

Task the PDT to perform SAMS runs including 18, 24, 30, and 36 DAS with NLSS, NLSN, and Access Area 2 closed. (all other areas open, no AA trips)

Additional runs with same above data: (individually and combined)

Newly defined closure to protect small scallops in the Mid Atlantic (closed)

Rationale: With no Access Area trips allocated and an uncertain concentration of scallops in CA1, a larger target for DAS is justified.

Discussion: A Committee member expressed support but questioned whether the newly defined Mid-Atlantic closure referenced in an earlier motion should also be included here. Others responded that this could be considered at a later stage, and staff clarified that both the small scallop closure in the Mid-Atlantic and provisions for Area I were already captured by earlier motions. Clarification was requested on the meaning of the “no access area trips” provision. It was explained that this would serve as the base run, closed to access area trips, while DAS ranges within the motion would still be considered. Another Committee member asked whether DAS numbers could be adjusted later without being locked to specific values, and it was confirmed that the motion defined only upper and lower bounds, leaving flexibility for refinement. Some Committee members voiced concerns over the upper bounds of the analysis, expressing that they could not support analysis with such high DAS limits.

Public Comment:

- **Ron Smolowitz** supported the motion, stating that leaving all but Area II and Nantucket Lightship South open as bottom and dividing Georges Bank and the Mid-Atlantic at 71°30' might be the most practical approach under current uncertainties. He added that, in this context, 36–38 DAS should not be viewed as excessive.
- **John Quinn** also supported the motion, noting that under the current system, vessels with 24 DAS and two access area trips effectively fish 46–48 days. He argued that even 36 DAS in a no-access-area scenario would represent a significant reduction in effort.

MOTION #4 PASSED 5-3 WITH ONE ABSTENTION

5. MOTION: HANSEN/PAPPALARDO

Task the PDT to calculate DAS separately for GB and Mid Atlantic using the current turtle chain demarcation of 71 Degrees West longitude. The open bottom fishing mortality rates in each region would be analyzed at the regional F_{ABC} from the 2025 Research Track Assessment.

Rationale: Georges Bank has been the focus of harvest for the last few years and would benefit from a break. The waters in the Mid-Atlantic have recently been cooler and surveys have shown an increase in abundance.

Discussion: Clarification was requested on whether the proposed Georges Bank to Mid-Atlantic ratio could be adjusted, and it was explained that the ratio originated with the AP and could be modified as needed. A Committee member asked for a specific run that would tie Georges Bank effort to an F rate of 0.36, noting concern that Georges Bank could otherwise be overfished if managed as a stand-alone region. Another Committee member supported this addition, pointing out that the SSC had cautioned Georges Bank would be considered overfished if treated separately from the Mid-Atlantic. Staff confirmed that such a run could be prepared for SSC review.

Public Comment:

- **Brady Lybarger (Scallop fishermen, Cape May, NJ)** Agreed with the concept of splitting Georges Bank and the Mid-Atlantic but cautioned that determining the right proportion of DAS between east and west requires additional analysis.

MOTION #5 PASSED BY UNANIMOUS CONSENT

6. MOTION: SMITH/PAPPALARDO

	NGOM 1	NGOM 2
F rate for NGOM TAL	F=0.20, F=0.25	F=0.18
Areas to be used	Stellwagen only	All NGOM excluding Stellwagen

Rationale: Scallops on Stellwagen are approaching 8 years old and need to be harvested. Having separate runs would set NGOM up for specific area management, but also still allow flexibility to retain a single TAL approach. After reviewing the 2025 season, it appears that realized F on Stellwagen exceeded the maximum F=0.25, so this tasking is to identify how to correct previous decisions to ensure a balanced approach to harvesting.

Discussion: A Committee member suggested that the Stellwagen closed area boundary, previously vetted by OLE and used in FW36/A21, could be a useful line for splitting Northern Gulf of Maine TALs. Others recommended that, given the decline in biomass and abundance, the PDT or SSC conduct a post-mortem comparing expected and realized F rates after the season. Several Committee members expressed support for this idea.

Public Comment: None

MOTION #6 PASSED BY UNANIMOUS CONSENT

AGENDA ITEM #4: SOCIAL AND WELLBEING OUTCOMES IN CATCH SHARE PROGRAMS

The Committee received a presentation from Dr. Kanae Tokunaga from Gulf of Maine Research Institute and Melissa Errend of Northern Economics on their case study of the scallop LAGC IFQ program, modeling the impact of different management interventions on social and wellbeing outcomes. The presenters explained that their work sought to evaluate how different program design elements and management interventions in catch share programs affect social and wellbeing outcomes, beyond simply measuring economic efficiency. They noted that while catch share systems are designed to promote efficiency, they also influence the distribution of both social and economic outcomes across communities, sometimes with unintended adverse effects. Their study used a three-phase approach, beginning with a review of U.S. catch share programs to identify common interventions, followed by interviews and an industry survey, and culminating in the development of a Bayesian decision model. This model was used to simulate how interventions, such as accumulation limits, quota banks, leasing prohibitions, and community ownership of quota, can affect wellbeing outcomes in the LAGC IFQ fishery.

Discussion: A Committee member noted that the survey received 32 responses and asked about the total potential data pool. The presenters replied that outreach was conducted to all permit holders, roughly 100 in total, and that they were satisfied with the 32 percent response rate. Another Committee member asked about the spatial spread of respondents, and the presenters reported that most responses came from Massachusetts but that the geographic distribution was reasonably broad. They added that repeating the survey over time could reveal how spatial patterns and perceptions evolve.

Clarification was requested on next steps. The presenters explained that they intend to continue refining the model, exploring additional scenarios, and ensuring that the outputs are applicable to Council processes. A Committee member asked whether they had studied other quota-managed fisheries where quota price was low or the stock underperformed. The presenters noted that while their current work was focused on the IFQ scallop fishery, their model allows for “what if” scenarios that can explore different economic contexts. They also explained that the model was based on data from 2020–2024, a period marked by particularly dynamic conditions, and acknowledged that additional “middle of the road” years would strengthen results. Another Committee member emphasized the importance of considering a broad range of economic case studies before relying heavily on speculative “what if” scenarios.

Finally, a Committee member observed that as the model and paper are finalized, some of the findings could inform the scallop strategic plan, particularly under Objective 6, which focuses on economic viability.

Public Comment: None

AGENDA ITEM #4: 2025 SCALLOP WORK PRIORITIES

Long-Term Strategic Plan

Council staff presented the Committee with an update on the progress of the Long-Term Strategic Plan, including the roadmap document that has been under development since June. Staff explained that the PDT had made minor revisions and added data since the last meeting, and the full plan is scheduled for final presentation at the December Council meeting. For this session, the Committee was asked to build on input provided by the Advisory Panel on the prioritization of strategies and to identify which items should be considered most urgent to address. Staff noted that this work would inform recommendations for 2026 priorities for scallop-related work at the October and November Committee meetings.

Discussion: The Committee agreed on the importance of establishing clear evaluation criteria that link back to each objective and recommended that the Strategic Plan also provide details on ongoing work related to each strategy. It was also suggested that progress should be reviewed annually even if some strategies involve multi-year work.

One Committee member identified certain strategies under Objective 1 as the most critical and noted that the earlier suggestion for post-mortem analyses, which would evaluate expected versus realized fishing mortality at the end of a season, ties directly into the in-season management objective. Another Committee member agreed with the Advisory Panel’s prioritization of strategies within Objective 1 but added that certain strategies are interdependent and should be advanced together.

The Committee also discussed how the Scallop Strategic Plan Roadmap document aligns with the ongoing management flexibility amendment. Clarification was requested on the overlap, and staff explained that the omnibus amendment is intended to give the Regional Office the authority to make in-season adjustments outside of the Council process. However, triggers for those adjustments would still need to be written into the scallop FMP to ensure they are applied consistently

Public Comment: None

2026 Work Priorities

The Committee received a presentation from Council staff on current Scallop work priorities, including progress on E.O. 14276: Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness. Staff presented the current draft

list of recommendations and added that the Council is committing to developing work plan for final recommendations due to NOAA on September 30.

Discussion: None

Public Comment: None

AGENDA ITEM #5: OTHER BUSINESS

Scallop Research Set-Aside Notice of Funding Opportunity

The Committee concluded its business by discussing the ongoing delay in the publication of the 2026 Scallop Research Set-Aside (RSA) Notice of Funding Opportunity. Committee members expressed concern that without a NOFO, no projects could be funded for the 2026 fishing year.

6. MOTION: HANSEN/SMITH

Recommend that the Council send a letter to NOAA Headquarters urging the immediate publication of the 2026 Scallop Research Set-Aside (RSA) Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

Rationale: Without the 2026 NOFO, the RSA grant cycle would not move forward, negatively affecting scallop research and resource surveys that are critical to the management of the fishery

Discussion: None

Public Comment: None

MOTION #6 PASSED BY UNANIMOUS CONSENT WITH ONE ABSTENTION

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at 2:23PM