



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 1, 2025
TO: Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)
FROM: Cate O'Keefe, Executive Director
SUBJECT: **Terms of Reference – Overfishing limits (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) for Atlantic sea scallops for fishing years (FY) 2026 and 2027 (default)**

TERMS OF REFERENCE

- A. Consider information provided by the Scallop PDT on survey data and methods to develop fishing mortality reference points and targets based on the 2025 research track assessments and recommendations of the SSC made in August 2025. Provide the Council with a recommendation as to whether these methods are appropriate.
- B. Review assumptions used in the Scallop Area Management Simulation (SAMS) model to project biomass, including natural mortality assumptions. Provide the Council with a recommendation as to whether these methods are appropriate.
- C. Recommend OFLs and ABCs for Atlantic sea scallops for FY 2026 and 2027 (default) that will prevent overfishing, are consistent with the Council's scallop ABC control rule, and consider the Council's Risk Policy Statement.

BACKGROUND

Overfishing Limit

The OFL is specified as the level of catch and associated fishing mortality rate (F) that, above which, overfishing is occurring. The 2025 research track stock assessment (NEFSC 2025) set the OFL where $F = 0.49$.

Acceptable Biological Catch

The Council's ABC control rule for Atlantic sea scallops sets ABC at a level that has a 75% probability of remaining below the fishing mortality rate (F) associated with OFL (*i.e.*, a 25% probability of exceeding OFL).

2025 scallop assessment

The research track assessment for Atlantic sea scallops was peer reviewed in April 2025. The assessment updated biological reference points for the scallop resource, and the F rate associated with OFL decreased from $F=0.61$ to $F=0.49$. The ABC control rule F rate with a 25% chance of exceeding OFL was estimated at $F=0.36$. Assessment results indicated that, as of 2023, Atlantic sea scallops were not overfished and overfishing was not occurring.

Specification setting

The SSC last recommended specifications for Atlantic sea scallops on October 9, 2024 for FY 2025 and 2026 (default; Document 3a).

As noted to the SSC on August 19, 2025 (Document 3c), the assessment indicated that overfishing was occurring on the Georges Bank scallop resource despite overfishing not occurring across the full range of the scallop stock (Table 1). Updated fishing mortality reference points through terminal data year 2023 suggest that continued combination of Mid-Atlantic ($F_{MSY} = 1.56$) and Georges Bank ($F_{MSY} = 0.36$) F_{MSY} reference points (Combined=0.49) could exacerbate resource decline, especially on Georges Bank where fishing effort has been concentrated in recent years. The Council sought input from the SSC for developing specification measures that limit excessive fishing effort in FY 2026, given strong evidence that the combined reference point introduces additional risk of overfishing, and there are currently no management measures available to apply regional reference points.

Table 1. Select biological reference points for Atlantic Sea Scallop derived from the Scallop Area Management Simulator (SAMS) model developed for the 2025 Atlantic Sea Scallop Research Track Assessment (excerpted from Miller et al., 2025 – Summary Report of the Atlantic Scallop Research Track Stock Assessment Peer Review)

Region	MSY (mt of meats)	F_{MSY}	B_{MSY} (mt of meats)	$B_{threshold}$ (mt of meats)	B_{2023} (mt of meats)	F_{2023}
Mid-Atlantic	7,941	1.56	15,909		20,556	0.06
Georges Bank	22,706	0.36	83,414		49,400	0.47
Combined	28,402	0.49	93,282	41,707	69,956	0.33

The SSC found that caution is warranted, and that developing several different options for setting FY 2026 and FY 2027 ABCs (and the associated yield lost) for the SSCs consideration in October 2025 would be highly valuable (Document 3d). The SSC requested that ABCs calculated using Methods 1 and 2 be produced, and Method 3 assuming a p^* of 20%. In doing so, the SSC will be able to evaluate the catch advice under these scenarios as it relates to the impact of using a combined reference point for setting catch advice. If time is a limiting factor, the SSC recommended prioritizing Methods 1 and 2.

1. Use the combined reference points as produced in the research track assessment to produce ABCs. This is considered the default method currently with the assessment passing peer-review. Caution regarding high levels of fishing mortality could be addressed through the specification process (e.g., setting days-at-sea).
2. Use the Georges Bank F_{MSY} and F_{ABC} in producing the stock-wide ABCs. This method would ensure that harvest remains below the Georges Bank region-specific levels.

3. Use combined F_{MSY} from the stock-wide approach, but modify p^* to calculate an F_{ABC} . Currently, ABC is determined as the catch associated with a fishing mortality rate that has a 25% chance of exceeding the overfishing limit. A lower p^* value and thus chance of exceeding overfishing is another method to reduce the probability of overfishing Georges Bank compared to that produced by Option 1.

The Council expects to take final action at its December 2025 meeting. Specifications are expected to be implemented on April 1, 2026.

Risk Policy

The Council approved updates to its Risk Policy Statement with a new Risk Policy Concept in September 2024. The Risk Policy aims to systematically account for factors that influence risk tolerance in Council decision making. Implementation of the updated Risk Policy began in January 2025 and is proceeding in stages. During the initial phase of implementation, the template for the Risk Policy Matrix (Document 1d) has been revised to align with the factors in the Risk Policy Concept. The SSC can use the revised matrices in a similar manner to previous Risk Policy information.

INFORMATION

1. Scallop Plan Development Team
 - a. Presentation by Council staff
 - b. Presentation by Dr. Dvora Hart, NEFSC
 - c. Scallop PDT memo to SSC re FY 2026-2027 OFLs and ABCs for Atlantic sea scallops, October 1, 2025
 - d. Risk Policy Matrix for scallops
2. Scallop Fishery Information
 - a. [Affected Environment for Scallop Framework Adjustment 39](#), including background information on the social and economic status of the fishery (see p. 82-1119)
 - b. [Fishery Performance Report](#) – Scallop landings, grades, and LPUE (GARFO)
3. Previous SSC recommendations regarding scallops
 - a. Meeting materials, [October 9, 2024](#)
 - b. SSC report (OFLs and ABCs), [October 29, 2024](#)
 - c. Meeting materials, [August 19, 2025](#),
 - d. SSC report (reference points), [August 31, 2025](#)
4. Hart, D.R. 2013. [Quantifying the tradeoff between precaution and yield in fishery reference points](#). *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, 70: 591-603.
5. Correspondence (if any)

Background Documents

1. The Council's [Risk Policy Statement and Concept](#), implemented January, 2025
2. NOAA/NEFSC [2025 State of the Ecosystem Reports for the Northeast U.S. Shelf](#)