



New England Fishery Management Council

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MEETING SUMMARY

Scallop Advisory Panel

Hybrid; Providence, RI

June 2, 2026

The Scallop Advisory Panel (AP) met in Providence, RI and via webinar on June 2, 2026 at 9:00 AM to 1) Develop recommendations for Scallop Research Set-Aside priorities for 2027/2028 and 2028/2029; 2) Receive an update on the timeline of Framework 42 and provide input on the development of expected measures; 3) Develop recommendations for sequencing Scallop Strategic Plan work items for 2027-2029; 4) Discuss other business, as necessary.

MEETING ATTENDANCE:

James Gutowski (Chair), Cassie Canastra Larsen (Vice-Chair), Kirby Aarsheim, Brady Lybarger, Wes Brighton, Michael Marchetti, Jay Elsner, Ben Martens, Brent Fulcher, Chris Merl, Kyle Grant, Ed Mullis, Peter Hughes, Alex Todd, Walter White; Council Staff: Connor Buckley, Chandler Nelson, Dr. Naresh Pradhan, Jennifer Couture; Committee: Melanie Griffin, Melissa Smith, Michelle Duval, Togue Brawn

Approximately 20 members of the public were also in attendance.

KEY OUTCOMES:

- **On NGOM sub-management areas**, the AP passed a motion recommending that the NGOM remain a single management area and supported setting an annual fishing mortality rate of $F=0.25$. The AP also passed a motion recommending additional analysis of an in-shell possession limit in the NGOM.
- **On regional Days-at-Sea (DAS) allocations**, the AP saw mixed opinions on regional DAS allocations. Motions both supporting and opposing further development of this management measure failed. The AP opposed differential DAS counting and supported maintaining the current 10-day DAS carryover provision.
- **On Strategic Plan Implementation**, the AP made a consensus statement identifying in-season adjustment triggers, improved real-time data collection, managing fishing in high-density areas, and developing a technical definition of high grading as near-term priorities. The AP also supported continued work on fishing practices and electronic monitoring.
- **On RSA Priorities**, the AP made a consensus statement recommending no changes to the RSA priorities for 2027-2028.

AGENDA ITEM #1: WELCOME AND UPDATES:

Council staff opened the meeting with brief updates. Staff reported on the International Pectinid Workshop, which was held in New Bedford and brought together scallop experts from around the world to share information on scallop biology, ecology, and management. Staff also highlighted the successful Scallop Research Share Day held on May 12, 2026, which featured ten presentations and drew approximately 60 participants both in person and online. Presentations covered a range of topics, including scallop biology, gear research, surveys, industry-collected data, and co-management efforts. Staff also summarized discussions from the recently reconstituted Enforcement Committee, noting that a portion of the meeting focused on enforcement trends and challenges in the Northern Gulf of Maine (NGOM) scallop fishery.

Discussion: An AP member asked whether the Enforcement Committee discussed the effectiveness of the increased vessel monitoring system (VMS) ping rate requirement and whether it had improved enforcement. Council staff explained that the issue was discussed but was not a major focus of the meeting, which concentrated primarily on NGOM enforcement issues. They were informed that enforcement agencies continue to use VMS data primarily as a secondary source of evidence and that staff have not received clear feedback indicating whether the increased ping rate has improved enforcement outcomes.

Public Comment: None

AGENDA ITEM #2: FY2026 FISHERY PERFORMANCE

Council staff reviewed preliminary fishery performance information for FY2026 and provided a brief update on the conclusion of FY2025. Staff reported that FY2025 ended with approximately 18 million pounds landed and that an unexpected storm event moved scallops from the Western Gulf of Maine closure into adjacent open fishing areas, resulting in approximately one million additional pounds of landings. Staff reported that catch rates and Landings Per Unit Effort (LPUE) have remained strong into FY2026, particularly in portions of the Mid-Atlantic. While catch rates have been higher than expected, staff indicated that exceeding the fishery Annual Catch Limit (ACL) currently appears unlikely as fishing effort expands into additional areas of the resource.

Staff also summarized preliminary survey observations. Survey groups reported continued growth and high densities in Nantucket Lightship South, strong biomass and yields in portions of the Mid-Atlantic, declining biomass on Stellwagen Bank, and healthy biomass on Jeffreys Ledge. Survey observations also identified seed scallops in portions of Area II and low levels of shell blister and nematodes in the Mid-Atlantic. Survey groups observed relatively few cut shells despite substantial fishing activity in portions of the Mid-Atlantic fishery.

For the NGOM, the fishery opened on April 1 and closed on April 13 after the projected harvest of the 437,867-pound set-aside. A record 207 vessels participated in the fishery, completing 2,325 trips. Approximately 35% of landings were made by LAGC IFQ vessels and that more than one-third of landings were delivered to ports other than Gloucester, Massachusetts. It was explained that a quota overage of less than 3% would trigger a pound-for-pound accountability measure in 2027 and that catch rates on Stellwagen Bank slowed during the season as vessels expanded effort onto Jeffreys Ledge.

Discussion: One AP member expressed concern that discussions of 2025 performance focused on final landings without acknowledging that a substantial portion of those landings resulted from the unexpected storm event. They also questioned whether scallops located in difficult-to-survey portions of the Gulf of Maine could contribute additional biomass in future years. Carl Huntsberger (Maine DMR) responded by saying that some areas remain challenging to survey due to bottom conditions and issues with high-density gear and are not currently incorporated into biomass estimates.

Several AP members discussed recent fishing conditions in the NGOM fishery. One AP member expressed concern about how quickly fishing conditions on Stellwagen Bank appeared to decline and suggested that increased participation may have contributed to fishing pressure in the area. Other AP members observed that fishing activity expanded into other portions of the NGOM management area as the season progressed and discussed observations of sea stars and changing catch rates throughout the fishery. They also discussed the importance of continuing to evaluate management approaches for the NGOM fishery as participation and fishing patterns evolve.

Enforcement and safety concerns in the NGOM fishery were also addressed. Several AP members observed limited at-sea enforcement presence during the season while also observing that dockside enforcement appeared more prevalent. The AP also discussed the NGOM two-trip-per-day provision. Several AP members opposed eliminating the provision, expressing concern that doing so could advantage larger vessels and place smaller vessels at a competitive disadvantage.

On recent Days-at-Sea (DAS) utilization and fishing behavior in the limited access fishery, AP members suggested that weather conditions, carryover DAS, crew limitations, and the transition away from access-area fishing opportunities may all be influencing effort patterns. Several AP members suggested that fishing effort is now spread across longer open-bottom trips than in previous years, affecting how DAS are utilized throughout the fleet.

Public Comment:

- **Ron Smolowitz (Fisheries Survival Fund):** Asked what accountability measures would be triggered if the scallop fishery exceeded its ACL. He noted that historical projections have occasionally underestimated available scallops and suggested that scallops located in difficult-to-survey areas may create challenges for quota-based management.
- **Togue Brawn (Downeast Dayboat):** Expressed concern about the limited at-sea enforcement presence in the NGOM fishery and asked whether AP members had similar experiences. She also asked about suggestions to eliminate the two-trip-per-day provision as a possible response to enforcement concerns.
- **John Quinn (Fisheries Survival Fund):** Asked about recent DAS utilization and whether the fishery may be front-loading landings during fishing year 2026. Council staff responded that about 25% of DAS have been used so far this year which is higher than at this point in some previous years.

AGENDA ITEM #3: 2026 SCALLOP WORK PRIORITIES

Council staff provided an overview of 2026 Scallop work priorities. Staff included that the recent Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) was released later than anticipated, delaying research award decisions. The AP was asked to provide input on several work priority topics, including Council-contracted work to develop a new scallop stock projection method, as well as Northern Gulf of Maine sub-management areas and region-specific DAS allocations

Developing new stock projection methods

Council staff reviewed a recently awarded contract to SMAST to develop new stock projection methods for use in setting annual scallop fishery specifications. Staff explained that the project will include a review of the existing SAMS model and relevant literature, development and testing of alternative projection approaches, and creation of a new LPUE model to improve DAS calculations. Staff indicated that the goal is to have a viable new stock projection model available for use in setting fishing year 2028 specifications, while continuing to compare the performance of new approaches against existing SAMS model outputs, survey information, and fishery data.

Discussion: One AP member asked when the AP would have an opportunity to review the LPUE modeling work. Council staff responded that the work would likely be presented once a more complete product is available. They remarked that it would not be used for setting specifications before fishing year 2028. Another AP member asked how the project would interact with the SAMS model. There is no intention to immediately replace the current SAMS model and that both approaches would likely be evaluated side-by-side during a transition period.

Several AP members discussed opportunities to improve survey methodologies and data collection. One AP member suggested that the project could be an opportunity to evaluate innovative survey approaches and improve survey coverage. Other AP members discussed the possible uses of Artificial Intelligence in HabCam data analysis, however this topic falls outside of the scope of this SMAST contract.

Public Comment:

- **Ron Smolowitz:** Commented that HabCam systems deployed from survey vessels are capable of collecting high-quality imagery at relatively high towing speeds and added that AUVs continue to provide new survey capabilities. He emphasized that advances in AI could substantially improve the speed and efficiency of image and video analysis and suggested that these tools have applications beyond stock assessment.
- **Bill DuPaul (College of William & Mary):** Expressed concern that scallop surveys are conducted during periods of heavy fishing activity, making it difficult to accurately project future biomass and fishery performance. He suggested that fishing activity occurring during survey periods may affect the reliability of stock projections. Other AP members agreed with this observation.
- **John Quinn:** Asked whether there were any jurisdictional issues between the Council and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center regarding the development and use of new projection models and whether there was agreement on pursuing this approach for fishing year 2028. Council staff responded that NEFSC staff would continue to participate directly in the process. It was added that one objective of the effort is to provide additional analytical capacity during periods of reduced federal support.

Scallop Framework 42

Council staff announced that the Council will be initiating Scallop Framework 42 at the June meeting in Mystic, CT. This framework will address FY2027 and 2028 (default) catch specifications and consider regional allocation of Limited Access Days-at-Sea and sub-management areas in the NGOM.

Northern Gulf of Maine Sub-management areas

Council staff reviewed ongoing work to develop NGOM sub-management areas as part of Framework 42. The concept was initially developed during Framework 40 discussions as a potential tool to reduce fishing pressure on Stellwagen Bank and encourage effort on other banks and ledges that contain substantial scallop biomass but generally support lower catch rates. The current NGOM Total Allowable Landings (TAL) is based on total exploitable biomass across the management area and a single fishing mortality target, while realized fishing mortality on Stellwagen may be considerably higher than elsewhere in the NGOM. Potential benefits of sub-management areas discussed by the Plan Development Team (PDT) included reducing vessel crowding on Stellwagen, distributing fishing effort more broadly, and extending the duration of the fishing season. Staff clarified that the PDT had generally favored a system with no more than two sub-management areas and sequential access between areas. Staff added that monitoring and enforcement would be challenging but that NOAA indicated the concept could be supported operationally.

Discussion: An AP member questioned why sequential access would be necessary. Council staff explained that enforcement considerations and the desire to distribute effort spatially were major reasons for the PDT's recommendation, but that concurrent access to sub-areas could be supported. However, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) has confirmed that, although simultaneous access would still be an enforcement challenge, it is more possible now than it was when the conversation on multiple management areas began last year. The same AP member recommended evaluating how recent fishing seasons would have unfolded under various sub-management area scenarios to better understand potential fleet responses.

Several AP members raised concerns about the proposed structure. One AP member questioned the need for a transit corridor and suggested that opening both areas simultaneously would provide additional flexibility and naturally distribute fishing effort. Council staff clarified that the proposed transit corridor would only be in effect when an area was closed and would not reduce available fishing grounds. Another AP member questioned how managers would respond if survey estimates proved inaccurate and a sub-area did not reach its allocation as expected. They also suggested that the transit corridor may not be necessary as northern ports become more viable for more vessels. Also voiced were equity concerns, with arguments that further subdividing the NGOM would disproportionately affect the Limited Access vessels and would further create an exclusive fishing zone in federal waters.

Several on the AP questioned whether sub-management areas addressed the underlying issues driving fishing behavior in the NGOM. They noted that fishing practices, such as high grading and deck loading, were a larger problem for the sustainability of the NGOM fishery that would not be addressed by dividing the NGOM into sub-areas. Others questioned whether the scale of the NGOM fishery justified the amount of management attention devoted to the issue.

AP members expressed differing views on the need for additional management measures. Some argued that the fishery could largely govern itself through fleet behavior and supported maintaining a simple management approach. Others expressed concern about concentrated fishing effort on Stellwagen Bank and supported exploring tools that could provide more responsive in-season management.

Public Comment:

- **Ron Smolowitz:** Suggested that much of the NGOM resource may be inaccessible and therefore unlikely to experience excessive fishing mortality. He argued that if this could be demonstrated scientifically, the fishery could be managed with a simpler approach that relies less on annual biomass estimates and allocation decisions.
- **John Quinn:** Echoed concerns that management measures should remain simple and proportional to the scale of the fishery. He added that NGOM landings represent a very small portion of total scallop landings and cautioned against creating unnecessarily complex management systems.
- **Damian Parkington (LAGC IFQ scallop fishermen, Provincetown, MA):** Questioned whether sequential sub-management areas would meaningfully change fishing behavior or fishing mortality. He opined that vessels would continue to concentrate on Stellwagen Bank once it became available and argued that splitting the area may not achieve the intended objectives. He also remarked that many landings south of 42°20' come from vessels operating under IFQ permits and suggested that providing alternative fishing opportunities earlier in the season may be more effective than limiting participation. Mr. Parkington also suggested that many vessels would continue fishing in areas closer to their home ports regardless of management boundaries. He expressed support for considering lower possession limits and smaller dredge gear in the NGOM fishery.
- **Todd Bragdon (Scallop vessel owner, Stonington, CT):** Suggested that management efforts should focus on addressing derby-style fishing behavior rather than dividing the management area into separate zones. He proposed identifying participants before the season and developing approaches that would spread fishing effort over a longer period.

1. MOTION (FULCHER/BRIGHTON)

Recommend that the NGOM be left as status quo, with no split sub-management areas. The fishing mortality rate of $F=0.25$ should be set for the entire area, annually.

Rationale: Separate sub-areas may not achieve the stated objective of reducing vessel crowding and limiting fishing mortality on Stellwagen Bank.

Discussion on the motion: One AP member supported consideration of an in-shell possession limit, noting that it could help simplify the fishery and provide a more equitable approach while protecting smaller scallops. Another AP member remarked that a fishing mortality rate of 0.25 would already be considered through Framework 42 and that the primary new element introduced by the motion was the in-shell possession limit. There was also caution against

eliminating consideration of sub-management areas before additional analyses are completed, noting that some fishermen in the NGOM continue to support the concept.

Public Comment: None

MOTION #1 CARRIED 10-4

2. MOTION (FULCHER/GRANT)

Recommend that Scallop Committee task the Scallop PDT with further analysis of an appropriate in-shell possession limit.

Rationale: Current in-shell possession limits in the Northern Gulf of Maine allow for 1,666 lb seaward of the demarcation line, which has led to concerns of moving shell stock outside of the NGOM management area or into state waters, as well as facilitating large deck loads that lead to increased discard mortality.

Discussion on the motion: Supporters of this motion saw it as an opportunity to maximize the resource for fishermen while staying mindful of the sustainability of the resource.

Public Comment: None

MOTION #2 CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY CONSENT

Regional Day-At-Sea Allocations

Council staff reviewed potential approaches for allocating DAS separately between the Mid-Atlantic and Georges Bank regions as a future management tool. The concept originated from the Long-term Strategic Plan and is intended to reduce the risk of regional overfishing when large differences in LPUE result in disproportionate fishing effort in one region. Since 2021, much of the fleet's effort has been concentrated on Georges Bank, and the 2025 stock assessment concluded that overfishing occurred on Georges Bank in 2023. The Scallop PDT recognized potential benefits of regional management but cautioned that additional management complexity could create challenges for administration, monitoring, enforcement, and fleet flexibility. GARFO staff have shared that there is capacity to support regional DAS allocations in FY 2027, but trading of DAS between regions and vessels could not be supported until FY 2028.

Two concepts were proposed to address this:

1. Vessels are allocated Mid-Atlantic and Georges Bank DAS, delineated by the 71W boundary line.
2. Differential counting, a measure used before for Northeast Multispecies areas, would enable specifying a ratio to adjust DAS charges to increase or decrease realized effort in a region. Differential DAS counting areas would be delineated by the 71W boundary line.

Regarding carryover, Council Staff requested feedback on how to address it for the period between FY2026 and FY2027. Three concepts were proposed for discussion:

1. Not allow any DAS carryover

2. Reduce DAS carryover from 10 DAS to 5 DAS
3. Split up DAS carryover between regions by the same proportion as FY 2027 DAS allocation.

Discussion: The AP discussed concerns about the complexity of regional DAS allocation and differential DAS counting. Several AP members stated that differential DAS counting would be difficult for captains to understand and could increase the risk of mistakes. Some AP members suggested that if regional DAS allocations are considered, the approach should be simple, such as allocating a set number of days east and west of the 71°W boundary.

Several AP members were concerned that regional allocations could reduce flexibility and force vessels into areas where fishing conditions are poor. AP members pointed out that fishing decisions are influenced by factors beyond LPUE, including price, meat quality, nematodes, water temperature, and timing of the fishing year. Some cautioned that survey information used to support regional allocations may be outdated by the time specifications are set, particularly when substantial fishing occurs after surveys are completed.

Several AP members questioned whether regional DAS allocations would effectively address the underlying issues facing the fishery. One AP member argued that high-grading and the need for more responsive in-season management tools were larger concerns than regional DAS allocation.

The AP also discussed DAS carryover. Some AP members supported reducing carryover, noting that 10 carryover DAS represents a large portion of the current DAS allocation and creates uncertainty for the following fishing year. Other AP members supported maintaining the current carryover provisions, noting that carryover DAS provides operational flexibility and allows vessels to respond to weather, market conditions, and changing fishing opportunities.

While opinions differed on the overall concept, some AP members supported continued analysis of a simple regional allocation system. Another AP member suggested that additional analysis and industry input would be useful before determining whether regional allocations are an appropriate management tool. Several AP members stressed that the Council should focus on evaluating alternatives and understanding fleet responses before making decisions.

Public Comment:

- **Ron Smolowitz:** Supported continued consideration of a regional split but expressed concern about the adequacy of current projection models to support it. He suggested that regional DAS allocations may be better considered after improvements to stock projection methods are completed.
- **John Quinn:** Urged caution and opined that regional allocations, differential DAS counting, and DAS carryover are separate issues that should be considered independently.
- **Eric Hansen (Scallop Vessel Owner, New Bedford):** Remarked that portions of Closed Area II that were previously considered overfished contained substantial numbers of juvenile scallops during the SMAST drop camera survey trips. He cautioned that resource conditions can recover more quickly than expected and encouraged the AP to consider that uncertainty when evaluating regional management measures.
- **Paul Weckesser (Scallop Vessel Owner, New Bedford):** Opposed dividing the fishery into separate regions, arguing that restricting where fishing can occur could produce

unintended consequences similar to previous area-based management approaches. He expressed concern that regional allocations could contribute to high-grading and noted that the fishery has only recently received additional open-bottom opportunities in the Mid-Atlantic and Area I. He also supported maintaining the current ten-day DAS carryover provision.

- **Todd Bragdon:** Opposed management measures that would reduce flexibility for fishermen, including regional allocations or reductions in DAS carryover.
- **Magnar Kvilhaug (Scallop Vessel Owner):** Opposed regional allocations, arguing that defining where vessels can fish may concentrate effort rather than distribute it. He also opposed reducing DAS carryover.

3. MOTION (MERL/AARSHEIM)

Recommend that regional-DAS allocations are not developed further for Scallop Framework 42, and that DAS allocations remain general across the open-bottom, as well as no changes to DAS carryover.

Rationale: Regional-DAS allocations decrease flexibility for the fleet, and would further concentrate effort in smaller regions.

Discussion on the motion: The motion received limited discussion before a substitute motion was offered.

Public Comment: None

MOTION #3 FAILED 5-9

3. MOTION TO SUBSITUTE (FULCHER/MULLIS)

Recommend that regional-DAS allocations be developed for implementation in FY 2028, when the Regional Office can support implementation of DAS trading. The Scallop AP does not support further development of differential counting of DAS. DAS carryover would remain status quo.

Rationale: There are benefits of regional-DAS allocations in reducing vessel concentration in a single region, but trading of DAS would be necessary to provide sufficient flexibility for vessel operations.

Discussion on the motion: One AP member generally opposed management measures that direct where fishermen can fish but supported continued development of regional DAS allocations because of concerns about the current condition of the resource. Another AP member expressed concern that uncertainty in biomass estimates could limit fishing opportunities and stated that he could not support the motion because of concerns about fairness and equity.

Public Comment: None

MOTION TO SUBSTITUTE FAILED 5-8-1

AGENDA ITEM #4: SCALLOP STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

As part of the discussion on developing a three-year roadmap of scallop work priorities, the AP received a presentation from Dr. Andrew Corso of the Coonamessett Farm Foundation on ongoing work to develop electronic monitoring (EM) systems for the scallop fishery. The presentation reviewed the status of the project, system components, vessel monitoring technologies, and opportunities to collect additional information through electronic monitoring platforms.

Discussion: The AP discussed implementation considerations and potential applications of electronic monitoring. Discussion focused on equipment requirements, opportunities to collect environmental data, and the potential integration of electronic monitoring across fisheries. Dr. Corso explained that current work includes collection of temperature and depth information and mentioned that additional environmental sensors may become feasible as technology continues to improve.

Several AP members were supportive of electronic monitoring and discussed its potential role in addressing issues such as high grading and deck loading. There were discussions on how fishermen could be encouraged to participate in future EM programs and suggestions that incentives may be needed if vessels continue to have access to traditional observer coverage. Questions were also raised regarding how EM systems would operate on vessels participating in multiple fisheries and how monitoring requirements could be integrated across fisheries.

The AP also discussed concerns regarding the use of EM data. One AP member cautioned that successful implementation would require clearly defining the objectives of the program and mentioned that challenges can arise when fishery-specific monitoring programs are incorporated into broader federal compliance programs. Dr. Corso agreed that the appropriate application of electronic monitoring is likely to differ among fisheries. He included that one objective of the project is to identify what approaches work well and where challenges remain.

Implementing the Scallop Strategic Plan

Council staff reviewed the development of the Scallop Strategic Plan and the process for creating a three-year roadmap of scallop work priorities. Staff explained that the Strategic Plan was informed by visioning sessions and input from Council members, NOAA Fisheries, Council staff, and industry participants. The plan includes 9 objectives and 29 strategies intended to guide future Council work.

Discussion: Several AP members identified in-season management tools as the highest priority. Some AP members stated that improved in-season management could help address high-density fishing areas, high grading, fishing practices, and resource distribution. Several AP members suggested that increased availability of real-time vessel communications and data transmission technologies could support development of these tools. Council staff commented that in-season management measures and tools for addressing high-density fishing areas are among the concepts most ready for Council consideration, while other approaches involving real-time data collection would require additional planning and development by the PDT.

One AP member added that many of the Strategic Plan objectives overlap with ongoing research priorities and suggested that RSA projects could help inform future management actions. Several AP members called for a clear definition of high grading before developing management

measures to address it. Additional discussion focused on identifying productive fishing areas and whether the Northern Edge should be included among future work priorities.

Public Comment:

- **Ron Smolowitz:** Recommended a more focused approach to implementing the Strategic Plan by concentrating on issues associated with the Nantucket Lightship South resource that may be ready for rotational access in FY2027. He suggested that work on predation, high grading, fishing practices, and reducing tow times could begin immediately and argued that electronic monitoring may provide a practical tool for addressing some of these issues. He added that successful approaches developed for one area of the fishery could later be expanded more broadly.

CONSENSUS STATEMENT #1

The Scallop AP recommends including the following near-term priorities in the 2027-2029 work for implementing the Long Term Strategic Plan:

- In-season adjustment triggers and improving real time data collection to inform them.
- Managing in high-density areas for accessibility and sustainability
- Developing a technical definition of high grading

Longer term, the AP supports the continued development of measures to improve fishing practices, and/or electronic monitoring to address high grading.

Scallop Research Set-Aside Priorities for 2027 & 2028

Council staff reviewed the proposed Research Set-Aside (RSA) priorities for 2027 and 2028 and requested feedback on the relative priority levels assigned to various research categories.

Discussion: The AP generally supported maintaining survey work as the highest research priority. Several AP members also supported elevating fishing gear research, while noting that too many high-priority categories could reduce the usefulness of the prioritization process. There were differing views on the appropriate priority for biology, resource enhancement, offshore wind, protected species, and habitat characterization research. The AP also discussed the need for clearer definitions of high-, medium-, and low-priority categories to improve future prioritization exercises. Ultimately, the AP decided to maintain Status Quo for the ranking of RSA priorities.

Public Comment:

- **Ron Smolowitz:** Questioned whether reducing the priority of sea turtle research could create issues given his understanding that research on sea turtles is required under the Biological Opinion governing the scallop fishery.

CONSENSUS STATEMENT #2

The Scallop AP recommends no changes to the Scallop RSA priorities for 2027-2028, relative to the Scallop RSA priorities for 2025-2026.

AGENDA ITEM #4: OTHER BUSINESS:

Lobster Gear Conflict

An AP member informed the AP of gear conflicts between the scallop and offshore lobster fisheries, noting reports of large concentrations of lobster gear in Closed Area II that have limited access to portions of the scallop resource.

Voluntary Permit Buyback Program

An AP member shared an idea for a voluntary permit buyback program for the scallop fishery. It was suggested that a buyback program could reduce excess harvesting capacity, reduce fishing pressure, and provide an option for fishermen interested in leaving the fishery. The AP discussed potential challenges associated with developing such a program, including identifying funding sources, and evaluating potential conservation benefits. Several AP members expressed general support for exploring the concept further but remarked that substantial additional discussion and analysis would be required before considering any future action.

The meeting adjourned at 5:37PM