New England Fishery Management Council
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Daniel Salerno, *Chair* | Cate O'Keefe, PhD, *Executive Director*

MEETING SUMMARY

Joint Scallop Committee & Advisory Panel

October 27, 2026
New Bedford, MA, webinar

The Scallop Committee met jointly with the Advisory Panel (AP) on October 27, 2026 in New Bedford, MA and via webinar at 9:00 AM to 1) review and discuss fishing year (FY) 2027 and 2028 (default) specifications; 2) the draft 2027 Scallop Work Priorities; and 3) other business.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Committee: Melanie Griffin (Chair), Eric Hansen (Vice Chair), Kirby Aarsheim, Togue Brawn, Doug Christel (GARFO), Matt Gates, Ted Platz, Robert Ruhle (MAFMC), Melissa Smith, Renee Zobel, and Jake Wiscott (MAFMC). Scallop AP: James Gutowski (AP Chair), Cassie Larsen (Vice Chair), Wesley Brighton, Jay Elsner, Brent Fulcher, Kyle Grant, Peter Hughes, Bob Keese, Brady Lybarger, Michael Marchetti, Chris Merl, Ed Mullis, Alex Todd, and Walter White. NEFMC staff: Connor Buckley, Jenny Couture, and Naresh Pradhan; PDT members: Bill DuPaul, Carl Huntsberger, Emily Keiley, Tasha O'Hara, Danielle Palmer, Sally Roman, and Kelly Whitmore; NOAA General Counsel: Scott Sakowski. Approximately 50 members of the public attended.

Note, only the Committee was asked to make motions during this meeting.

KEY OUTCOMES

- **Specifications Action for FY 2027 and FY 2028 (default)**
  - Recommended refining the range of DAS to 32-42, and continued consideration of a range of trip limits to the Nantucket Lightship access area from 9,000-15,000 lbs, with a seasonal closure and a continued closure of the Nantucket Lightship Extension as well as Area II. In the Northern Gulf of Maine, the range of fishing mortality rates being considered to set Total Allowable Landings was refined to F=0.21-0.23.
- **2027 Draft Scallop Priorities**
  - No motions or consensus statements, though there was some discussion on the Northern Edge draft priority and interest in use of automated detection technology to improve fishing surveys.
- **Other business**

- The meeting participants heard a concern raised about a discrepancy between the LAGC IFQ components 5.5% allocation of the Annual Projected Landings (APL) and their proportion of the realized landings.
- A member of the public discussed his new online GIS tool that shows scallop survey size distribution by area and year (with predator observations) to help stakeholders better visualize publicly accessible data to inform decision-making.

INTRODUCTIONS

The Committee Chair reviewed the agenda. Council staff reviewed the goal for the meeting and timeline for the specifications action.

AGENDA ITEM #1: FY 2027-2028 (DEFAULT) SPECIFICATIONS

Staff provided an overview of the specifications work to date to set FY 2027 and FY 2028 (default) specifications, noting that the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) met on October 7th to recommend overfishing limits (OFLs) and acceptable biological catches (ABCs) for the next two fishing years. Staff presented the PDT's analyses to date that support the Committee tasking made during the September 10th meeting. The action being developed will set the following specifications for FY 2027 and FY 2028 (default): ABC/ACLs, DAS, access area allocations, total allowable landings for the Northern Gulf of Maine (NGOM) management area, targets for General Category incidental catch, General Category access area trips and trip accounting, and set-asides for the observer and research programs for FY 2027 and default specifications for FY 2028.

Discussion

Several advisors and a Committee member asked several questions about the staff presentation:

- Whether a delayed opening was incorporated in the projection estimates for a potential Nantucket Lightship access area; this cannot be precisely modeled but there's potential for slightly higher meat count and fewer discards with a delayed opening.
- How the Risk Policy scoring for Atlantic sea scallop would change if the climate vulnerability factor were to be removed; staff noted this was challenging to determine but suggested it may not change the intermediate risk level.
- The impact on the fishing mortality rate due to the change in shell height meat weight equation and natural mortality parameters in 2025; staff suggested that the fishing mortality would increase because of how natural mortality is estimated (which includes all non-fishing related mortality).
- Whether the Georges Bank growth curve was used for Nantucket Lightship-South; the growth curve is specific to Nantucket Lightship (NLS) region, which uses the NLS-West parameters with slower growth than other areas. Georges Bank is used for approximating the selectivity curve for NLS, where the animals are smaller, thus discarding animals at a smaller size.
- The impact of predation on scallop mortality; predation is not explicitly considered, though natural mortality was evaluated and increased from 0.2 to 0.27 as part of the 2025 Research Track Assessment. Staff shared that there was an increase in sea star abundance observed in the 2026 surveys. Sea stars abundance did appear to increase in the NLS in

2026, but remained lower than areas on Eastern Georges Bank, and one advisor suggested there could be value in harvesting some scallops to enhance future growth.
- The large differences in the 2026 scallop biomass estimates of the Nantucket Lightship South between the optical and dredge surveys; this was assessed by the PDT and noted to be due to survey station allocation rather than dredge efficiency issues from high scallop densities.
- The effect of reopening an access area too early before a year class of scallops were fully exploitable; Staff replied that this situation had likely occurred in the past, and allocating an access area too early would result in less growth and forgone yield.

Regarding potential Nantucket Lightship access area: an advisor stated that for every scallop harvested, three scallops would be discarded, which is not worth the risk for future access to this area.

Public Comment:

- **John Quinn (Fisheries Survival Fund)** commented that the fishing mortality at the 40 DAS under consideration for FY 2027 is lower than last year's mortality rate and even in prior years; staff concurred that the highest open bottom rate was in 2023.
- **Ron Smolowitz (Fisheries Survival Fund)** asked whether natural mortality rate was the same value used for closed areas and areas open to fishing and inquired if this includes incidental fishing mortality. He agreed with the sentiment that incidental fishing mortality in the Nantucket Lightship area will be very high and should be further discussed. Staff stated that the natural mortality rate does include incidental fishing.
- **Ziggy Johansen (New Bedford Scallop vessel owner)** commented that the biggest predator is high-grading and that the degree of discarding is the main issue; he explained that he started a fuel business and thinks the scallop fishery is a good fishery and there are some bad actors who are overextended financially that are adversely affecting the scallop resource.

AP Recommendations:

- Full-time Limited Access trip limits of 9,000 lb; 12,000 lb; 15,000 lb in the Nantucket Lightship Access Area in FY 2027, as well as no access area allocation. Consider a seasonal closure from May 15 or June 1, until October 15 or November 15.
- 32 - 40 DAS range recommended by the PDT.
- Consider a fishing mortality rate in the NGOM of F=0.21-0.25, with a FY 2028 Set-aside set at 50% of the FY 2027 value.
- Use the default approach, restricting RSA compensation fishing to the open bottom, not allowing additional harvest in access areas in FY 2027.

Rationale: Natural mortality on Georges Bank was increased from 0.2 to 0.27, and half of the area would remain closed in FY 2027, still protecting half of the scallop biomass in the NLS. This represents a conservative approach.

Discussion on the AP recommendation: The AP Chair recommended considering other trip limit options for the potential Nantucket Lightship access area. Several advisors were not in

favor of allocating this access area in FY 2027 due to high-grading concerns, anticipated high level of discarding, potential for damage to the small scallops, and a desire to maximize the growth potential of this year class. There was also a concern that given the low trip limits under consideration for a potential access area that the trip would not be profitable due to high fuel prices. An opposing argument by another advisor commented that leaving the dense aggregations as is might result in sea star predation and would not actually move around the scallop resource, preventing any enhancement of scallop growth. There was interest in the higher 15,000 lb trip limit to evaluate whether a trip would be profitable or not.

There was a brief discussion on the purpose of the November 17th joint AP and Committee meeting. This November meeting will be an opportunity for the AP and subsequently the Committee to select their preferred alternatives via formal motions.

Regarding delayed opening: There was support by one advisor to open the Nantucket Lightship access area on June 1 and closing the area in September, while another advisor wanted to mirror what was done for Closed Area II access area, which was closed from May 15 through November 15. Generally, there was consensus to delay opening and a seasonal access area approach to reduce discarding, avoid derby fishing, and encourage the fleet to move around areas. Any access to the Nantucket Lightship area for FY 2028 would be based on next year's specifications action.

Regarding DAS: There was interest in removing consideration of 20-28 DAS, with advisors noting that the open area fishing mortality rates were reasonable even at a higher DAS allocation (e.g. 40)

Regarding LAGC IFQ distribution of access area trips: A few advisors wanted to retain the default 5.5% allocation methodology, with one advisor noting that LAGC IFQ vessels should only be allocated access area trips into an area that limited access vessels are also allowed.

Regarding the NGOM set-aside: Several advisors who are active in the NGOM fishery were supportive of a higher fishing mortality in the NGOM area, within the F-0.15-0.25 range. They noted that Status Quo fishing mortality (F=0.21) would not result in status quo in terms of days fished, which they thought should remain similar to FY 2026 despite the decline in biomass.

Regarding Research Set-Aside (RSA) restrictions: There was consensus that the RSA program should be used only for open bottom fishing to find new scallop grounds and to enhance the resource and should not be permitted in any access areas.

Public Comment:

- **Drew Minkiewicz (Sustainable Scallop Fund)** supported a model run with the highest number of DAS under consideration paired with an access area trip to evaluate the fishing mortality rate to better inform decision-making. He explained that trip profitability is driven by prices (which fluctuate by size classes) and fuel prices and in some scenarios, an access area may make sense; incidental fishing mortality is likely to occur regardless.
- **Ron Smolowitz (Fisheries Survival Fund)** asked about the process by which tools are developed to evaluate access areas given he anticipates high fishing mortality from high

grading, long tow times, etc.; he explained that these tools should be developed before allowing any access.
    - Staff explained that time limits for access area trips was previously discussed, but could not be developed in time for FY 2027 implementation.
- **Aubrey Church (Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance)** shared her own poll of the Cape Cod LAGC IFQ scallop fleet and found that there was broad support for keeping the Nantucket Lightship area closed next year. Should there be an access area, however, she suggested a delayed opening from June to September to improve meat yields, a 9,000 lb trip limit, and an evaluation of the impact to the resource in the area.
    - Staff concurred that the PDT discussed a delayed opening of either May 15 or June 1 and also discussed a seasonal closure to improve meat yield and prevent excess discarding.

1. **MOTION (HANSEN/GATES)**
   Move that the Scallop Committee add the following range of alternatives:

Run	Range
DAS	32-42
Delayed opening	June 1 – Oct 1
Access Areas and Trips	Nantucket Lightship (North and South)
FT LA possession limit	N/A
Trading Increment	N/A
FT LA allocation	0; 9,000; 12,000; 15,000 lb
PT allocation, possession limit and access area	0; 3,600; 4,800; 6,000 lb
LAGC IFQ Trip Allocation	0; 202; 270; 337 trips to Nantucket Lightship (North and South)
Rotational Closures	Nantucket Lightship Extension, Area II
Open Bottom	Nantucket Lightship West, Area I, NYB, Elephant Trunk, HCS, all other areas not listed above.
FY 2028 Default	75% of FY 2027 DAS, no access area trips
RSA	Restricted to open bottom

Rationale: AP's recommendation with extension of DAS to 42; looked at open area F under 40 DAS is .35, which is historically lower than last 4-5 years due to several access area opportunities; this is for analysis only.

Discussion on the motion:

A few Committee members spoke in favor of model runs that evaluate higher DAS options, with one member suggesting 44 DAS option without NLS access area, while a couple of Committee members supported the motion for discussion purposes only. There was interest in a delayed

opening with seasonal access ending in the fall, before thermal shocks to the resource could cause scallop mortality events.

MOTION #1 CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY CONSENT

2. **MOTION (SMITH/BRAWN)**
   Move to create two alternatives for the Northern Gulf of Maine management area that sets the fishing rate to F=0.21 and F=0.23.

Rationale: While there was agreement among the PDT to maintain a conservative fishing mortality due to the uncertainty around the exploitable biomass on Stellwagen Bank, a range is warranted due to the uncertainty in survey overlap.

Discussion on the motion: One Committee member anticipated a concentration of fishing effort on Stellwagen due to the shorter fishing season; she explained the 0.23 high fishing mortality rate is okay for analysis only.

MOTION #2 CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY CONSENT

3. **MOTION (SMITH/BRAWN)**
   Move to create an alternative to set the default FY 2028 TAL at 50% of FY 2027 NGOM set-aside value.

Rationale: Supported by the PDT and utilized for FY 2026 specifications. Represents status quo.

Discussion on the motion: None.

MOTION #3 CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY CONSENT

AGENDA ITEM #2: DRAFT 2027 SCALLOP WORK PRIORITIES

During their meeting in September, the NEFMC approved the Scallop Work Plan for 2027 – 2029 as originally drafted by the Scallop PDT. The work plan does not constrain the Committee's ability to make annual priority recommendations that are not included in the work plan. Staff sought feedback from the AP and Committee on the draft 2027 Priorities relevant to the scallop fishery, and requested input on the purpose, need, and scope for items included in the draft list. The feedback will help determine feasibility for completion and staff time estimates that will be further discussed by the Council's Executive Committee in November, before work priorities are finalized during the December 2026 Council meeting.

Discussion

Regarding a Northern Edge work priority: An advisor asked whether staff resources could be shifted from any scallop permit stacking work item to Northern Edge work, given this is a high priority for the Scallop AP; staff noted that Council staff time is still needed for any Secretarial Action led by NOAA for scallop permit stacking. A Committee member questioned whether

there was any new information or data to support prioritizing work on Northern Edge since the Council stopped this work a couple of years ago; she commented that she expects the Council to discuss this further during the December priorities discussion. Another Committee recommended prioritizing scallop access to the Northern Edge area given the presence of scallop stock and high interest from the scallop industry.

Regarding the coordinated review of automated detection technology draft priority: the Committee Chair suggested reaching out to researcher Dr. Evan Howell to better understand his related work. Another Committee member thought AI-related work would be useful for improving survey data. An advisor later explained his recent conversations with NOAA Headquarters on NOAA's use of AI to enhance stock assessments with more real-time information.

Other priorities mentioned include prioritizing improving fishing practices and retaining the NGOM sub-management areas as part of Framework 42, and several Committee members expressed an interest in prioritizing this work for 2027 and not allowing the action to be pushed back in favor of other work.

Public Comment:

- **Drew Minkiewicz (Sustainable Scallop Fund)** and **John Quinn (Fisheries Survival Fund)** supported prioritizing work on Northern Edge.

- **Ron Smolowitz (Fisheries Survival Fund)** asked who is responsible for work on improving fishing practices and any Northern Edge action, specifically an analysis comparing the U.S. Northern Edge fishing closure to the Canadian seasonal closure across the Hague line.
    - Council staff explained that the Council sets priorities, including research priorities, and also has RSA priorities, which are avenues to address this analytical question.

AGENDA ITEM #3: OTHER BUSINESS

Council staff presented an overview of upcoming meetings and decision points regarding the specifications setting and Framework 42 actions. An important meeting to note is the upcoming Scallop PDT meeting on November 6th, the Scallop Joint Committee and AP meeting on November 17th, and the Council meeting in Newport, RI and via webinar December 8-10th.

Discussion

One Advisor asked the Committee to address his concern regarding the LAGC IFQ fisheries discrepancy between their 5.5% allocation of the Annual Projected Landings (APL) and their proportion of annual realized landings. This occurs when open area landings per unit effort (LPUE) is underestimated, leading to actual realized Limited Access landings on a DAS that are greater than projected landings. This allows Limited Access landings to fluctuate higher or lower than the APL, while LAGC IFQ quota is fixed. He is anticipating this problem to worsen next year due to the underestimation of LPUE.

Public Comment:

- **Magnar Kvilhaug (Michigan Fishing Inc.)** walked through a GIS website he developed which displays publicly accessible scallop survey size distribution data by area, year, etc. and includes information on predator observations. His intention with this tool is to make data more readily available, enable stakeholders to have the same baseline information, and to move away from data shared via PDFs. This is only a visualization tool, not a tool to manipulate or analyze data.
    - *Please contact Magnar for more information and a link to the website: magnar.kvilhaug@odinpharmacyinnovations.com*

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at 12:15 PM.