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New England Fishery Management Council

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Daniel Salerno, *Chair* | Cate O'Keefe, PhD, *Executive Director*

MEETING SUMMARY

Scallop Plan Development Team

August 17, 2026
Webinar

The Scallop Plan Development Team (PDT) met on August 17, 2026 via webinar at 2:00 PM to discuss 1) 2026 scallop survey updates; 2) Framework 42: the Northern Gulf of Maine sub-management areas; and 3) other business.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Connor Buckley (PDT Chair), Sharon Benjamin (GARFO), Jenny Couture (NEFMC), Dr. Adam Delargy (SMAST), Dr. Bill DuPaul (College William & Mary), Carl Huntsberger (ME DMR), Emily Keiley (GARFO), Dr. Robert Murphy (NEFSC), Tasha O'Hara (CFF), Dr. Naresh Pradhan (NEFMC), Sally Roman (VIMS), and Kelly Whitmore (MA DMF). Scallop Committee: Chair Melanie Griffin, Vice Chair Eric Hansen, Togue Brawn, Doug Christel, Matt Gates, and Melissa Smith. Approximately 15 members of the public attended.

AGENDA ITEM #1: 2026 SCALLOP SURVEY UPDATES

Council staff began by discussing updates from the 2026 scallop survey groups, the specifications setting process for fishing years (FY) 2027 and 2028 (default), SAMS area considerations, a reminder on the shell height meat weight equations that will be used this year, and a brief overview of data disagreements between the different surveys. Mr. Buckley reviewed the open area landings per unit effort and also the goals and objectives of the upcoming Scallop PDT meeting on August 26th and 27th, with an overview of upcoming decision points.

Discussion:

The Scallop PDT briefly discussed the CFF HabCam spatial autocorrelation work, which Ms. O'Hara confirmed would be completed shortly. A few members commented on the importance of the large year-class in the Nantucket Lightship South that is approaching harvestable size, and that treatment of that management area should be a priority in the PDT's upcoming discussions. GARFO and Council staff recommended careful consideration of any potential access area in this Nantucket Lightship region next year to maintain orderly access given the very high scallop densities.

One PDT member asked if there could be early coordination between the SMAST and VIMS survey groups to map survey stations sooner rather than later given the issues identified between the survey biomass estimates last year. Staff noted that this mapping work is already underway.

AGENDA ITEM #2: FRAMEWORK 42: NORTHERN GULF OF MAINE SUB-MANAGEMENT AREAS

Staff presented a brief recap of Scallop Framework 42 and the remaining Framework 42 topics that had not been discussed during the July PDT meeting, specifically the Northern Gulf of Maine (NGOM) sub-management areas. Mr. Buckley sought PDT feedback on the NGOM sub-management area boundaries, timing of opening, how effort might shift on Stellwagen Bank, any changes to Accountability Measures or set-asides, and whether the current in-shell possession limit is effective.

Discussion:

Regarding the transit corridor between the sub-management areas: one PDT member was concerned with the potential for fishing in the transit corridor on the way to or from the sub-management area if there are known high density areas. There was a desire to understand whether the implementation of a transit corridor would improve or hinder enforcement of the fishery. The Committee tasked the PDT to evaluate modifications to shell stock possession limit, so transit corridor enforcement concerns can be evaluated as part of this tasking. Another PDT member confirmed that there is a 5-minute VMS ping rate for all federal scallop permits and asked whether VMS could be used as an enforcement tool for the transit corridor. Staff explained that VMS alone is likely insufficient as there needs to be two methods for verification of any illegal activity for enforcement purposes (i.e., a flyover where any illegal fishing is visually observed in addition to VMS ping rate data).

Regarding the timing of opening of the sub-management areas: a PDT member thought simultaneous access was the best option to achieve the goal of trying to control the fishing mortality on high density fishing grounds; they also asked whether simultaneous access could be enforced. For the fixed-date option, one person asked whether the first area would close on a fixed date and then the second area would open accordingly, and, also what happens if the harvest limit isn't reached in the first sub-area. Staff explained that a sub-management area wouldn't close until the harvest limit for that area is reached (i.e., area would not close early), thus, there could be both a staggered open with simultaneous access potentially, depending on how quickly the quota is reached. Regarding the fixed-date option, one member suggested including a mechanism such as "X date or sooner" in order to open the second area should the quota not be reached in the first area. Staff thought this backstop idea would be helpful in case the first area's harvest is reached earlier than anticipated.

The GARFO PDT member explained that the VMS team has already started the process to develop VMS codes for potential sub-management areas and could handle simultaneous opening of the areas. She cautioned that there are enforcement concerns and added complexity to consider (two separate management areas, two different quotas, separate ports of departure and landing, additional transiting areas, and so on). She commented that the scallop fishery, particularly in NGOM, already has enforcement concerns and simultaneous opening could be an added challenge. Should the Advisory Panel, Committee, and Council want to pursue this management measure, both Council and GARFO staff are interested in understanding input from the Council's Enforcement Committee, which is planning to meet in late October.

There was a brief discussion on how fishing effort might shift in the NGOM area should two sub-management areas be implemented, using FY 2026 data as an example. One PDT member questioned the assumption that there would be fewer vessels fishing on Stellwagen based on his

experience looking at the survey data when there was evidence of high scallop abundance a couple of years ago. The PDT member had also heard there was some amount of fishing effort occurring on Jeffreys Bank during this time. The management goal for increased flexibility for maximum harvest in each high-density scallop bed should be kept in mind.

Regarding any change in Accountability Measures: One PDT member preferred keeping the current NGOM reactive accountability measure (AM) versus specifying to each sub-management area to reduce any unnecessary complexity. The overall goal for the NGOM AM would remain and there is likely not a lot of benefit gained by further sub-dividing the AMs. The group also agreed that modifications to the method of deductions from the NGOM Total Allowable Landings for Scallop RSA and observer coverage were not warranted.

Regarding modifications to in-shell possession limits: To address Committee tasking to analyze appropriate NGOM possession limits of both shell stock and shucked meats, a PDT member suggested that looking at a range of average meat weights from across the NGOM could inform any potential modifications.

Next steps:

- Follow up with NOAA Office of Law Enforcement to understand any implications for a transit corridor between NGOM sub-management areas (Emily Keiley)
- Analysis on the range of average shell height meat weight in the NGOM to inform potential changes to the in-shell possession limit (Carl Huntsberger)
- Revise FW42 discussion document (Connor Buckley, Jenny Couture)

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 Scallop PDT meeting on August 26th and 27th to review and discuss 2026 survey results and data treatment.

Discussion:

One PDT member asked about the deadline for sharing scallop survey presentations for the August 26-27 Scallop PDT meetings, which is August 24th.

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at 3:07 PM.