New England Fishery Management Council
50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492
Rick Bellavance, *Chair* | Cate O'Keefe, PhD, *Executive Director*

MEETING SUMMARY

Scallop Plan Development Team

Webinar

July 24, 2025

The Scallop Plan Development Team (PDT) met on July 24, 2025 at 12:30 PM via webinar to: 1) Discuss Council tasking to work with NOAA OLE to request data on NGOM fishery enforcement trends; 2) review projections results from the Scallop Research Track Assessment with updated natural mortality parameters; 3) develop recommendations on the use of new biological reference points for management; 4) develop recommendations on E.O. 14276: Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness; 4) and discuss other business as necessary.

MEETING ATTENDANCE

Connor Buckley (PDT Chair), Chandler Nelson, Jonathon Peros, Dr. Naresh Pradhan; GARFO: Emily Keiley, Danielle Palmer, Benjamin Galuardi, Sharon Benjamin; NEFSC: Dr. Dvora Hart, Bridget St. Amand, Dr. Robert Murphy; ME DMR: Carl Huntsberger; VIMS: Dr. David Rudders; SMAST: Dr. Adam Delargy; College of William and Mary: Dr. William DuPaul; RI DEM: Chris Parkins; MA DMF: Kelly Whitmore

Also present were Jason Berthiaume (NOAA OLE NED), Melissa Smith (Scallop Committee), and 10 members of the public.,

AGENDA ITEM #1: WELCOME, AGENDA, AND UPDATES

Council staff opened the meeting with some brief updates. The PDT was informed that Framework 40 has been initiated and will focus primarily on setting specifications for fishing year 2026 and 2027 default measures, as well as updating stock reference points based on the recent research track assessment. Survey data and other updates are expected in mid-August.

Council staff also updated the PDT on potential changes to the administration of the Research Set-Aside (RSA) program. In response to a Council request at its April meeting, staff have been working with GARFO to explore alternatives that could address future administrative uncertainties. While several ideas are currently being discussed, staff noted that no changes are expected before the 2026 RSA cycle.

A PDT member asked whether there was any information on when the next Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) would be released. It was explained that while it had initially been on track for an early release, the NOFO is currently still delayed.

An update on the HabCam survey noted that the NEFSC HabCam platform was lost after a collision with an uncharted wreck, reducing achieved coverage to about 30%. To fill the resulting gap in optical survey data, the Coonamessett Farm Foundation (CFF) HabCam platform will survey the southern Mid-Atlantic, helping ensure full optical and dredge coverage of the scallop resource.

On fishery performance, Council staff reported little effort in Closed Area I due to poor conditions, including elevated natural mortality and low yields, while Closed Area II was performing somewhat better. The FY2024 bycatch report showed that the fishery remained under sub-ABCs for all stocks except northern windowpane flounder, which exceeded 62% but was not expected to trigger an accountability measure. A preliminary report for FY2025 indicated that the fishery was already 130% over the sub-ABC for southern New England/Mid-Atlantic yellowtail flounder. One PDT member asked whether the bycatch rate might change as the year progresses, and it was explained that the cumulative bycatch rate is updated over time and may decline if continued fishing occurs without further encounters with that stock.

Public Comment:

- **Drew Minkiewicz (Sustainable Scalloping Fund)** asked what specific numbers were being referenced for the southern yellowtail bycatch. A PDT member replied that the numbers were not known but appeared unusually high, jumping from 10% to 230%. Mr. Minkiewicz followed up, asking if there is a gear AM for the southern yellowtail and windowpane flounder stock units. Staff confirmed that when AMs were last updated, gear modifications were standardized across all flatfish stocks.

AGENDA ITEM #2: NGOM ENFORCEMENT

Council staff opened the discussion by asking the PDT to consider what data should be requested from the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) to better understand enforcement and monitoring issues in the NGOM. This request arose from Committee and public concerns that the 2025 NGOM season had seen an increase in noncompliant fishing behavior, coinciding with growing participation in the NGOM fishery and a perceived decrease in enforcement presence. The goal of the analysis is to determine whether violations have increased over time as the fishery expands and whether enforcement capacity has kept pace with that growth.

The purpose of the discussion was to determine what specific data the PDT should request from OLE to assess whether violations have increased over time and whether enforcement presence has diminished. It was suggested that this data request limit the timeframe to post-Amendment 21 (i.e., 2022 onward), since that was when the NGOM fishery structure significantly changed.

Jason Berthiaume (NOAA OLE) advised that a high-level, simplified request would be most feasible. He explained that tracking total hours of NGOM patrols or obtaining Coast Guard data would be impractical. Instead, OLE could likely provide the number of enforcement "contacts" (boardings or dockside inspections) and identify whether they occurred at sea or dockside. He also added that any citation issued by the Coast Guard for fisheries violations is automatically referred to OLE, which could then provide information on the violation type and its outcome. However, detailed notes or context around individual boardings would only be available if part of a formal investigation, and personal field notes are not shared. A PDT member asked whether boardings could be further categorized by location, such as whether they occurred in transit or while on the fishing grounds. It was explained that trying to set a finer resolution for the location of boardings would not be realistic.

Ultimately, the PDT agreed that the request to OLE should include: the number of boardings or contacts by year (from 2020–2025), categorized as either dockside or at sea; the type of violation, if any; and the percentage of boardings that resulted in violations. There was also support for complementing this request with internal PDT analysis of VMS data examining tow durations or time spent on Stellwagen Bank. This VMS analysis would remain a separate internal effort and would not be part of the formal OLE data request. The PDT agreed on a written memo to formally request the agreed upon data from OLE.

AGENDA ITEM #3: SCALLOP RESEARCH TRACK ASSESSMENT

Projection Results

Dr. Hart presented the results from the Stochastic Yield Model (SYM), which was used to estimate reference points for the scallop fishery. She explained that yield curves were generated using 100,000 simulation runs, with each point on the combined curve representing a 10% trimmed mean of those runs. The fishing mortality rate at maximum sustainable yield (F_{MSY}) calculated as F=0.49 for the combined resource. She also explained that the ABC fishing mortality rate (F_{ABC}) is calculated as the 25th percentile of the MSY distribution, meaning that 75% of the time, the true fishing mortality would be at or below F_{MSY}. The resulting F_{ABC} values were: 0.29 for Georges Bank, 1.24 for the Mid-Atlantic, and 0.36 for the combined resource.

A PDT member asked whether it still made sense to use a combined model for Georges Bank and the Mid-Atlantic, given the large difference in fishing mortality values. They questioned whether the regions could be treated as separate stocks. Dr. Hart responded that there was biological justification for treating them separately, but doing so would require a fundamental change in management approach. She also noted that the PDT could still recommend limiting Georges Bank fishing mortality to 0.36 using open area allocations, even under the combined stock model.

Another PDT member supported the direction of the assessment but noted that the tail of the Mid-Atlantic yield curve appeared quite flat, suggesting a high level of uncertainty in that region's F_{MSY} estimate. Dr. Hart explained that this flatness reflects the biology of Mid-Atlantic scallops, which grow quickly, rarely exceed 130 mm, and are largely protected by a fixed selectivity curve due to gear selectivity. Because natural mortality now exceeds growth for scallops larger than 100 mm, the yield-per-recruit model tends to support high fishing mortality rates. As a result, the stock-recruit relationship becomes more important for evaluating sustainable yield than the yield-per-recruit analysis. She added that the updated stock-recruit relationship used in the model is less constraining than those used in previous assessments.

Public Comment:

- **Drew Minkiewicz** asked what percentage of fully recruited scallops would be removed annually at Mid-Atlantic F_{MSY}. Dr. Hart replied that the Mid-Atlantic F_{MSY} would result in the removal of approximately 65% of these scallops. Mr. Minkiewicz followed up, asking whether any other shellfish fisheries use similarly high F_{MSY} values. Dr. Hart responded that other shellfish stocks with high natural mortality, such as blue crab and lobster, also exhibit high F_{MSY} values. She noted similar issues with fixed selectivity in these fisheries as there are with scallops.

Dr. Hart then presented on updated natural mortality (M) estimates and how they could be incorporated into SAMS modeling. The recent research track assessment estimated an average fully-recruited natural mortality rate of 0.4 in the Mid-Atlantic, but more recent years showed a higher estimate of 0.56. Dr. Hart emphasized that while these are reasonable spatial averages, mortality has clearly been higher in the southern and inshore portions of the Mid-Atlantic in recent years.

To investigate this spatial variability, she applied the Beverton-Holt length-based mortality estimator to survey data within SAMS areas. Results showed that the southern and inshore areas had the highest total mortality estimates (Z), despite little or no fishing effort during the period. This suggests elevated natural mortality rather than fishing pressure. In contrast, the four northernmost areas (HCS, NYB, LI, BI) showed relatively low Z values even with some fishing activity. The Elephant Trunk area was intermediate. Proposed M values for SAMS modeling were derived based on these findings.
She then compared model runs using the Framework 39 "Alternative 1" base case against new runs incorporating the revised M values. For the Mid-Atlantic, M was adjusted based on spatial patterns, while on Georges Bank and in the Gulf of Maine it was increased uniformly from 0.2 to 0.27. Mid-Atlantic recruitment was also reduced by 59% in line with the research track assessment. The result was a 19% reduction in one-year projected biomass in the Mid-Atlantic and a 4% reduction on Georges Bank and in the Gulf of Maine, relative to the original Framework 39 SAMS projection. Over the long term, the biomass declined by 56% in the Mid-Atlantic and 27% on Georges Bank and in the Gulf of Maine.

Council staff asked whether the proposed value of M = 0.5 was appropriate for the Elephant Trunk area. They added that while this spatial variation reflects biological reality, the PDT would need to develop a clear and strong recommendation to the SSC explaining any changes to how natural mortality is being applied. Dr. Hart responded that these values were not inconsistent with the research track, which estimated M to two significant figures, leaving some flexibility for interpretation. A PDT member supported the use of area-specific mortality, noting that the spatial mismatch between survey observations and model assumptions is a meaningful source of uncertainty. They characterized the updated M values as a "major change in perception" that likely reflects real dynamics in the system. Dr. Hart was asked to clarify whether the values shown reflected total mortality derived from the Beverton-Holt estimator, and she confirmed they did. This led to a detailed explanation of how the estimates were constructed and why certain areas, like Elephant Trunk, were proposed for higher M values.

Another PDT member asked whether a longitudinal analysis may be able to show how shifting environmental conditions, like temperature, are affecting mortality over time. Dr. Hart agreed that such a pattern is plausible, noting that once-productive inshore areas like those off New Jersey no longer support fisheries. She has been in contact with other researchers and hopes to develop predictive models of bottom temperature and scallop response, but acknowledged that mechanistic models are not yet available.

Prompted by a question from a PDT member, Dr. Hart gave a detailed explanation of how she arrived at the proposed M value for Elephant Trunk. She noted that it had the highest observed Z of any of the five areas analyzed and that this was supported by evidence of a natural mortality event in that region. While she was not recommending setting M exactly equal to the high observed values from that year, she explained that increasing M in Elephant Trunk would move the overall spatial average closer to 0.56, which better reflects recent mortality patterns. She emphasized that this choice is not arbitrary, even though the approach may seem ad hoc, and is guided by the Beverton-Holt estimates. She added that spatial averaging is inherently approximate and will vary year to year depending on scallop distribution, but the goal is to arrive at a plausible representation of expected mortality going forward.
Another PDT member asked whether a longitudinal analysis may be able to show how shifting environmental conditions, like temperature, are affecting mortality over time. Dr. Hart agreed that such a pattern is plausible, noting that once-productive inshore areas like those off New Jersey no longer support fisheries. She has been in contact with other researchers and hopes to develop predictive models of bottom temperature and scallop response, but acknowledged that mechanistic models are not yet available.

A PDT member asked whether the proposed M values would apply only to the model's plus group or across all age categories. Dr. Hart clarified that the M values would apply to all categories in the model.

Another PDT member asked whether similar spatial analysis should be done on Georges Bank. Dr. Hart replied that there was no strong evidence of elevated or spatially uniform mortality there, so the same urgency does not apply. Dr. Hart was also asked what the process for addressing natural mortality trends would look like if SAMS modeling could not be used in the next framework. She replied that the 2025 data would be essential to determine whether the recent mortality increases are persistent. If so, further adjustments will be made.

Public Comment:

- **Drew Minkiewicz** asked how the PDT distinguishes between a lack of recruitment and elevated mortality in areas where few scallops are observed. Dr. Hart clarified that recruitment is still occurring in areas like Delmarva and even Virginia, though survival is poor. She explained that recruits are considered scallops around 40 mm to 75 mm in shell height after one year of growth, and while recruitment is present, most fail to survive to older size classes. Mr. Minkiewicz then asked whether excluding the Virginia SAMS area from the analysis would alter the model since it is arguably no longer part of the resource. Dr. Hart replied that removing Virginia would be complex but would not substantially change the model outcomes.

Recommendations on use of new biological reference points

The PDT held a detailed discussion on how to frame recommendations to the SSC regarding the ABC control rule for FY2026 and FY2027 in light of updated reference points from the research track. The group discussed three possible approaches:

1. Using the combined F_{ABC} of 0.36 as the default control rule and recommend reduced Days-at-Sea (DAS) or fishery allocations.
2. Using Georges Bank-specific reference points (F_{MSY} = 0.36, F_{ABC} = 0.29) to ensure that legal limits could cap fishing effort below George's Bank F_{MSY}
3. Increasing the management uncertainty buffer between OFL and ABC

The discussion began with a PDT member asking about the current ABC control rule which allows a 25% chance of exceeding the combined $F_{MSY.}$ They asked how difficult it would be to alter that default. Council staff clarified that any change to the control rule would require SSC input.

On Option 1, a PDT member noted that while they were comfortable with this approach conceptually, it was unlikely to constrain effort meaningfully, as the OFL and ABC are not the primary tools used to manage the fishery. Another PDT member expressed concern that, even under Option 2, Georges Bank F could still increase, depending on how DAS are allocated. It was also noted that Option 1 could allow DAS to be set up to F=0.49, which was seen as problematic for the resource.

Discussion of Option 2 focused on using Georges Bank-specific reference points in place of the combined reference point to set the OFL and ABC. A PDT member agreed that Option 1 may not be constraining enough but felt that Option 2 could be too limiting. Concerns were raised that it feels like an arbitrary decision on what to use for setting legal limits. Another PDT member agreed and said that while the concern about localized overfishing is recognized, there are regulatory limitations that need to be considered. They added that Option 3 seemed like the most appropriate course and suggested that increasing the uncertainty buffer might be more suitable than changing the reference points directly.

Option 3 involved modifying ABC control rule to reduce the probability of overfishing associated with the ABC, beyond the current approach which allows a 25% probability of overfishing. A PDT member supported this, noting that the way OFL is currently calculated causes it to become inflated and not

constraining to fishing effort, and modifying the buffer could help address that. Another PDT member stated that this option was the most appropriate path forward, as it could help avoid overfishing in a subcomponent of the stock without running into legal issues. Council staff added that OFL itself cannot be modified, but the translation to ABC is more viable to adjust. It was suggested that the PDT bring the SSC ideas for what an appropriate buffer might look like.

The PDT generally agreed that, in some form, all three options should be communicated to the SSC. It was also agreed that ideas for an appropriate buffer should also be presented. One PDT member raised a question about how to practically limit effort so that ABCs are not exceeded and suggested rounding DAS allocations or adjusting the amount of catch from an Access Area. Council staff responded that the Council's risk policy could be applied in the future to provide a more quantitative framework for evaluating risk.

Table 1 – Scallop stock status and reference points from recent stock assessments.

	Definition in Scallop FMP	SARC 50 (2010)	SARC 59 (2014)	SARC 65 (2018)	2020 Management Track	2024 Research Track
OFL	F_{MSY}	F=0.38	F=0.48	F=0.64	F=0.61	F=0.49
ABC=ACL	25% probability of exceeding the OFL	F=0.32	F=0.38	F=0.51	F=0.45	F=0.36
B_{MSY}	B_{TARGET}	125,358 mt	96,480 mt	116,766 mt	102,657 mt	93,282 mt
½ B_{MSY}	$B_{THRESHOLD}$	62,679 mt	48,240 mt	58,383 mt	51,329 mt	46,641 mt
MSY		24,975 mt	23,798 mt	46,531 mt	32,079 mt	28,402 mt
Overfished?	$B < B_{THRESHOLD}$	No	No	No	No	No
Overfishing?	$F < F_{THRESHOLD}=F_{MSY}$	No	No	No	No	No*

AGENDA ITEM #4: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR E.O. 14276 RESTORING AMERICAN SEAFOOD COMPETITIVENESS

Council staff reminded the PDT that under Executive Order 14276, "Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness," the Council must submit recommendations by August 15 aimed at reducing burdens on domestic fishing, increasing production, stabilizing markets, improving access, enhancing economic profitability, and preventing closures. Staff reviewed the current list of proposed ideas and asked the PDT to consider any additional suggestions.

One PDT member asked whether there was an estimate for how much cost savings might result from the recommendation related to VMS. It was noted that the cost reduction would not be unsubstantial, and that there was previous analysis from the development of VMS measures in Framework 38 to refer to. Another PDT member stated that the PDT should prioritize development of in-season management tools this year. A separate PDT member expressed agreement with that recommendation.

With no other business the meeting adjourned at 3:31 PM.

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

MEETING SUMMARY

Scallop Plan Development Team

Buzzards Bay, MA

August 27-28, 2025

The Scallop PDT met in Buzzards Bay, MA on August 27th-28th, 2025 to: 1) Review preliminary results of the 2025 scallop surveys; 2) discuss data decisions for combining biomass estimates, data on fishery performance, and potential management scenarios for FY2026/2027; 3) Discuss other measures for Framework 40; 4) Discuss other business as necessary.

MEETING ATTENDANCE:

Connor Buckley (PDT Chair), Chandler Nelson, Jonathon Peros; GARFO: Emily Keiley, Danielle Palmer, Benjamin Galuardi; NEFSC: Dr. Dvora Hart, Dr. Robert Murphy; ME DMR: Carl Huntsberger; VIMS: Dr. David Rudders; SMAST: Dr. Adam Delargy; CFF: Tasha O'Hara; College of William and Mary: Dr. William DuPaul; RI DEM: Chris Parkins; MA DMF: Kelly Whitmore.

Also present were Scallop Committee members Melanie Griffin (Scallop Committee Chair), John Pappalardo, Eric Hansen, and Melissa Smith along with along with Dr. Liese Siemann (CFF), Sally Roman (VIMS), Dr. Jui-Han Chang (NEFSC), and several members of the public.

AGENDA ITEM #1: 2025 SURVEY PRESENTATIONS:

The PDT received presentations on findings from the 2025 scallop resource surveys. Short reports and presentations can be accessed at the following links. Key points from PDT discussion around each presentation are summarized below.

Virginia Institute for Marine Science	Short Report	Presentation Additional information: Observations from the Dredge Surveys
UMass Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology	Short Report: Georges Bank, Gulf of Maine	Presentation: Georges Bank, Gulf of Maine
Coonamessett Farm Foundation	Short Report	Presentation
Northeast Fisheries Science Center	Short Report	Presentation Additional Information: SH/MW Equations
Maine Department of Marine Resources	Short Report	Presentation

An Assessment of Sea Scallop Abundance and Distribution in the Mid-Atlantic Bight and Georges Bank Resource Areas – Sally Roman (Virginia Institute for Marine Science)

- The Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) conducted dredge surveys of the scallop resource throughout the Mid-Atlantic (MA) and all of Georges Bank (GB) over 3 cruises.
- In the MA, some stations were dropped due to wind development restrictions. On GB, three stations were dropped due to gear issues in Nantucket Lightship North (NLS-N).
- Recruitment signals were observed in several MA areas, but very few scallops were found in Virginia (VI) and Delmarva (DMV). It was noted that if this trend continues into 2026, it may warrant reconsideration of continuing to survey these areas annually.
- On GB, due to the survey delay there was a substantial amount of harvest that happened in the area prior to the survey. As a result, the survey saw declines in biomass across the eastern part of the area which is consistent with fishing effort.
- Nantucket Lightship – South (NLS-S) and surrounding areas showed recruitment but at slower than expected growth rates. One PDT member commented that, although the growth of this cohort is slow, they are still growing faster than the Peter Pan cohort. PDT members also expressed concern about unusually thin shells and very small gonad weights in this area, suggesting atypical development.
- Updated shell-height meat-weight relationships were applied without a minimum size cutoff, which allowed the survey to better capture small scallops in NLS-S. Ms. Roman noted that these models did not include a covariate for the presence of shell blister disease despite the general preference toward models that do incorporate shell blister disease.
- Biomass increased in some MA areas, however there was a decline in biomass in ET due to not seeing the larger animals that were observed in 2024. In some areas, like DMV and VIR, few animals were observed but the survey found that, for the first time since 2015, animals are surviving in these areas.
- Sensitivity analyses showed differences in biomass estimates depending on which shell-height meat-weight equation was applied, with the VIMS equation falling between the higher estimates of the 2025 RTA and the lower estimates of SARC-65.
- The PDT discussed the need to track and report survey access issues, particularly related to wind energy development, to improve coordination and mitigation in the future.

2025 CFF HabCam Survey – Tasha O'Hara (Coonamessett Farm Foundation)

- Coonamessett Farm Foundation (CFF) conducted HabCam surveys in Nantucket Lightship through Georges Bank and the Mid-Atlantic with HabCam v3. This year's surveys were conducted on the F/V *Princess Scarlet*, operating at slightly higher speeds than in past years. Due to scheduling changes, GB was surveyed later than usual, shortly after heavy fishing, which influenced conditions and observations.
- On GB, NLS-S showed high densities of small scallops, with additional hot spots observed in the Southern Flank (SF) and Closed Area II (CAII). These hot spots contained scallops of all size classes, while larger adults were most common in CAII.
- In the MA, explosives testing prevented access to part of the survey area, and a camera failure limited sampling in ET. Where surveys were completed, recruitment was observed in ET and the southern portion of NYB, while larger adults were most abundant in ET, LI, and NYB.
- Clappers were observed in both GB and the MA, generally in areas with the highest live scallop densities.
- Exploitable biomass was highest in NLS-S and SF on GB, and in ET and LI in the MA.
- Comparisons of shell-height meat-weight equations showed little difference in biomass estimates for the MA but large differences in GB, where the RTA equation produced much lower estimates than SARC-65.

- Environmental observations included a low-salinity band across CAII and unusually high temperatures along the SF, which were attributed to Gulf Stream intrusions. In the MA, conditions were largely similar to last year but with some warmer and more saline water in the deeper areas.

Public Comment:

- **Drew Minkiewicz (Sustainable Scalloping Fund)** asked about the presence of sea stars. Ms. O'Hara confirmed that there were a substantial number of sea stars found in the MA.

2025 Habcam/Dredge Scallop Survey Results – Dvora Hart (Northeast Fisheries Science Center)

- The Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) dredge survey was conducted on the F/V Selje and marked the first implementation of a Generalized Random Tessellation Stratified (GRTS) survey design.
- The survey found that biomass was concentrated in the northern areas of CAI and CAII, with additional biomass in GSC. A very large, non-random station was noted in the NLS extension.
- Recruitment was minimal, with only a small amount in CAI that may represent slow-growing three-year-olds.
- GRTS implementation required adjusting inclusion probabilities after 205 stations were allocated but only 173 were completed. Adjustments were made by stratum and zone to account for dropped stations.
- Summary estimates showed most biomass in CAI and CAII, with exploitable biomass concentrated outside CAII North. A PDT member commented that there was a notable decline in relative biomass in the HEPC. It was added that this area also had a large amount of both clappers and sea stars.
- The 2025 NEFSC HabCam survey lost a vehicle due to an uncharted wreck, leading to deployment of an AUV from shore in the northern MA. The AUV was limited by currents and could not survey GB but was able to cover the Lightship area.
- Geostatistical models were developed for NLS-W, NLS-S, CAII-S, and CAII extension, showing the NLS-S cohort aggregation further north and shallower than the 2012 cohort, possibly explaining improved growth.
- In the MA, models were developed for BI, LI, NYB, and ET, showing good survival of the 2024 ET recruitment event. CFF deployed additional AUVs in BI and LI, finding hot spots in both areas.
- One PDT asked about the benefits of GRTS and whether it increased confidence in the resulting estimates. Dr. Hart stated that CVs were around 10–11% for GSC and that the approach was simpler and more flexible than the old strata system.
- A PDT member asked about practical challenges with GRTS compared to expectations. Dr. Hart acknowledged adjustments were needed but emphasized that the solutions were statistically justified.
- A PDT member asked whether biomass estimates were compared with other 2024 surveys. Dr. Hart confirmed comparisons were made with dredge and HabCam data, which were similar.

Public Comment:

- **John Quinn (Fisheries Survival Fund)** asked why an AUV could not be deployed from a vessel. Dr. Hart explained that no contract could be arranged in time. PDT members discussed possible backup options to avoid issues like this in the future such as using CFF or volunteer vessels.
- **David Bethoney (Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation)** asked about SH/MW calculations in CAI, noting that his own researchers have reported large shells and small meats in the area. NEFSC staff answered that further data analysis is necessary to provide a concrete

answer, however, observationally, meat condition was poor in CAI. An industry member added that they had observed the most sever poor meat condition in deeper waters, often alongside high sea star densities.

- **John Quinn** raised the need for a backup vessel plan in case of future equipment loss. The PDT agreed planning for this issue is important.
- **Ron Smolowitz (Fisheries Survival Fund)** questioned survey methodology and the need for precise point estimates of the scallop population instead of focusing on broader coverage. Dr. Hart responded that surveys balance coverage across strata, with more effort in higher-density areas while still sampling lower-density zones.

SMAST Georges Bank Survey Results 2024- Adam Delargy (School for Marine Science and Technology)

- The School for Marine Science and Technology conducted drop camera surveys throughout
- Georges Bank, non-SAMS area eastern George's Bank, Nantucket Lightship West extension,
- north of the "sliver", and along the edge of Cape Cod (North and South Cape Cod)
- For this year, the same steel frame was used but the software was updated and hardware like the converter device were modernized.
- The survey was completed earlier than usual, between April and early June, which PDT members noted may influence estimates since fishing effort had not yet occurred in some areas.
- Overall, abundance, biomass, and exploitable biomass declined across most of GB compared to last year, partly reflecting changes in the shell-height meat-weight equation. However, increases were observed in NLS-S, SF, and several non-SAMS areas.
- Distribution patterns of scallops were generally consistent with 2024, although fewer scallops were observed in CAI, CAII, and in the Habitat Closed Area (HAPC).
- Signs of recruitment were observed in CAI-sliver, CAII, CAII-extension, Great South Channel (GSC), HAPC, and NLS-S.
- Non-SAMS areas, including regions near Cape Cod and GB edges, also showed increases and evidence of recruitment, though sample sizes in some locations were limited.
- A PDT member asked about sea star observations, to which Dr. Delargy stated that they observed the highest density seen on GB since 2003.

Public Comment:

- **Drew Minkiewicz** asked about the standard error for biomass estimates. Dr. Delargy explained that the large uncertainty in some areas, like SF, are driven by a small number of high-density stations. He added that this coincides with the results from the CFF survey.

2025 Gulf of Maine Scallop Survey Results - Carl Huntsberger (Maine Department of Marine Resources)

- The School for Marine Science and Technology conducted drop camera surveys throughout the Gulf of Maine, including Stellwagen Bank, Jeffreys Ledge, Ipswich Bay, and other areas. The focus of this survey was to collect samples for shell-height meat-weight equations.
- Unlike in previous years, the 2025 survey was spread across three vessels. The survey was also completed about two weeks earlier than in past years
- The 2024 and 2025 SH/MW equations were nearly identical, and updated fits showed minimal differences in meat weight and biomass estimates.
- For scallops ≥40 mm, declines in abundance, biomass, and exploitable biomass were observed in fished areas, though less severe than on GB. Some declines were also seen in closed areas such as Cashes and Fippennies, while increases were observed in Stellwagen within the WGOM closure. Results at Jeffreys Ledge were mixed, with biomass increasing in fished areas but exploitable biomass decreasing, while unfished areas showed the opposite trend.

- Densities across size classes were similar to 2024. Recruitment was observed in Stellwagen, Fippennies, and Jeffreys Ledge, while adult scallops were most abundant in Stellwagen (closed), Fippennies, and closed portions of Jeffreys.
- Detailed SH/MW sampling showed varied size distributions across sites, including strong recruitment cohorts in Stellwagen and Jeffreys, and large adults in the WGOM closure. Overall differences between the updated SH/MW equations were minor, resulting in less than a 2 mt difference in biomass estimates.
- A PDT member asked about potential spatial gaps between north Cape Cod (surveyed as part of the GB leg) and Stellwagen South. Dr. Delargy noted a possible four nautical mile gap and suggested that some biomass may be present there. The PDT discussed the possibility of better connecting these two survey areas while developing the SAMS areas for the GOM survey.

SMAST Gulf of Maine Survey Results 2024 - Adam Delargy (School for Marine Science and Technology)

- Maine Department of Marine Resources conducted 2024 scallop surveys throughout the Gulf of Maine with minimal gear conflict, aside from some issues in Ipswich Bay. Most priority stations were completed.
- SH/MW relationships were generally consistent with past years. Data from Platts Bank and Machias Seal Island (MSI) were nearly identical to prior equations, though MSI showed notably lower values compared to other areas.
- Survey results varied across locations. Biomass increased in Platts but declined in Ipswich, Jeffreys, Stellwagen, and Stellwagen South, with Stellwagen showing several cases of poor or fair meat quality and one instance of shell blister. MSI also showed a substantial biomass decline, no scallops under 100 mm, and evidence of fishing activity.
- Exploitable biomass decreased in all fished areas of the NGOM, with Stellwagen, Stellwagen South, and Jeffreys representing the highest-density areas. The total exploitable biomass estimate for NGOM was 1,155 mt.

AGENDA ITEM #2: DISCUSSION ON SURVEY RESULTS AND DATA TREATMENT

The PDT discussed survey results and data treatment decisions. Key points from discussion are summarized below for each topic. Final PDT recommendations on survey data treatment are available in the group's memo to the SSC (forthcoming).

SAMS Area considerations

The PDT reviewed SAMS boundaries and considered whether adjustments were necessary. PDT members discussed the potential for standardizing survey areas in the NGOM to better align with how SAMS are used for estimation elsewhere in the resource. It was noted that combining survey areas is not always appropriate, particularly when fishing effort differs substantially across them, and that models may not be informative in areas with very little activity.

In Georges Bank, the PDT noted that the outer Cape Cod area does not appear productive enough to warrant designation as its own SAMS, despite relative increases compared to nearby areas. No changes were recommended to existing SAMS boundaries, reflecting the lack of clear recruitment signals.

In the Mid-Atlantic, the PDT questioned whether surveys should continue in VIR and DMV given consistently low results. While some suggested options such as alternating-year surveys, others emphasized the value of maintaining continuous time series data. The PDT agreed this was not an immediate concern but may be an area to consider reducing in the future if resources become constrained.

Shell-height meat-weight assumptions and curves

The PDT reviewed shell-height meat-weight (SH/MW) equations developed during the 2025 Research Track Assessment (RTA). The RTA applied generalized additive models (GAMs) to survey shell-height meat-weight data and used observer information to calculate anomalies relative to baselines.

The PDT had a robust discussion on the SH/MW equations for GB. One PDT member suggested that the equations be updated annually with the additional survey data, as is currently done for Gulf of Maine. Some of the PDT stated that annual updates would better capture spatial variation and interannual differences, particularly across SAMS areas, rather than relying on a single equation applied to the entire region. Other PDT members cautioned that annually updated equations may reduce stability and provide poor forecasts when anomalous years occur. The PDT agreed not to shift to annual updates at this time, but to continue evaluating annual data as a check against the multi-year approach.

The PDT also considered whether a single GB-wide equation is sufficient or whether SAMS-area specific equations would provide a better reflection of spatial variation. It was noted that equations have been produced for individual SAMS areas in the past, and while this was not completed for the current research track due to time constraints, PDT members agreed this method should be revisited. The PDT concluded that area-specific relationships are worth testing in future analyses, with possible weighting by biomass, depth, or latitude. The PDT further discussed whether a truncated time series might better reflect current conditions. While some supported focusing on more recent years, others expressed concern that shorter series may not provide robust forecasts. The PDT agreed that truncated series could be useful as sensitivity analyses but that projections should continue to rely on multi-year averages.

The PDT compared the RTA GAM-based SH/MW equations with the older SARC 65 generalized linear mixed-model (GLMM) equations. It was explained that SARC 65 used Julian day for the Mid-Atlantic but not for Georges Bank, while the GAM approach identified a significant relationship between Julian day and meat weight. Questions were raised about whether switching from GLMs to GAMs represented a process change that would need to be documented for the SSC. It was confirmed that the inclusion of temporal variables marked a difference from SARC 65, and members agreed it should be documented and shared with the SSC.

Several members attempted to fit the Research Track SH/MW equations with recent survey data and found that it fit poorly, with the RTA equation underestimating weight at length for scallops on Georges Bank compared to the SARC 65 model. This misfit was attributed to slope differences in the equations, with predictions running high for small scallops and low for large scallops. The PDT agreed that incorporating SAMS-area fixed effects may help resolve these issues and decided that side-by-side model diagnostics and sensitivity runs should be prepared for the September 5th meeting.

During Day 2, follow-up analysis confirmed a clear difference in model fit by SAMS area. PDT members supported developing revised equations with area-specific fixed effects, and it was agreed that a draft equation would be prepared for review at the September 5th meeting. The group discussed whether to use SARC 65 or the revised RTA equation, with agreement to use SARC 65 as a backup. The PDT emphasized the need for model diagnostics and acknowledged trade-offs: when applying SAMS-specific models, some covariates such as depth or latitude cannot be included.

Finally, the PDT reviewed specific equations for NLS-S and the Gulf of Maine. For NLS-S, the group agreed to move forward with a VIMS 2025 equation, given that the area will likely remain closed and an additional year of data can be incorporated when revisited. For the Gulf of Maine, the PDT supported using the combined DMR and SMAST 2016–2025 equation for all areas except for Platts Bank and Machias Seal Island, which would use the DMR 2016-2025 equation.

Public Comment:

- **Drew Minkiewicz** asked whether biomass estimates would be delayed until this modeling issue was resolved. PDT members clarified that numbers could still be presented, but estimates may change depending on which equation is ultimately selected.
- **Ron Smolowitz (Fisheries Survival Fund)** asked how annual variation in meat weights could be accounted for and suggested placing confidence limits around projections using the historical range of SH/MW for each area. Dr. Hart agreed that this could be a useful sensitivity approach, though current models cannot forecast interannual changes in meat yield.
- **Dave Bethoney** (**Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation)** relayed feedback from research fleet fishermen in CAI, who reported that the SHMW equation does reflect field observations of large shells with poor meat yield.

Dredge Efficiency

The PDT reviewed potential dredge efficiency issues. Catch rates indicated densities of about 10 scallops/m^2 without adjustments and 25 scallops/m^2 with adjustments. Results from SMAST and dredge surveys in NLS-S were comparable, suggesting efficiency was not a primary source of discrepancy between survey types. PDT members also noted little evidence of dredges being filled to capacity, further reducing the likelihood of bias. The PDT agreed that dredge efficiency is unlikely to explain observed differences and that other factors should be investigated.

Review of VMS fishery data

Staff presented FY 2024 and 2025 VMS data of scallop fishing activity. To further investigate effort, there was a suggestion to analyze percentages for open areas only, excluding rotational area polygons. PDT members added that vessels continue to show a strong preference for fishing open bottom on Georges Bank, while Mid-Atlantic open bottom effort was higher than in recent years.

For NGOM, the PDT considered whether the 20-hour data cutoff used elsewhere is appropriate, since shorter tows in this region still represent meaningful fishing activity. Suggestions included applying a smaller cutoff threshold and conducting analysis at a finer spatial scale (1 nm) to capture potentially more efficient fishing.

Survey Estimate Agreement

The PDT discussed how to combine results across surveys for 2025 assessments. In most areas, a simple average of survey estimates will be applied. For NYB, it was agreed that estimates will be revisited once they have been re-scaled. However, a simple average will still be applied. For ET, there was some discussion on whether to restratify estimates from high-density stations, but no final decision was made. The PDT agreed to use a simple average of survey estimates for ET this year while flagging the area for further review in September, especially given its role in recruitment and potential management implications.

Treatment of the Southern Flank received additional discussion. The SMAST estimate was influenced by one or two stations with extremely high densities, which inflated biomass and increased variance. It was added that the outlier station may represent a dense cohort of scallops in the 65–70 mm range that could enter the fishery in 1-2 years. Some PDT members suggested that these densities could warrant consideration of a closure to improve yield if the area proves large enough. The PDT agreed to prepare additional analyses for the September 5th meeting, including geostatistical treatments with and without the

high-density station, to determine how best to combine estimates and whether management action should be considered.

Observations from the VIMS dredge surveys

The PDT received a presentation from Sally Roman on disease, condition, and water temperature observations from the 2025 VIMS dredge surveys.

Nematodes: Hotspots remained consistent in Elephant Trunk, though a higher percentage of infected scallops were observed in VIR and DMV. This was likely due to sampling methodology, as smaller scallops were included this year with no shell length minimum. A PDT member made a suggestion to train staff on the difference between nematodes and other parasites, as no protocol on this currently exists.

Shell blister: Prevalence and distribution in the Mid-Atlantic showed no major changes compared to recent years, though scallops with shell blister are increasingly observed inshore. In Georges Bank, occurrence was much lower overall, with no consistent trends across SAMS areas. Shell blister was mainly seen in smaller scallops in NLS-S, but the prevalence was too low to impact SHMW. One PDT member asked if shell blister was related to temperature. Ms. Roman replied that there is current research efforts on this topic.

Clappers and natural mortality: Elevated numbers were recorded in NYB and LI. Ratios of clappers to live scallops were similar to 2024, but the overall extent was reduced. On Georges Bank, clappers remained generally low in the east, with increases observed in the CAI-extension and CAII in 2025.

Predators: Astropecten distribution aligned closely with clapper distribution, and higher densities were observed in 2025 compared to prior years. Asterias were also more common in 2025. A PDT member noted that astropecten primarily prey on very small scallops, while asterias are more indicative of changing environmental conditions such as warming bottom water temperatures.

Bottom water temperature: In the Mid-Atlantic, bottom water temperatures have declined across most SAMS areas in recent years, except for BI. While some areas exceeded the 59°F threshold in 2018–2019, conditions were cooler in 2025. On Georges Bank, June–July temperatures have remained stable across most SAMS areas, with slight declines in NLS-S and NLS-W. The PDT agreed that a dedicated bottom water temperature survey in the fall would be useful to better understand these trends.

Public Comment:

- **Eric Hansen (Scallop Committee Member)** asked whether tows with 100% shell blister had been observed, given that figures go up to 100%. The response was that prevalence is estimated from 15 randomly selected scallops, and in some cases all 15 have shown shell blister.
- **Ron Smolowitz** asked whether multiple causes of shell blister have been identified. It was noted that this is currently under investigation by graduate research, and more information is expected in the future.

Outlook for FY2026

The PDT reviewed area-specific outlooks for FY2026, focusing on recruitment signals, biomass trends, and management options. For NLS, NLS-S appears to be growing slowly and will remain closed. There was concern over whether closing high-density patches in NLS-W could lead to derby fishing when reopened. For CAI, current numbers do not support allocating access area trips in 2026. Options discussed included opening as general category only, designating as open bottom, or allowing limited carry-over trips. There were comments on uncertainty in biomass estimates and natural mortality risk,

with potential for carry-over trips as a compromise. In CAII, signs of recruitment were observed, leading members to recommend closure to protect developing scallops. Because of the delayed opening of access areas, carry-over trips from FY2025 will be allowed until July 2026, which will generate some effort regardless. Options such as half trips, reallocation between areas, or partial closures were also broached. On ET, the PDT agreed the area should remain closed for now, though its recovery and long-term viability remain uncertain. Options such as delayed openings or open-bottom management were discussed, but the difficulty of projecting recovery given uncertainty around mortality and growth was emphasized. Stellwagen surveys showed some one and three-year-old scallops but no strong recruitment overall. The PDT agreed that mortality risk and lack of replacement cohorts should keep expectations conservative.

Public Comment:

- **Drew Minkiewicz** questioned why ultra-dense patches of scallops appear more frequently each year in NLS and expressed concern about the implications for management. Mr. Minkiewicz also suggested that, in CAI, it may be better to allow fishing to harvest scallops subject to natural mortality rather than leaving them.
- **Peter Hughes (Atlantic Capes Fisheries)** noted that surf temperatures were colder last year and hotter this year, though it was clarified that these observations may not reflect bottom water temperatures.
- **John Quinn** asked whether a delayed opening later in the fishing year could be considered for ET, but PDT members explained that optimal meat yields occur in spring, making late-year openings less favorable.

AGENDA ITEM #3: DEVELOP PDT INPUT FOR 2026/2027 SPECIFICATIONS

The PDT discussed approaches for developing the base run for 2026/2027 specifications. For initial modeling, the PDT supported starting with 24 DAS as the base level. There was discussion on how DAS should be calculated this year, whether through the LPUE model or alternative approaches. Questions were also raised about how to handle ET and CAI, and whether HCS should be included with ET if reopened. It was agreed that ET and HCS will be run with F = 0.3.

PDT members considered how selectivity assumptions applied in CAI and CAII compared to observed fishing behavior this season. It was stated that extreme selectivity often occurs in closed areas when vessels target larger scallops, while effort in more barren areas tends to be less selective. Auction price trends were reviewed, showing larger scallops targeted early in CAI with gradual size declines, while CAII landings included more U's. Observer data on landings and discards will be reviewed to refine assumptions, particularly for CAI. For the initial run, CAI will remain open with carry-over and general category trips allowed until July, and CAII will be closed.

NLS-S will remain closed in the initial run, though growth trends may be reviewed using Georges Bank growth relationships. For Platts Bank, it was noted that last year it was excluded from the model, but some of the group felt it should be added to Jefferys, particularly if the Advisory Panel seeks to include all available biomass in GOM considerations.

Public Comment:

- **Drew Minkiewicz** emphasized that auction prices influence selectivity, with vessels targeting high-value scallops when available. He added that when biomass estimates are uncertain, it is better to leave areas open rather than risk over-allocation of trips, as vessels will always attempt to meet trip limits regardless of actual biomass.
- **John Quinn** suggested that with less access area fishing expected, specifications should consider more DAS and more open bottom.
- **Eric Hansen** commented that CAI-Sliver does not have sufficient recruitment to warrant closure.

AGENDA ITEM #4: DISCUSS SSC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SETTING OFL AND ABC

The PDT discussed how to incorporate SSC recommendations regarding the use of reference points for setting OFLs and ABCs. It was noted that scallop regulations prescribe a very rigid process from OFL to ABC specifications, with limited flexibility. Amendment 15, however, clarified that anything within the ABC control rule could be modified through a Framework.

The PDT emphasized that options should be brought to the SSC for their consideration. The goal is to reduce the risk of overfishing in regions of the fishery that are not separately managed, particularly Georges Bank.

The PDT reviewed projections that applied a Georges Bank–specific F_{ABC} of 0.29 rather than the combined F_{ABC} of 0.36. It was noted that the intent is not to hold the entire fishery below F=0.29, but rather to keep Georges Bank fishing mortality consistent with the regional reference point.

The PDT agreed that growing evidence supports treating Georges Bank and the Mid-Atlantic as separate stocks, with separate fishing mortality reference points. Also highlighted was that differences between open area and access area fishing in the Mid-Atlantic should be evaluated, since unrestricted access area effort may lead to local overfishing even if total removals remain within the overall limit.

AGENDA ITEM #5: RISK POLICY

Council staff presented on the Council's updated risk policy and a draft scallop-specific risk policy matrix. The risk policy framework provides a structured way to consider trade-offs between scientific uncertainty and management flexibility. The draft matrix presented options for how risk tolerances could be applied within the scallop fishery. There was no discussion among PDT members on this item.

AGENDA ITEM #6: UPDATES ON THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Council staff presented the PDT with the draft Strategic Plan Roadmap document and provided input on research needs, timing, and prioritization. A PDT member commented on the value of a retrospective review of access area performance to better understand how specification decisions relate to fishery outcomes.

The PDT also discussed the need for a framework that sets clear bounds on what GARFO can do in-season. It was agreed that a procedural language outlining criteria and flexibility for opening or closing areas would be an important step for the Scallop FMP and the broader Omnibus Management Flexibility Amendment.

AGENDA ITEM #7: OTHER BUSINESS

A PDT member asked whether more timely updates could be provided on RSA compensation landings. They stated that they were not notified of potential overages in 2024 until late in the process, and suggested that quarterly reports would be helpful. There was agreement that more frequent updates would be helpful for tracking RSA removals, particularly from access areas.

Another PDT member asked about any potential updates to the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). It was reported that it remains frozen in Washington, D.C., with no movement toward publication. A PDT member commented that if the delay continues, there may be no 2026 grant competition and thus no new

project submissions. The PDT agreed that alternative ways to improve grant administration should be explored.

Finally, there were suggestions for survey groups to agree on standardization of methods and closer communication. It was emphasized that improved coordination between the two HabCam programs could be a worthwhile starting point.

Next Steps

- SH/MW equations: Develop revised 2025 Research Track shell-height meat-weight equations for Georges Bank with area-specific fixed effects, and add 2024 and 2025 data to a revised SARC 65 shell-height meat-weight equation as a back-up approach.
- Survey Data: Conduct further geostatistical analysis for the Southern Flank, including sensitivity tests with and without the high-density station
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The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:40PM

New England Fishery Management Council
50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492
Daniel Salerno, Acting *Chair* | Cate O'Keefe, PhD, *Executive Director*

MEETING SUMMARY

Scallop Plan Development Team

Webinar

September 5th & 9th 2025

The Scallop Plan Development Team (PDT) met on September 5th and September 9th, 2025 at 9:00AM and 11:00AM via webinar to: 1) Discuss Framework 40, including 2025 survey data treatment, analysis and modeling decisions, and the fishery outlook for FY 2026; 2) Discuss other business as necessary.

SEPTEMBER 5TH MEETING ATTENDANCE

Connor Buckley (PDT Chair), Chandler Nelson, Jonathon Peros, Dr. Naresh Pradhan; GARFO: Emily Keiley, Benjamin Galuardi, Sharon Benjamin; NEFSC: Dr. Dvora Hart, Dr. Robert Murphy; ME DMR: Carl Huntsberger; VIMS: Dr. David Rudders; SMAST: Dr. Adam Delargy; CFF: Tasha O'Hara; College of William and Mary: Dr. William DuPaul; RI DEM: Chris Parkins; MA DMF: Kelly Whitmore.

Also present were Scallop Committee members Melanie Griffin (Chair), Eric Hansen, Melissa Smith, and Ted Platz, along with Sally Roman (VIMS), Dr. Jui-Han Chang (NEFSC), Dr. Liese Seimann (CFF), and several members of the public.

SEPTEMBER 9TH MEETING ATTENDANCE

Connor Buckley (PDT Chair), Chandler Nelson, Jonathon Peros, Dr. Naresh Pradhan; GARFO: Emily Keiley, Benjamin Galuardi, Sharon Benjamin; Danielle Palmer; NEFSC: Dr. Dvora Hart, Dr. Robert Murphy; ME DMR: Carl Huntsberger; SMAST: Dr. Adam Delargy; CFF: Tasha O'Hara; College of William and Mary: Dr. William DuPaul; RI DEM: Chris Parkins; MA DMF: Kelly Whitmore.

Also present were Scallop Committee members Melanie Griffin (Chair), Melissa Smith, and Ted Platz, along with Sally Roman (VIMS), Dr. Jui-Han Chang (NEFSC), Dr. Liese Seimann (CFF), and several members of the public.

AGENDA ITEM #1: CONTINUE DISCUSSION ON SURVEY RESULTS AND DATA TREATMENT

Shell-Height Meat-Weight models

The PDT revisited Shell-Height/Meat-Weight (SH/MW) equations during the September 5 and September 9 meetings as a continuation of the August 27-28 PDT meeting. The discussions focused on how best to treat SH/MW relationships for survey biomass estimates and SAMS model runs, particularly in light of issues identified with the 2025 Research Track (RTA) equation. PDT members noted that the RTA formulation did not perform consistently across regions, producing lower biomass estimates on Georges Bank and higher ones in the Mid-Atlantic than expected.

Dr. Dvora Hart (NEFSC) presented an updated 2025 RTA SH/MW equation that corrected an error in the calculation of the mean year effect and incorporated additional data. The revised model included depth

and latitude covariates as well as area fixed effects, which improved performance by capturing differences across SAMS sub-areas. Comparisons with Coonamessett Farm Foundation (CFF) seasonal survey data from 2024-2025 indicated that the updated equation provided a better fit than the RTA equation and produced less biased estimates overall. Ultimately, the PDT decided to adopt the 2025 VIMS equation for Nantucket Lightship South, given that the area will not be allocated in FY 2026 and additional data will be available before reconsidering rotational access, and the revised 2025 RTA SH/MW equation with area effects for Georges Bank and the Mid-Atlantic areas.

2025 Survey Data Treatment

The PDT revisited the treatment of survey data for the Southern Flank (SF) to address concerns raised about a single high-density station that had been inflating biomass estimates. Dr. Jui-Han Chang (NEFSC) presented updated analyses using a 9x9 nm box centered on the station, which was subdivided into smaller grid cells to better account for spatial heterogeneity.

Dr. Hart added that when the SMAST data were expanded in the traditional way, the one dense station produced an unrealistically high estimate. Instead, she recommended using all available images within the 9x9 nm box to calculate an average density that more realistically reflects conditions in the area. This approach produced a density estimate of 14.9 scallops per m^2, compared to nearly 100 per m^2 when the single SMAST station was used to represent the entire grid cell. The PDT agreed to use this approach of substituting the adjusted estimate for the hotspot and then averaging it with the rest of the survey data as usual. There was also consensus that the decision should be clearly documented to explain why the PDT deviated from its default method of using a simple average of the survey estimates. The PDT added that while extreme heterogeneity of this type is unusual, similar situations have arisen in the past, and it would be worthwhile to consider developing standardized guidelines for how to handle anomalously high-density survey points in future assessments.

Modifications to SAMS Areas

The PDT reviewed survey data showing increasing densities of small scallops in the New York Bight (NYB) and considered whether a closure might be warranted to protect the recruitment event. There was discussion on the feasibility of modifying SAMS areas before developing initial projections, referencing the additional time and effort this would require. The PDT ultimately agreed not to modify SAMS areas for the initial OFL and ABC projections and decided to retain the 2025 SAMS configuration. The group agreed that if the Advisory Panel (AP) or Committee (CTE) provides tasking, the PDT could adjust the SAMS areas for that particular run.

Initial SAMS Runs

The PDT agreed to postpone developing the initial SAMS model runs until after the upcoming AP and CTE meetings on September 12 and 15, with the rationale that the remaining time was better directed toward resolving outstanding issues with growth, selectivity, and survey inputs, which need to be finalized before projections can be generated. The initial SAMS runs will be developed following tasking from the CTE at their September 15 meeting.

Next Steps

The PDT will calculate final combined survey biomass estimates using the revised SH/MW equation. All changes in methodology will be documented for inclusion in the memo to the SSC, including justification for deviations from the 2025 Research Track SHMW equations. Initial SAMS model runs will be prepared after growth and selectivity parameters are finalized, with outputs to be reviewed later in the process ahead of the SSC meeting on October 8th.

With no other business, the September 5th meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:00 AM, and the September 9th meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:30 PM.