New England Fishery Management Council
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MEETING SUMMARY

Joint Scallop Plan Development Team & Advisory Panel

September 9, 2026
Boston, MA, webinar

The Scallop Plan Development Team (PDT) and Advisory Panel (AP) met jointly on September 9, 2026 in Boston, MA and via webinar at 9:00 AM to 1) review preliminary survey results from 2026 scallop surveys and provide input on the development of FY 2027 and 2028 (default) scallop fishery specifications; 3) discuss input on the scoring of the Commercial Fishery Characterization factor of the revised Risk Policy; 4) discuss the development of Framework 42; 5) finalize the Scallop Work Plan for 2027-2029; and 6) other business.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Scallop PDT: Connor Buckley (PDT Chair), Sharon Benjamin (GARFO), Jenny Couture (NEFMC), Dr. Adam Delargy (SMAST), Dr. Bill DuPaul (College William & Mary), Ben Galuardi (GARFO), Dr. Dvora Hart (NEFSC), 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 AP: James Gutowski (AP Chair), Cassie Larsen (Vice Chair), Wesley Brighton, Jay Elsner, Brent Fulcher, Kyle Grant, Bob Keese, Brady Lybarger, Michael Marchetti, Ben Martens, Ed Mullis, Alex Todd, and Walter White. Scallop Committee: Chair Melanie Griffin, Vice Chair Eric Hansen, Ted Platz, Melissa Smith, Togue Brawn, and Jake Wiscott. Approximately 31 members of the public attended.

KEY OUTCOMES

- **2027 & 2028 (default) Specifications:** The AP passed several motions recommending that the Committee task the Scallop PDT with projections under scenarios with an allocation of 1 access area trip to a combined Nantucket Lightship South (NLS-S) and North (NLS-N) area. The Nantucket Lightship Extension would remain closed (delineated from the NLS-S along the 69.1W line) to protect slower growing scallops. Trip limits for analysis ranged from 9,000 – 15,000 pounds, and full-time Limited Access Days-at-Sea (DAS) ranged from 24-36 DAS. The AP also passed a motion recommending projections of a DAS-only option with no access area allocation, as well as a motion recommending a Northern Gulf of Maine (NGOM) set-aside set using a fishing mortality (F) rate from F=0.15 – F=0.25.
- **Risk Policy:** The AP reviewed the Risk Policy factor scoring conducted by the Scallop PDT on the Commercial Fishery Characterization factor and ultimately agreed with the

Scallop PDT's scoring that indicated the scallop fishery is currently operating under an elevated stress condition.

- **Framework 42 management measures:** The AP reviewed new information provided by the Scallop PDT on the development of Framework 42 management measures and provided staff with additional direction on the action.
- **Scallop work priorities:** The AP reviewed the draft Scallop Work Plan for 2027-2029, and recommended approval of the document, but stressed consideration of additional measures to manage fishing time on scallop access area trips.

INTRODUCTIONS

The AP Chair reviewed the agenda. Council staff reviewed the 2026 Council Scallop FMP priorities, timeline for ongoing work, and an overview of scallop fishery performance.

AGENDA ITEM #1: 2026 SCALLOP SURVEYS

Council staff began by presenting an overview of the 2026 scallop survey results, preliminary biomass estimates, and other fishery data. Overall, key survey findings are summarized as follows:

Surveys continued to detect the strong 4-year-old year-class in the Nantucket Lightship South (NLS-S) region that was first detected in 2023. The mean survey abundance estimate from this region was approximately 3.3 billion animals. While this year class continues to represent more than 50% of the scallop biomass on Georges Bank (>40mm), they continue to grow more slowly than scallops elsewhere on Georges Bank. A large recruitment event was detected this year in the eastern portion of Closed Area II (CAII), which was closed to scallop fishing beginning in FY 2026. Small areas of recruitment were detected also around the northern Mid-Atlantic (Block Island, Long Island), in the northern portion of the Great South Channel (GSC), Area I, the Nantucket Lightship North (NLS-N), and in the Southern Flank (SF). While no incoming year classes were observed throughout the rest of the Mid-Atlantic, the current 4-year old cohort continue to survive and grow, although the region saw heavy fishing effort after the survey season. Overall, surveys suggest a slight increase in biomass on Georges Bank driven by growth of the Nantucket Lightship cohort, and in the Mid-Atlantic, with one large year class on the cusp of entering the fishery. Fishing opportunities in the Stellwagen Bank region of the Northern Gulf of Maine Management Area (NGOM) are expected to be similar or slightly lower in FY 2027 compared to FY 2026.

Discussion on 2026 scallop surveys:

Scallop AP members discussed the results of the surveys and recent fishery performance. One AP member asked why FY 2027 projections of exploitable biomass were not available for this meeting, with staff replying that the PDT met to review and finalize the 2026 survey data only two weeks prior, thus there has not been enough time to produce projections. Several AP members commented on the strong yielding Mid-Atlantic scallops this year, with PDT members replying that this was driven by recent favorable oceanographic conditions. While the AP felt that the reliance on open bottom fishing in the current fishing year was positive for the scallop resource, several advisors noted issues with poor fishing practices such as excessive tow times, deckloading in warm summer conditions, and challenges with limiting incidental mortality.

Other AP members brought up the high seasonal and interannual variability in Mid-Atlantic meat yields as well as underestimated open area landings per unit effort (LPUE) for FY 2026, leading to comments from several PDT members about the difficulty of precisely estimating catch rates in the open bottom, particularly in areas that have been regularly fished. Several AP members also noted concerns about nematodes and meat quality, which have led to higher discard rates in the southern Mid-Atlantic, though many agreed this was less of an issue this year. On the Nantucket Lightship South (NLS-S), the AP discussed at length their concerns regarding high-grading the large, high-density cohort of slow-growing scallops in the area. An AP member suggested a delayed opening in FY 2027 could help improve yields and allow fishermen to take better advantage of market conditions.

In the Northern Gulf of Maine (NGOM), several AP members shared that this past season was heavier fishing than historically seen, particularly on Stellwagen Bank, and that the decline was very noticeable from day to day. A Scallop PDT member noted that surveys saw declines on Stellwagen Bank but increased biomass off the bank, with recruitment observed elsewhere in the NGOM.

Public Comment:

- **Ron Smolowitz (Fisheries Survival Fund)** – asked about the distribution of scallops in the Nantucket Lightship South (NLS-S), noting a small recruitment event in deeper waters that may extend out of the SAMS area. He referenced previous work to transplant scallops from this area further north to more suitable habitat, as well as concerns with incidental mortality from dredge impacts.
- **John Quinn (Fisheries Survival Fund)** – asked when the group would review projection performance, noting that 5.5 months into FY 2026, the fishery was already nearing their annual projected landings (APL), and that the FY 2026 projections were using updated natural mortality and shell-height meat weight assumptions. PDT members replied that while biomass overestimation was an issue in prior years, the FY 2026 projections were very close to the observed survey estimates, particularly in the Mid-Atlantic. The PDT continued to explain that underestimation of LPUE was the issue leading to underestimated open area landings in FY 2026 and further work was needed to refine that model.
- **Eric Hansen (Scallop Committee Vice-Chair)** – noted that scallop fishing practices were different this year without access area allocations, and he asked how the ~10 million pounds of open area landings from the Mid-Atlantic from April through June would be accounted for in projections. PDT members replied that projections incorporate an estimate of landings between the survey and the start of the next fishing year.

AGENDA ITEM #2: FISHING YEAR (FY) 2027 AND 2028 (DEFAULT) SPECIFICATIONS

The primary focus of this presentation was to develop input on the range of potential specification alternatives for FY 2027 and FY 2028. The action will set ABC/ACLs, days-at-sea, 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 fishing year 2027 and default specifications for fishing year 2028.

Discussion on 2027 Specifications:

The Scallop AP and PDT both discussed the Nantucket Lightship South, as well as the Nantucket Lightship Extension (NLS-Ext) area (69.1W boundary line) that the PDT was analyzing separately. Some PDT members were concerned with the NLS-S area being fished while leaving the NLS-Ext closed, given the small area may lead to increased area swept and higher localized fishing impacts than distributing that effort across a larger area. Several Scallop AP members, however, thought the area was sufficiently large, and that the fleet can function effectively in a smaller area as long as there was sufficient exploitable biomass. Other AP members supported a delayed opening of this potential access area until June 1st or June 15th. The AP noted that, if allocated an access area trip there, the NLS-S should be fished relatively conservatively to ensure the area was viable for access area fishing for several years. The group also discussed concerns about the thin shells of scallops in the NLS-S, particularly in deeper waters, and how the effects of dredge gear on incidental mortality are likely more severe as a result. Others noted the evidence of sea stars and increased predation in the area and wanted to limit scallop losses due to natural mortality.

The AP also strongly supported the idea of limiting time spent fishing in access areas, and suggested use of DAS or another measure to implement this in the NLS-S to limit high-grading and gear impacts. Staff replied that while this could be achieved, it was unlikely feasible to develop measures to do this for an access area trip in FY 2027; staff suggested developing measures to limit time spent in access areas for inclusion in the Scallop Strategic Plan for future work.

Public Comment:

- **Ron Smolowitz –** noted that twenty years ago, vessels could use open area DAS and exchange with an access area trip and supported limiting access area fishing time. He asked for an explanation of why this tool could not be immediately supported. It was explained that the PDT has discussed this, and the tool could be developed if the Council prioritized this, though given the lack of lead time and competing priorities, GARFO would not be able to achieve this in time to see specifications implemented by April 1, 2027.

- **Aubrey Church** (**Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance)** – shared that the fishermen she represented, largely LAGC IFQ permitted scallop vessels, were not supportive of an access area trip to the NLS-S to allow the slow-growing scallops in the area to grow to a larger size; she noted a preference for open bottom fishing only in FY 2027.
- **Paul Weckesser (Scallop Vessel Owner, New Bedford)** commented that he agreed with Mr. Smolowitz that new approaches were needed for managing access area trips, such as 100% scallop retention or time-limits on access area trips, that would improve the number of scallops harvested while minimizing mortality.
- **David Frulla (Fisheries Survival Fund)** – asked again whether it would be viable to get additional management measures added to the specifications package within the next three months before the Council takes final action. Staff replied that the specifications package was specifically separated from management measures to ensure that the new rules are in place on time, referencing NOAA staffing shortages which substantially limit the ability to quickly work through new management measures.

1. **MOTION (WHITE/BRIGHTON).**

   Recommend that the Committee task the PDT with analysis of a SAMS run with no access area trips for FY 2027.

Rationale: Scallops in the NLS-South are still growing, and another year of closure could allow for larger scallops to be harvested next year, as well as allowing the year class to reproduce another year. Several noted that without an access area trip, they could recommend more fishing effort in the open bottom to achieve similar landings.

Discussion on the motion: Several AP members did not support including consideration of specifications without an access area trip for FY 2027, while many others were supportive of including a projection scenario without an access area trip for further analysis.

Public Comment: None

MOTION #1 CARRIED 9-3-0

2. **MOTION (FULCHER/ELSNER).**

Recommend that the Committee task the PDT with analysis of a SAMS run with:

1 trip to a combined Nantucket Lightship North and South area, with trip limits ranging from 9,000 to 15,000 pounds. The Nantucket Lightship Extension area would remain closed. A delayed opening until July 1, 2027 would be in place.

Rationale: This motion would analyze an option that allows access area fishing for the LAGC fleet, and allows for the NLS-Ext to continue to be closed to allow for further observation and analysis of growth and yield of the cohort.

Discussion on the motion: Several AP members were concerned about including the NLS-N for consideration along with the NLS-S but ultimately supported the motion for further analysis. AP members noted that their previous experience in the NLS-S was not positive, with low LPUE and poor yields that needed additional crew to accommodate the work of shucking so many smaller scallops. An AP member noted that a smaller trip limits would be preferable to larger ones to limit the time spent in the area.

Public Comment: None

MOTION #2 CARRIED 10-1-1

CONSENSUS STATEMENT #1

Recommend that the Committee task the PDT with analysis of a SAMS run with:

24 – 36 Days-at-Sea

Rationale: Without projections of exploitable biomass, the 2026 surveys indicate that total open bottom biomass is similar to current levels. This range would include the PDT recommendation of 24 DAS.

CONSENSUS STATEMENT #2

Recommend that the Committee task the PDT with analysis of a NGOM set-aside for FY 2027 using F=0.15 to F=0.25 applied to all available biomass in the Northern Gulf of Maine.

Rationale: This represents the historic range over the prior five years, which is sufficient for further analysis.

AGENDA ITEM #3: RISK POLICY

Council staff reviewed the Scallop PDT Risk Policy scoring results and sought input from the AP on the scoring of the Commercial Fishery Characterization factor.

Discussion:

The Scallop AP had several clarifying questions regarding the definitions of each sub-factor of the Commercial Fishery Characterization factor, as well as the data that the PDT used for scoring. Several AP members were unclear as to the purpose of the exercise and how their input should be considered. Some were uncomfortable with the lack of nuance around different regions and permit types, noting that some aspects of the fishery, or different ports that are engaged in the fishery, are experiencing very different socioeconomic conditions. Others noted that a lot of the information they were being asked to consider was already provided, and remained unclear what the Risk Policy was adding to the process. In general, the AP reached consensus around the characterization that the scallop fishery was in a state of elevated stress and that was unlikely to change in the near future; the group remained uncomfortable with the process of providing input on the Scallop PDT's scoring exercise due to the lack of specificity in how the fishery was being assessed and how the Risk Policy might negatively affect future scallop fishery allocations.

Public Comment: None

AGENDA ITEM #4: FRAMEWORK 42

Council staff reviewed the Framework 42 Discussion Document and sought input regarding the development of measures for regional DAS management and NGOM sub-management areas. Staff advised that the AP not provide recommendations regarding the range of alternatives during this meeting, though the Committee may wish to make tasking motions for additional analysis or provide further direction on the scope of this action.

Discussion on Regional DAS management measures:

The Scallop AP expressed mixed support for regional management of DAS as a potential future tool but largely agreed that it was not necessary to address current scallop resource conditions. Several AP members were interested in discontinuing development of this work in favor of other items they felt were higher priority, namely implementing time limits on access area trips. An AP member suggested that any measures that drew additional management boundaries and reduced vessel operational flexibility were undesirable. Several AP members considered this a valuable management tool that would be helpful to have available when needed in the future, with one advisor noting that they thought that the scallop resource on Georges Bank would not be as poor as it is currently if the Council had this tool two year ago.

Public Comment:

- **John Quinn:** commented that regional management of DAS should be considered very carefully due to the negative biological and economic consequences of allocating too much effort to one region without allowing for a sufficiently strong self-correcting mechanism.

- **Shauna Heines (Scallop vessel owner, New Bedford, MA)**: shared that she agreed with Dr. Quinn that this was an unnecessary tool, and that the Council should not spend time developing tools that will never be used.
- **Mary Beth Tooley (O'Hara Corporation)**: noted the recent history of this discussion as well as the PDT's recommendations, and shared that while it was unlikely this tool would be needed regularly, it could be important to have as an option given the limited number of DAS currently allocated.

Discussion on NGOM sub-management areas

The AP also had mixed opinions on the continued development of NGOM sub-management areas. While AP members that were associated with the NGOM scallop fishery were supportive of these measures to help expand the scallop fishery in the area to explore new grounds, other advisors saw this an additional way to make the NGOM area exclusive to a subset of permit holders. Those that were supportive also agreed that simultaneous access to the two sub-management areas was preferred and agreed with the PDT recommendation to allow continuous transit across both areas. One AP member commented that this was a way to maximize fishing effort while equitably distributing that effort across the large region.

Public Comment:

- **Aubrey Church:** Commented that when discussing these measures with scallop fishermen in her organization, most preferred a single management area, but if the Council were to continue forward with these measures, they preferred simultaneous access and no transit corridor.

AGENDA ITEM #5: SCALLOP WORK PRIORITIES

Council staff provided a presentation on progress toward completing the 2026 work priorities. The Scallop PDT developed a draft three-year work plan, incorporating input provided during the June AP and Committee meetings. The work plan is intended to serve as an implementation tool for the Scallop Advisory Panel and Committee to sequence work priorities over 2027 – 2029. While the work plan would not constrain the Committee's ability to make annual priority recommendations that are not included in the work plan, recommendations from outside of the work plan should consider how the work would further the objectives of the Scallop Strategic Plan and be weighed against work already specified in the work plan.

Discussion:

The AP was supportive of the Scallop PDT's draft 3-year work plan. One AP member commented that the review of automated detection technology for scallop surveys was in line with the federal administrations push to use Artificial Intelligence for stock evaluation to complete assessments faster. Another advisor commented that it was helpful that there would still

be flexibility to add new work items in the work plan to account for any emerging issues; the advisor asked whether consideration of work towards use of the NGOM control date was discussed when developing the Scallop Strategic Plan. Staff replied that while it was a recommendation from the Committee in June, the Scallop PDT needed additional clarity around what work was intended before including this in the work plan. Advisors were also interested in adding time limits on access area trips and development of electronic monitoring or scallop retention regulations as part of the three-year work plan. Staff replied that this could be added to the Strategic Plan for consideration if desired by the Committee.

CONSENSUS STATEMENT #3

> The AP recommends that the Committee approve of the Scallop Work Plan for 2027-2029. The AP also recommends that work to develop management measures to limit time in access areas be prioritized by 2028, reflecting a high management priority. This priority would address Scallop Strategic Plan Objectives 4 (Improving Rotational Management Performance) and 5 (Improving Fishing Practices).

Rationale: The AP supports the current list of high priority work items from the Scallop Strategic Plan included in the work plan but want to ensure that new tools are available when needed.

Public Comment: None

AGENDA ITEM #6: 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 Council meeting in Plymouth, MA and via webinar, specifically the Scallop Committee report on September 16th.

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 4:15 PM