New England Fishery Management Council
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Scallop RSA Priorities for 2027/2028 and 2028/2029 Award Cycles

Overview:

The Scallop PDT reviewed the Scallop RSA Priorities for 2025 & 2026 via correspondence, and provides the Scallop AP and Committee with the following input to inform their recommendations regarding changes to these priorities for 2027 & 2028.

1. SCALLOP RESOURCE SURVEYS: The Scallop PDT continues to recommend that this remain a High Priority and did not recommend any changes to the language of this priority. Staff note that several Scallop Strategic Plan work items could be included in the language of this priority, including establishing a small-scale February/March survey of access areas each year before the start of the fishing year (Strategy 2.3), and increasing sampling effort in access areas at the end of their rotational cycle to reduce projection uncertainty (Strategy 2.4). The PDT notes that many surveys are currently funded through 2027 and 2028.
2. SCALLOP BIOLOGY: The Scallop PDT continues to recommend that this remain a Medium Priority and did not recommend any changes to the language of this priority.
3. TURTLES: While several Scallop PDT members suggested this priority be removed from the list for this cycles, others preferred to see it remain on the list as either a Medium or General Priority. Those that supported removing or deprioritizing turtle research noted that loggerhead sea turtle bycatch concerns have not been noted for several years and that other scallop fishery and resource issues were in greater need of research funding. Those that supported maintaining turtle research as either a Medium or General Priority noted that it would be valuable to maintain continued monitoring of sea turtle behavior and any changes in overlap with the scallop fishery (e.g., tracking studies funded under previous RSA have offered insights in sea turtle movement patterns and potential shifts (due to changing climate conditions)), and that this information can provide useful scientific information to serve as an early-warning system in the short term and to contribute to important time-series datasets in the long term. Monitoring can also include documenting the types of injuries observed in captured turtles over time, which can provide a window into possible population-level effects of human interaction (possibly including dredge interactions). The Scallop PDT recommendation therefore is to deprioritize this topic to a General Priority.
4. COMMERCIAL FISHING GEAR: The Scallop PDT continues to recommend that this remain a Medium Priority and did not recommend any changes to the language of this priority. Staff notes that fishery accountability measures may be revisited holistically by

2028, so it is unlikely that new gear research could be used in the refinement of scallop fishery accountability measures.

5. BYCATCH: The Scallop PDT recommends deprioritizing bycatch research to a General Priority and did not recommend any changes to the language of this priority. Staff notes that fishery accountability measures may be revisited holistically by 2028, so it is unlikely that new bycatch research could be used to aid the scallop fishery in avoiding or responding to accountability measures.
6. FISHING IN HIGH DENSITY AREAS: The Scallop PDT continues to recommend that this remain a Medium Priority and recommends minor changes to the language of this priority to highlight the need for social science methods to understand and improve fishing practices. PDT members noted that fishing in high-density areas has been a recurring concern that may be relevant for rotational fishing in the Nantucket Lightship in upcoming years and suggested possibly modifying the title and language of this priority to better capture general research focusing on improving fishing practices, e.g. FISHING PRACTICES AND DECISION-MAKING.
7. WIND: The Scallop PDT recommends deprioritizing wind research to a General Priority and did not recommend any changes to the language of this priority. The PDT notes that at the current stage of offshore wind development, with many turbines already installed and generating energy, navigating through wind lease areas and further understanding of impacts is still valuable.
8. SCALLOP RESOURCE ENHANCEMENT: The Scallop PDT continues to recommend that this remain a Medium Priority and recommends minor changes to the language of this priority. PDT members noted that this priority would best be refined to focus in on areas that have shown promise or exclude tools that do not seem to be effective or scalable.
9. HABITAT CHARACTERIZATION AND FISHERY IMPACTS: The Scallop PDT continues to recommend that this remain a General Priority and did not recommend any changes to the language of this priority. PDT members noted that Scallop Essential Fish Habitat will be updated shortly based on species distribution model, suggesting the need for additional research is low. Other PDT members noted that research that aims to address survey dredge efficiency issues are valuable and could be considered under this priority, or FISHING IN HIGH DENSITY AREAS.

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Scallop PDT Recommendations (Smoothed)

High Priorities: (Priority 1)

1. SCALLOP RESOURCE SURVEYS: Industry-based scallop surveys using dredge and/or optical tools conducted at varying sampling intensities (e.g., intensive and regional), and analysis of collected survey data needed to support annual Atlantic Sea Scallop fishery management and scallop science needs. This includes industry-based surveys within Georges Bank and/or the Mid-Atlantic, and the Gulf of Maine, including the Northern Gulf of Maine Management Area. Surveys may extend sampling efforts beyond the current known extent of the sea scallop resource. Survey results must be available by early August of the year in which the survey is conducted (e.g., survey results that would inform 2028 fishing effort decisions must be available by mid-August 2027). The survey or surveys do not need to be carried out by a single grant recipient. In addition, the data needs of some resource areas benefit from redundant surveys that use different sampling technologies (e.g., optical and dredge). Survey data will be used to develop estimates of total and exploitable biomass. Successful projects may be asked to provide data in a standardized format. The primary objective of these surveys would be to provide length frequencies, abundance, and biomass estimates.

Medium Priorities: (Priorities 2-5, Not Listed in Rank Order – Equal Importance)

2. SCALLOP BIOLOGY: Research on Atlantic sea scallop biology, including studies aimed at understanding recruitment processes (e.g., reproduction and gonad development, timing of spawning, larval transport, larval and early post-settlement stages, source/sink dynamics, age and growth, and yield), spatial population dynamics of the scallop resource, and examination of environmental stressors (anthropogenic and natural) and climate change on all of these processes. This priority also includes research on natural mortality processes, such as scallop predation (e.g., starfish, crab, snails), discard mortality, juvenile mortality events, and disease and parasites. The results of biology research should be informative to scallop stock assessments and projection models (current and future) and to support decision-making by fishery managers.

3. COMMERCIAL FISHING GEAR: Commercial dredge and gear research to improve scallop catch efficiency, improve scallop size selectivity, reduce scallop damage (discard and incidental mortality), reduce non-target species bycatch, and to reduce fuel consumption and improve energy efficiency. Research under this priority area could incorporate social science methods to explore fishermen perspectives and decision-making

associated with gear modifications.

4. FISHING IN HIGH DENSITY AREAS: Research to examine the impacts of intensive fishing effort in areas of high scallop densities on non-harvest mortality or sublethal effects. This includes impacts of sediment disruption, impact of high volumes of viscera on the benthic environment and water quality, scallop shell damage, repeated harvest/discarding cycles on scallop mortality, and re-examination of non-harvest mortality assumptions. This may include research that occurs concurrently with harvest. This priority includes research utilizing social science methods to better understand fishermen decision-making and ways to improve fishing practices to minimize waste and maximize yield.

5. SCALLOP RESOURCE ENHANCEMENT: Research focused on the development of Atlantic sea scallop enhancement tools (spat collection, seed rearing in hatcheries, grow out of juvenile scallops, disease resistance, and offshore seeding of hatchery reared spat) to supplement the scallop population and fishery harvest in the federally managed scallop fishery. Research could focus on the development of standards and best practices for using husbandry techniques to enhance the wild capture fishery while mitigating the impact of predators or could evaluate the economic feasibility of enhancement efforts. Research could also focus on projects that aim to develop and(or) refine techniques for growing seed from spat and transplanting those scallops to beds in federal waters, focusing on the identification of suitable habitat that is viable for scallop growth. Projects conducted in state waters should describe plans to comply with local and state regulations, as well as describe how research findings are applicable to scallop enhancement in federal waters. Projects are encouraged to share best practices and lessons learned to advance the state of knowledge in this field.

General Priorities: (Priorities 6-9, Not Listed in Rank Order – Equal Importance)

6. HABITAT CHARACTERIZATION AND FISHERY IMPACTS: Research on fishery impacts includes (but is not limited to): identification of which species and life history stages depend on particular habitats vulnerable to alteration by the scallop fishery for use as nursery, over-wintering, or spawning areas; evaluation of long-term or chronic effects of scallop fishing on the ecosystem; habitat recovery potential from fine scale fishing effort; before / after gradient designs. Habitat characterization includes (but is not limited to) research aimed at identifying and assessing the waters and substrate necessary to scallops for spawning, breeding, feeding, and growth to maturity. In particular, projects that would evaluate Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) closures and Habitat Management Areas to assess whether these areas are accomplishing their stated purposes and to assist with better definition of the complex ecosystem processes that occur in these areas would be of

interest. Finally, investigation of variability in dredge efficiency across habitats, times, areas, and gear designs to allow for more accurate quantitative estimates of scallop dredge impacts on the seabed and other managed species, and the development of practicable methods to minimize or mitigate those impacts would also qualify under this research priority.

7. BYCATCH: Identification and evaluation of methods to reduce the impacts of the scallop fishery with respect to bycatch of small scallops and non-target species. This would include projects that characterize spatial and temporal distribution patterns of non-target species, collect and analyze catch and bycatch data on a near-real time basis, as well as the associated discard mortality rates of key bycatch species. Research efforts focusing on non-target bycatch should provide results that would help the scallop industry avoid or respond to the implementation of accountability measures. Projects should consider the enforceability and feasibility of regulations in the commercial fishery.

8. WIND: Research aimed to support scallop management through studies that assess biological and ecological impacts of offshore wind energy development, and scallop production. This priority also includes research that aims to characterize the impacts of offshore wind energy development on scallop surveys through simulation modeling recommended by the Scallop Survey Working Group, and research that assesses the utility and feasibility of alternative sampling tools.

9. TURTLES: Research to support the investigation of sea turtle behavior in the Mid-Atlantic and Georges Bank (via satellite tagging or other means). This could include, but is not limited to, research to understand their seasonal movements, vertical habitat utilization, and the status and range of the population in response to climate change. This research could assist in the collection of data that may be required by current or future biological opinions, to address reasonable and prudent measures of the biological opinion and could be used to evaluate current turtle regulations (e.g., timing and spatial extent of gear modifications). Oceanographic data collected during turtle research should be analyzed and products provided to managers to support decision making (e.g., bottom temperature data and maps).

Scallop RSA Priorities for 2027/2028 and 2028/2029 Award Cycles

Scallop PDT Recommendations (Tracked changes)

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