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

MEETING SUMMARY

Scallop Plan Development Team

October 16, 2026
Webinar

The Scallop Plan Development Team (PDT) met on October 16, 2026, via webinar at 9:30 AM to 1) review and discuss projection results and develop recommendations for FY 2027 and FY 2028 (default) specifications, 2) prioritization of 2027 scallop work priorities, and 3) other business.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Connor Buckley (PDT Chair), Jenny Couture (NEFMC), Dr. Adam Delargy (SMAST), Bill DuPaul (College of William & Mary), Ben Galuardi (GARFO), Dvora Hart (NEFSC), Carl Huntsberger (ME DMR), Emily Keiley (GARFO), Bobby Murphy (NEFSC), Tasha O'Hara (CFF), Danielle Palmer (GARFO), Chris Parkins (RI DEM), Sally Roman (VIMS), and Kelly Whitmore (MA DMF). Scallop Committee: Chair Melanie Griffin, Togue Brawn, Ted Platz, and Melissa Smith. Scallop Advisory Panel (AP): James Gutowksi (AP Chair), Peter Hughes, and Brady Lybarger. Approximately 14 members of the public attended.

AGENDA ITEM #1: SCALLOP PROJECTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FY 2027 – FY 2028 (DEFAULT) SPECIFICATIONS

Council staff began by presenting an overview of the specifications action which will set the following specifications for FY 2027 and FY 2028 (default): Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), Annual Catch Limits (ACL), days-at-sea (DAS), access area allocations, total allowable landings for the Northern Gulf of Maine (NGOM) management area, targets for General Category incidental catch, General Category access area trips and trip accounting, and set-asides for the observer and research programs for fishing year 2027 and default specifications for fishing year 2028. Staff also provided an overview of the projection model outcomes and sought questions from the PDT and members of the Advisory Panel (AP), Committee, and public who were in attendance. Staff asked for PDT feedback on recommendations to make for AP and Committee consideration during their October 27th meeting. The PDT also received a brief presentation from Dr. Dvora Hart (NEFSC) on additional model outputs.

Discussion:

The PDT discussed projection bias and uncertainty, noting that projection bias in the Mid-Atlantic was clearly reduced after natural mortality estimates were increased through the 2025 Research Track assessment. Overestimation on Georges Bank was discussed as a concern that

warranted a sensitivity projection using an increased Georges Bank natural mortality estimate for the Council's preferred specifications alternative. One PDT member asked about the regional fishing mortality rates across the range of open area DAS allocations, and staff replied that this would be provided for the next meeting. The PDT then discussed concerns about landings per unit effort (LPUE) projections and the challenges of precise estimation given the uncertainties of fleet dynamics and individual fishermen behavior. Kyle Grant (Scallop AP) commented that LPUE is also heavily affected by variation in meat yield, and fishermen will continue to closely track the highest yields, especially in a small area.

One PDT member asked if the size frequency of discards was estimated in the SAMS model, and Dr. Hart replied that it was not, and confirmed that the Georges Bank open selectivity curve was applied for the Nantucket Lightship-South (NLS-S) area to account for the smaller sized scallops. The PDT also discussed the idea of expanding the delayed opening of a potential Nantucket Lightship access area to be a seasonal closure, with harvest limited to just overlap the months with the highest meat yields and closure during months with poor yield.

On the Northern Gulf of Maine (NGOM) projections, one PDT member asked for clarification on the calculation on the deduction from the NGOM Total Allowable Landings (TAL) to cover observer coverage (1% of the NGOM ABC), noting that this value is heavily influenced by biomass within the Western Gulf of Maine (WGOM) closure. Staff replied that this 1% deduction was established under Amendment 21 and agreed that this value has increased as the NGOM ABC has increased with new areas being surveyed and biomass added to the ABC estimate. Staff shared that analysis of whether the observer set-aside was being over- or under-used might justify future modifications. The group discussed that while 40% of the exploitable biomass was projected to be on Stellwagen Bank in FY 2027, fishing effort would still likely be concentrated there to some degree even if the fleet was more broadly distributed than in past years.

Scallop PDT Input on FY 2027 and FY 2028 (default) specifications:

1. **Nantucket Lightship management:** Two different perspectives were shared by PDT members on how to manage the Nantucket Lightship in FY 2027. While all agreed that the area had sufficient exploitable biomass to support the limited harvest that was analyzed (9,000 – 15,000 lb trip allocation), many PDT members were concerned that with the small projected size of these animals, allocating a trip of any size would contribute to high incidental mortality through anticipated heavy discarding. It was previously discussed that the scallops in this area have much thinner shells than elsewhere on Georges Bank, leaving them more susceptible to gear damage and predation. These PDT members preferred to leave this area closed for an additional year of growth before allowing fishing to occur in the area, especially given that the open bottom could likely support sufficient harvest without necessitating an access area trip allocation. These PDT members were concerned that allocating effort to this area too early might lead to a decline in the Nantucket Lightship cohort before the 2026 Closed Area II cohort had reached exploitable size. Another PDT member shared that they thought with the management measures already being considered (delayed opening and closure of the Nantucket Lightship Extension), the benefits of limited harvest with a small allocation justified the risk of elevated incidental mortality.

2. **Days-at-Sea:** The PDT reviewed the open area fishing mortality rates associated with the range of 20-40 DAS, and the resulting landings. The group generally agreed that the entire range presented would result in a reasonable fishing mortality and thought that options that considered a higher DAS allocation with no access area allocation, or a more conservative DAS allocation with some access area allocation, would be preferrable to maintain stability in landings. The PDT's recommendation was to constrain the range to 28-40 DAS.
3. **Northern Gulf of Maine:** The PDT considered that with recent declines of the Stellwagen Bank cohort, and a large proportion of the exploitable biomass within the Stellwagen range lying off of the bank, a more conservative range of fishing mortality rates would be preferable. The PDT's recommendation was to constrain the range of fishing mortality rates used to set the NGOM TAL at F=0.15 – F=0.21, and to set the FY 2028 default NGOM set-aside to 50% of the FY 2027 value.
4. **Scallop Research Set-Aside (RSA) compensation fishing:** The PDT did not recommend RSA compensation fishing in a potential Nantucket Lightship access area due to the potential for additional mortality of the slower-growing cohort.

Next steps:

- Revise the draft 2027 Specifications Decision Document to reflect the Scallop PDT's input (Connor Buckley, Jenny Couture)

Public Comment:

- **Drew Minkiewicz (Sustainable Scalloping Fund)** commented that he had not heard of any large areas of higher catch rates, rather that the fleet was widely distributed with uniform catch rates of approximately 2,500 lb/day. He also shared support for a conservative access area allocation to the Nantucket Lightship to learn more about the area.
- **Bob Keese (Scallop Advisory Panel)** commented that he agreed with Mr. Minkiewicz and supported limited fishing of the Nantucket Lightship, and suggested consideration of the area as a LAGC IFQ access area for FY 2027.
- **Brady Lybarger (Scallop Advisory Panel)** commented that he was concerned about allocating the area too early, before the current year class had reached optimal size. He related this discussion to the previous Nantucket Lightship South cohort, and thought that sea stars are more of an issue because of low scallop abundances.
- **Magnar Kvilhaug** (**Limited Access vessel owner, New Bedford)** commented that he believed more incorporation of microeconomics would help improve estimation of LPUE as fishing behavior was largely driven by variation in expected margins.
- **John Quinn (Fisheries Survival Fund)** commented that in the current fishing year where there were only allocations of DAS, captains were 'on the clock' and more heavily targeted areas with higher LPUE.

AGENDA ITEM #2: 2027 WORK PRIORITIES

Council staff provided an overview of the upcoming work plan for 2027 – 2029 and asked for any input on prioritization of work items for 2027 consideration, noting that staff are not seeking any new ideas at this time.

Discussion:

One PDT member noted that ongoing work developing conceptual models with the scallop industry on fleet behavior and fishing practices would align well with the proposed AP/PDT working group on scallop fishing practices. On a review of automated detection technology, another PDT member suggested timing the review to later February/early March to give survey groups sufficient time to adapt their processes and workflows before the 2027 surveys begin. The PDT also felt it was important that a review of this automated detection technology should involve outside experts who were more familiar with these methods, in addition to the SSC. It was confirmed that the intention of this review should be to develop appropriate standards and best practices for all optical survey groups to implement automated detection technology in their image annotation workflows that would be suitable for use in management.

AGENDA ITEM #3: OTHER BUSINESS

Council staff presented an overview of upcoming meetings and decision points regarding the specifications setting and Framework 42 actions. An important meeting to note is the Joint Scallop AP and Committee meeting in New Bedford, MA on October 27th. The PDT, AP, and Committee meetings will be focused on the scallop specifications action.

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at 11:58 am.