



New England Fishery Management Council

50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492

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

MEETING SUMMARY

Scallop Plan Development Team

July 29, 2026
Wakefield, MA, webinar

The Scallop Plan Development Team (PDT) met on July 29, 2026 in Wakefield, MA and via webinar at 9:00 AM to discuss 1) 2026 scallop work priorities; 2) bottom temperature forecasting products for use in scallop management; 3) scallop Essential Fish Habitat (EFH); 4) Risk Policy factor scoring; and 5) other business. Scallop Strategic Plan and the development of a 3-year work plan will be discussed during a future PDT meeting.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Connor Buckley (PDT Chair), Sharon Benjamin (GARFO), Jenny Couture (NEFMC), Dr. Adam Delargy (SMASST), Dr. Bill DuPaul (College William & Mary), Dr. Dvora Hart (NEFSC), Carl Huntsberger (ME DMR), Emily Keiley (GARFO), Dr. Robert Murphy (NEFSC), Tasha O'Hara (CFF), Danielle Palmer (GARFO), Chris Parkins (RI DEM), Dr. Naresh Pradhan (NEFMC), Sally Roman (VIMS), and Kelly Whitmore (MA DMF). Other NEFMC staff: Alex Dunn and Julian Garrison; invited participants: Dr. Joe Caracappa (NEFSC EDAB), Dr. Chris Haak (Monmouth University), and Angelia Miller (Maris Collaborative LLC). Scallop Committee: Chair Melanie Griffin, Eric Hansen, Ted Platz, and Melissa Smith; Scallop Advisory Panel: Peter Hughes. Approximately 19 members of the public attended.

AGENDA ITEM #1: 2026 SCALLOP WORK PRIORITIES

Council staff began by presenting an overview of the June Council meeting outcomes, fishing year (FY) 2027 and FY 2028 (default) specifications action, and Framework (FW) 42 (management measures action). An overview of the survey updates was provided, and staff more thoroughly described the management measures included in FW42, namely the regional day-at-sea (DAS) allocations and the Northern Gulf of Maine (NGOM) sub-management areas. Analysis of Mid-Atlantic Bight shell-height meat weight equations from two PDT members.

Discussion on June Council meeting outcomes and fishery performance:

One PDT member asked about scallop fishery day-at-sea (DAS) use and landings, specifically what the consequences were if landings exceeded the overfishing limit while there were DAS remaining. This scenario is unlikely given the scallop fishery has never met the annual catch limit (ACL), let alone the legal limits of acceptable biological catch (ABC) / overfishing limit (OFL). Landings for most years are well below the ACL and respective sub-ACLs, but

accountability measures exist for each scallop fishery component (Limited Access, LAGC IFQ, NGOM).

Discussion on survey updates:

Overall, high recruitment was seen in the southern part of Closed Area II, off of Block Island and Long Island, northern part of the Great South Channel, and along the Northern Edge; there were high densities of medium sized scallops and also large sea stars in Nantucket Lightship area (and other areas); scallops were observed in areas where they were expected to be; there was some evidence of clappers; scallops in Platts Bank area grew as expected (~100 mm) and a substantial decline in scallops was observed in Stellwagen Bank, north of 42°20'N. In the Mid-Atlantic region, most of the 2022-year class (4-year old scallops) are now fished down, with little evidence of recruitment in the area. Staff summarized the surveys as overall good signs for the resource and the fishery, though further discussion is warranted for the Nantucket Lightship area given the large growth observed and potential for substantial natural mortality from sea stars. One PDT member suggested that the northern part of the Mid-Atlantic area should be considered for a closure given the magnitude of recruitment observed; she noted that a similar closure was done in the New York Bight region and that proved effective for seeding other areas.

Discussion on shell height meat weight (SH/MW) analyses:

A couple of PDT members discussed the year effect used for SH/MW calculations and that there are strong year effects of meat weights that can substantially impact results. There was a big difference in meat weights observed between 2024 and 2025, mostly because 2024 showed a continuing decline in meat weights in the Mid-Atlantic but meat weights improved in 2025, likely due to cooler temperatures and perhaps a stronger cold pool. Other factors that can vary between years and even within a given year include seasonal effects, specifically changes in spawning cycles where if scallops spawn earlier, the meats during the summer survey season may be smaller, for example. Using the mean year effect averages across this interannual variation.

The PDT discussed the depth and depth² parameters in the Mid-Atlantic SH/MW equation that was presented, noting that including the depth² was found to be highly significant given depths shallower than 40 m do not show scallops increasing in meat weight. Note that the depth parameter is not included in the SAMS model because the data are aggregated by SAMS area. The PDT agreed to include the proposed Mid-Atlantic shell height meat weight equation that included a latitude parameter, rather than a SAMS area effect, due to the minimal reduction in model deviance. Use of this equation for developing survey biomass estimates would require the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to review and approve the equation for use in scallop management. The depth² term was briefly discussed for inclusion in a Georges Bank equation, though it was noted that Georges Bank does not typically have shallow populations of scallops.

Public Comment:

- **Drew Minkiewicz** (Sustainable Scalloping Fund) asked about the net change in scallop biomass using the proposed Mid-Atlantic shell height meat weight equation for next year's projections.

- Staff explained that survey data are still being compiled and analyzed, though anticipate that biomass will be slightly higher relative to last year. Furthermore, a sensitivity analysis will need to be run using last year's equation as the baseline to compare biomass projections using the new Mid-Atlantic equation.

Discussion on Specifications Action:

There was a brief discussion on potentially requesting the SSC to set three-year ABCs/OFLs given the regulations allow for this flexibility. One PDT member commented that the observer set-aside is set at 1% of the ABC/ACL and that setting an annual ABC/OFL does not require a lot of time nor effort, though could increase some uncertainty in the process. Staff noted that most of the time savings would be for Council staff preparing materials for the SSC (PDT memo to the SSC, Risk Policy documents, etc.). One PDT member suggested looking at the second-year projection that is presented to the SSC and comparing against the first year of the new projection to understand any implications of this change. The GARFO PDT member explained that the PDT and other Council groups would not lose the opportunity to modify setting the ABC/OFL annually if there is a need; she also noted that this does not involve NOAA rulemaking.

Public Comment:

- **Drew Minkiewicz** (Sustainable Scallop Fund) explained that the benefit of setting ABC/OFL specifications longer than annually is minimal, and the cost is higher with the big fluctuations in the fishery between years; he thought that accuracy was more important.
- **John Quinn** (Fisheries Survival Fund) agreed with Mr. Minkiewicz that scallop biomass has fluctuated substantially over the last couple of years.

Discussion on Framework 42:

The Scallop PDT primarily discussed Framework 42's regional DAS allocations measure as the group ran out of time to discuss Northern Gulf of Maine sub-management areas measure. There was a lengthy discussion on DAS trading, with GARFO encouraging the group to be specific on what trading looks like so that the programming and accounting capabilities within GARFO can be adequately developed. For example, should DAS trading be allowed for 1:1 or in partial day increments; allowance for in-season trading done online via FishOnline, similar to access area trading; should there be an overall DAS trade cap; how will DAS carryover work (with the assumption that ten-day carryover remains). GARFO and Council staff reiterated that any DAS trading scheme would be developed for implementation starting in FY 2028, that this program could not be revised annually, and that this is just DAS exchange, not leasing or buying of DAS. One team member thought that a DAS trading mechanism would be needed in order for regional DAS allocations to work, though suggested using an exchange rate between the two areas so that fishermen have the flexibility to make any applicable regional DAS deals amongst each other (3 DAS in Mid-Atlantic for 2 DAS in Georges Bank, for example). The total number of DAS would not change; just the number of regional DAS for a given vessel would change based on any exchanges with other vessels. This type of exchange rate may cause DAS stacking, thus, the PDT would want to recommend an overall DAS vessel cap to prevent this. The original intention for regional DAS was to limit fishing effort in certain areas, thus, allowing people to choose a DAS exchange rate amongst each other could jeopardize that goal. Staff were also concerned that this

could create competition for trading DAS early in the fishing year. A further complication of this is how DAS carryover would work in a subsequent year if DAS are not traded 1:1.

Public Comment:

- **Peter Hughes** (Atlantic Capes Fisheries Inc.) asked how regional DAS allocation would work.
 - The Scallop Committee would make a recommendation implementing a regional DAS split for a given year and if so, the number of DAS that should be allocated in each region based on the exploitable biomass in each area.
- **John Quinn** (Fisheries Survival Fund) suggested to let fishermen fish as they want; he is worried about an excess number of DAS in one area versus another, which could result in overfishing. He suggested making management as flexible as possible.
 - Staff explained that biomass would be evaluated in each region to determine if fishing could be supported; Mr. Buckley reminded the group that the intention for regional DAS is to shift effort elsewhere when there is a concentration in a certain area.
- **Ted Platz** remarked that the DAS exchange rate conversation is akin to other economic policy discussions in other countries and that because the DAS pool would not change, then an exchange rate should be allowed; the PDT is discussing managing something that does not require management.

Next steps:

- 2027 Specifications action:
 - Consider the new Mid-Atlantic SH/MW equation as a sensitivity against the 2025 Scallop Research Track equation revised for Scallop Framework 40. If the new equation is recommended for final survey biomass estimates, present this analysis to the SSC during their October 7th meeting (Scallop PDT/Hart)
 - Consider the advantages and disadvantages of setting ABC/OFL for three years (two years projection with one year default) (Buckley/Couture).
 - Carefully review northern Mid-Atlantic recruitment to determine if a closure in the region would be beneficial to protect small scallops (Scallop PDT).
- FW42 Regional DAS – Consider the program mechanics and advantages and disadvantages for various options for further PDT discussion (Buckley/Couture)

AGENDA ITEM #2: OCEANOGRAPHIC FORECASTS FOR FY 2027

Dr. Joe Caracappa (NEFSC) reviewed MOM6 ocean forecasts and specifically, bottom temperature forecasts and relevant effects on scallop mortality, Ecosystem and Socioeconomic Profiles including the report cards, and potential indicators for inclusion in any report cards in the future that are pertinent to the scallop fishery and management. Dr. Caracappa sought feedback from the Scallop PDT on whether the Ecosystem and Socioeconomic Profiles are useful, how these types of forecasting products might be most useful for scallop management, what socioeconomic data would help make those decisions, and the timeline for decision-making. Overall, the model has not been validated for scallop management use and will not be considered for decisions regarding 2027 scallop specifications.

Discussion:

A couple of PDT members asked about the heat stress figures for certain regions (Delmarva, Virginia Beach, Elephant Trunk, etc.) and that scallops are most likely not in certain areas due to depth constraints (scallops aren't typically present shallower than 40 m) so heat stress may be less of a concern for those areas relative to other regions. Dr. Caracappa explained that the heat stress values are averages over the entire extent of management areas and not cropped where scallops were observed in recent surveys, though this can be done using HabCam data estimates, for example. There were questions related to the heat stress and bottom temperature forecast figures; Dr. Caracappa will look into this more to understand why there are differences in results. He explained that the model is set with initial conditions but there is stochasticity on the physical properties that can change through time. Staff appreciated the work done and thought that the measure of time and intensity of degree days was most important for scallop management. One PDT member suggested including 21 degrees as another threshold to denote acute scallop mortality; he also asked if there is reason to believe certain times of the year for specific areas would be most impacted by temperature stress. Another PDT member explained that post-spawning and under heat stress, scallops are consuming more energy than they can replace and are particularly vulnerable in the fall when the water is de-stratified. She suggested validating the model with other surveys and data sources (fall surveys that use CTDs, EcoMon, glider data, etc.). There is a need to understand variability of spatiotemporal findings and level of uncertainty before use in management. One member suggested working with the Milford lab to coordinate modeling efforts.

Another team member asked about the spatial scale of the model and relevance to SAMS areas and asked how observations are included in the model. Dr. Caracappa explained that the forecasts are new and are more regional, not by specific management area yet, and are on a scale of $1/12^{\text{th}}$ of a degree (~ 9 km); the forecasts are initialized with data interpolated from observations, but the model can deviate from those observations due to atmospheric interactions, etc. One PDT member suggested looking at the proportion of grids within a certain SAMS area that are above a certain number of degree days or alternative ways to evaluate the amount of suitable habitat for scallops. Being able to quantify the probability of a certain proportion of grid cells with certain bottom type conditions like high heat stress would be helpful information. There is some ongoing work on this through a new Scallop Research Set-Aside project with WHOI as well as other applicable papers on changes in bioenergetics and temperature changes.

There was a brief discussion on other NOAA products from the NEFSC Social Sciences Branch, which included port-level information; one PDT member asked if there is value in doing something similar for the ESP work with a particular focus on the economic perspective. Overall, fishing behavior is determined by both catch per unit effort, the size distribution of catch, and scallop prices; other data sources like vessel trip reports could be helpful to understand fishing behavior, though, the goal of the ESP report card is to provide context and not to provide specific indices to use directly to support decision-making. The suggestion posed would be a separate research project.

Regarding potential use in management, the ESP report card is a useful tool, particularly if the information is available in time for PDT discussion and consideration in July-September time period. Once the initial ESP is developed, the intention is to be able to update the information and data periodically based on the schedule for a given target audience, though this cannot be

done every year for every stock. ESP report cards are typically tied to research track assessments and updated for management track assessments. An online tool is anticipated to access these ESP report card data.

Next steps:

- Based on the feedback received during today's meeting, consider potential changes and updates to the data and figures presented to the Scallop PDT for evaluation by the Scallop PDT next summer; this includes model validation specifically for the scallop fishery (Caracappa)

AGENDA ITEM #3: DRAFT ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT (EFH) MAPS, TEXT

Dr. Haak and Mr. Garrison reviewed the draft EFH map for adults (75 mm+) and descriptive text developed to update the Scallop EFH and asked for feedback from the PDT. The revised EFH map is based on a "single index" species distribution model (SDM) developed primarily for the purpose of EFH designation.

Discussion:

A couple of PDT members asked about the SDM-based methods for developing the Scallop EFH maps, including the specific data sources, the temporal component, and how different gear indices are combined. One person was concerned that using the NEFSC trawl data will result in erroneous results given the dome-shaped selectivity of scallops by trawl gear. Scallops prefer hard bottom habitat types and catchability of scallops in trawl gear on hard bottom is typically quite poor, so the EFH designation using trawl gear is not likely to align with scallop habitat and magnitude of scallop biomass. No Canadian data are used in the SDM, so any areas where scallop habitat are predicted in Canadian waters (eastern side of Georges Bank) are based on NEFSC trawl survey data.

A few PDT members thought some areas of the draft EFH map looked incorrect. Specifically, whether the areas off Portland, Maine should be characterized as having high scallop densities and the extension south of the Nantucket Lightship South SAMS area is further than expected. Dr. Haak suggested evaluating a seasonally varying catchability coefficient for trawls and considering how this influences the estimated relationship between trawl and dredge catches to see if that could be driving biases in the draft EFH map. He also noted that he excluded juvenile scallops less than 75 mm from the model, which could explain some of the patterns. Any additional areas of concern should be sent to Dr. Haak for further evaluation. One PDT member reiterated her concerns that use of trawl gear for EFH designation for scallops is not appropriate and leads to inclusion of areas where scallops are not located.

The Scallop PDT discussed using a different depth cutoff for EFH designation of 180 m on Georges Bank. As bottom temperatures increase, scallops are seen in deeper waters, so including a deeper depth range for scallop habitat in the EFH text is important (the current EFH designation references a depth limit of 110 m).

Next steps:

- Follow up with Dr. Haak as needed to provide any remaining input on the Scallop EFH draft text and maps (Scallop PDT)
- Send EFH draft map and text to Scallop AP (Buckley/ Garrison)

AGENDA ITEM #4: RISK POLICY

Ms. Couture reviewed the Council's new Risk Policy concept and reviewed the risk factor scoring exercise as it pertains to the scallop fishery this year. She presented the draft scores for PDT discussion and next steps before the PDT scoring is finalized in September; the PDT score will be used in combination with the Council's global weighting for the Scientific and Statistical Committee consideration during their October meeting, when the FY 2027 and FY 2028 (default) OFL and ABC will be recommended.

Discussion:

Regarding the SSC/stock status factor, the PDT discussed a score of 0 or -2. A few members suggested scoring as -1 given the terminal year SSB (2023) is 74.99% of the SSB target (i.e., between the scoring threshold of < or > 75%). The PDT decided to score this factor as -2 to follow the rules set out in the Risk Policy Guidance document and suggested the Risk Policy group update guidance accordingly to account for this gray area.

Regarding the climate vulnerability factor, one member thought that basing the score on the Hare et al. (2016) paper was not sufficient given this represents a more general paper and not specific to scallops. Staff encouraged the PDT to use information from the 2025 Scallop Research Track Assessment, which has a similar level of high vulnerability conclusion as the Hare et al. (2016) paper. There was a question on how fish condition was incorporated; this will be noted in the Risk Policy matrix but is not considered in the PDT scoring at this time.

Regarding the revenue question of the Commercial Fisheries Characterization factor, there was a lengthy discussion on the lack of reference points or thresholds and the desire to have the fishing industry to weigh in on what is considered a 'good' or 'bad' revenue year (similar to the recruitment factor and the recreational fishery characterization factor). The goal for this question is to focus on stability of revenue; the PDT has the flexibility to decide the reference time period to determine the quantiles. A couple of members were concerned that the time period is arbitrary and what happens if the revenues were very low for 20 years but then increased slightly in the most recent five years – the revenue would still be considered low, which is still not a good state. One person thought that relative change in revenue was not appropriate. Another member commented that the last two decades were unprecedented in the magnitude of scallop landings until the recent severe decline; she suggested using a continuous scale instead of a discrete cutoff year. There was also a suggestion to track important scallop ports over time and specific port-revenue changes to inform the risk assessment. One person explained that if the commercial fishery is not viable and fishermen cannot make a living, then the scoring doesn't capture this accordingly.

To help determine the baseline year for the revenue time series, the PDT decided using 2010 when Amendment 11 implemented the IFQ program as this represents comparable scallop management as the fishery today. There was a discussion on whether to use 2011 when the ACL was established, though this period felt arbitrary and non-significant as exceeding the ACL has never been a concern. 2007 was also considered given this is when Magnuson-Stevens Act was last reauthorized.

Public Comment:

- **Drew Minkiewicz** (Sustainable Scalloping Fund) explained that there is an ongoing risk to scallops due to climate change and there is nothing that can be done to minimize the risk to scallops, which are sedentary animals. Management should be done based on observations; he commented that the 2025 Research Track Assessment predicted low recruitment and survivability, but Fmsy was exceptionally high instead.

Next steps:

- Discuss PDT concerns and suggestions with Mr. Jonathon Peros (NEFMC) who is the Council's lead on Risk Policy for potential future changes in Risk Policy scoring (Couture/Buckley)

AGENDA ITEM #5: OTHER BUSINESS

Council staff briefly mentioned the new NOAA priorities that were published in early July and presented an overview of upcoming meetings and decision points regarding the specifications setting and Framework 42 actions. An important meeting to note is the Scallop PDT meeting on August 26th and 27th to review and discuss 2026 survey results and data treatment. The PDT did not have time to discuss the Northern Gulf of Maine sub-management areas nor the Scallop Strategic Plan, as planned. These topics will be brought up during upcoming Scallop PDT meetings.

Discussion:

One team member noted that the AFS conference begins August 31st and runs through September 4th, which may conflict with one of the upcoming Scallop PDT meetings under consideration. There was a brief discussion on the ability to quantify the lag effect of when survey data are available in the summer and when biomass projections are done as it relates to shell height frequencies. Dr. Hart will need to see what is possible given current workloads.

Another PDT member asked for an update on the Scallop Research Set-Aside awards for 2026 and if there is any guidance; another member advised that there is a 90-day pre-award spending that can be done. GARFO and Council staff shared that NOAA is still working through the process.

With no other business, the meeting adjourned around 4:10 PM.