



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

Webinar

February 26, 2026

The Scallop Plan Development Team (PDT) met on February 26th, 2026 at 1:00 PM via webinar to: 1) Debrief the 2026/2027 specifications setting process; 2) Discuss Council work priorities for 2026, including the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Designation Framework; 3) Discuss other business.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: NEFMC: Connor Buckley (PDT Chair), Chandler Nelson, Dr. Naresh Pradhan; GARFO: Emily Keiley, Danielle Palmer, Benjamin Galuardi; NEFSC: Dr. Dvora Hart; 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 Scallop Committee Chair Melanie Griffin and Vice Chair Eric Hansen, NEFMC staff Julian Garrison, as well as approximately 12 members of the public.

AGENDA ITEM #1: WELCOME AND UPDATES

Council Staff reviewed the meeting agenda and provided several updates to the PDT. The Omnibus Management Flexibility Amendment has been submitted, which includes measures that, when implemented, will enable in-season adjustments of scallop specifications and certain management measures, such as rotational management, subject to applicable legal requirements. The 2026/2027 Scallop Research Set-Aside (RSA) Notice of Funding Opportunity was published on January 23, with proposals due on March 23. Awards are expected to be made for both 2026 and 2027 RSA pounds.

AGENDA ITEM #2: 2025 FISHERY PERFORMANCE

Council staff reviewed FY 2025 fishery performance. Overall landings were stronger than in FY 2024, and catch rates improved relative to the previous year. Open bottom LPUE was higher than anticipated, indicating that the projected LPUE used to set 2025 days-at-sea was underestimated.

Overall, access area performance was poor, with Area I landings consisting of mainly smaller market grades, and low catch rates in Area II. Open bottom performance was strongest early in the year due to high catch rates in Nantucket Lightship West during May. In the Mid-Atlantic, catch rates have been relatively high, but composed of smaller market grades. There were also reports of large stretches of seed in the Elephant Trunk region. Higher catch rates in open bottom areas were attributed in part to a strong three-year-old year class.

On bycatch performance, Council staff reported that sub-ACL overages are expected for both Georges Bank yellowtail flounder and Southern New England Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) yellowtail flounder. Preliminary estimates indicate catches of approximately 180% of the sub-ACL for Georges Bank yellowtail and 249% of the sub-ACL for SNE/MA yellowtail. A SNE/MA yellowtail overage will trigger

the reactive accountability measure in the Mid-Atlantic (west of 71° W) for FY 2027. No overages were reported for northern or southern windowpane flounder.

The proposed rule for Northeast Multispecies Framework 69 was also discussed. If implemented, this action would modify scallop accountability measure triggers for Georges Bank yellowtail and northern windowpane flounder so that a reactive accountability measure would only be triggered if both the scallop sub-ACL and the overall ACL are exceeded. This modification would not apply to Southern New England Mid-Atlantic yellowtail flounder.

Public Comment:

- **Drew Minkiewicz (Sustainable Scalloping Fund)** asked how the LAGC IFQ component had harvested 108% of their allocation and requested an update on vessels leaving the dock with zero quota balance. Council staff clarified that the 108% figure includes carryover pounds and does not represent an overage relative to total available quota. GARFO staff also responded, stating that negative balances are being tracked. Outreach is occurring with vessels, and coordination with the Office of Law Enforcement is underway where appropriate to understand and address the issue.

AGENDA ITEM #3: 2026 SCALLOP WORK

Work Priorities

Council staff outlined the 2026 work priorities and work that has already been completed. Completed work includes the LAGC IFQ Program Review and submission of Framework 40.

Council staff then reviewed the anticipated 2027/2028 specification setting timeline and noted that the September 2026 Council meeting is scheduled earlier than usual. This compresses the timeline between survey data delivery and the Council meeting. A tentative schedule would require survey data availability by mid-August to support a late August Plan Development Team meeting and early September AP and Committee meetings. Some PDT members raised concerns over the proposed timeline for the year, stating that August 17th may not be feasible for the presentation of survey data. Council staff acknowledged these concerns and stated that the schedule is tentative and will need to reflect what is realistically achievable.

Public Comment:

- **John Quinn (Fisheries Survival Fund)** asked about the timing of the Framework 39 Final Submission compared to previous framework documents. Staff responded that Framework 39 was submitted in March 2025 as opposed to February 2026 for Framework 40.

Improving Standardization

The PDT were presented with suggestions for improving short reports, which was followed by a discussion on opportunities to improve consistency and transparency in survey reporting and data treatment decisions. With respect to density maps, it was noted that optical surveys routinely produce density maps, while dredge surveys often report scallops per tow due to catchability assumptions, particularly in areas such as Nantucket Lightship South. The PDT discussed how dredge surveys could use swept area adjustments and a catchability assumption to estimate density. A PDT member presented an alternative, applying a catchability coefficient based on bottom type and dredge efficiency, such as 40% on soft bottom and 27% on harder bottom, with appropriate caveats where catchability is uncertain. Other PDT members agreed that this is feasible.

The PDT also discussed standardizing the exploitable size cutoff. A 40 mm threshold has historically been used due to the 38 mm dredge liner. However, a 35 mm threshold may better reflect biological considerations and is still highly catchable in the dredge, and make both estimates of exploitable biomass

and density maps more comparable. PDT members noted that standardizing the cutoff across survey products could improve consistency.

A PDT member raised concerns about the influence of survey timing relative to active fishing. Surveys occur at different times of year, and fishing activity may occur between surveys or after surveys are completed, which is not accounted for in projections of abundance and biomass. It was noted that this can complicate comparisons among surveys and affect access area allocations. There was interest in developing a more consistent way to document or evaluate the effect of removals that occur after surveys, particularly when those removals may not be reflected in biomass estimates used for projections.

A PDT member also added that informal work is being done with ESRI to create an online tool to visualize scallop data. More information will be provided on this in the future.

New Projection Methods

Council staff reviewed the alternative catch-setting approach used to set FY 2026 specifications. An interim method was developed that used projected exploitable biomass, a target fishing mortality rate, assumed LPUE, and full-time equivalent limited access vessels to estimate catch and days-at-sea. The approach provided flexibility but relied on simplified assumptions and was not fully comparable to prior SAMS projections.

The Council issued an RFP to develop improved projection methods. Goals include improving model accessibility and transparency, refining LPUE components, enhancing spatial resolution, allowing for sub-annual time steps, and improving the ability to evaluate in-season adjustments. The timeline has been adjusted, with the goal of delivering a final product in 2027 for use in setting 2028 and 2029 specifications.

Environmental Data Integration

Council staff also discussed efforts to incorporate environmental information more quantitatively into the specification process. Current survey data includes clappers, disease, parasites, and bottom temperature, but these data have largely been considered qualitatively. The Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) Changing Ecosystems and Fisheries Initiative (CEFI) is working to develop quarterly oceanographic forecasts at spatial and temporal scales relevant to scallop management. Potential products include forecasts of bottom temperature thresholds, indicators of phytoplankton productivity, and larval retention probabilities.

One PDT member noted that bottom temperature forecasts may be useful in the near term, though uncertainty remains. For other environmental indicators, they emphasized that retrospective analyses would be necessary before incorporating such indices into management decisions. In particular, linking environmental indicators to outcomes such as meat yield would require additional evaluation. Concerns were also raised about spatial bias in some oceanographic models, including bottom temperature hindcasts that may systematically over or under-estimate conditions in certain areas. They emphasized that any environmental products used in management would need to address potential bias and undergo appropriate review. Council staff indicated that further discussion with NEFSC staff is planned later in the spring to refine management-relevant thresholds and identify useful products. They also noted that hindcasts are being evaluated with these specific questions already in mind.

Scallop Strategic Plan Implementation

Council staff noted that the Council approved the long-term Scallop Strategic Plan in December. In 2026, the focus will be on developing a more structured roadmap to implement strategic objectives and improve forward-looking priority setting.

A draft approach was outlined that would begin with the Advisory Panel identifying high-priority strategies for 2027 through 2029. The Committee would then task the PDT to review relevant research, identify information gaps, consider timelines for action development, and develop a draft multi-year priority list. This list would inform the annual priority setting process in the fall, with a goal of providing clearer sequencing and planning for longer-term work items.

Northern Gulf of Maine Sub-Areas

The PDT discussed development of sub-areas within the Northern Gulf of Maine, as directed under 2026 priorities. Council staff reviewed the previously discussed concept of splitting the Northern Gulf of Maine into two areas, generally separating Stellwagen Bank from the remainder of the management unit. PDT members discussed potential implementation approaches, including staggered openings versus concurrent openings. From a fleet perspective, simplicity of implementation was emphasized as an important consideration. A PDT member suggested developing a clear list of pros and cons for alternative configurations to help focus discussion.

It was also noted that recent survey results showed a shift in biomass distribution within the management unit, with relatively greater biomass in areas outside Stellwagen compared to recent years. Differences in survey coverage, including inclusion of Machias Seal Island in some years but not others, were noted as affecting biomass comparisons. Another PDT member noted that accountability measures would need to be clearly addressed if areas are split, including how they would function in transition years and in future management cycles.

AGENDA ITEM #4: ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT UPDATE

Julian Garrison (NEFMC) provided an overview of the upcoming Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) designation framework, which will update scallop EFH as part of a broader multi-species action. EFH designations consist of both maps and text, developed using the best available scientific information. Updated designations will include separate maps for juvenile and adult scallops based on species distribution models, with updated text descriptions for all life stages. Scallops will be modeled separately from the joint New England/Mid-Atlantic demersal finfish species model, incorporating data from trawl surveys, dredge surveys, and other available sources. Environmental predictors include bottom temperature, salinity, depth, substrate characteristics, and other habitat variables. Draft designations will be reviewed by the Habitat PDT and then shared with the Scallop PDT and Advisory Panel for feedback later in the spring and summer.

A PDT member asked what threshold is being considered for use when designating EFH boundaries, particularly given changing ocean conditions. Mr. Garrison noted that a percentile-based threshold approach has been used in other recent EFH updates, but species-specific considerations may warrant further discussion for scallops.

With no other business the meeting adjourned at approximately 3PM.



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MEETING SUMMARY

Scallop Plan Development Team

Webinar

April 7, 2026

The Scallop Plan Development Team (PDT) met on April 7th, 2026 at 9:00 AM via webinar to: 1) Discuss survey data treatment decisions and process improvement; 2) Discuss Council work priorities for 2026, including NGOM sub-areas and regional DAS Allocations; 3) Discuss other business.

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

Also present were Scallop Committee Chair Melanie Griffin and approximately 11 members of the public.

AGENDA ITEM #1: WELCOME AND UPDATES

Council Staff reviewed the meeting agenda and provided several updates to the PDT. Staff provided an update on Framework 40, noting that it was published as an interim final rule on March 27, with an open comment period through April 27. Fishing Year 2026 began under these specifications, and no interruption to the fishery is anticipated while comments are reviewed.

Council staff also summarized 2025 fishery performance, reporting that landings exceeded 18 million pounds and that more than 99% of allocated Days-at-Sea were utilized, excluding carryover.

AGENDA ITEM #2: 2026 SCALLOP WORK PRIORITIES

The PDT discussed priorities for 2026, with a focus on preparing for Framework 42 and the development of specifications for FY 2027 and 2028. It was noted that this year's timeline is particularly compressed due to the earlier September Council meeting, the timing of Labor Day, and the limited window between survey data availability and decision-making deadlines. PDT members raised concerns about the feasibility of an early data delivery deadline, with multiple PDT members supporting a deadline of late August.

Improving Survey Data Standardization:

The PDT continued discussions from their February 27 meeting regarding improvements to data standardization and analytical processes. Council staff provided examples of areas where standardization could streamline the framework process and improve consistency across analyses.

Suggestions from the PDT included standardizing the naming of areas in short reports, particularly Ipswich. A PDT member sought clarification on what survey estimates were expected in the short reports. Council staff replied that short reports should present individual survey estimates and not aggregated means.

Shell height–meat weight relationships were also discussed in detail. A PDT member asked how the revised SHMW equations from 2025 compared to the 2025 size frequency data for the Mid-Atlantic. Due to time constraints, these plots were never developed for the Mid-Atlantic area last year. A PDT member agreed to generate these for the next meeting. Other questions were raised about how these relationships vary across regions and over years. It was noted that, while there is interannual variability, long-term trends indicate that northern areas tend to have higher meat to shell-height relationships. One PDT member cautioned that the timing of sampling can significantly influence results and that biological cycles can vary from year to year, warning against overinterpreting differences observed between individual years. There was support for examining an average of several years of data rather than relying solely on annual comparisons.

The PDT also discussed how fishing activity is accounted for in projections. It was noted that current projections represent conditions at the start of the fishing year, whereas survey data are collected after fishing has already occurred in some areas. This mismatch can complicate comparisons between projected and observed conditions. One suggestion was to compare survey results to end-of-year model estimates rather than beginning-of-year projections to better align the datasets.

NGOM Sub-Management Areas

The PDT reviewed potential management measures for inclusion in Framework 42, with a focus on Northern Gulf of Maine (NGOM) sub-area development. A PDT member asked if the boundaries of these sub-areas will be revisited in the future and updated based on survey data. It was clarified that increasing spatial subdivision introduces trade-offs, particularly with respect to monitoring and enforcement, and that the development of these sub-management areas has been discussed as a one-time structural decision rather than something that would be revisited annually.

The group discussed several different options for sub-area configurations (figures 1-4) and access strategies, including sequential and concurrent openings of the sub-areas. Sequential access was generally viewed as easier to implement and enforce, while concurrent access could provide greater flexibility but would introduce additional complexity, including the need for multiple VMS codes, more complicated transit provisions, adjustments in observer coverage, and challenges enforcing more complex spatial management structures. A PDT member noted that the Stellwagen Bank could be opened after fishing in the northern sub-area had occurred, either on a fixed-date or when the sub-area Set-Aside had been harvested. This approach could potentially extend the fishing season and encourage effort to be distributed across areas rather than concentrated on Stellwagen early in the year. There was broad interest in this idea, though questions were raised about how vessels would respond and whether it would

effectively shift effort. Overall, the PDT agreed that two sub-management areas were manageable and more would create unnecessary complexity.

Figure 1. Draft Concept 1, which was developed initially in Fall 2025, would create separate the southern extent of the NGOM management area along the 41°15'N boundary line as well as delineating the area west of Stellwagen Bank as an area for continuous transit.

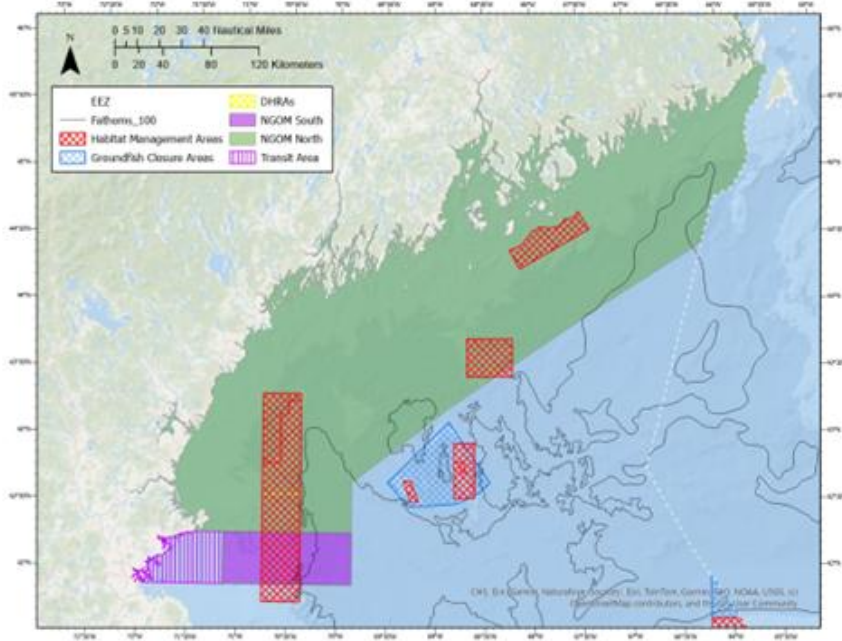


Figure 2. Draft Concept 2, which would reduce the size of the southern sub-area to only the immediate survey domain on Stellwagen Bank with a small buffer.

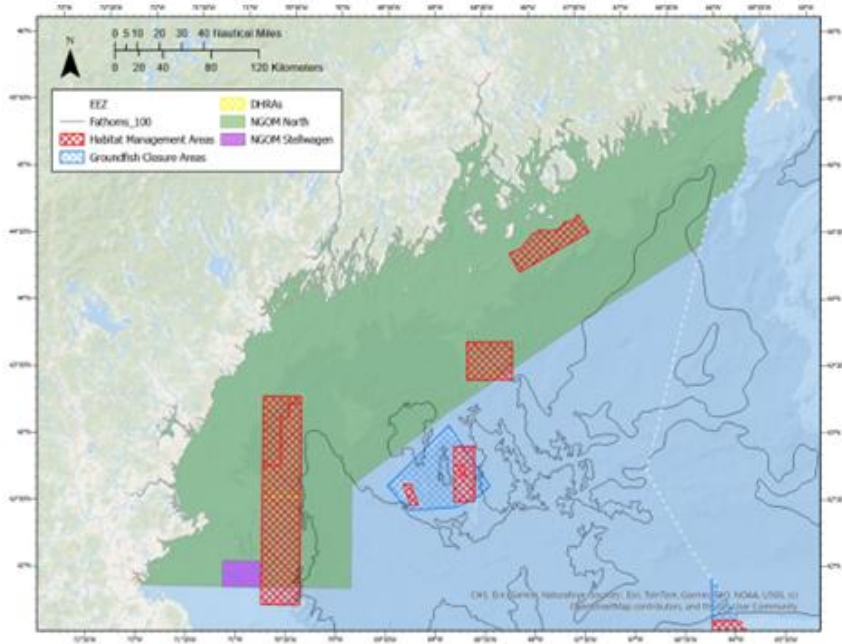


Figure 3. Draft Concept 3, which would further divide the northern sub-area, separating Platts Bank and Machias Seal Island from the more southern sub-area.

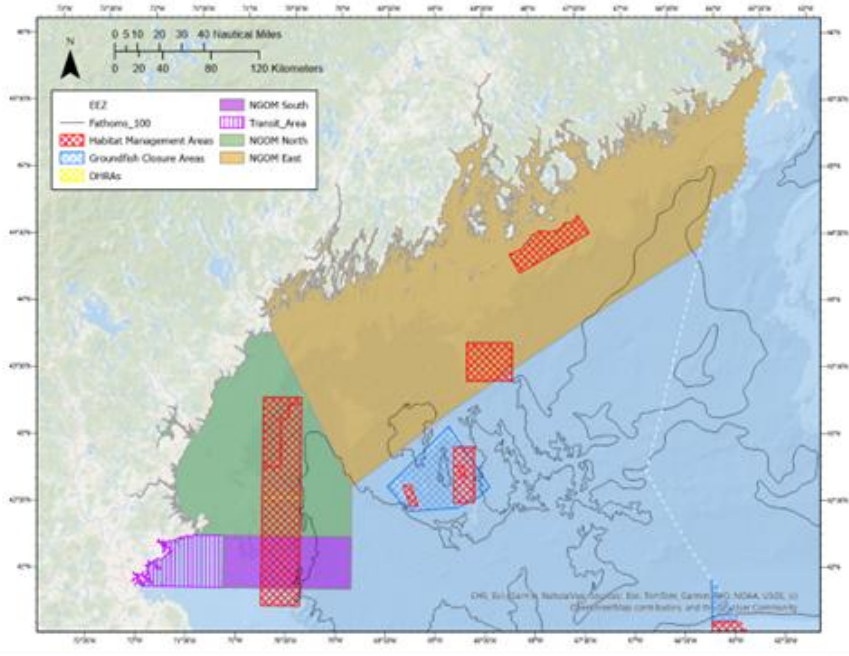
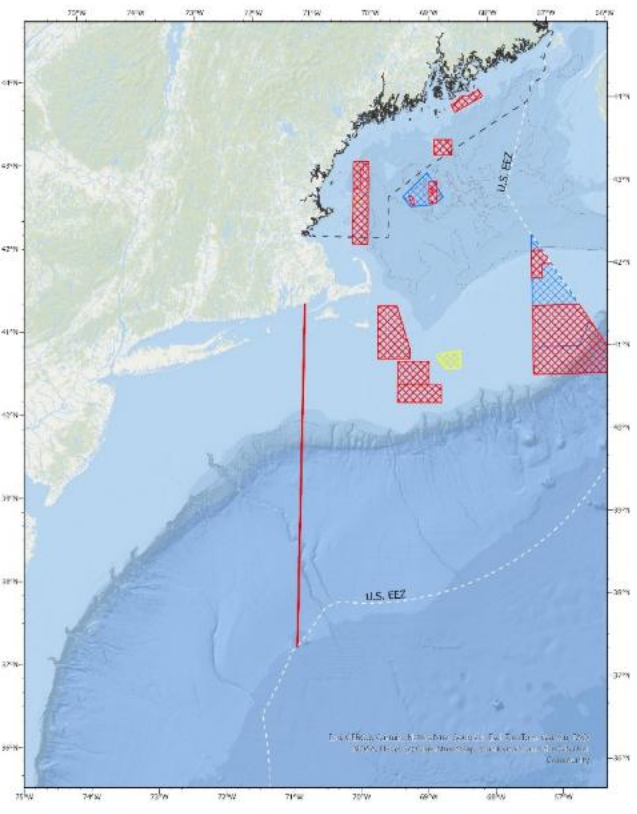


Figure 4. 71°W has been the proposed boundary line to delineate Mid-Atlantic from Georges Bank/Great South Channel Days-at-Sea



Regional DAS allocations

The PDT discussed potential approaches to regional DAS allocations. There was agreement that, if DAS are subdivided by region, some form of DAS-trading mechanism would likely be necessary to allow vessels to operate efficiently. Concerns were raised about implementation, with some noting that while DAS-trading could improve the overall function of the FMP, it may introduce administrative and operational challenges. PDT members discussed the benefits of regional allocations made at the vessel level and a regional cap on DAS usage in each region.

The group also discussed how DAS carryover might be handled under regional allocations. A PDT member suggested carryover allocating proportionally based on the previous year's proportional split of DAS. The possibility of eliminating carryover in a transition or "bridge" year was also raised as a way to reduce administrative burden. The PDT did not consider a regional split of Scallop RSA compensation to be a necessary addition to these measures.

Several PDT members cautioned that regional DAS allocations could lead to excessive complexity. As management areas become more fractured, the system becomes more difficult to administer, monitor, and enforce. It was noted that the final structure of any allocation system may ultimately be constrained by what is practical for NOAA Fisheries to manage. There was support for incorporating DAS-trading if a regional system is adopted. The PDT discussed looking to other fisheries, such as the monkfish fishery, as a potential model. Another idea was to apply differential DAS charges by region. Similar approaches are already used in observer coverage programs, and this type of system could help limit effort in high-abundance areas while maintaining flexibility for the fleet.

Dr. Naresh Pradhan presented a break-even point analysis for DAS allocations for a limited access scallop vessel, intended as an economic screening tool to evaluate how many DAS are required for vessels to cover fixed and variable costs under different assumptions. The analysis linked revenues, costs, and productivity using inputs from the 2022 NEFSC vessel survey, including assumptions about LPUE, scallop price, variable costs, and fixed costs, and compared outcomes under both regionally split DAS allocations and a unified DAS system.

During discussion, the PDT focused on the assumptions and limitations of the analysis. A PDT member asked how the two different DAS scenarios were determined in the equations. Dr. Pradhan explained that under a regional allocation framework, fixed costs are distributed in proportion to the share of fishing attributed to each area.

The analysis assumes that LPUE can be applied consistently across regions, which the PDT noted is unlikely to reflect real-world conditions where productivity differs between areas such as Georges Bank and the Mid-Atlantic. As a result, using a single average LPUE simplifies the analysis but does not capture how vessels would actually experience fishing conditions under a split system. The PDT also noted that the analysis does not account for interannual dynamics, particularly the relationship between DAS and future LPUE, where higher DAS in one year could reduce LPUE in subsequent years due to increased fishing pressure.

Public Comment:

- **John Quinn (Fisheries Survival Fund)** asked how vessel-specific debt was factored into this analysis. Dr. Pradhan replied that it was not included but opportunity cost of investment in vessel was included. Fixed costs were based on median reported values from the NEFSC Cost Survey, rather than individual business conditions.

Next steps:

- Connor Buckley – Revise Short Report templates to reflect new sections. Revise FW42 Management Measures Discussion Document to reflect Scallop PDT input.
- Dvora Hart – Develop plots of projected size frequencies compared with survey size frequencies for 2025 and 2026 for evaluation at a Fall 2026 Scallop PDT meeting
- Sally Roman – Develop plots fitting survey data in the Mid-Atlantic to the 2025 Mid-Atlantic Shell-Height Meat weight equations (2023 year effect) for evaluation at a Summer 2026 Scallop PDT meeting.

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 11:45AM.