2021/2022 Scallop RSA Priorities – Committee Recommendations

From May 28, 2020 Scallop Committee Webinar

Staff recommends that the Council consider language to *Priority 1: Survey Related Research* to address instances where 2020 surveys are delayed. The intent is to clarify in the federal funding opportunity that if any survey research awarded for 2020 is delayed until 2021 due to COVID-19, that coverage should be considered by NOAA Fisheries when evaluating additional survey proposals in the 2021/2022 RSA cycle. For example, if three surveys are already planned for an area in 2021 due to either two year awards from the 2020 RSA cycle or delayed 2020 surveys as a result of COVID-19, the delayed research should be a factor in the selection process to survey a specific area for 2021. Example text to add before 1a:

- *Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some survey projects that were funded for the 2020 field season may be delayed for a year. Delays in previously funded 2020 survey work may be considered in the evaluation of proposed surveys for 2021.*

SURVEYS (Highest Priority)

1. Survey Related Research

Survey results must be available by early August of the year in which the survey is conducted (e.g., survey results that would inform 2022 fishing effort decisions must be available by mid-August 2021). The survey or surveys do not need to be carried out by a single grant recipient. Survey data will be used to develop estimates of total and exploitable biomass to be used for setting fishery catch limits and allocations. Successful projects may be asked to provide data in a standardized format. The primary objective of these surveys would be to provide additional biomass estimates in addition to the federal survey to improve the overall precision of the scallop biomass estimate produced by the Scallop Plan Development Team.

1a. An intensive industry-based survey of each of the relevant scallop rotational areas (Closed Area II, Closed Area I, Nantucket Lightship, Elephant Trunk and Hudson Canyon) that will provide estimates of total and exploitable biomass to be used for setting fishery catch limits under the rotational area management program.

1b. an intensive industry-based survey of areas of importance (i.e., open areas with high scallop recruitment or areas of importance to the fishery). For 2021, the priority areas are where scallop recruitment was observed during 2020 surveys, and areas of the Gulf of Maine that have recently been or are likely to be fished (Stellwagen Bank).

1c. a resource wide industry-based survey of scallops within Georges Bank and/or Mid-Atlantic resource areas.

High Priority Non-survey research (in ranked order)

2. Turtles: Research to support the investigation of 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.

3. Scallop Biology: Research on scallop biology, including studies aimed at understanding recruitment processes (reproduction, timing of spawning, larval and early post-settlement stages, age and growth, and yield), examination of environmental stressors on reproduction and growth , and mass mortality event, i.e. the disappearance of 50 million pounds of scallops in NLS-W . This priority also includes research on natural mortality, such as scallop predation (e.g., starfish, crab, snails, and dogfish), discard mortality, and juvenile mortality events.

General Research Needs (not in rank order)

4. Scallop Recruitment Supplementation: Research to develop the tools, such as spat collection, grow out of juvenile scallops, predator control, and offshore seeding, to supplement natural recruitment of scallops.

5. 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 determine seasonal bycatch rates of non-target species, characterize spatial and temporal distribution patterns, 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 pending or potential implementation of accountability measures. Projects should consider the enforceability and feasibility of regulations in the commercial fishery.

6. Gear: Commercial dredge research to improve scallop catch efficiency, improve scallop size selectivity, reduce scallop damage, reduce non-target species bycatch, and to reduce fuel consumption.