



New England Fishery Management Council

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 2, 2017

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Council Receives 2017 Scallop Survey Overview and Progress Report on 2018 Management Measures in Framework 29

During its late-September meeting in Gloucester, MA, the New England Fishery Management Council received a comprehensive overview of the “very successful” 2017 scallop survey season. The Council then reviewed the range of measures under development for Framework Adjustment 29 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan. These measures, once fully developed and approved, will apply to the 2018 scallop fishing year, which will begin on April 1 instead of March 1 as in previous years.

Five separate groups contributed to the 2017 scallop surveys:

- The **Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS)** conducted dredge surveys in the Mid-Atlantic, Nantucket Lightship Area, and Closed Area II.
- **UMass Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST)** conducted intensive surveys of Closed Area I, Closed Area II, and the Elephant Trunk Area, along with broadscale surveys of Georges Bank and the Mid-Atlantic and a drop camera survey of Stellwagen Bank in the Gulf of Maine.
- The **Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI)**, in partnership with **Lund’s Fisheries**, conducted a Habitat Camera Mapping System (HabCam) version 5 (v5) survey of the Northern Edge on Georges Bank.
- **Coonamessett Farm Foundation (CFF)** conducted a HabCam v3 survey of the Nantucket Lightship Area, as well as a HabCam v3 survey on Stellwagen Bank and Jeffreys Ledge in the Gulf of Maine, along with six dredge tows on Stellwagen. And,
- **The Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC)** conducted a dredge survey on Georges Bank and a HabCam v4 survey of the Mid-Atlantic and Georges Bank.

Collectively, the surveys indicate that total biomass is expected to increase from 2016 levels to nearly 600 million pounds.



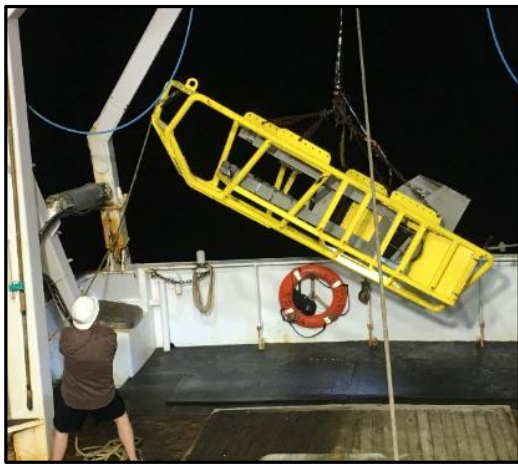
SMAST found high densities of scallops in several regions of the Nantucket Lightship Area (above), as well as in the Elephant Trunk Flex Area. – SMAST photo



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Given the high biomass, catch limits may increase in 2018. Roughly half of the total biomass is projected to be “exploitable,” meaning 50% of the resource will be of harvestable size for the fishing fleet.

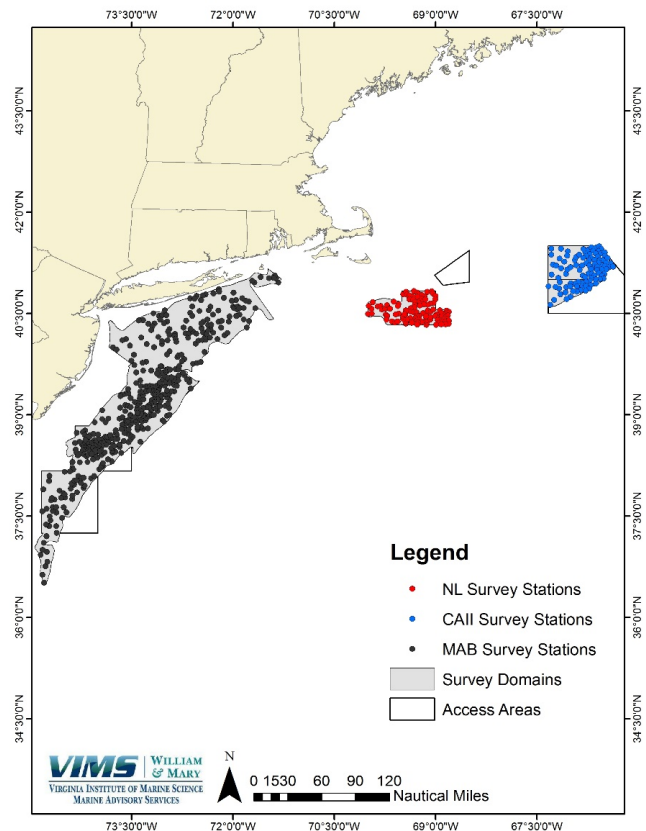
However, the Scallop Plan Development Team (PDT) expressed a few cautionary notes: (1) similar to last season, the surveys overall did not come across any strong signs of incoming recruitment, so very few seed scallops are in the pipeline for the future, especially in open areas; (2) scallops in high density areas were found to be “slow growing” and below the size they normally would be at a given age; and (3) of the various survey methods – dredge, drop camera, and HabCam – all three methods showed general agreement in estimating biomass, except in very high density areas.



CFF used HabCam v3 to survey the Nantucket Lightship Area, as well as Stellwagen Bank and Jeffreys Ledge in the Gulf of Maine. – CFF photo

Scallop size in the **Nantucket Lightship Area** is extremely variable:

- The largest scallops are located in the north, averaging 111 millimeters (mm) to 127 mm with a preliminary exploitable biomass estimate of roughly 2.9 million pounds.
- Scallops in the southeastern Lightship, known as the “extension” among industry, also are large, averaging 107 mm to 122 mm. The very preliminary estimate of exploitable biomass is roughly 4 million pounds.
- Scallops in this northwestern portion of the Lightship are off limits to harvesting. The animals are averaging 102 mm to 105 mm with a preliminary exploitable biomass estimate of 18 million pounds. Approval of the Council’s Omnibus Habitat Amendment is needed before the Council can consider opening up this area to scallop harvesting.

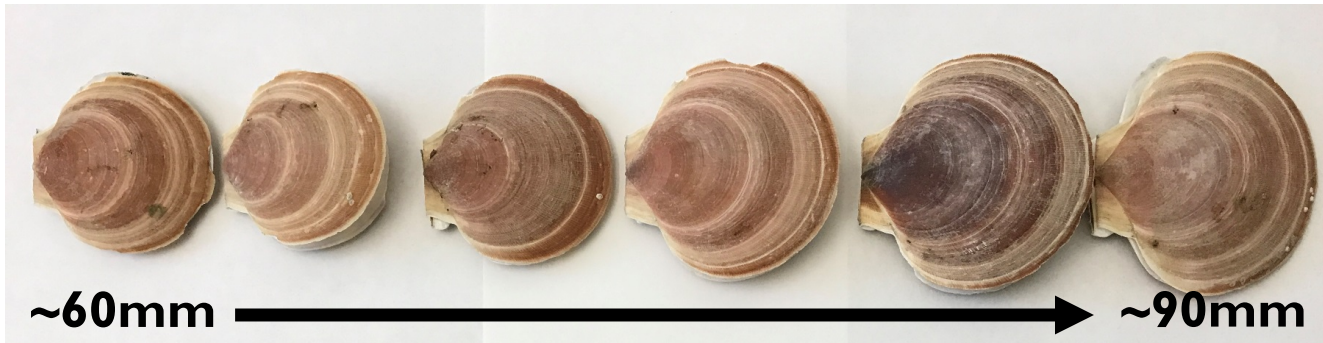


VIMS conducted 440 dredge tows in the Mid-Atlantic Bight, 115 in the Nantucket Lightship area, and 100 tows in Closed Area II. VIMS also took 5,000 samples in the Mid-Atlantic and 1,000 samples in both the Lightship and Closed Area II to determine shell-height-to-meat-weight ratios.

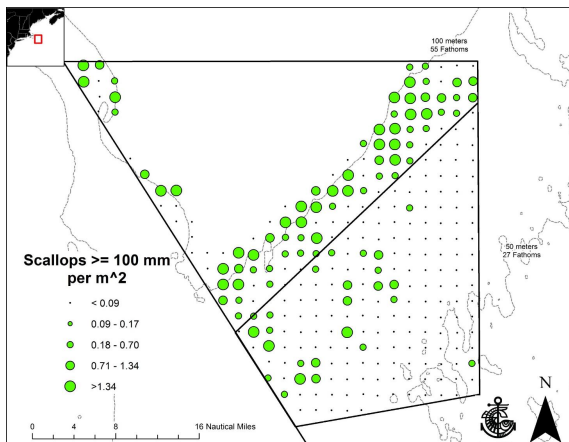


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- Scallops in the southern portion of the Lightship are the smallest, averaging 77 mm to 86 mm, which would result in high-count meat weights. However, the preliminary estimate of exploitable biomass is extremely high, on the order of 18.6 million pounds.



The southern portion of the Nantucket Lightship Area contains high densities of small scallops that are thought to have a finite scope of additional growth given their “marginal” habitat conditions. – VIMS scallop shell photo



The current Closed Area I Scallop Access Area, depicted in the SMAST graphic above (left), is located in the southern half of Area I below the diagonal black line. The green dots above the line are concentrated in what is known as the “sliver,” which currently is off limits to harvesting. The Council has recommended that this area be opened as part of the Omnibus Habitat Amendment, which is under review by the National Marine Fisheries Service. The Council is proposing alternatives in Scallop Framework 29 to allow access to this new bottom pending approval of the habitat action. The scallops piled on deck in the photo above (right) were harvested in the sliver during the NEFSC’s 2017 dredge survey of the area. – NEFSC photo

Other survey highlights include:

- **Closed Area II** – Exploitable biomass in this area is high enough to potentially support a 2018 trip if the access area is combined with the Closed Area II extension; and
- **Mid-Atlantic Access Area** – Exploitable biomass remains high, and this combined Hudson Canyon/Elephant Trunk/Delmarva area is expected to support multiple trips in fishing year 2018.



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Here's what the **Northern Gulf of Maine** surveys revealed:

- SMAST conducted a July 7-13 drop camera survey on Stellwagen Bank with the *F/V Guidance*. The survey team found no signs of incoming recruitment. Mean shell height was estimated to be 103 mm. Total biomass was estimated at 800,000 pounds with exploitable biomass in the Stellwagen Bank area estimated to be 500,000 pounds.
- Coonamessett Farm Foundation surveyed Stellwagen Bank and Jeffreys Ledge July 8-9, 2017 with Habcam v3 and conducted six dredge tows on Stellwagen. The survey team found no strong signals of recruitment. Estimated biomass on Stellwagen was 1 million pounds, and on Jeffreys Ledge it was 335,000 pounds.

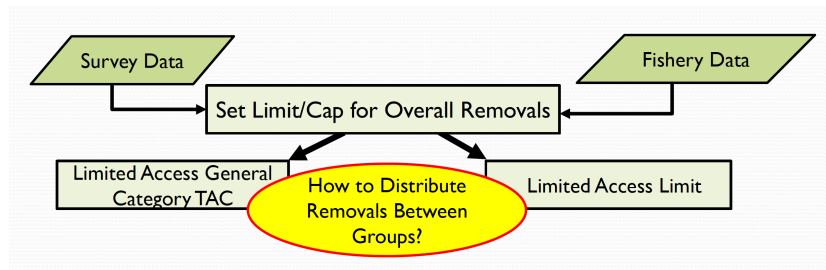
The highest densities of scallops in the Gulf of Maine remain on Stellwagen Bank, and this is where 2018 fishing activity is expected to take place.

What's Next?

Now that the survey results are in, the Council's Scallop PDT, Scallop Committee, and Scallop Advisory Panel will continue to meet throughout October and November to finalize alternatives for consideration during the New England Council's December 5-7 meeting in Newport, RI. The Council is expected to take final action on Framework 29 during this meeting.

The PDT will focus on alternatives that allow full-time limited access vessels to make several access-area trips in 2018 and be allocated a specified number of open-area days-at-sea.

In addition to 2018 specifications and Northern Gulf of Maine Management Area measures, Framework 29 also will contain: (a) default specifications for 2019; (b) flatfish accountability measures for northern windowpane flounder, Georges Bank yellowtail flounder, and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic yellowtail flounder; and (c) potential modifications to the Closed Area I Scallop Access Area – and, secondarily, the Nantucket Lightship Area – in order to be ready for when the Omnibus Habitat Amendment is implemented. Implementation *may* occur in the late winter or spring.



*The Council will consider alternatives for the **Northern Gulf of Maine Management Area** that split the allowable catch between the Limited Access General Category fleet and the regular Limited Access fleet, both of which operate under different rules.*

- Documents used during the Council's scallop discussion in Gloucester are available for downloading at: <https://www.nefmc.org/management-plans/scallops>
- For more information, contact Jonathon Peros at (978) 465-0492, ext. 117, jperos@nefmc.org. Also, visit the Council's scallop webpage at: <https://www.nefmc.org/management-plans/scallops>