



New England Fishery Management Council

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Council Approves 2019-2020 Scallop Research Set-Aside Priorities; Initiates Framework 30 for Next Specs Cycle

The New England Fishery Management Council today approved research priorities for the 2019-2020 Scallop Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program. Once again, the Council ranked resource surveys as “high” on the list of preferred projects.

The Council also initiated Framework Adjustment 30 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan. The framework will include specifications for fishing year 2019 and default measures for 2020, as well as the addition of “standard default measures” – actions that have become a routine part of each year’s fishery and can be included automatically in each specifications package, barring Council objection.

RSA PRIORITIES – TWO CATEGORIES

More specifically, the Council approved two categories of priorities for the next RSA cycle. These include: (1) “high” priorities; and (2) “general research areas” with no preference in ranking.

Survey-related research is at the top of the list with three subcomponents, all of which carry equal weight:

- 1a: An intensive industry-based survey of each relevant scallop rotational area – Closed Area I, Closed Area II, Nantucket Lightship, Elephant Trunk, and Hudson Canyon – that will provide estimates of total and exploitable biomass to be used for setting catch limits under the fishery’s rotational area management program;
- 1b: An intensive industry-based survey of areas of importance, such as open areas with high scallop recruitment or areas of overall importance to the fishery, which possibly could cover:
 - The Habitat Area of Particular Concern in Closed Area II and surrounding bottom,
 - The area south of Closed Area II that formerly was part of the Closed Area II extension,

2019-2020 Scallop RSA Priorities

HIGH PRIORITIES – RANKED

1a: Intensive surveys of access areas

1b: Intensive surveys of areas of interest

1c: Broadscale surveys of Georges Bank and Mid-Atlantic resource areas

2: Variability in survey dredge efficiency

GENERAL RESEARCH AREAS – NOT RANKED

Impact of offshore wind development

Sea turtle research

Bycatch: small scallops/non-target species

Scallop meat quality research

Management Strategy Evaluation research

Scallop biology research



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- Delmarva,
 - Areas off Long Island, and
 - Areas in the Gulf of Maine that recently have been or are likely to be fished;
- 1c: A broadscale industry-based survey of Georges Bank and/or Mid-Atlantic scallop resource areas, which does not need to be carried out by a single grant recipient.

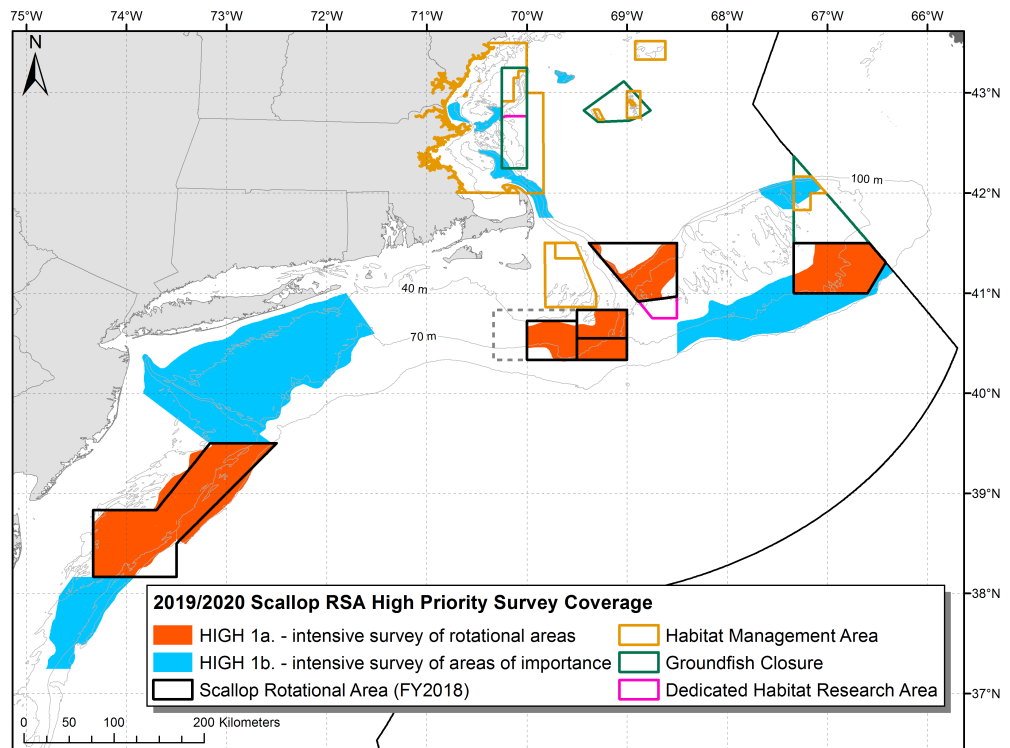
The other “high” 2019-2020 Scallop RSA priority involves dredge efficiency. The Council is looking for proposals that investigate variability in dredge efficiency across habitats, times, areas, scallop densities, and gear designs to improve dredge survey estimates either through new research or analyses of existing data sets.

GENERAL RESEARCH

At the recommendation of its Scallop Committee, the Council agreed to list all other RSA priorities under a single category called “general research areas” without ranking. Instead, each proposal will be judged on its overall merit and contribution to the Council’s scallop management program.

Projects in the general research category may include:

- Research to assess the impact of offshore energy development on the Atlantic sea scallop resource, including larval settlement and dispersal;
- Research on turtle behavior and potential impact on the scallop fishery in the Mid-Atlantic and on Georges Bank;
- Research to identify and evaluate methods to reduce bycatch of small scallops and non-target species and assess impacts to the fishery;
- Scallop meat quality research aimed at describing the occurrence of disease and parasites, as well as many other aspects affecting product quality, including density dependence, seasonality, and others;



– New England Fishery Management Council graphic



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- Projects involving Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) to gauge biological, social, and economic impacts and associated long-term consequences of rotational area management; and
- Scallop biology research focusing on recruitment-related issues, environmental stressors on reproduction and growth, scallop spat/seed, natural mortality and predation on scallops, and juvenile mortality events. Scallop biology research may include projects in the Gulf of Maine.

Framework Adjustment 30 – Specifications/Defaults/Measures for 2019-2020

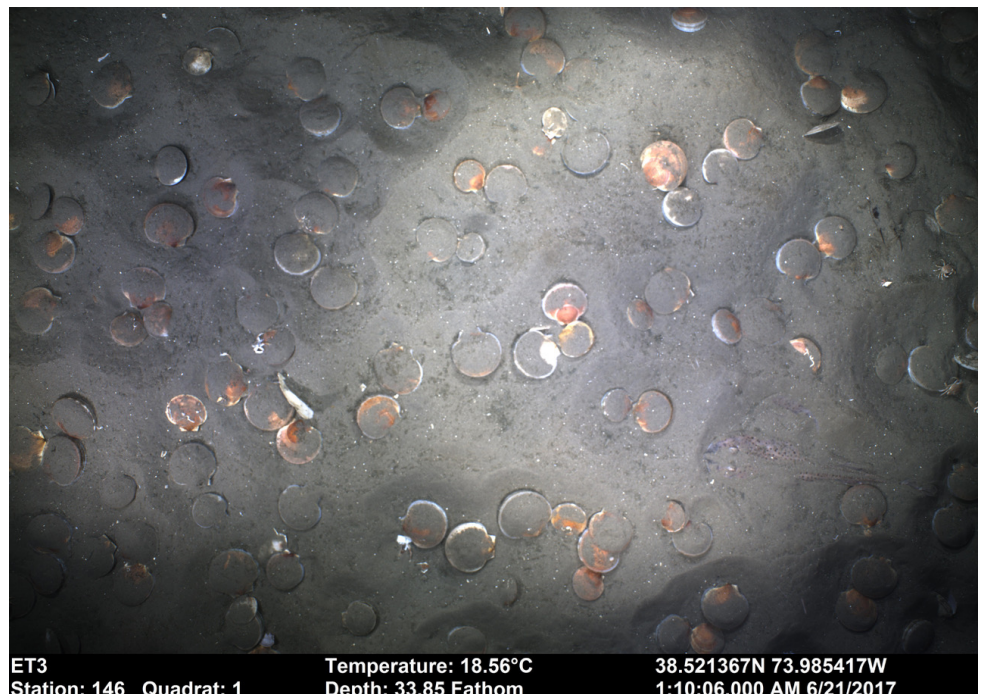
The Council sets specifications on an annual basis. However, during each specification-setting cycle, it includes default “specs” for the subsequent year in the event that a final rule cannot be implemented in time for the start of a new fishing year. The scallop fishing year now begins on April 1.

Framework Adjustment 30, which the Council initiated at its mid-June meeting in Portland, ME, will contain fishing year 2019 specifications, 2020 default specifications, and a new category called “standard default measures” – provisions that generally end up in specifications packages year after year without variation.

The Council is just beginning work on Framework 30, but so far, the Scallop Committee has identified the following candidates for conversion to “standard defaults”:

- Setting open-area days-at-sea for the Limited Access component of the scallop fleet at 75% of the previous year’s allocation;
- Setting Limited Access General Category (LAGC) Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) allocations at 75% of the previous year’s allocation; and
- Standardizing LAGC IFQ access area allocations at 5.5% of the total expected access area harvest.

The above default measures have become widely accepted within the fishery in recent years. The Council expects that by converting these familiar actions to “standard defaults,” the specification-setting process will become more streamlined and efficient, resulting in predictable



An image from the 2017 UMass Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) drop camera survey of the Elephant Trunk area. – SMAST photo



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outcomes for the fleet and increasing the prospect of timely implementation of final rules.

The Council also is working to improve monitoring and catch accounting in the Atlantic sea scallop fishery. Following its April meeting, the Council sent two letters to the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) expressing concerns over vessel monitoring system (VMS) hail compliance and LAGC vessels fishing without IFQ allocations. The Council's goal is to achieve 100% compliance with all scallop monitoring and catch accounting requirements. GARFO and the NOAA Fisheries Office of Law Enforcement are working to address compliance issues.

At this June meeting, the Council took an additional step and asked the NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator at GARFO to use his authority to require a VMS pre-landing notification on *all* limited access scallop trips. Currently, vessels complete a pre-landing notification on access area trips but are not required to do so when using an open-area day-at-sea. Pre-landing notifications are required on all LAGC trips. Expanding the reporting requirement to limited access days-at-sea fishing will create consistency in reporting across all scallop trips and hold vessels accountable for reported catch while transiting to port and selling product to dealers.



Resource surveys remain a high priority for the Scallop RSA Program. Above, a survey haul from the Nantucket Lightship area during a 2017 Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) cooperative research trip. – VIMS photo

2018 Scallop Benchmark Assessment

The 65th SAW/SARC – officially called the Stock Assessment Workshop/Stock Assessment Review Committee – is conducting a benchmark assessment for Atlantic sea scallops and Atlantic herring. The SARC will peer review assessment results during a June 26-29 meeting in Woods Hole, MA. More information can be found at www.nefsc.noaa.gov/saw/.

The Council will: (1) receive a presentation on the assessment results at its September meeting in Plymouth, MA; and (2) use the resulting scallop biological reference points when developing 2019-2020 specifications in Framework Adjustment 30. The Council will take final action on the framework at its December meeting in Newport, RI.

- Documents used during the Council's June 13, 2018 scallop discussion in Portland, ME are available at <https://www.nefmc.org/library/june-2018-scallop-committee>.
- Questions? Contact Scallop Plan Coordinator Jonathon Peros at (978) 465-0492, ext. 117, jperos@nefmc.org. Also visit <https://www.nefmc.org/management-plans/scallops>.