



New England Fishery Management Council

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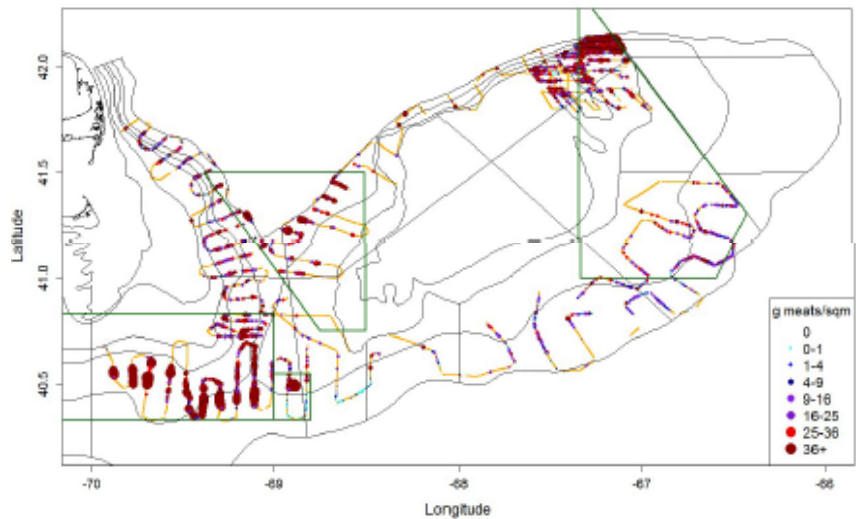
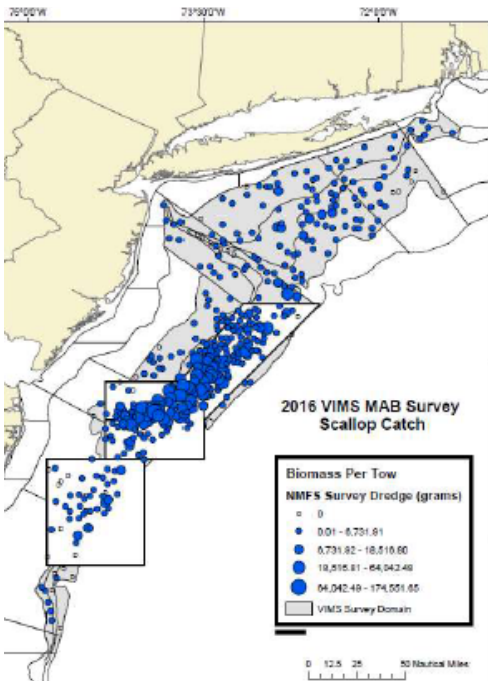
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Council Reviews Sea Scallop Survey Findings and FW 28 Status

In preparation for developing new specifications for the Atlantic sea scallop fishery, the New England Fishery Management Council today received a broad overview of 2016 scallop survey results. These results will guide the Council, Scallop Committee, Scallop Plan Development Team (PDT), and industry in formulating 2017 fishing year days-at-sea and access area trip allocations for limited access vessels, as well as individual fishing quotas for limited access general category boats. Default specifications for 2018 also will be developed.

In short, here are some of the key survey findings:

- Total biomass is at a very high level and expected to increase as a result of growth from *previous* large year classes.
- Survey results did *not* show signs of good incoming recruitment on Georges Bank or in the Mid-Atlantic.
- The vast majority of the current high biomass is located either in closed areas or scallop access areas.



Pictured here, VIMS dredge survey catches in the Mid-Atlantic (above) and NEFSC and WHOI HabCam 4 data for Georges Bank (right).

Biomass is high in the Mid-Atlantic closed and access areas, but scallops in the closed portion of the Elephant Trunk are still small in size. Portions of Nantucket Lightship have extremely high biomass. The Closed Area I “sliver,” for which access is pending approval of the Council’s Omnibus Habitat Amendment, has a nice amount of biomass. The Closed Area II Scallop Access Area in the south has exploitable biomass, but scallops in the Closed Area II Extension are still small and not optimal for harvest.



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The surveys also came across an unprecedented number of densely concentrated, “slow growing” scallops in the southern portion of the Nantucket Lightship area in deep water. Many of these age-four scallops had only reached a size normally achieved by age two. The PDT said that “growth potential” for these animals may be limited given their depth.

In another development, large concentrations of starfish, a known predator of scallops, were observed in the shallow portion of the Habitat Area of Particular Concern on the Northern Edge. Surveys also found *Didemnum*, an invasive tunicate, covering the gravel in this shallow area. These tunicates may be interfering with scallop seed settlement.

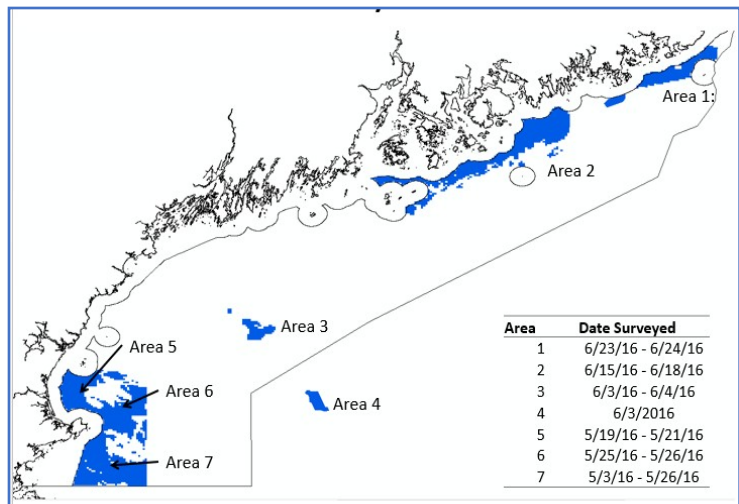
Given current low densities of scallops in open areas, the Scallop Committee and industry advisors may consider scaling back open-area days-at-sea and concentrate effort in selected high-biomass scallop access areas.

The following institutions contributed to the 2016 scallop survey:

- The Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) conducted dredge surveys in the Mid-Atlantic, Nantucket Lightship, and Closed Area II and surrounding bottom;
- The School for Marine Science and Technology (SMST) at the University of Massachusetts – Dartmouth conducted intensive Closed Area I and Nantucket Lightship drop camera surveys;
- The Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) with Lund’s Fisheries conducted a HabCam Version 4 survey on the Northern Edge of Georges Bank;
- Arnie’s Fisheries conducted an intensive Elephant Trunk survey with HabCam 3;
- The Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) conducted the federal Georges Bank dredge survey plus Mid-Atlantic and Georges Bank HabCam 4 surveys; and
- The Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) and University of Maine conducted a Northern Gulf of Maine dredge survey (map at right).



These 5-to-15-millimeter one-year-old scallops from the 2012 VIMS dredge survey in the Mid-Atlantic are now big enough to contribute to the 2017 fishery. – VIMS photo



The Maine DMR, with help from the University of Maine, conducted a May-June 2016 dredge survey for the Northern Gulf of Maine Area. The survey covered 238 stations across seven areas (in blue above) from Cape Ann up to Machias Seal Island. Biomass has increased substantially since the last survey was conducted in 2012. The majority of the biomass was found off Cape Ann and in portions of Stellwagen Bank.



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The 2017 specifications and 2018 default measures will be part of Framework Adjustment 28 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan, which is still under development and scheduled for final action at the Council's Nov. 15-17 meeting in Newport, Rhode Island. The full range of specifications will include: (a) acceptable biological catches (ABCs), annual catch limits (ACLs), days-at-sea, and access area allocations for both limited access (LA) and limited access general category (LAGC) vessels; (b) a hard total allowable catch (TAC) for the Northern Gulf of Maine Management Area; (c) a target TAC for the LAGC incidental catch; and (d) set-aside amounts for the scallop observer and research set-aside programs.

The framework also contains: (1) a measure to potentially restrict the possession of shell stock inshore of the days-at-sea demarcation line north of 42° 20' N; (2) measures to apply spatial management to fisheries specifications (ACL flowchart); and (3) measures to modify the Closed Area I Scallop Access Area boundary to be consistent with potential changes to habitat and groundfish mortality closed areas as outlined in the Omnibus Habitat Amendment, which is under review by the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Greater Atlantic Region Fisheries Office.

A Note to Industry: The 2017 scallop fishing year will begin on March 1. The 2018 fishing year will begin April 1 as a result of Framework Adjustment 19, which is under review by NMFS.



Image from S Mast's drop camera survey taken in the southern portion of the Nantucket Lightship Scallop Access Area. S Mast carried out this year's survey work with industry funding.
– S Mast photo

For more information, contact Scallop Plan Coordinator Jonathon Peros at (978) 465-0492 ext. 117, email jperos@nefmc.org. Or visit the Council's scallop webpage at <http://www.nefmc.org/management-plans/scallops>.

Today was the last day of the Council's Sept. 20-22 meeting. In other news, the Council:

- Conducted its initial discussion about 2017 priorities with the intention of taking final action during its November meeting;
- Received a report from the Habitat Committee – details are available at <http://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/NEFMC-Habitat-release-Sept.-22-2016.pdf>; and
- Received a report from the Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management (EBFM) Plan Development Team and developed comments for NMFS on its EBFM road map. Visit the Council's EBFM webpage at <http://www.nefmc.org/committees/ecosystem-based-fisheries-management>.
- Documents, presentations, and other materials for all agenda items are available at: <http://www.nefmc.org/calendar/september-2016-council-meeting>