

New England Fishery Management Council
50 Water Street, Mill 2
Newburyport, MA 01950
Tel (978) 465-0492 | Fax (978) 465-3116
www.nefmc.org

NEFMC Scallop Research Set-Aside Program May 2014

The Scallop Research Set-Aside, or RSA program, was formally included in the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan in 1999. The program has evolved over time, but currently about 2% of the total projected scallop catch is “set-aside” to fund research projects that support scallop management. It has funded more than 80 scallop specific research projects since 2000, and the program expands each year.

At least biennially, the Council recommends specific research priorities that are to be used for a Scallop RSA funding announcement. The Scallop Plan Development Team (PDT) and Scallop Advisory Panel provide specific input about needed research priorities through the NEFMC Scallop Oversight Committee, and the Committee’s recommendations are then considered and approved by the full Council. The Council’s decision forms the basis for the federal funding opportunity and administered by NOAA Fisheries.

This program is successful because of several important aspects:

- 1) Scallops are a high valued species; therefore, a small set-aside can support a substantial amount of research.
- 2) The process has the appropriate balance of industry control and federal government oversight to help maintain transparency and fairness and keeps the program more insulated from potential budget constraints, fraud, and political influences.
- 3) The Council sets the research priorities with input from scallop scientists and industry so they evolve over time to meet current scallop management needs.
- 4) The set-aside catch is sold in the same regional market so the overall industry still benefits from the catch, i.e. processors, shoreside facilities, crew, etc.
- 5) There are numerous academic and state agencies in the region to participate in collaborative fisheries research.
- 6) The Council has a specific scallop technical team that is used to review and integrate results of RSA projects directly into the management process.

RSA Projects

There are many examples of how the RSA-funded projects have solved challenges facing the scallop industry and management process. For example, when finfish bycatch was a concern in newly opened areas that had been closed for groundfish conservation purposes, the research set-aside program funded critical research to investigate gear modifications. When encounters with loggerhead sea turtles were identified as a potential problem, the RSA program supported projects to learn more about turtle behavior and test gear modifications to reduce impacts. Every year a substantial portion of the set-aside is spent on intensive resource surveys of scallop access areas to identify appropriate harvest levels, and to identify concentrations of small scallops to protect for the future.