



New England Fishery Management Council - News

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NE Fishery Council to Address Sea Scallop Rules

Newburyport, MA In response to the unfortunate circumstances surrounding the sinking of the scallop vessel *Northern Edge* in December, the New England Fishery Management Council's Executive Committee yesterday agreed to recommend that the full Council take action to remove a regulation that reduces the catch of scallops on trips cut short by weather or other factors. The current rule allows a vessel to retake a "broken trip", but is intended to discourage abuse of a potential enforcement loophole.

At its February 1-3 meeting in Portsmouth, NH, the Council will review the findings of the Coast Guard, if available, and other related information to better understand all of the factors that contributed to the sinking. Once the full details of the incident are known, and in consultation with its Scallop Advisory Panel, the Council will make any additional changes, if necessary, to the scallop regulations.

Council Chairman Frank Blount pledged to place a high priority on scrutinizing rules that may have the unintended consequence of creating safety problems. "While the immediate focus is on the scallop regulations, there is a need to re-assess all of the Council's fishery management plans to ensure that we are risk-averse in matters of personal health and safety at sea," he said.

The Council closed certain areas, including the area in which the accident occurred, to scallop fishing in 1994 to protect overfished groundfish stocks. Since 1999, a special access program with limits on catch and season has allowed boats to take advantage of the abundant scallop resource in the areas without jeopardizing groundfish conservation.

The New England Council was established by federal legislation in 1976. Its 18 voting members are charged with conserving and managing fishery resources from three to 200 miles off the coasts of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut.

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