Research Priorities

NMFS published an announcement in June 2012 for possible Scallop RSA funding for both 2013 and 2014. Most proposals only applied for 2013 funding, so there are ample funds still available for 2014.

NMFS could issue another announcement this summer with the same priorities the Council approved last year for FY2013 and FY2014, or the Council could modify the priorities for the 2014 RSA announcement.

In addition, the Council will want to decide if this announcement should be for FY2014 only, or if it should cover two-years again. If it is one year, it will sync up with biennial specification packages (FW25 is for FY2014 only and the next action is expected to be for FY2015-2016). And if it is for two years, it would be more flexible for applicants, and if there are funds available for the second year another announcement could be published.

The PDT has reviewed the list of research priorities from FY2013 (below). Several recommendations have been inserted as underlined text. The PDT recommends that RSA announcements always be two year announcements to facilitate proposals that are better suited to be multi-year projects. However, the PDT also recommends that if funds are left over for the second year of funding there should be another announcement. Ideally, announcements would just continue every year so priorities could be as up to date as possible and set-aside could be maximized.

The AP and Committee should review these priorities and make final recommendations for the Council to consider at the April Council meeting.

After the priorities are approved, the Council will send a letter to NMFS and an announcement for available funds would likely be published in the summer of 2013. Final awards will not be granted until implementation of FW25 (May 2014), but it is important to get the process started so there is sufficient time for the application, review and selection process.

Research priorities approved by the Council for 2013 and 2014

Major modifications from 2012 include: moving turtle related research from HIGH to MEDIUM; adding more specificity to the HIGH bycatch priority item; adding the third item under HIGH to survey "candidate" access areas; and general clean-up of redundant language in several of the priorities listed under OTHER.

Major recommendations from PDT from 2013 announcement include: clarify that some access areas have a higher priority than others based on schedule for opening; add mortality from predation as a MEDUIM priority; and add a new MEDIUM priority about scallop product quality and marketability.

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HIGHEST PRIORITIES (not listed in order of importance):

- An intensive industry-based survey of each of relevant scallop ~~the existing~~ access areas (Closed Area I, Closed Area II, Nantucket Lightship, Delmarva, Elephant Trunk, and Hudson Canyon). The primary deliverable of these surveys would be to estimate total allowable catches (TACs) under the rotational area management program if the data from these surveys are available by

Comment [DVB1]: The PDT discussed that Closed Area I could be removed from the list since that is not a high priority area for access in 2015. However, the PDT noted that things do change and it may be useful to leave prioritizing which areas have the highest priority to the management review process and not right in the announcement.

August of the prior fishing year. Areas scheduled to be open in the following fishing year generally have a higher priority than other areas.

- Identification and evaluation of methods to reduce the impact of the scallop fishery with respect to bycatch. This would include projects that determine seasonal bycatch rates, characterize spatial and temporal distributional patterns as well as the associated discard mortality rates of yellowtail flounder, and other key bycatch species.
- An intensive industry-based survey of areas that may be candidate access areas in the future (i.e. open areas with high scallop recruitment or closed areas that may open to fishing in the future such as groundfish mortality closed areas or current habitat closed areas).

MEDIUM PRIORITY (not listed in order of importance):

- Other resource surveys, to expand and/or enhance survey coverage in areas that have the potential to be important resource areas, but currently have a lack of comprehensive survey coverage.
- Research to support the investigation of the loggerhead turtle behavior in the Mid-Atlantic (via satellite tagging or other means) to understand their seasonal movements, vertical habitat utilization, and how and where interactions with dredge gear are occurring. This priority topic also includes monitoring of scallop dredge and trawl operations, and the development of further gear modifications if monitoring should indicate current designs are not eliminating the threat or harm to sea turtles or are resulting in unacceptable scallop catch loss.
- Studies aimed at addressing issues that were identified as research priorities at the latest assessment: i.e. incidental gear mortality, discard mortality, mortality from predation, and seasonal growth of scallops.
- Research aimed at describing the occurrence as well as understanding the mechanisms of processes that affect scallop product quality and marketability (i.e grey meats, diseases). Related to that, research that would evaluate the potential magnitude of impacts on scallop mortality from "scallop quality" discarding (while shucking).

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OTHER PRIORITIES (not listed in order of importance):

- Other scallop biology projects, including studies aimed at understanding recruitment processes (reproduction, larval and early post-settlement stages), growth, and natural mortality (including predation and disease).
- Investigation of variability in dredging efficiency across habitats, times, areas, and gear designs to allow for more accurate quantitative estimates of scallop dredge impacts on the seabed and development of practicable methods to minimize or mitigate those impacts.
- Habitat characterization research including, but not limited to: video and/or photo transects of the bottom within scallop access areas and within closed scallop areas and in comparable fished areas that are both subject and not subject to scallop fishing before and after scallop fishing commences (BACI or before after control impact dredge impact studies); identification of nursery and over-wintering habitats of species that are vulnerable to habitat alteration by scallop fishing; and other research that relates to habitats affected by scallop fishing, including, but not limited to, long-term or chronic effects of scallop fishing on marine resource productivity, other ecosystem effects, habitat recovery potential, and fine scale fishing effort in relation to fine scale habitat distribution. In particular, projects that directly support evaluation of present and candidate EFH closures to assess whether these areas are accomplishing their stated purposes and to assist better definition of the complex ecosystem processes that occur in these areas.
- Scallop and area management research, including but not limited to: evaluation of ways to control predation on scallops; research to actively manage spat collection and seeding of sea scallops; social and economic impacts and consequences of closing areas to enhance productivity and

improve yield of sea scallops and other species; and estimation of factors affecting fishing power for each limited access vessel.

- Develop methodologies or alternative ways for the scallop fleet to collect and analyze catch and bycatch data on a near real-time basis (i.e. collection of scallop meat weight and quality data, specific bycatch information, etc. Potential ideas include but are not limited to: concepts like a "Study fleet", electronic monitoring, dockside monitors, bag tags, etc.).