



New England Fishery Management Council

News Release

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New England Fishery Council Approves Scallop General Category Amendment for Public Hearings

Mystic, CT By a unanimous vote, the New England Fishery Management Council yesterday agreed to solicit comments from the public on an action that would better control scallop fishing by small scale, largely inshore boats that operate from Maine to North Carolina and harvest Atlantic sea scallops.

Amendment 11 to the Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan, as proposed, would limit participation in what is referred to as the general category scallop fishery. Currently, anyone can apply for and receive a general category permit and fish for 400 pounds of scallop meats per day throughout New England and Mid-Atlantic waters. The amendment also would limit the amount of scallops that could be taken by the general category fleet as a whole in any given year. While some larger full-time scallop vessels would be affected by the action, Amendment 11 principally concerns vessels that have general category permits.

The Council and its industry advisors have been working on the amendment for over a year in order to cap the growth of the general category segment of the fishery so that it does not threaten the health of the scallop resource. Scallops are not overfished, and are currently priced at about \$7 to over \$8 depending on the size. The total harvest in 2005 was over 53 million pounds and worth over \$400 million dollars.

Just who will fish for scallops in the general category fleet and at what level are questions the public will have an opportunity to address. A public hearing document will provide the range of alternatives under consideration and supporting background information. Although dates and locations are not yet available, the Council expects to schedule the hearings in May.

The Council also identified a number of preferred alternatives at the meeting. Among them was a catch cap of five percent of the total projected annual scallop catch for the general category fleet and a limited entry management program in which only vessels that meet certain qualification criteria would be able to fish for scallops. The qualification period of 1994-2004 was identified as preferred in tandem with landings of 1,000 pounds or more in one year during that period of time. Preferred alternatives are not final decisions, but do indicate the Council's current thinking.

The New England Council will make a final decision on Amendment 11 at its June 19-21 meeting in Portland, ME. At that time, public comments will be weighed along with the rationale for the various alternatives provided in a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Analysis document.

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