



New England Fishery Management Council

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 1, 2010

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Fishery Council Makes Tough Choices on Scallop Rules

NEWBURYPORT, MA The New England Fishery Management Council concluded a two-day marathon discussion in Newport, RI yesterday about upcoming rules for the sea scallop fishery. At issue was a final vote on Amendment 15 to the east coast sea scallop fishery management plan. The proposals under consideration would neither increase nor decrease the scallop harvest since the action focused on proposals to reduce excess capacity in the full-time active fleet and federal requirements for annual catch limits and accountability measures. Nonetheless, public testimony was critical to the Council's decision-making and deeply divided.

Many scallop fishermen, local public officials and legislators had serious concerns over the two capacity reduction measures under consideration. One would increase the number of scallop permits allowed on a vessel from one to two. The Council also proposed to allow leasing of scallop access area trips and/or scallop days-at-sea. In what was clearly a difficult choice, members voted down both options despite a lengthy and open development process.

As background, each year the Council annually sets the number of trips that scallop vessels may take into the very productive scallop beds on Georges Bank and in the Mid-Atlantic region. Additional days-at-sea, time available to fish for scallops outside of the trips to the "access areas", are also allocated each year. Under this system, a boat's total fishing time can fluctuate, depending on the availability of harvestable scallops, but has remained constant at about 80 days annually over the last several years.

Many on one side of the debate agreed that leasing and/or "stacking" more than one permit on a vessel would be a reasonable option, given the large amount of time a boat spends at the dock as a result of the restrictions on scallop fishing time. Safety at sea was another important concern for vessel owners who might choose to place all of their fishing time on the newest or most efficient of two boats.

The opposing side worried that the proposals would have significant community impacts such as a further consolidation of fishing businesses into large corporations. Other concerns included a potential uptick in unfair business practices, unemployment, lower wages, monopoly pricing and a loss of shore-side support jobs during the current economic downturn.

A number of proposals in the scallop amendment did receive approval during the Council meeting. Several addressed the limited access general category fishery, which is made up of smaller boats that operate under an individual transferable quota system. Also approved were changes to the boundaries of areas closed to protect habitat so they will be consistent with the areas defined in the Council's groundfish plan and improvements to the scallop research set-aside program. Measures in Amendment 15 are expected to take effect in January 2011.

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