



New England Fishery Management Council News Release

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New England Fishery Council Requests Interim Action to Prevent Scallop Overfishing

Newburyport, MA The New England Fishery Management Council voted 15-1-0 this week to request that NOAA Fisheries take interim action to prevent overfishing of the sea scallop resource. At its meeting in Gloucester, MA, the Council was informed by its sea scallop technical advisory team that scallops were projected to be overfished by a small margin in 2007 if current management measures were maintained through next year. As part of its advice, the team outlined the root causes of the problem --- an overestimate of scallop biomass --- and emphasized the need to adopt a more conservative management approach based on the existing uncertainties associated with measuring scallop biomass.

Reacting quickly to avoid potential problems and in response to overwhelming industry support for the measures, the Council agreed to request that NOAA Fisheries take interim action in 2007. The request specifically asks the agency to reduce the number of scallop trips allowed in the Elephant Trunk Area for all scallop permit categories. For example, the reduction would be from five to three trips for full-time limited access vessels. It also includes a change in the opening date of the area from January 1, 2007 to March 1, 2007 and a measure that prohibits vessels from "deck loading" scallops and leaving the controlled access areas with more than 50 bushels of unshucked scallops.

The Elephant Trunk Area is located off the Mid-Atlantic coast and contains particularly high levels of scallops that will become more valuable if harvested when they are older and larger. It is currently closed under a rotational area management program in which defined areas are opened and closed to control scallop fishing.

Interim action to address overfishing may be taken only by NOAA Fisheries and not the Council. If approved, measures would remain in effect for 180 days, with the possibility of an additional 180-day extension. For its part, the Council voted to initiate a new framework adjustment (#19) to its Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan to set management measures for 2008 and 2009. Framework 19 also would provide time for the Council to develop permanent measures to replace any interim action that might be taken agency.

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