



New England Fishery Management Council

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 2, 2006

Patricia Fiorelli
978.465.0492

Council Will Consider Controls for General Category Vessels

Portland ME The New England Fishery Management Council today initiated an amendment to its Scallop Fishery Management Plan to address capacity, the balance between the number of vessels fishing, their harvesting capabilities and resource availability in the general category scallop fishery. The Council's goal is to limit the number of vessels in the general category fleet and directly control catch using total allowable catch limits that cap landings at a defined level. The amendment also will include alternatives to change the scallop fishing year to allow more timely integration of updated science into the management process.

The general category sector is currently an "open access" fishery --- one in which anyone can apply for and obtain a vessel permit without qualifications such as a history of landings or previous participation in the fishery. General category scallop vessels are chiefly controlled by a daily possession limit of 400 pounds per vessel, a restriction that was intended to accommodate other fisheries that take small amounts of scallops and small-scale scallop fishing near shore. Vessels from Maine to North Carolina participate in the scallop fishery under general category rules.

Until recently, the possession limit has sufficiently controlled the overall level of general category fishing. But with the dramatic increase in the availability of scallops, coupled with recent prices as high as \$10 per pound, general category landings have grown from 2 percent of the overall scallop landings in 1999 and may reach 13 percent in 2005 (this estimate is based on preliminary landings information that include only March through October 2005 and not the entire 12 month fishing year). Expressing serious concerns about overfishing, the Council approved the development of measures that will manage this sector of the fishery more effectively.

As a first step toward addressing the problem, the Council will hold three public scoping hearings in February 2006 in Portsmouth, NH, Hyannis, MA and Cape May Court House, NJ. Public comments are invited through March 6, 2006. Please see the Council website, www.nefmc.org, for further details about the hearings and the scallop scoping document.

#