



## *New England Fishery Management Council News Release*

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### ***New England Fishery Council Approves New Sea Scallop Rules***

Newburyport, MA The New England Fishery Management Council last week set the levels of scallop fishing that will be allowed over the next two years on Georges Bank and in areas off the Mid-Atlantic coast from New York to North Carolina. During its day-long meeting in Wakefield, MA the Council remained confident that its actions would ensure the continuation of a sustainable fishery over the long-term and passed a number of key management measures for both the offshore fleet of large boats and smaller scallop vessels.

The fishery has been managed for a number of years through a system of rotational areas in which scallop vessels are allowed varied levels of access, depending on the condition of the scallop resource in the specific areas. Three access areas are available on Georges Bank, while three others have been identified in the Mid-Atlantic region. No new areas were identified as access areas in this action and some will be closed completely during the two-year period.

Access area allocations are assigned for each vessel in the form of scallop trips. In the case of the 2008-2009 rules, each full-time boat will receive 5 access area trips of 18,000 pounds each. "Open area" days, time available to fish for scallops outside of the access areas, were set at 35 days in 2008 and 42 days in 2009.

A two-month seasonal closure to reduce the risk of potential sea turtle interactions with scallop gear in what is known as the Elephant Trunk Area off New Jersey was lifted because of poor information about where turtles are distributed in the Mid-Atlantic during warm weather months. The Council expressed concern that, given the level of uncertainty about the location of turtle "hot spots", fishing activities could move into areas where turtles might be present in greater numbers than in the closure area. Also, a gear modification to keep turtles out of scallop gear has been in effect since 2006, but was not approved when the Elephant Trunk Area closure was put in place in 2005.

Sea scallops are not overfished and have largely been the reason that New Bedford, MA ranks as the number one port in the nation in terms of dollar value of fish landings. There are about 325 active full-time vessels and another 500 smaller active vessels in the fishery. Scalloping overall has produced about 56 million pounds of scallops for consumers and generated over \$360 million dollars in revenues for vessels as well as additional benefits to ports along the eastern seaboard.

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