

The Associated Press January 28, 2010, 5:22PM ET text size:

## **Key New England fishery manager calls for reform**

By JAY LINDSAY

BOSTON

A day after hotly disputed cuts to the Atlantic scallop catch were revoked, the head of the council that made the decision said reform is urgently needed to remove any hint that its actions are tainted by politics. New England Fishery Management Council chairman John Pappalardo said Thursday that the council must provide a way to protest its decisions, so that the heavy political pressure applied in the scallop case isn't the only option for people who disagree. Some environmentalists said the council chose politics over science Wednesday when it restored a 22 percent cut in scallopers' fishing days. Pappalardo denied that, but said, "If we don't do our work to set up a process if there's a grievance ... we do run the risk of being challenged again on this." Pappalardo also reiterated his call, made in a December letter to Commerce Secretary Gary Locke, for an outside review of council operations that he has said are ineffective and antiquated. The 18-member council is an advisory body to federal managers with representatives from New England's coastal states, including fishermen, environmentalists and government officials. Its decisions are made after extensive public meetings and analysis and have a major effect on an industry that employs thousands of people and brings in hundreds of millions of dollars. The vote Wednesday gave scallopers 38 fishing days, reversing a November council decision that cut fishing days to 29 this year amid concerns about overfishing. Some council members who reversed their vote said they had misunderstood new science indicating scallopers wouldn't come close to overfishing the stock under the more lenient rules.

The industry objected loudly to the initial decision, saying scallopers in the robust fishery would lose up to \$300,000 per boat. Politicians weighed in en masse, included Rep. Barney Frank, who said Pappalardo should resign if the council didn't reconsider. Pappalardo said recent weeks were "probably the hardest period in my life," but also an important reminder. "You can't go numb and remove yourself from the impacts of your decisions," he said. Pappalardo, a 37-year-old former hook fisherman on Cape Cod, said because he found no precedent for reconsidering a final council decision, he initially focused on defending it. Eventually, Gov. Deval Patrick asked Pappalardo to make his case during a weekend meeting Jan. 10.

Pappalardo said Patrick listened intently, then got him thinking when he asked whether the higher level of fishing scallopers wanted was considered scientifically safe, which it was. Pappalardo left the meeting with Patrick uncertain what he would do. "I just was in a pretty dark place because I felt like I personally was being asked to make a decision that I didn't feel was my decision to make," Pappalardo said. "I decided to bring it back to the council and challenge them to defend themselves and the decision they had made, or change their minds." The process was rocky, but Pappalardo said the council is stronger after having the chance to consider solid economic arguments the industry made Wednesday.

"I think we've demonstrated that we are a deliberative body that can make decisions, and can also make decisions to change our minds," he said.