NOAA proposes measures to raise catch limits for Atlantic sea scallop fishery and protect sea turtles and yellowtail flounder

NOAA today proposed raising the catch limit for Atlantic sea scallop vessels from the current level of 47 million pounds to 51 million pounds in 2011 and to 55 million pounds in 2012.

“The sustainable and profitable scallop fishery has given Massachusetts the nation’s top fishing port for landing values: the port of New Bedford,” said Eric Schwaab, assistant administrator for NOAA’s Fisheries Service. “Our goal is for all U.S. fisheries and the communities they support to experience similar success as we continue rebuilding our nation’s fish stocks.”

Another measure proposed would continue the successful scallop rotational area management scheme, which limits access in certain areas to allow small scallops to grow and replenish scallop stocks before they are caught. The rotational management scheme promotes higher catch with less fishing time in the areas that are open, an increase in efficiency that is a key goal of scallop fishery management.

The proposed rule would also limit scallop fishing in portions of the Mid-Atlantic during June through October, when scallop fishing activities overlap with the movements of endangered and threatened sea turtles.

Another measure would adjust days-at-sea allocations for some scallop fishermen only when the yellowtail flounder catch limit is reached in the Georges Bank access areas. The measure will allow yellowtail flounder to continue rebuilding while enabling scallop fishermen to harvest their full scallop allocations.

The proposed catch limits announced today are based on a recently proposed revision to the scallop fishery management plan. The revision brings the plan into compliance with new requirements under federal fisheries law, including annual catch limits and accountability measures to prevent overfishing for all federally managed fish species.

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