



Contact: Maggie Mooney-Seus
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NOAA Announces New Management Measures for Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery for 2010

NOAA today announced new measures to prevent overfishing of Atlantic sea scallops and to better protect threatened and endangered sea turtles from unintentional capture in sea scallop dredges.

This year, there will be a slight decline in the number of fishing days allotted to full-time fishermen, from 42 to 38 days, and a proportional decline in available fishing days for part-time fishermen. The Nantucket Lightship management area will be opened for controlled harvest and the Elephant Trunk and Delmarva areas will remain open.

To minimize risks to sea turtles, the number of trips taken by full-time vessels into the latter two areas that are in mid-Atlantic waters will be restricted, with no more than two trips allowed between June 15 and August 31. In addition, no scallop vessels may fish in those management areas in September and October.

Also, to provide more business options to the fishing industry, fishermen with an individual fishing quota will now be able to lease a portion of their allocation to other permitted fishermen.

Sixteen public hearings were held between March and November 2009 and comments were considered before the new scallop measures were finalized. Scallop rules are updated regularly.

“We are reducing the overall fishing effort and expect to see a shift in fishing activity out of the Mid-Atlantic,” said Patricia Kurkul, NOAA’s Fisheries Service northeast regional administrator. “This will help keep the scallop resource healthy by preventing localized depletion of scallops and also reduce risks posed to sea turtles, which can be unintentionally captured in scallop gear where they can be seriously injured or drown.”

Atlantic sea scallops are managed through a combination of approaches. A small portion of the industry is made up of vessels with an individual allocation of the annual catch, also called an individual fishing quota. The remaining vessels are allocated a specific number of fishing days to be used inside and outside of defined rotational management areas.

Under rotational management, areas of the ocean containing highly productive sea scallop beds are periodically closed for a year or more to allow sea scallops to grow to maturity, then reopened for controlled harvest. Larger sea scallops are more valuable than smaller ones, both for landings and as breeders that replenish the population. This system is a good way to maximize both the economic and biological value of large, mature sea scallops.

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