



NMFS Northeast Regional Office

N E W S

Sea Scallop Opening Set off New England

Contact:

Teri Frady, NOAA
508 495-2239

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Gloucester, MA – NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) has announced that Northeast sea scallop vessels will be allowed limited fishing in presently closed areas off New England beginning November 2. The areas have been closed to protect recovering fish species, which has also allowed sea scallops to grow in abundance for harvest.

Sea scallops brought in \$226.8 million to Northeast harvesters in 2003, second only to lobsters in top-grossing species in the region, and propelled New Bedford to first in landings value among the nation’s ports. “Sea scallop populations were low and depleted during much of the 1990s. The remarkable rebound in the stock and the fishery today results from effective fishery management,” said Patricia Kurkul, NOAA Fisheries Northeast Regional Administrator.

The sea scallop fishery management plan has been revised in recent years to identify the most productive sea scallop beds off New England and the Mid-Atlantic, in order to establish systematic closures of some of these areas to allow for sea scallop growth, while opening and directing effort into other areas that have been fallow. The result has been the most lucrative and sustainable fishery period in the history of the region’s sea scalloping.

The openings announced today are in areas on Georges Bank and south of Nantucket Shoals that were last accessed by sea scallopers during 1999 and 2000. The areas are sub-portions of larger areas generally closed to all gear that can take recovering groundfish species, including scallop gear.

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The sea scallop controlled access fisheries announced today are designed to prevent overfishing, mitigate bycatch of other species, and avoid damage to important habitat. Vessels are further restricted by number of trips, landings per trip, bycatch quotas for yellowtail flounder, and reporting and observer requirements.

The fishery rules approved today have been under consideration by the agency since July, and public comment on the proposed rule closed in September. Usually, an additional 30-day waiting period occurs between final approval of new rules and their effective date. However, since the rules for operating in the access areas are well known to the fleet and the action relieves, rather than adds restrictions, NOAA Fisheries has waived that waiting period. Another factor is weather, since opening the fishery later in the year would also mean pushing operations into wintry conditions.

One exception to the waiver of the waiting period is access granted to so-called “general category” vessels. These vessels have not previously operated in the controlled access sea scallop fisheries. While the rule allows general category vessels to participate, the required reporting and monitoring conditions for that participation are still in the approval process.

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NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement, and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries, please visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

The Commerce Department's [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\)](#) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

NOAA/National Marine Fisheries Service * One Blackburn Drive * Gloucester, MA * 01930