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NOAA issues emergency action to prevent opening of scallop area to protect resource
Scallop industry supports measure that protects successful rotational management

NOAA today announced that, at the request of the New England Fishery Management Council and members of the scallop industry, it will not reopen the Nantucket Lightship Access Area to scallop fishing, as had been scheduled for June 15.

"We are working with the council and scallop fishermen to protect scallops and southern New England yellowtail flounder stocks in this area to allow for future sustainable fishing here," said Eric Schwaab, assistant NOAA administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "By ensuring sustainable scallop yields for the future from this area, we are also preserving the integrity of our successful rotational management program."

Rotational management, where some areas are opened to fishing while others are closed to allow scallops to mature and grow to marketable size, promotes higher catches with less fishing time in the areas that are open. Rotational management has helped make the scallop fishery one of the top valued fisheries in the nation and made New Bedford, Mass., the nation's top earning port.

Today's emergency measure is needed because increased landings as a result of a reopening could jeopardize the scallops and undermine the future of the rotational management program. New proposed measures will require that this roughly 1,400-square mile area, southeast of Nantucket Island, be closed until June 15, 2012, and three other scallop fishing areas be open instead in the 2011 fishing year, as part of rotational management.

"We urged both the council and NOAA to keep this area closed because the high price of scallops may make fishing in this area more attractive than anyone expected and we don't want to risk exceeding our catch limits for the fishery or compromise the effectiveness of the rotational management program," said Drew Minkiewicz, an attorney with the Fisheries Survival Fund, which represents sea scallop fishermen.

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