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Contact: Maggie Mooney-Seus
978-281-9175
Marjorie.Mooney-Seus@noaa.com

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Individual Quotas Introduced in Northeast Sea Scallop Fishery

Some Northeast sea scallop vessels will soon have an individual annual catch quota that can be used, leased, or permanently transferred to another vessel. Under rules announced today by NOAA's Fisheries Service, qualifying federally permitted general category scallop vessels will eventually share five percent of the annual available landings, with each vessel's limit set according to their historical participation in the fishery.

This individual fishery quota (IFQ) system is just the second of its kind in the Northeast, and only the sixth in the nation. The first was the Northeast surfclam-ocean quahog fishery, which adopted IFQs in 1990. The action is consistent with the President's Ocean Action Plan and his call to double the number of limited access privilege programs in the nation's fisheries by 2010.

The sea scallop IFQ permits will replace open-access permits. The open access permits were available to almost any vessel and originally intended to account for small-scale sea scallop fisheries and bycatch incidental to other fisheries. However, open-access permit holders increased their landings from fewer than 100,000 pounds in 1994 to approximately seven million pounds annually in recent years.

Not every vessel with an open-access permit will qualify for an IFQ permit. Those that do not may qualify for a possession-limit-only permit allowing up to 40 pounds of sea scallops to be retained per trip, or a permit to fish exclusively in the Northern Gulf of Maine.

Approximately 2,500 to 3,000 general category permits have been issued annually in recent years, with only about a third of the permits showing any scallop landings at all. Exactly how many vessels will qualify is not yet known, although the best current estimate is 369.

IFQ scallop permits, and the incidental and Northern Gulf of Maine scallop permits, will be required beginning July 1, 2008. Vessels that are under appeal for a new scallop permit can be authorized to fish with special documentation while their appeal is being considered.

Actual individual quota amounts can be issued only after all qualified IFQ scallop vessels have been identified. Until then, the IFQ fleet and those fishing under appeal are allocated 10 percent of the scallop catch which is divided by quarter. A subsequent action under consideration by NOAA Fisheries Service would implement actual total allowable catch levels for the general category fleet for 2008 and 2009.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.