



**CITY OF NEW BEDFORD**  
JONATHAN F. MITCHELL, MAYOR

April 11, 2024

Eric Reid, Chair  
New England Fishery Management Council  
50 Water Street, Mill 2  
Newburyport, MA 01950

**Re: Advancing a scallop rotational harvest program within and/or around the Closed Area II Habitat Closure Area in 2024**

Dear Chairman Reid:

I write to encourage the New England Fisheries Management Council to follow through expeditiously with creating the access areas identified by the Scallop and Habitat Committees which would allow for the harvest of scallops in the Northern Edge this year. We appreciate and commend the extensive efforts by NEFMC staff and committee members in undertaking this process.

As you know, the Port of New Bedford is the most valuable commercial fishing port in the U.S., and has maintained that leadership consistently for over two decades. This sustained leadership is substantially due to the steady profitability and ongoing responsible management of the scallop industry. The Port is home to over 7,000 jobs and more than 400 fishing vessels. Its complexity and scale are unmatched on the East Coast. The Port is a major driver of the regional economy, as shoreside businesses thrive by providing services to the fishing fleet, and tens of millions of dollars of public and private investment is currently underway modernizing port infrastructure.

While there are multiple species that are harvested by New Bedford fishing vessels, scallops are the prime drivers of economic activity within the Port. The fishermen of New Bedford know this, and they take great care in maintaining the resource and recognize the strategic long-term importance of managing the biomass. Opening the Northern Edge would provide a key new source of scallops as other locations recover and scallop recruitment is allowed to take place.

Developing a scallop rotational harvest program within and/or around the Closed Area II Habitat Closure Area (i.e., “habitat management area” or “HMA”) avoids habitats important to juvenile cod, minimizes adverse effects to essential fish habitats, minimizes adverse biological and economic impacts to other managed fisheries, and contributes to optimum yield for the scallop fishery.

The work of the Habitat and Scallop Plan Development Teams (PDTs) has been careful and thoughtful, and has led to the cautious and prudent recommendation to pursue the opening of Concept Areas #2 and #4. While these are the smallest of the Concept Areas that were evaluated, they will nevertheless represent an important step in providing much needed scallop fishing opportunities, with Concept Area #4 potentially representing the highest concentration of scallops in the closed area in recent surveys. Also, scallops have been spawning in the entire Closed Area for years, and it is likely that 75% of the overall biomass will remain even after any of these areas are opened to fishing.

These two identified areas also represent the lowest amount of complex bottom conditions and thus are less likely to incur adverse habitat impacts from the opening to scallop fishing.

While we recognize and support the strong commitment to protecting important groundfish habitats such as those found in the Closed Area, there has been no fishing in that area for two decades. Despite that prohibition, there has been minimal return of cod and other groundfish to the area. In fact, it is my understanding that prominent members of the groundfish industry are supportive of a limited opening of the area to scallop fishing.

The WHOI-led long term study of habitat impacts that was presented just two years ago is clear: impact on most habitats from scallop fishing are minor and recovered in less than 10 months, and even more complex habitats fully recovered in six years' time.

Given that report, and given the fact that the proposed areas are the smallest under consideration with the least amount of complex habitat, we urge the Council not to require a mitigation framework before the areas can be opened. The level of mitigation that may be required is right now unknown and by any objective measure ought to be modest. The Council should advance the rotational area in Closed Area II first to allow scallop fishing to commence and address any mitigation under a follow-on process.

The scallop fishery is facing some challenging years upcoming, after a few years of low recruitment. This is likely to lead to lower catch limits. The industry would benefit greatly by adding these areas to its available fishing grounds. On behalf of my fellow Commissioners and in support of the New Bedford scallop fleet and everyone it employs, I urge the Council to take this modest but meaningful step to open these areas to fishing this year.

Sincerely,



Jon Mitchell  
Mayor, City of New Bedford  
Chairman, New Bedford Port Authority