

# Fishermen decry new scallop quotas

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Fishing quotas on sea scallops are due to change March 1.

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The Cape Coddler  
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CAPE COD — March comes in like a lion for the local scalloping industry.

Those fishing federal waters, more than three miles out, will see a change from their 400-pound per day limit as general category scallopers to an individual fishing quota based on their catch from 2000-2004 on March 1.

Provincetown-based scalloper Mary Beth DePoutiloff isn't eagerly awaiting the date. She was in Washington on Wednesday for the "United We Fish" rally to reform the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, under which fisheries are managed, and to request a moratorium on the catch shares program.

"We fish and we vote," DePoutiloff said. "This is the first time recreational and commercial guys are on the same side."

She planned to meet with U.S. Sens. Scott Brown and John Kerry and Congressman John Tierney, who spoke at the rally. DePoutiloff is certain the coming quotas will slam Cape Cod scallopers.

"Nobody will have enough to be viable," she said. "On March 1, general category boats will be fishing under catch shares for the first time — individual tradable quotas — meaning we can have 1,600 pounds. That's equal to four days of fishing (under the old system), so I can fish for four days a year. A life raft costs \$1,000. GPS is \$100 a month so we basically are forced to sell or hang on and lose money. And it's just not me. Everybody I talk to — nobody has enough catch to make a living."

All five scallopers in Provincetown and everyone else on Cape Cod fall into the general category division, as far as federal regulations go. Their share of the total allowable catch will be cut from 10 percent to 5 percent (2,257,534 pounds) by Amendment 11 on March 1. Last year they could catch 4,590,024 pounds.

"In 2006, when Amendment 11 passed, there were over 2,900 general category permits; 600 were working permits that actually landed scallops that year. Now it's estimated there'll be 369 left. That was their estimate," she emphasized.

"Years back there were hundreds of boats on Cape Cod that maintained the right to go small boat (general) category opportunistic fishing," said Tom Dempsey of Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association. "When the scalloping was good they'd hitch up a dredge and go. It's been transformed so they need a full-time permit and that's led to consolidation through allocation."

Because the individual fishing quotas were set by taking the best year's scallop catch during 2000-2004, reducing it if effort slacked off and partitioning it proportionally into 5 percent of the total catch, the allotments may not be enough. DePoutiloff said one Provincetown scalloper has already sold his permit. Part-time scallopers who caught less than 1,000 pounds a year during 2000-04 lost their allocations.

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“In Maine, some landings weren’t reported because they went to state dealers so I never got credit for those,” DePoutiloff said.

Implementation of the quotas program was delayed until this March to give fishermen time to get their paperwork in order and appeal their allotments.

“A lot of fishermen have made a substantial investment in permits and quota to put together a full-time position,” Dempsey noted.

Last year, when general category boats got 10 percent of the total catch, they were able to fish for six weeks, DePoutiloff said.

“It’s crazy,” she said. “Even when we stopped fishing here last month, everybody was doing really well. It’s not like it’s overfished. There are plenty of scallops.”

The larger boats, day-trippers that operate out of deep ports such as New Bedford, have a trip limit but they can catch 45.9 million pounds in aggregate.

In November, the New England Fishery Management Council voted to adopt a rule chopping the trip boats days at sea from 37 to 29 and limiting the total catch to 41.7 million pounds. That caused an uproar with fierce political pressure coming from Congressman Barney Frank, who represents New Bedford, Gov. Deval Patrick and the New Bedford mayor. On Jan. 27, the council reversed itself, by a 10-5 vote with two abstentions, due to economic concerns. The days-at-sea were restored and the limit boosted.

“The risk of overfishing, while higher with the choice approved today, was acceptable in terms of the economic costs associated with the alternative approved last fall,” council representative Patricia Fiorelli said in a statement.

“I guess it’s the story of the golden rule. Whoever has the gold makes the rules. It doesn’t seem right,” DePoutiloff said. “I think it’s politics. They would like to push the little guys out. We’re like ants at the picnic. They don’t even want us to have the crumbs.”

It was estimated the rule change could have cost the day trip boats about a quarter of their income.

“They’re managed under two different plans,” Dempsey noted. “The scallop fishery is a very complicated fishery. It’s not as simple as the big boats got all they wanted, now why can’t the small boat scallopers on Cape Cod not face consolidation.”

He noted the fishery council picked the more conservative alternative in November and now opted for a lesser restrictive approach. Since the total allowable catch was raised a bit, the small boats’ share also went up slightly.


“But the point is there are no guys left,” DePoutiloff said. “The NOAA budget meeting is the same day. It’s really a coincidence. They’re spending \$54 million to put us all out of business.”

Still, she wants everyone on the same page, at least for the rally.

“It’s not a big boat, little boat thing, a recreational commercial guys thing. The problem is federal regulators are trying to get rid of us,” she said. “Each fisherman creates six other jobs.”

She said she’s heard of quotas being sold for \$10 a pound. Fishermen, or groups such as the hook fishermen’s association can purchase quotas and form a sector – allotting catch shares within that sector.

“But they still own them so the fishermen are like sharecroppers,” DePoutiloff said. “I don’t think anyone has a right to own fish or the ocean because how can you decide who’s going to get it?”

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