

[Fishing council overturns controversial scallop decision](#)

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By Beth Daley

The council overseeing the region's fishermen in federal waters reversed a controversial scallop fishing rule today, after weeks of pressure from Gov. Deval Patrick and a host of other politicians and industry members.

The controversial issue has its roots in a November vote by the New England Fishery Management Council to cut the days many scallop fishermen can fish from about 37 to 29 and reduce the number of scallop trips into certain areas.

The move was done, council members said at the time, because the fleet caught more scallops than expected in 2008 and 2009 and they were at or approaching the federal definition of overfishing. The fishing council said conservation was needed to ensure the stock would be robust in the future.

Yet the change meant a steep 2010 economic hit to scallopers who, along with some scientists, argued that the threat of overfishing was not much greater if the council went with a more relaxed version of the rules.

The new decision will allow scallop fishermen to catch about seven million more pounds of scallops a year than what the November decision called for - a catch ultimately worth an estimated \$250 million to New Bedford, according to Mayor Scott Lang.

"The council was a little too cautious back in November," Lang said in a telephone interview from the New Hampshire meeting. "What they did today is have a full debate and went with a more moderate option. It won't result in overfishing, it won't go toward an edge, it's merely the middle ground."

Some environmental groups however, decried the decision, saying the council put short-term profits ahead of the long-term health of the scallop fishery.

"Politics clearly triumphed over sound science today," said Dave Allison, senior campaign director at Oceana. "This is a perfect example of how politics can interfere with the Council's responsibility and authority as an 'advisor to NOAA' to manage fishery resources."

Gov. Deval Patrick issued a statement, saying "By revisiting the scientific data and revising their previous decision on scallop catch, (the council) struck a better balance for fishermen and the resource on which they depend.

"I look forward to continuing a strong partnership with the Council to use sound science and fair regulation to manage our precious fisheries resources."