

## Atlantic Sea and Bay Scallops

### NORTH CAROLINA FISHERIES

Sea scallops are found in the Northwest Atlantic Ocean from Newfoundland, Canada to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. Sea scallops are very prolific. A single scallop can generate up to 270 million eggs during its lifetime and live up to 20 years. Sea scallops spawn in late summer to fall, and larvae grow rapidly. Between ages three and five years, sea scallops grow to 50 to 80 percent of their shell height and may quadruple their meat weight. They can reach a maximum size of 6.7 inches in height. Juvenile and adults sea scallops are a food source for cod, flounder, crabs, lobsters and sea stars.



Currently the Atlantic sea scallop resource is healthy and sustainable. This fishery is extremely important to our country's economy and is the largest wild scallop fishery in the world. In 2009, U.S. fishermen harvested 58 million pounds of sea scallop meats worth over \$382 million. North Carolina watermen participating in this fishery in 2009 harvested 382 thousand pounds of meat having a market value of over \$2.3 million to commercial fishermen.

The New England Fishery Management Council manages the sea scallop resource in cooperation with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

Atlantic sea and bay scallops are filter feeders, meaning they strain plankton and other food particles from water by passing it over a specialized structure that traps food. Cilia move the food toward the mouth and into the digestive tract.

Bay scallops live up to 26 months and grow up to four inches. Early in life, larvae attach to the leaves and stems of sea grass. As they mature, scallops sink to the bottom and continue to grow. Environmental factors such as temperature, rainfall, and sea grass health play a critical part in scallop abundance and yearly landings can vary a great deal.

According to the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries, the status of the North Carolina bay scallop fishery is "recovering." The resource was compromised by a red tide in 1987 and several hurricanes in the 1990s. Sampling in areas south of Bogue Sound in 2009 showed stock improvements in some areas. Environmental disturbances and predation by cownose rays may still limit the spawning stocks in the central coastal region.

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