

# Protecting Sea Turtles in the U.S. Atlantic Scallop Fishery

## Region

U.S. New England and the Mid-Atlantic

## Timeframe

2001-present

## Fishery Affected

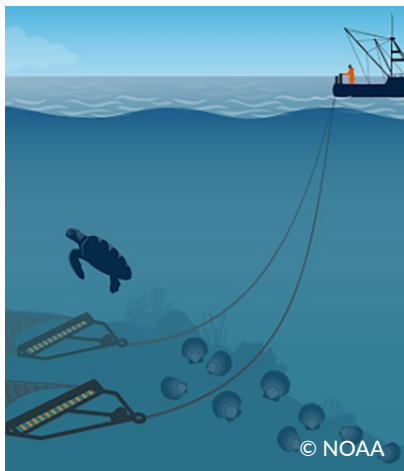
Atlantic scallop

## Target Species

Atlantic scallop

## Gear Type

Scallop dredge



Oceana successfully campaigned to compel the U.S. Atlantic scallop fishery to adopt significant changes to its gear and fishing practices which have reduced bycatch of threatened and endangered sea turtles. In 2001, the National Marine Fisheries Service determined that the U.S. Atlantic scallop fishery was likely to adversely affect threatened and endangered sea turtles, and initiated a Biological Opinion under the Endangered Species Act.

At the New England Fishery Management Council, Oceana highlighted the problem of sea turtle bycatch in the scallop fishery and advocated that the Council put in place measures to reduce bycatch to levels that complied with the Endangered Species Act.

In response to this advocacy, the scallop industry worked with gear researchers to develop a new kind of gear called the Turtle Deflector Dredge (TDD) that forces sea turtles up and over the heavy dredge frame instead of under the frame where they were being caught and killed.

**Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) Connection-** Action to reduce bycatch of turtles was driven by the requirements of the Endangered Species Act but satisfied:

National Standard 9 of the MSA (“Conservation and management measures shall, to the extent practicable, (A) minimize bycatch and (B) to the extent bycatch cannot be avoided, minimize the mortality of such bycatch”), as well as required provision 303(a)(11) that all FMPs, “include conservation and management measures that, to the extent practicable and in the following priority—

- (A) minimize bycatch; and
- (B) minimize the mortality of bycatch which cannot be avoided”

In 2012, Framework 23, a Magnuson-Stevens Act management action developed by the New England Fishery Management Council, was approved by the Fisheries Service. It included requirements for vessels fishing in the Atlantic sea scallop fishery to use the TDD in the Mid-Atlantic from May through October when turtles are present.

**Outcomes-** The TDD requirement has been in place since 2012 and the gear has since been modified to improve efficacy. For the most recent reporting period from April 1, 2022 to September 30, 2022, zero sea turtle interactions were observed in the U.S. Atlantic scallop fishery.