

Sea Scallop Research Resumed in June

By Sally Mills

Scientists in the Marine Advisory Program are gearing up for another season of sea scallop research in the Mid-Atlantic Closed Areas. This is a cooperative effort among VIMS, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and commercial fishermen. A 15-day trip to the Hudson Canyon South site took place in June aboard the vessel, *Alice Amanda*, owned by Mark Shackelford of S&S Marine in Hampton, Virginia, and captained by Kenny Brown of Gloucester Point. Under the direction of Dr. William DuPaul, students and researchers are planning a second survey to the Virginia Beach site in August. The 2000 survey provided baseline information to help resource managers set harvest limits for scallops in these two areas, which are scheduled to re-open in March 2001.

Among other things, the data are used to estimate total biomass in each closed area, or an estimate of the number of pounds of scallop meats available for harvesting. That information directly impacts how the opening of an area will take place, including the length of the opening and the number of vessel trips allowed. Final decisions are made by the New England Fisheries Management Council with input from NMFS and the Sea Scallop Plan Development Team.

Researcher Dave Rudders has been part of the sea scallop research team for three years and has witnessed some refinements in the equipment used to conduct surveys. One advancement that is sure to help resource managers is the “inclinometer,” an instrument adapted from torpedoes. Its small sensor indicates when the dredge is in contact with the ocean bottom.

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The source of the BDEs and their route of entry to the rivers is currently uncertain. However, the polyurethane foam production process may be key. VIMS research has already shown that BDEs can be released to the atmo-

remain in the environment for years to come. And the longer they are used, the greater these levels will be.”

An article on VIMS' BDE research was recently featured in the journal Environmental Science and Technology

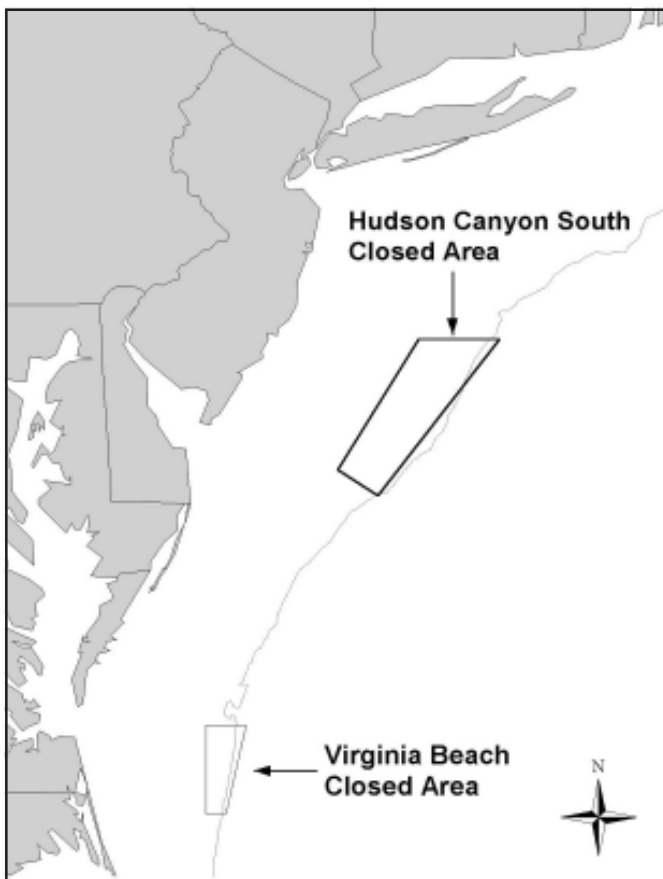


This 10-minute commercial survey tow yielded 30 baskets of 4-inch scallops.

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By synchronizing its output with GPS location data, one is able to more closely identify the length and area of the dredge tow path. The result is a more accurate assessment of dredge efficiency, which is critical in calculating an estimate of biomass. “Typically,” said Dave, “many variables can affect the efficiency of the dredge. Weather, the type of bottom being dredged, and the skills of the vessel captain are prime examples.”

Similar survey work was recently completed in three closed areas of the Georges Bank off the New England coast. As a result of those efforts, a decision was made by NMFS to open Closed Area II last June for a period of five months. During that time, over six million pounds of scallops were harvested. Area II is scheduled for re-opening again this summer along with two other areas, Area I and Nantucket Lightship, with the potential to harvest over 16



Map shows the two mid-Atlantic areas closed to sea scallop commercial fishing. These areas were the focus of the recent collaborative survey conducted by both VIMS and the sea scallop industry.

million pounds of scallop meats, depending upon the level of finfish bycatch. VIMS scientists will again conduct research aboard commercial scallop vessels in these areas. Specifically, they will examine dredge modifications to reduce finfish bycatch and the inadvertent harvest of small scallops.