

NEW ENGLAND FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Habitat/Marine Protected Areas/Ecosystems

I. STATUS

MEETINGS AND ONGOING WORK

The Habitat PDT met on October 17 and 18 to further develop alternatives to protect deep-sea corals in the Northeast Region. These alternatives will be part of the Omnibus Amendment, and are based in large part on the canyon and seamount Habitat Areas of Particular Concern approved by the Council in 2007. In addition to PDT and audience members, eight invited experts attended and participated in the meeting. Many had experience surveying corals and associated ecosystems off the east coast of the US and elsewhere, while others had expertise in coral database development, coral biology, coral conservation efforts, and/or geology.

Meeting outcomes:

- Improved understanding of the range of information available upon which to base decisions about coral protection zones
- Progress towards effort to catalog and summarize available information for each canyon area
- Completed an assessment on a high/moderate/low scale for each canyon of either coral presence, or likely coral presence based on suitable habitat. This will form the basis of advice to the Committee on whether a coral zone should be implemented in each area.

On October 25, the PDT held a conference call to review meeting outcomes and discuss additional work to be completed in the coming two months. The PDT will meet in person on December 7 in Boston, MA to refine (possibly finalize) advice to the Committee on these issues.

The Habitat Advisory Panel and Habitat Committee have not met since the last Council meeting. The plan is to have both groups meet concurrently in early January to (1) review PDT-recommended deep-sea coral alternatives, and (2) finalize alternatives to minimize the effects of fishing on EFH. The timing for integrating habitat area alternatives and groundfish area alternatives will depend on how evaluation of the groundfish closed areas is prioritized for 2012 relative to other groundfish management issues. A joint Habitat/Groundfish Committee and PDT will be convened at some point in the process, after some amount of groundfish-related analysis is completed.

II. COUNCIL ACTION

No Council action on Omnibus Amendment alternatives at this meeting, however the Habitat Committee chair and Council staff will provide an update on progress (Doc 1). The list of Omnibus goals and objectives is also provided for reference (Doc 2).

III. INFORMATION

1. PowerPoint presentation to be given on November 15 – Omnibus Amendment Update (*See also updated timeline for Omnibus EFH Amendment 2*)
2. EFH Omnibus Amendment 2 Goals and Objectives