



New England Fishery Management Council  
Habitat Committee Report – September 27, 2012  
Document 4 - Recent habitat-related meeting summaries

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Habitat Plan Development Team – August 9, 2012  
Habitat Committee – August 23, 2012



**New England Fishery Management Council  
Habitat Plan Development Team Meeting Summary**

**August 9, 2012  
Boston, MA**

**PDT members:** Michelle Bachman (chair), Jessica Coakley, Kiley Dancy, Katie Richardson, Moira Kelly, David Stevenson, Chad Demarest, Geret DePiper, Melissa Smith, Peter Auster, Page Valentine, Kathryn Ford

**Committee members:** David Preble (chair)

**Others:** Three additional audience members in person and via webinar

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The Habitat PDT met on August 9, 2012. The agenda had originally included an update on deep-sea coral management including fishing effort distributions, a discussion of dedicated habitat research areas, and a discussion of adverse effects minimization options, specifically those related to ground cable length modifications. Time was also allotted to review extra-SASI materials.

Most of the original agenda was superseded by a discussion of recent groundfish committee motions/recommendations regarding closed areas, so this report is fairly brief. Most of the PDT's discussion is captured in a separate memo to the Habitat Committee that provides recommendations about the closed areas and adverse effects minimization. Recommendations about ground cable options and research areas are detailed in other documents referenced below.

**Groundfish Committee motion and implications for adverse effects options**

The PDT spent most of the meeting drafting a response to the Groundfish Committee's closed area motion from August 2. The PDT memorandum discusses inconsistencies between Habitat Committee options to minimize the adverse effects of fishing on EFH and areas that are contemplated in the Groundfish Committee motion for opening in order to mitigate economic impacts of lower catch limits. The memo includes recommendations that the Habitat Committee might consider forwarding to the Council at its September meeting.

**Adverse Effects Minimization Options – Ground cable limits**

The PDT briefly discussed ground cable length limits as an approach to adverse effects minimization. While estimating a reduction in gear width due to such a modification is

straightforward, there are no studies to inform how catchability would change given shortened ground cables. Thus, it would be very difficult to estimate how area swept would change overall if shortened ground cables were required. A discussion document on this issue was prepared in advance of the PDT meeting. This document will be reviewed by correspondence and then forwarded to the Committee.

### **Dedicated Habitat Research Areas**

A working group of the PDT has been developing a range of research area options for the PDT and Committee to consider. Based on Committee feedback provided on June 8, the working group met in July to consider how to refine and update the DHRA proposals. A PowerPoint presentation was prepared for the PDT but there was not time at the meeting to review it, so it will be edited and reviewed by correspondence before the August 23 Committee meeting. The focus of the presentation was to discuss the tradeoffs associated with a full before-after-control-impact design, vs. a design within adverse effects minimization areas only.

### **Deep-sea corals**

MAFMC staff drafted a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on coral management that will be reviewed by the MAFMC Ecosystems and Ocean Planning Committee on August 14 and possibly forwarded to their Council for action. The NEFMC Habitat Committee will review the MOU and any MAFMC feedback on August 23.

NEFMC has published a supplemental notice of intent (NOI) indicating that it is considering splitting the coral alternatives out of the Omnibus EFH A2 and into a separate action. The NOI solicits feedback on this decision (comment period closes August 27).

Recent new research related to corals includes multibeam seabed mapping, remote visual observations of coral distributions, and modeling work, among other initiatives. It is not exactly clear when all of the results will be able to be incorporated into the Council process, but collaboration with the Northeast Fisheries Science Center and other academic institutions is ongoing and the information will be used to the extent possible depending on the timeline for the OA2 or other action, if the coral alternatives are split.

Geret DePiper (NEFSC) presented some updated work on fishing effort distributions within broad coral zones. His analysis examined fishing effort attributed to the entire slope area seaward of 300 m (i.e. the shallowest broad coral zone alternative). First, he queried the fishing vessel trip report (VTR) data for trips in the 300 m zone, and then he evaluated the top 20 species by kept weight. Next, to make comparisons between fisheries of different sizes more meaningful, he compared those kept weights to the total annual landings for each species. For

example, over the past five years, deep sea red crab trips attributed to the 300 m zone were associated with an average annual kept catch of 1.9 million lbs. Over that same period, this represents approximately 65% of annual red crab landings. Because it is known that there is spatial uncertainty in the VTR data, the results were compared to vessel monitoring system (VMS) polls where possible. Some species with a high proportion of annual catch in coral zones have a high percentage of trips with VMS coverage, while for other species VMS coverage is spotty. For example, VMS data are available for roughly 97% of *Illex* squid trips between 2009-2011 (nearly 100% of landings), but only for 10% of red crab trips over the same time period (less than 1% of landings). Full results will be presented at the Habitat Committee meeting on August 23.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 5:00 pm.



**New England Fishery Management Council  
Habitat Oversight Committee Meeting Summary**

**August 23, 2012  
Providence, RI**

**Committee members:** David Preble (chair), Dave Goethel (vice chair), Lou Chiarella, Mark Gibson, Doug Grout, Peter Kendall, Howard King (MAFMC member, for Warren Elliot), Terry Stockwell. Council chair Rip Cunningham also attended.

**PDT members:** Michelle Bachman (PDT chair/Council staff), Peter Auster (UConn/Sea Research Foundation), Kiley Dancy (MAFMC), Heather Deese (Island Institute), Chad Demarest (NEFSC SSB), Geret DePiper (NEFSC SSB), Kathryn Ford (MADMF), Moira Kelly (NERO SFD); David Stevenson (NERO HCD)

**Others:** 8+ additional audience members, including some habitat advisors

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The Habitat Committee met to:

- Recap previous discussion on splitting corals out of Omnibus EFH A2, and generate a recommendation about whether the Council should split corals out of Omnibus EFH A2.
- Review fishing effort data within broad coral zones
- Review contents of Memorandum of Understanding with other Atlantic coast Councils on deep-sea corals. Generate comments on the MOU and a recommendation about whether the Council should approve the MOU at their September meeting.
- Discuss groundfish motion and its relationship to habitat management
- Discuss PDT recommendations about ground cable options
- Receive and comment on a presentation from the PDT on Dedicated Habitat Research Areas

**Deep-sea coral management**

Documents for this part of the meeting included:

- **Document 1 - Notice of Intent** that NEFMC is considering splitting the coral alternatives from Omnibus EFH Amendment 2 into a separate action
- **Document 2 - Draft Memorandum of Understanding** between the New England, Mid Atlantic, and South Atlantic Councils on coordination of deep-sea coral related fishery management measures
- **Document 3 - Fishing distributions in deep-sea coral zones presentation** prepared by Dr. Geret DePiper, NEFSC/Habitat PDT

***Splitting coral and EFH alternatives into separate amendments***

In July the Council published a notice of intent in the Federal Register indicating that it is considering splitting the coral alternatives out of EFH Omnibus Amendment 2 (OA2). Similar to the June Committee meeting, the group discussed various pros and cons of splitting the amendment.

Committee members made following comments:

One Committee member was reluctant to split the coral alternatives. He cited concerns over falling behind MAFMC's coral amendment. Related to this, another member asked if the MAFMC's intention was to develop measures similar to those already drafted by NEFMC. The response was affirmative, as far as the MAFMC has already discussed, although they are in the very beginning stages of developing their amendment.

A Committee member thought that removing the coral alternatives would enable OA2 to progress more quickly. Another noted that if the corals are split, he would recommend tabling completion of the coral amendment until after OA2 has been completed.

A Committee member questioned what would be done with the Habitat Areas of Particular Concern – designations have already been drafted and approved by the Council. Consensus was to keep these designations within OA2 and figure out a way to adjust boundaries later via framework action if appropriate, based on agreement with the boundaries of any discrete coral zones that are designated by NEFMC or MAFMC in canyons, on the slope, or on seamounts. Because EFH designations only go to a depth of 1500 m on the slope and 2000 m on the seamounts, perfect agreement between discrete coral zones and HAPCs, which are a subset of EFH, will not likely be possible.

The AP chairman made comments on behalf of the advisors. He noted that the coral measures are likely to be relatively uncontroversial in comparison with the EFH measures, which will be contentious. He argued that leaving the two groups of alternatives together will likely slow the process down.

PDT economist Geret DePiper, who has been working on an analysis of the fishing effort in coral zones, noted that while this investigation is well underway for the broad zones, effort has not yet be parsed out according to the discrete zones. Given the smaller size of the discrete zones, attributing effort accurately to the smaller areas will present additional challenges.

Audience members made the following comments:

Gib Brogan (Oceana) supported splitting the coral alternatives. He noted that his organization supported this choice whether the strategy was to split and finish the coral action quickly, or if the decision was to split and table the coral action until completion of OA2.

Drew Minkiewicz (Fisheries Survival Fund) doesn't see how splitting the action made things faster. Ron Smolowitz (Fisheries Survival Fund) argued that it makes little sense to split at this

stage, given that the coral alternatives are already drafted and also that there will be benefits to evaluating fishing overlaps between coral areas and adverse effects areas in the same action.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the following motion was made and carried:

**Motion 1: (Grout/Gibson) To split the coral alternatives out of Omnibus EFH Amendment 2, with OA2 continuing to be the priority of the Habitat Committee and Plan Development Team. Motion carried 5/1/2**

This recommendation along with any public comments received by the August 27 deadline will be forwarded to the Council for a decision at their September meeting. As of August 22, the Council had received a single letter from the Natural Resources Defense Council, indicating support for the split.

### *Fishing effort in coral zones – draft analysis*

Geret DePiper (PDT, NEFSC SSB) presented some data on fishing effort and catch in the broad coral zone, specifically all areas deeper than 300 m between the Hague Line and the VA-NC border (the jurisdictional boundary between the MAFMC and SAFMC) out to the EEZ. This analysis included observer data, fishing vessel trip report data, and vessel monitoring system data. The majority of the top 20 species landed (by weight) according to the observer and VTR data were the same. In addition to presenting total landings by species for the study area, Dr. DePiper compared those landings to the total for each species in all areas, to indicate the proportion of the fishery potentially affected, given the vastly different landings between species. Given the spatial imprecision of FVTR data, VMS data were also evaluated. For many species there is VMS data for the majority of the vessels or trips landing that species, and/or for the trips representing a large share of the landings. However, there are VMS data gaps because this type of monitoring is not universally required. In particular, VMS is used by a minority of red crab vessels, on roughly 10% of those vessels total trips, and covering only a small fraction of red crab catches (< 0.1%). VMS coverage is also scant for Jonah crab, golden tilefish, American lobster, and blueline tilefish. The take home message was that for these fisheries, the impact of coral zones will need to be based on largely on FVTR data.

Committee members had the following questions and comments:

One member asked whether fishing effort distributions and catches have changed more rapidly in recent years. Specifically, he asked about changes in the last year in the *Illex* and *Loligo* fisheries. Dr. DePiper noted that the most recent data in the analysis were from 2011, but that there was consistency between 5 yr and 12 yr trends.

Another member urged caution when determining what threshold, in terms of percentage of total catch coming from the coral zone, constitutes a ‘significant’ impact. This impact might not be distributed evenly across vessels or areas, for example. Dr. DePiper noted that at this stage, impacts are not being quantified – the point is to see where the overlaps are in order to know which segments of the industry might be most likely to be impacted.

Staff asked whether it seems like it would be possible to discriminate between broad zone alternatives (300 vs. 400 vs. 500 m. minimum depths) given the available data. Dr. DePiper acknowledged that this will be difficult, particularly for fishing activities where FVTR data will be the main source of information. Ultimately the distinction between these alternatives will be largely qualitative.

### ***Memorandum of Understanding***

Staff reviewed a draft Memorandum of Understanding between the Atlantic coast councils and the Committee provided feedback.

The Committee agreed with the MAFMC suggestion that the scope of the MOU be broadened to encompass all types of coral conservation measures, not just those focused on minimizing fishing impacts on corals. A Committee member asked whether the SAFMC has provided input yet, and whether the MOU has been reviewed by General Counsel. SAFMC input is still pending, although their staff was involved in earlier discussions about the scope of the MOU. Staff will seek GC feedback. Another Committee member asked whether the MAFMC/NEFMC jurisdictional boundary splits any of the discrete coral zones. Staff responded that it probably doesn't, but will confirm before the Council meeting. Finally, a Committee member commented that the Council coordination activities outlined in section E3 seemed to be mainly written in such a way as to commit NEFSC to sharing data with MAFMC, and wondered if the language could be reworked to be more balanced. NEFMC and MAFMC staff will work on some updated language.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the following motion was made and carried:

**Motion 2: (Goethel/Kendall) Recommend the Council endorse the MOU as written, subject to approval of General Counsel. Motion carried 6/0/3**

This recommendation will be forwarded to the Council for action at their September meeting.

### **Management Options to Minimize the Adverse Effects of Fishing on EFH and designated Dedicated Habitat Research Areas**

Documents for this part of the meeting included:

- **Document 4 - Memo from the Habitat PDT** outlining EFH management issues stemming from the August 2 Groundfish Committee Motion
- **Document 5 - Ground cable options discussion document** outlining the range of ground cable management options and discussing challenges associated with the analysis of these types of options
- **Document 6 - Updated recommendations about dedicated habitat research areas** – PowerPoint presentation prepared by the PDT

The Groundfish Committee made a motion at their August 2 meeting that was designed to increase access to fishing opportunities during FY 2013. The motion proposed to open some



groundfish closed areas (and presumably the overlapping habitat closures) year round, and others seasonally to selective gears. Since the August 2 meeting, Council staff and NERO staff have been discussing the mechanism by which these changes could be implemented to provide access next year. An update on these discussions was provided to the Habitat Committee by the Council Chairman. It appears that given the scope of the changes requested, that both an amendment (vs. a framework) and an environmental impact statement (vs. environmental assessment) would be required to implement and analyze the changes. Because the timeline for such an action would be too long (about 18 months from September initiation) to provide relief before May 2013, the fastest course of action appears to be adding additional exemptions to the list of those that can be requested by sectors. This expansion of allowable exemptions would be implemented via the current groundfish framework (FW 48). Specifically, sectors could request exemptions from the prohibitions on fishing in the groundfish closed areas (mortality closures), but not from the parts that overlap with the habitat closures, and would need to analyze the impacts of such access to groundfish resources etc. in the environmental assessments associated with their operations plans. The Groundfish Committee will discuss this alternate approach at their September meeting.

One Habitat Committee member commented that this situation provides an even stronger incentive to complete OA2 quickly. His view was that the Council may be providing false hopes to the industry with the exemption approach, given that such exemptions would need to be granted individually by NOAA to each sector that makes a request. The Council Chair responded that NOAA has clearly indicated that such exemptions will be granted.

Under the assumption that the Groundfish Committee motion could be added to the current framework as initially laid out, the Habitat PDT raised concerns about the possibility that current habitat closures might be opened (see Document 4). Of particular concern were areas that the Habitat Committee has identified as options to minimize adverse of fishing on EFH during the OA2 process, including Stellwagen, Fippennies Ledge, and Cashes Ledge (modified), which are all subsets of existing habitat closures. Other potential habitat management areas lie outside the current set of closures and would not be affected by the motion. Other areas were highlighted specifically by the Groundfish Committee to remain closed for habitat protection (Ammen Rock, Jeffreys Ledge). Assuming that the sector framework approach is supported by the Groundfish Committee and the Council, and that it would apply only to the parts of the groundfish closures that lie outside the habitat areas, these concerns are minimized.

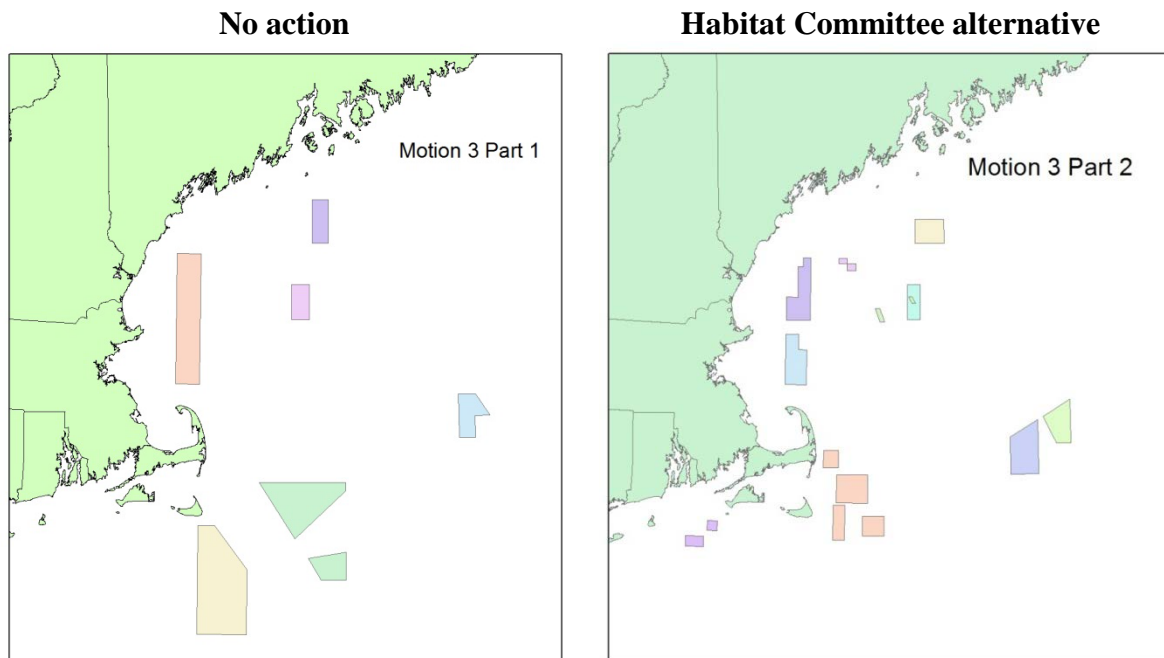
Audience member Greg Cunningham (Conservation Law Foundation) voiced concerns about NEPA-related issues such as segmentation and analysis via an EA, even if the sector exemption approach is used. He urged the Habitat Committee to put a collection of adverse effects minimization options before the Council at their next meeting in order to convey the Committee's views on the range of areas that appear to be needed for habitat management purposes.

The Committee discussed whether the concept of packaging options into alternatives was helpful or not. Staff offered that the Committee/Council intent as well as the analyses would be clearer and easier for stakeholders to understand if options were packaged. If habitat management areas are closed to certain types of fishing gears for the purpose of habitat protection, in order to

conduct the most comprehensive analysis of economic impacts it will be necessary to know which areas would remain open. In other words, because people fish in multiple areas, there will be interaction effects depending on which combination of habitat management areas (and groundfish management areas) are selected. A Committee member noted that it will be very difficult to estimate the likely patterns of fishing effort going forward, even if options are packaged, because there will be so many changes in 2013. Thus, the benefits of being able to conduct the analyses on packages rather than on individual options may be minimized.

One Committee member raised the idea of proposing the options grouped into three alternatives, and this approach evolved into the following motion, which carried.

**Motion 3: (Stockwell/Goethel) Recommend to the Council three adverse effects minimization area alternatives in OA2: (1) No action. (2) Habitat Committee alternative as shown below (areas from June 2012 Adverse Effects Options document), as a complete package. (3) Modified Habitat Committee alternative, with the specific combination of areas to be identified by the Council following public comment. A suite of management measures identified by the Committee could be applied to each area. Motion carried 6/0/2**



The intention of this motion was that the Council would either maintain the current range of habitat closures, or implement the new/modified habitat closures as shown in the right hand figure above, or at least some subset of them. The Committee discussed that the time to select from amongst these options was after the analysis of each area had been conducted and the Council had received comments on the options via the public hearing process. The management measures for each of the new/modified could include closure to mobile bottom tending gears, closure to all fishing (Ammen Rock area only), or ground cable restrictions.

The PDT recommended that the Committee consider removing the range of ground cable length limit options from the range of options (see document 5). The rationale behind this recommendation was that the effects of shortened ground cables on catchability, and thus on overall area swept, are not well known. Ground cable restrictions would lead to habitat protection if the restrictions result in an overall reduction in area swept, which is a combination of gear width and total distance towed, or if the restrictions create an incentive for vessels to avoid the ground cable management areas that contain vulnerable habitats. Given the uncertainty in how fishing effort would change if ground cable size limits were implemented, the PDT was concerned that the impacts analysis might be inconclusive as to the direction of costs and benefits. The Committee agreed that it might be difficult to analyze such measures, but wanted to get feedback on the issue from the habitat and groundfish advisors. The following motion to this effect was made and carried:

**Motion 4: (Goethel/Kendall) The Habitat Committee recommends that the ground cable length limit options be sent to the groundfish and habitat advisors for comment. Motion carried 7/0/1**

Part of the work to be completed by the advisors would be to develop an optimum ground cable length for each area, considering the objective of reducing area swept as well as fishing considerations (depth, bottom type, target species, etc.).

Finally, the Committee discussed PDT work to be done in the short term. Because they emphasized their desire to see areas evaluated individually, there is no need to wait for a range of groundfish options to be developed before beginning to analyze the habitat and economic costs and benefits of the habitat management areas. The following motion was made and carried. Ground cable options will be analyzed at a later time pending the outcome of the advisory panel process described above.

**Motion 5: (Goethel/Grout) That the PDT analyze the areas shown above (referenced in motion 3.2) as mobile bottom tending gear closures. The expectation is that each of the areas (individual polygons) would be analyzed separately. Areas include Jeffreys Bank modified, Cashes Ledge modified, Fippennies Ledge, Platts Bank (2 areas), Jeffreys Ledge, Stellwagen, Georges Shoal (2 areas), W. of Great South Channel (4 areas), and Cox Ledge (2 areas). Motion carried 6/0/1**

#### *Dedicated Habitat Research Areas*

Finally, the Committee discussed Dedicated Habitat Research Areas (DHRAs). PDT member Peter Auster gave a presentation updating the Committee on recent work and recommendations (Document 6). Key takeaways from this presentation were as follows:

1. Before After Control Impact (BACI) designs will produce more conclusive, less ambiguous results than Control Impact (CI) designs, and can be used to investigate questions regarding fishing impacts, recovery, and fish production within habitats that are in multiple recovery states.

2. CI designs can be implemented entirely within proposed adverse effects minimization areas, with the necessary treatments occurring in subareas (one per treatment, plus reference) and replicates (at least three per subarea). BACI designs would require DRHA designation in locations that have parts which are currently fished and parts which are currently unfished.
3. DHRAs based entirely on adverse effects minimization areas will include mainly gravel, cobble, and boulder habitats, because the management areas were designed to incorporate mainly these substrates. To learn about mud and sand-dominated locations, DHRA footprints may need to be extended, or DHRAs located in other places with different habitat characteristics.
4. Total DHRA size is a function of (1) design, (2) number of treatments, (3) number of habitat types, (4) area required per replicate, (5) area required as a buffer between treatments and replicates.
5. Fishing treatment options for gear impact studies range from (1) open access to that gear type to (2) limited access to (3) research directed fishing only. The first has the greatest uncertainty in terms of specifying the amount of fishing effort and the data collected, but would be low cost to researchers and low cost administratively. The second would have a better chance of meeting research needs, but be administratively costly because a limited access program would need to be designed. The third would be best targeted towards research needs, but would be the most costly to the researchers themselves.
6. The PDT recommended a review after a minimum of 5 years to assess progress towards meeting general and site specific goals, revision of goals based on lessons learned, adverse impacts to the fishery, and future status of the DHRA.

The PDT posed the following questions to the Committee:

- A. What designs can we consider? BACI, or just CI?
- B. What type of fishing treatment options can be considered? Open, limited access, research directed?
- C. How large an area is required for each replicate to deploy/fish/retrieve mobile gears? Fixed gears?
- D. What research questions are highest priority?

The Committee had the following questions and responses to the presentation and the questions:

A Committee member asked whether all the adverse effects areas discussed earlier were potential DHRA candidates, and how many DHRAs are envisioned in total? The PDT response was that no, DHRAs in all of those areas would not be necessary, but ideally, three DHRAs would be designated per region. Given that Committee had previously recommended not designating areas in the Mid-Atlantic, we are looking at perhaps three in the GOM and three in GB/SNE. Given minimum sizes (see takeaway 4 above), and the intention to overlap with adverse effects areas, the smaller AE areas would not be a suitable foundation for a research areas. In response to this comment, the Committee member questioned whether the 35 mi<sup>2</sup> CI-design three-treatment research area shown as an example is practicable. He also asked whether a combination of CI-design and BACI-design areas had been considered. Dr. Auster responded

that while a combination approach had not been discussed previously, there was no reason not to consider it.

Finally, the same Committee member also asked about funding possibilities for a system of research areas. Dr. Auster responded that he had been impressed with the ability of the research community to direct funds towards these types of projects in the past, although of course there were no guarantees. He also noted Stellwagen Bank NMS' support for research work.

In response to the PDT's questions listed above, a Committee member recommended research-directed fishing, that 1 mile by 1 mile is an appropriate replicate size for various gear types, and that the CI design is more practicable than a BACI design. He noted that the entire DHRA will need to be closed/controlled in order to ensure that the treatment fishing impacts are well characterized and to ensure that the results will be unambiguous and usable. He also commented that the types of gear treatments that are useful and appropriate will vary by location and habitat type, and Dr. Auster agreed.

Finally, the same Committee member commented that perhaps a good way forward would be to design and designate a single area and see how it works. Dr. Auster expressed concern that the case for research funding could be weakened by not designating a system of areas. He added that a problem with the existing control/impact areas is that they are fundamentally different from one another and that it has been difficult to compare and contrast results of various studies given different methodologies, area designs, amounts and types of fishing activity (impact), etc. Having at least two areas in a region that encompass similar habitat types and have similar studies conducted in each would allow for an assessment of whether you could make regional inferences, or not.

A Committee member commented that for a full BACI design to be palatable, other areas will need to be opened up. Thus, it will be necessary to see how the process of designating and de-designating habitat and groundfish areas evolves before research areas can be finalized.

A Committee member commented that from a scientific perspective, we do need the system of multiple BACI areas per region that was originally proposed by the PDT. The decision for the Council will be whether such a system is practicable. As mentioned earlier, the cost of not taking a more comprehensive approach is that the Council may not have the opportunity to learn much beyond what we already know.

A Committee member noted that there seems to be an opportunity for research area designations in locations where habitat areas appear likely to be modified – for example, on Jeffreys Bank, or on Cashes Ledge. He wondered if there might be an opportunity to delay implementation of some measures in order to allow time for initial data collection.

A Committee member asked what effects have the current closures had on productivity, given the apparent disconnect between existing long term area closures and recently observed declines in stocks. Similarly, another Committee member asked whether CPUE near the margins of closed areas has increased. Dr. Auster responded that we do know that some species in some types of habitats benefit from certain habitat features; that we have seen spillover of some

species from closed areas (haddock in particular); and that there appear to be feeding differences inside and outside closed areas.

Audience members made the following comments:

Ron Smolowitz (FSF) stated that we don't have the resources to implement full BACI-design studies. He argued that the biggest question facing us is what factors affect productivity. He suggested a research area in Closed Area I where they have proposed scallop productivity research and where there is substantial amount of baseline work. He also noted that lots of gear research can be completed outside of dedicated research areas to look at questions of efficiency, bycatch, protected resource impacts, etc.

Dave Stevenson (NERO) suggested refining the questions to address the gear types and habitat types of greatest interest so that smaller areas can be designated in greater numbers to see how the results may vary across different locations.

Vito Giacalone reminded the Committee about the Stellwagen Bank NMS research area proposal. As a modification of this initial proposal, the industry has expressed support for a research area within the existing WGOM habitat closure, and thinks it would be best to capitalize on the head start in recovery that has taken place since the closure was implemented in 1998. The area that has been discussed by industry and other stakeholders would include the current overlap between the WGOM habitat closure and SBNMS (the sliver) and additional areas to the east. At this time, industry support for this option is predicated upon the Stellwagen research area serving as the sole habitat management area in the Western Gulf of Maine (i.e. the Jeffreys Ledge area would not be created and the northern portion of the WGOM closure would open). An unofficial, ad-hoc working group will keep discussing the issue and would like to see the area vetted through the Council process.

Next steps:

- Explore one BACI design per region as well as some smaller designs within adverse effects areas
- Work up more detailed proposals in Stellwagen area, CAI, and areas where modifications are likely (e.g. Cashes, Jeffreys) that could be capitalized on to achieve a BACI design
- Get advisory panel feedback to help further develop specific proposals before bringing back to the Committee

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The Committee discussed the timing of the next meeting, which will be planned for early October, and may be a joint meeting with the Advisors and PDT, or following a joint AP/PDT meeting. The meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.