

Essential Fish Habitat Description

Atlantic halibut (*Hippoglossus hippoglossus*)

According to the NMFS' *Report to Congress: Status of the Fisheries of the United States* (September 1997), Atlantic halibut is currently overfished. This determination is based on an assessment of stock level. Essential Fish Habitat for Atlantic halibut is described as the area of the coastal and offshore waters (out to the offshore U.S. boundary of the Exclusive Economic Zone) that is designated on Figure 18.1 and meets the following conditions:

Eggs: Pelagic waters to the sea floor of the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank as depicted in Figure 18.1. Generally, the following conditions exist where Atlantic halibut eggs are found: water temperatures between 4 and 7° C, water depths less than 700 meters, and salinities less than 35‰. Atlantic halibut eggs are observed between late fall and early spring, with peaks in November and December.

Larvae: Surface waters of the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank as depicted in Figure 18.1. Generally, the following conditions exist where Atlantic halibut larvae are found: salinities between 30 and 35‰.

Juveniles: Bottom habitats with a substrate of sand, gravel, or clay in the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank as depicted in Figure 18.1. Generally, the following conditions exist where Atlantic halibut juveniles are found: water temperatures above 2° C and depths from 20 - 60 meters.

Adults: Bottom habitats with a substrate of sand, gravel, or clay in the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank as depicted in Figure 18.1. Generally, the following conditions exist where Atlantic halibut adults are found: water temperatures below 13.6° C, depths from 100 - 700 meters, and salinities between 30.4 - 35.3‰.

Spawning Adults: Bottom habitats with a substrate of soft mud, clay, sand, or gravel in the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank, as well as rough or rocky bottom locations along the slopes of the outer banks, as depicted in Figure 18.1. Generally, the following conditions exist where spawning Atlantic halibut are found: water temperatures below 7° C, depths less than 700 meters, and salinities less than 35‰. Atlantic halibut are most often observed spawning between late fall and early spring, with peaks in November and December.

The Council acknowledges potential seasonal and spatial variability of the conditions generally associated with this species.

Essential Fish Habitat
Atlantic halibut (*Hippoglossus hippoglossus*) All life stages

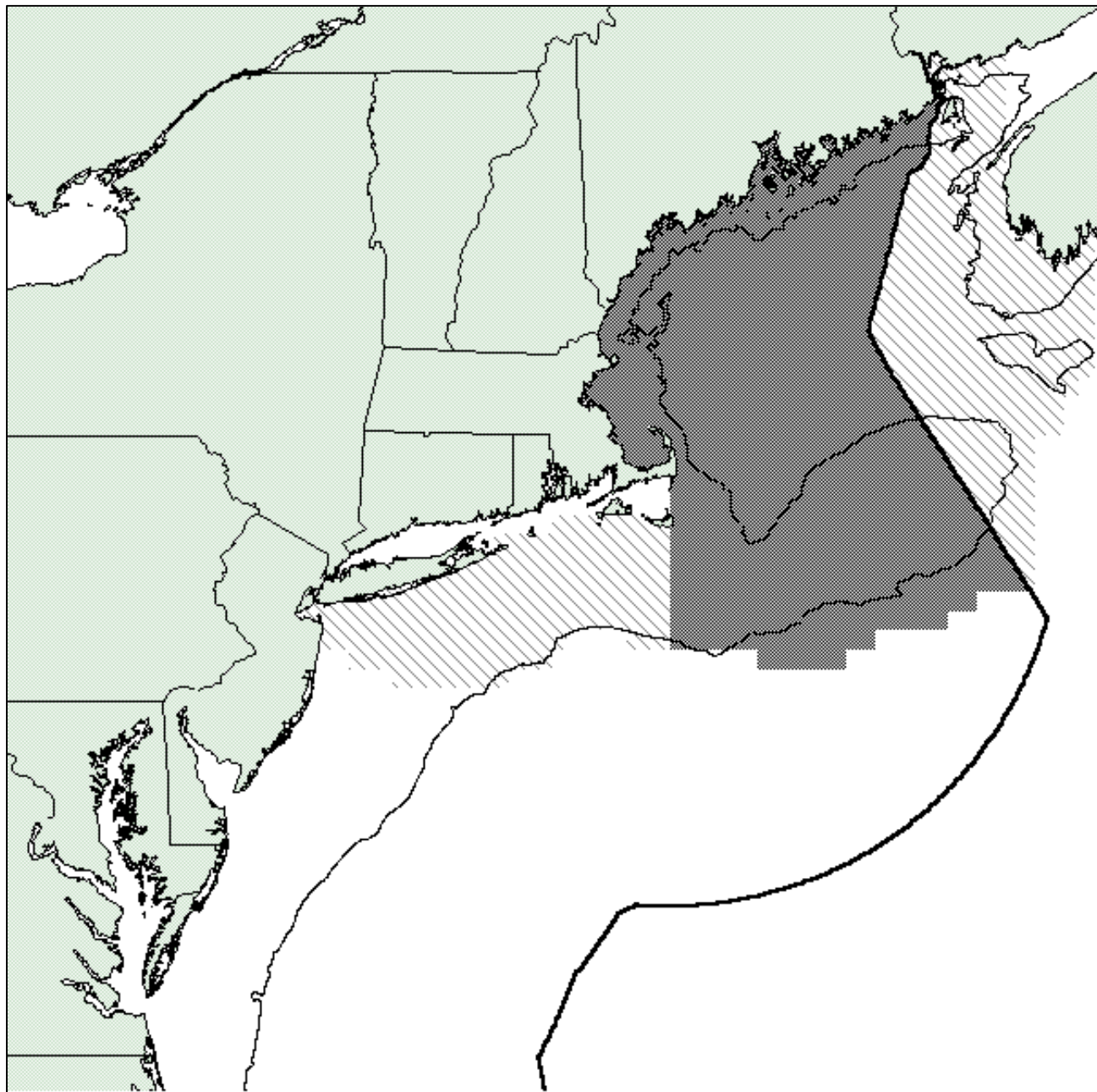


Figure 18.1: The EFH designation for all life history stages of Atlantic halibut is based on the portion of the historic range of Atlantic halibut that coincides with entire observed range of Atlantic halibut (alternative 4). The historic range is based on a composite of areas known to support Atlantic halibut, described by: (1) Bigelow and Schroeder, 1953; (2) Goode and Collins, 1887; (3) Rich, 1929; and, (4) EFH Source Document, 1998. In the absence of other information, this portion of the historic range most accurately represents the areas used by and important to this species, where halibut are likely to be caught in the foreseeable future. The light shading represents the entire reported historic range of Atlantic halibut.