



New England Fishery Management Council

Press Backgrounder

Newburyport, MA

September, 2004

New England Fishery Council Acts to Protect Deep-Sea Corals

Newburyport, MA At its meeting in the port of Fairhaven, MA last week the New England Fishery Management Council took an important step toward minimizing the impacts of fishing gear on sensitive marine habitats. By a very wide margin, Council members voted to support the closure of two offshore canyons located southeast of Nantucket to protect deep-sea coral habitats from potential effects of vessels targeting monkfish (also known as goosefish) in the area. The Council's action marks the first direct protection afforded to deep-sea coral communities in New England.

Dr. Peter Auster, a member of the Council's Habitat Plan Development Team and Science Director of the University of Connecticut's National Undersea Research Center urged the Council to support the action during a broader discussion on measures to conserve and manage the monkfish resource in the Northeast. "By recognizing the importance of habitat components that are easily disturbed by humans and that may take centuries to recover, the Council is being pro-active in terms of moving toward ecosystem-based fisheries management."

Approval of the measures to protect deep-sea corals was part of a program to revise management measures that would apply to the monkfish fishery that operates off New England and the Mid-Atlantic. Known as Amendment 2 to the Monkfish Fishery Management Plan, measures approved would require modifications to gear used to catch monkfish to protect essential fish habitat, reduce discards of monkfish, and establish a mechanism to support and fund cooperative research between scientists and fishermen.

The Monkfish Plan is prepared jointly with the Mid-Atlantic Council. A vote by that group on the amendment is scheduled for early October. Once both Councils have approved the package of measures, final documents will be submitted to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval and implementation next May.

The New England Fishery Management Council, one of eight regional councils established by federal legislation in 1976, is charged with conserving and managing fishery resources from three to 200 miles off the coasts of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut.

More about deep water corals: <http://www.coris.noaa.gov/about/deep/deep.html>

Federal legislation introduced to protect deep sea corals: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query>

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