

MAFMC Deep Sea Corals FMAT Draft Meeting Summary

January 28, 2013

Gloucester, MA

FMAT Members Present: Kiley Dancy (MAFMC staff), David Stevenson (NMFS/NERO), Dave Packer (NEFSC), Katie Richardson (NMFS/NERO), Mark Minton (NMFS/NERO), Rob Vincent (NMFS/NERO), Greg Power (NMFS/NERO)

The Deep Sea Corals Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) met on January 28, 2013 in Gloucester, MA. The objectives of this meeting were to:

- Review management authorities and general options for deep sea coral protections
- Review the approach to deep sea coral protections taken by the New England Fishery Management Council Habitat Plan Development Team (PDT) and Habitat Committee
- Review objectives and preliminary results of 2012 mapping/research surveys
- Develop initial recommendations/draft alternatives for deep sea coral protections in Amendment 16 to the Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish FMP

Overview of Management Authorities and Objectives

MAFMC staff gave a brief overview of the management authorities contained within the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act that could be used to justify protections for deep sea corals. These include the discretionary provision to designate deep sea coral zones, authority to implement management measures to minimize impacts to Essential Fish Habitat, the discretionary provision to conserve non-target species, and the mandate from National Standard 9 to minimize bycatch.

Review of NEFMC Habitat PDT Methodology and Recommendations for Deep Sea Corals

David Stevenson (NMFS/NERO Habitat Conservation Division) gave a presentation outlining the efforts to date of the NEFMC Habitat PDT in developing alternatives for deep sea coral protections. Although these alternatives were developed as part of the NEFMC's Omnibus Habitat Amendment 2, coral-related measures have since been split into a separate omnibus amendment.

Generally, the PDT has developed alternatives to protect deep sea corals via the discretionary authority to create deep sea coral zones. These alternatives have been revised several times based on input from the NEFMC Habitat Committee, but many of the alternatives need further development. The PDT has developed alternative sets for:

- Designation of both “broad” and “discrete” deep sea coral coral zones. Broad zones are intended to be areas generally outside the range of current fishing effort, where management measures may be put in place to prevent expansion of effort into deeper waters as a precautionary measure. Discrete coral zones were recommended on the basis of a PDT analysis examining coral presence and habitat suitability in canyons, seamounts, and slope areas throughout the northeast region.
- Management measures that may be applied to either or both types of zones. The PDT has focused on measures to minimize impacts of bottom-tending gear, in particular trawls and dredges.
- Exemptions to management measures.
- Framework provisions for deep sea coral zones, including options to change fishing restrictions and exemptions.

Overview and Preliminary Results of 2012 ACUMEN Mapping Surveys

Dave Packer (NEFSC James J. Howard Marine Sciences Laboratory) gave an overview of goals, activities, and preliminary results from 2012 Atlantic Canyons Undersea Mapping Expeditions (ACUMEN) surveys. From February-August 2012, NOAA and external partners conducted multibeam mapping of deepwater canyons in the northeast region. Mapping and visual surveys were conducted at priority areas on the continental shelf and slope from Virginia to Rhode Island.

In July 2012, 3 coral 'hotspots' predicted by a habitat suitability model were surveyed using Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution’s TowCam. High-resolution multibeam bathymetry collected was used to refine model predictions. Hotspot areas surveyed included Veatch and Gilbert Canyons in New England, and the Toms Canyon complex in the mid-Atlantic. Deep sea corals were observed in all three of these areas.

Data collected during these surveys are currently being analyzed and results are forthcoming. Some output from the habitat suitability model will be available in the near future to aid in development of Amendment 16 alternatives, and preliminary findings from the survey of the Toms Canyon complex will be used to update preliminary coral zone recommendations.

Development of Draft Alternatives for Coral Protections in MSB Amendment 16

The FMAT reviewed the alternatives developed by the NEFMC Habitat PDT as of April 2012, with a focus on those specific to the mid-Atlantic region. The FMAT discussed their relevance to MAFMC’s Amendment 16, and concluded that it would be appropriate for the MAFMC to consider sets of alternatives similar to those being considered in New England, to encourage continuity and consistency in measures between the two regions.

Specifically, the FMAT recommended that the MAFMC:

- Develop alternatives using the Magnuson-Stevens Act discretionary authority to develop deep sea coral zones. The FMAT felt that authorities for bycatch and conservation of non-target

species were not appropriate for this action, in part due to lack of data on fisheries interactions with deep sea corals. Essential Fish Habitat authority would be potentially difficult to justify, and less flexible in terms of spatial options for coral zones. Additionally, using the non-target species provision would likely require that deep sea corals be managed species, subject to all MSA requirements, e.g. catch limits.

- Using the discretionary authority, develop alternatives for both broad and discrete coral zones to allow for increased flexibility in management measures (and consistency with NEFMC alternatives).
- For broad coral zones, consider designating a landward boundary at depth contours of 200, 300, 400, or 500 meter depth, extending to the edge of the EEZ. The FMAT discussed Geret DePiper's (NEFSC) analysis of effort distribution within broad coral zones, and noted that fishery effort will need to be further analyzed as alternative development progresses.
- Consider options for designation of the discrete coral zones proposed by the NEFMC Habitat PDT within the mid-Atlantic. The FMAT noted that the boundaries of at least two overlapping recommended areas, the Mey-Lindelkohl slope area which includes the Toms Canyon complex, and Toms Canyon itself, will need to be reconsidered based on new information. Toms Canyon was recommended by the PDT based on habitat suitability (not based on coral presence), and recent surveys have confirmed coral presence in this area.
- Consider alternatives for possible exemptions to management measures. A general list of alternatives for exemptions has been put forth for consideration and feedback, but need further development. The FMAT again discussed the need to evaluate the distribution of fishing effort and seek industry input to evaluate which fisheries could be considered for exemptions.
- The FMAT recommended including options for framework provisions for deep sea coral zones. These could include options to make minor modifications to deep sea coral zone boundaries, options to change fishing restrictions, or options to change exemptions.