



# New England Fishery Management Council

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PRESS CONTACT: Janice Plante  
(607) 592-4817, [jplante@nefmc.org](mailto:jplante@nefmc.org)

## Council Sends Clam Dredge Framework Back to Habitat Committee to Develop New Alternatives

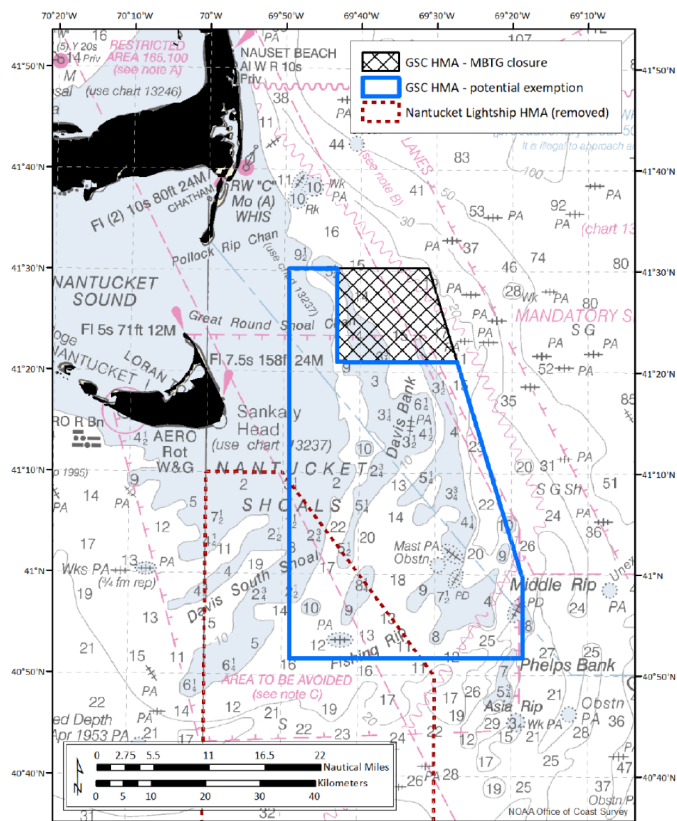
The New England Fishery Management Council voted on June 14 to remand its draft Clam Dredge Framework Adjustment to the Habitat Committee for further development. The Council also issued a specific request to the surfclam industry to propose additional alternatives for consideration and analysis.

The Council initially was scheduled to select the framework's range of alternatives, which then would have been analyzed in detail over the summer by the Habitat Plan Development Team (PDT). Under this timeline, the Council potentially could have taken final action on the framework in September.

However, during the Council's recent meeting in Portland, ME, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS, NOAA Fisheries) Regional Administrator expressed concern that all of the alternatives proposed to date in the Clam Dredge Framework appeared to include a fair amount of "sensitive habitat" and may not meet the framework's "purpose and need for action."

The Regional Administrator recognized that additional analyses were forthcoming and stressed that no conclusive determination had been made.

Nonetheless, the Council clearly heard the words of caution, noting that NMFS may have a challenging time approving proposed surfclam hydraulic dredge exemption areas within the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area (HMA) if the framework's purpose and need aren't met.



*The Great South Channel Habitat Management Area became effective April 9, 2018 when the Council's Omnibus Habitat Amendment 2 was implemented. Hydraulic clam dredges were granted a one-year exemption to continue operating within the blue-outlined area above. This exemption expires April 9, 2019. The Council is considering alternatives to allow continued access to portions of the area. – New England Fishery Management Council graphic*



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The framework applies exclusively to the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area, which became effective in April as part of the Council's Essential Fish Habitat Omnibus Amendment 2. The area now is closed to mobile bottom-tending gear to protect habitat, but the surfclam fishery is continuing to operate within the HMA under a one-year exemption. Presently, hydraulic clam dredges may be used in all but the northeastern portion of the area, which remains closed to *all* mobile bottom-tending gear, including clam dredges. The one-year exemption expires April 9, 2019. The Council has been working on the framework to consider allowing continued surfclam fishery access to portions of the Great South Channel HMA beyond the expiration date and, more recently, agreed to consider a limited exemption for mussel dredges.

## Problem Statement

The framework's "problem statement" in part says:

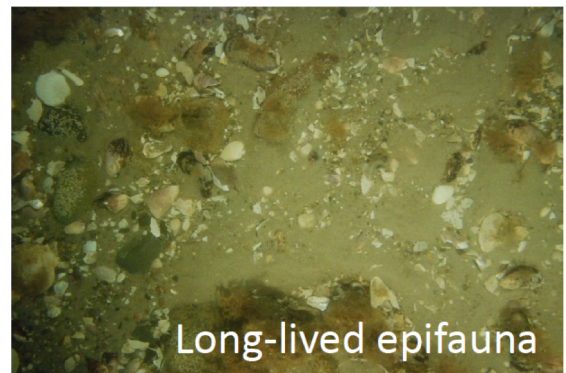
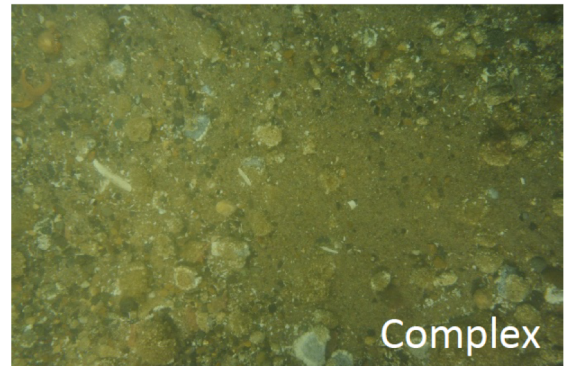
*"The Council intends through this action to identify areas within the Habitat Management Area that are currently fished or contain high energy sand and gravel that could be suitable for a hydraulic clam dredging exemption that balances achieving optimum yield for the surfclam/ocean quahog fishery with the requirement to minimize adverse fishing effects on habitat to the extent practicable and is consistent with the underlying objectives of Omnibus Habitat Amendment 2."*

## What's Next?

***The Council specifically requested that industry members from BOTH the surfclam fishery and the mussel dredge fishery propose additional, viable options for consideration.***

Once the Council receives new proposals, the Habitat Committee will review the suggestions and prepare recommendations for the full Council to consider when it next meets in late-September in Plymouth, MA. At that point, the Council is expected to select the range of alternatives for further analysis by the PDT. The Habitat Committee will provide final recommendations to the Council in early December.

Given this timeline, the Council could not guarantee that NMFS would have time to review and implement a final rule by April 9, 2019, which is when the current hydraulic clam dredge exemption expires.



*The Great South Channel Habitat Management Area contains sensitive habitat, including the three types pictured above. The images were captured by the UMass Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology's drop camera.*



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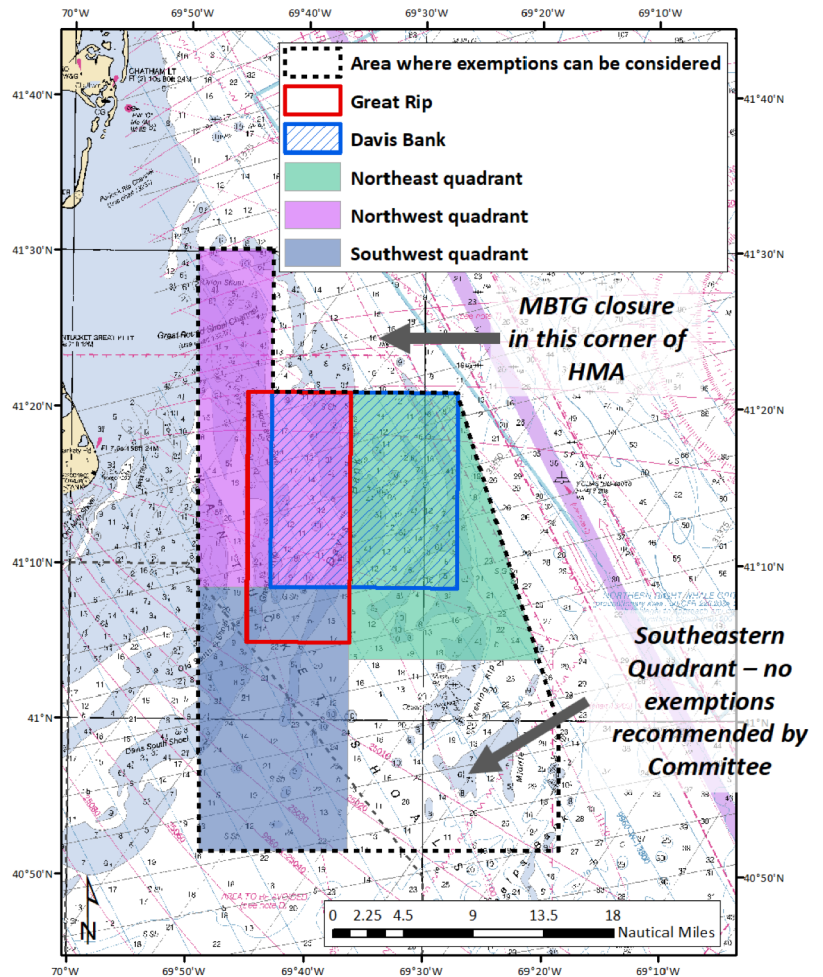
The Council was presented with the following alternatives, which were developed by the Habitat Committee, before hearing the NMFS Regional Administrator's words of caution about sensitive habitat in these areas. The Council did not vote to include any of these in the framework before remanding the entire action to the committee.

## Hydraulic Clam Dredge Exemption Alternatives

- **Alternative 1:** No action. No exemptions would be granted. The entire Great South Channel HMA would be designated as a mobile bottom-tending gear closure as of April 9, 2019.
- **Alternative 2a:** Clam dredging would be allowed in the **Northwest Quadrant** of the habitat management area (purple on map).
- **Alternative 2b:** Clam dredging would be allowed in the **Northeast Quadrant** (green on map).
- **Alternative 2c:** Clam dredging would be allowed in *both* the **Northwest** and **Northeast** Quadrants.
- **Alternative 2d:** Clam dredging would be allowed in the **Southwest Quadrant** (blue/grey on map).
- **Alternative 2e:** Clam dredging would be allowed in the **Great Rip Area** (red outline on map).
- **Alternative 2f:** Clam dredging would be allowed in the **Davis Bank Area** (bright blue outline with hatching on map).

## Mussel Dredge Exemption Alternatives

- **Alternative 1:** No action. Mussel dredges currently are prohibited throughout the entire HMA and would continue to be prohibited under this alternative.
- **Alternative 2:** Mussel dredges would be allowed *only* in the **Northwest Quadrant**.



*Great South Channel Habitat Management Area showing alternatives that initially were proposed by the Habitat Committee but now will be revisited. – NEFMC graphic*

- All documents used during the Council's June 14, 2018 discussion on the Clam Dredge Framework are available at <https://www.nefmc.org/library/june-2018-habitat-committee>.
- Visit the Council's Habitat Webpage at <https://www.nefmc.org/management-plans/habitat>.
- Questions? Contact Michelle Bachman, the Council's habitat coordinator, at (978) 465-3116, ext. 120, email [mbachman@nefmc.org](mailto:mbachman@nefmc.org).