

Exemption area alternatives for clam framework

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VMS/Enforcement meeting

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Statement of work (approved fall 2015)

(This action is trailing to Omnibus Habitat Amendment 2)

The SC/OQ fishery will be granted a one-year exemption for the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area (HMA) following implementation of OHA2, which will allow NEFMC to consider development of an access program for this fishery. The Council intends through this action to identify areas within the HMA 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 SC/OQ fishery with the requirement to minimize adverse fishing effects on habitat to the extent practicable and is consistent with the underlying objectives of OHA2.

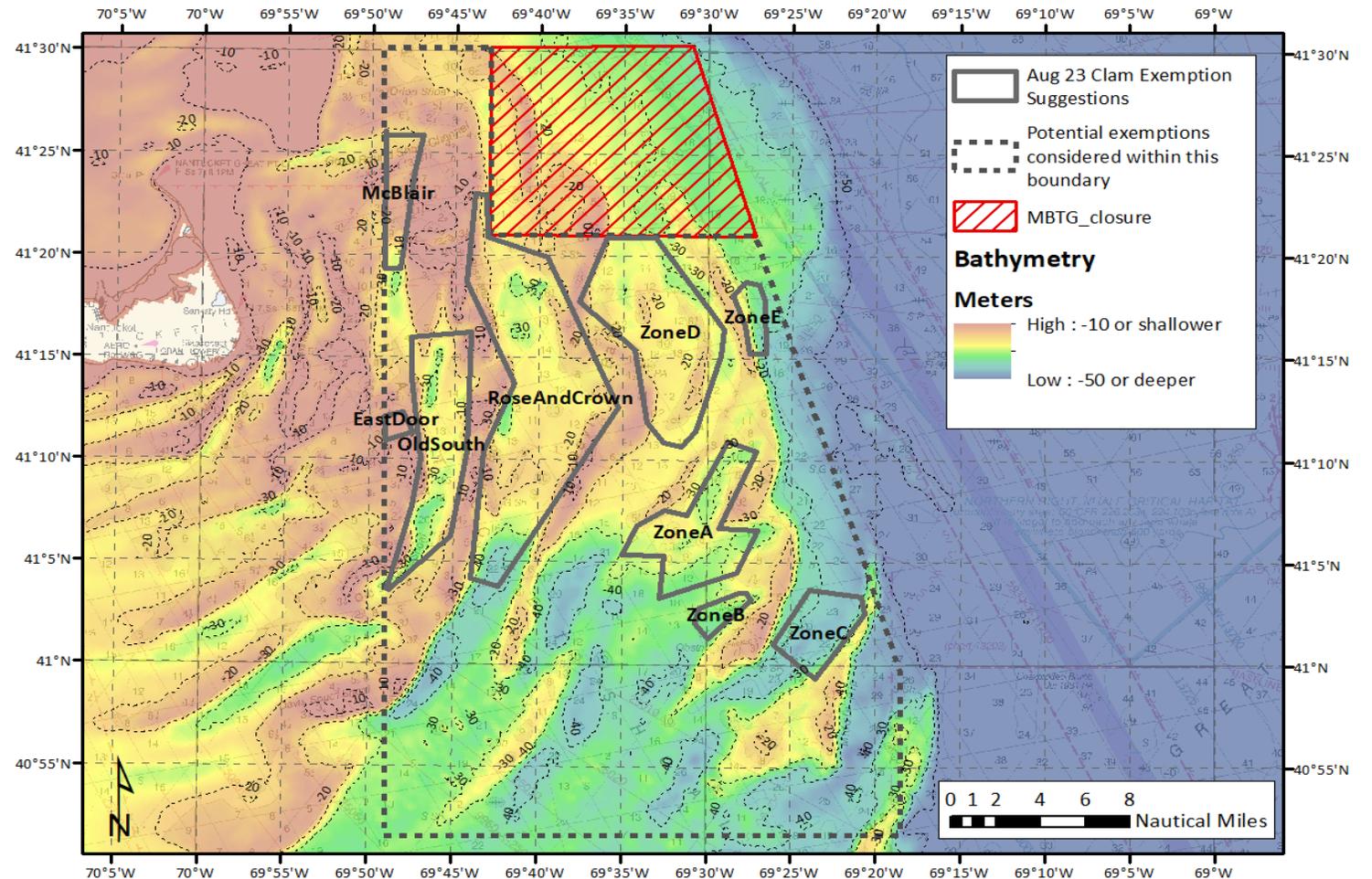
Management Alternatives

(We know generally where exemptions might be located, but the Habitat Committee will discuss specific approaches under alternatives 2 and 3 on November 7)

1. Taking no action (GSC HMA closes to clam dredges)
2. Designation of clam dredge exemption areas (year round and seasonal)
3. Designation of clam dredge exemption areas (year round and seasonal) with rotational management component
4. Exempt mussel dredges from any exemption areas defined for clam dredges

Location and size of nine potential exemption areas

Area name	Size, km ²
Great South Channel HMA	2,566
MBTG closure	332
Total possible exemption area	2,234
Rose and Crown	218
McBlair	26
Area A	69
Area B	9
Area D	124
East Door (seasonal)	4
Old South (seasonal)	88
Area C (seasonal)	34
Area E (seasonal)	12



Clam dredge fishery in the GSC HMA

- Nantucket Shoals is an important area for the clam fishery
- Represents roughly 20% of annual surfclam landings in recent years
- During 2011-2016, the entire HMA was fished by 11-21 vessels per year
- These vessels took 423-986 fishing trips in the HMA
- Vessels are from New Bedford, Fairhaven, and Cape Cod ports
- Processing of clams mostly occurs in New Bedford
- Vessels vary in size and capacity (number of cages) but all use hydraulic-style dredge
- Distinct from the set of larger vessels that fish on Georges Bank (Georges Shoal, etc.)

Possible year-round exemption areas

- Rose and Crown, McBlair, Zones A, B, and D
- The five sub-areas proposed for year-round clam dredge exemptions encompass a substantial percentage (37-54% in total) of the fishing revenue generated from the Great South Channel HMA
- Rose and Crown has generated by far the most revenue of the five sub-areas, followed by Area D, Area A, and Area B

Possible seasonal exemption areas

- Old South, East Door, Zones C & E
- Open period (March 1 – August 31)
- Closed period (September 1 – February 28/29)
- Fishing activity is shifting from western areas of the HMA (East Door and Old South) towards the east (Zones C & E).
- Old South is by far the most productive of these areas followed by East Door

Hours fished by clam dredges

- Hours fished by area were calculated on an annual (calendar year) basis using finely-gridded, speed-filtered VMS polls
- From 2011 to 2017 there is substantial interannual variability in hours fished across all areas
- As an example, in 2017 hours inside the entire potential exemption area were 9,645

Hours fished by clam dredges

2017:

Zone A: 111 hours

Zone B: 1 hour

Zone C: 8 hours

Zone D: 2,551 hours

Zone E: 1 hour

East Door: 174 hours

McBlair: 34 hours

Old South: 2,212 hours

Rose and Crown: 3,642 hours

Enforcement considerations

- Need to increase monitoring for these vessels beyond current requirements?
 - For example, require that vessels entering the HMA provide a position every 5 minutes via an appropriate vessel monitoring system unit, and/or
 - Require a Letter of Authorization and a trip-by-trip Declaration
- Can we ensure that fishing activity is limited to within the exemption areas given current 60-min VMS? Does 5-minute VMS provide enough resolution if current polling rates are insufficient?
- How small could exemption areas be?
- What should transit rules be? Dredge on board? Gear fully stowed (hoses on board)?
- Are there specific boundaries or pinch points between individual exemption areas that could be adjusted to improve enforceability?
 - If a rotational approach is used, these concerns could be mitigated by putting adjacent areas into different rotational groupings.
 - Or it could be mitigated by adjusting the coordinates of the exemption areas to create wider gaps.
- Should the same monitoring requirements associated with any clam dredge vessel exemptions be replicated for mussel dredge vessels?

Establishing a violation

- Letters of Authorization and trip declaration could be used to inform Enforcement of exempted area participants on annual/trip basis
- VMS with a five-minute ping interval may indicate a potential violation, but may be insufficient to establish a violation
- Would issuance of a NOVA need to be accomplished by USCG boarding at sea?