Summary of workshop for NEFMC Habitat Committee with a focus on policy statements and habitat goals sessions

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Workshop objectives

1. Fulfill recommendations from EFH Summit that EFH practitioners should seek collaborations between the regions and action agencies through better communication of key interests, and identify opportunities to share conservation approaches across regions.

2. Evaluate EFH designations as they relate to consultations on non-fishing impacts, and ensure that their design is effective for use in non-fishing consultations.

3. Evaluate how best to make use of limited council staff and member attention, on short time frames, while still providing meaningful consultation on issues of concern to the council.
4. Identify best practices for designating EFH at a fine-scale resolution that more closely matches the appropriate scale on which non-fishing Federal activities are occurring.

5. Identify ways to provide more effective access to existing EFH spatial and habitat/species use information through online tools and capabilities. These tools are supported by the councils, NOAA Fisheries, and regional partner agencies for internal use by the councils and NOAA Fisheries and for external use by other federal agencies, States, or regional stakeholders. This collaboration would identify and connect existing capabilities and regional access to EFH information to enhance the council/NOAA Fisheries EFH consultation, permit and policy review processes.
Workshop Sessions
Introductory session

- Joint responsibility to conserve EFH
  - Requires partnership between Councils, Regional offices, industries, local/state/Fed governments, scientific community
- 23 years since EFH added to MSA
  - Meetings/summits to elucidate
- Interregional differences/similarities
  - Opportunity to learn from one another
- 2004 EFH consultation guidance being revised - target May 2020
  - Important opportunity
  - Area for coordination
EFH Consultation and Collaboration

• Yes, Council involvement adds value to EFH consultations
  ▪ Powerful when speak with same voice; Council brings in many stakeholders; Council can provide additional info about social/economic costs; Councils sometimes have more flexibility than agency channels
• We identified best practices for Council-RO collaboration
  ▪ Tools for keeping Council informed
  ▪ Tools for identifying Council’s priorities/key concerns
  ▪ Mechanisms Councils can use that NMFS can’t
  ▪ Tools for Council comments, including early intervention on projects that don’t overlap a Council meeting
• Improvements in consultation tracking coming - continue work on this
• Hard to prioritize time for engagement on consults - how can we do better at this? Clear articulation of goals (next section) may help establish priorities
Habitat Goals

- Identified different places where goals reside
- What makes an effective goal?
  - Critically evaluated, tested over time after EFH consultations and FMP changes
  - Specificity - the more the better
  - Tiered - councils set high goals with more specific actions
  - Prioritized - helpful for funding, staff time, research, restoration
- Measuring progress/degree of protection needed is hard
Council Policy Statements on Non-fishing Impacts

- Work in small groups and build up to Council approval
- Importance of Council education, bringing in outside experts
- Link to strategic planning work
- Be clear about uncertainty in underlying science/knowledge
- NMFS and Councils should collaborate on policy development/content to ensure coordination to extent possible with NMFS EFH conservation recommendations
Offshore marine planning and regional issues

• Council role:
  ▪ 1. source of data;
  ▪ 2. information sharing among stakeholders about upcoming

• **Need to have personnel infrastructure/learning in place,** as once these projects start, they happen fast
  • Early relationship-building key,
  • BUT balance with meeting fatigue if there isn’t a focal project to dig into

• Potential role for CCC
  ▪ Help clarify with other Fed agencies that Councils, as major partners in managing fisheries, need to be part of EFH consultation
FSC engagement with ROs/Councils on EFH consultation work

Opps for improving engagement: better communication, joint meetings, shared understanding of needs/ priority setting

Low hanging fruit:

  • Distribute list of habitat contacts at FSCs, ROs, Councils - build relationships
  • Council roadshows/briefings that illustrate where science/mgmt intersect
  • Tell our success stories, e.g. how habitat info is directly used in assessments
  • Habitat/ecosystem persons on Plan Teams/advisory committees

Other ideas include:

  • Improve FSC understanding of scope/timeliness of EFH consultation reqs; get regional input on species in the spotlight/similar initiatives; opportunities through cross-regional teams (e.g. wind energy); setting joint habitat priorities so that research matches mgmt needs
Tools/technology to aid access to and use of EFH information

Tools and technology are variable across regions; identify best practices.

Low hanging fruit:

- Should be able to link to EFH information from both Council and NMFS websites. NMFS Alaska EFH webpage is good model - includes descriptions (incl associated amendment analyses), maps/shape files, consultation resources, habitat assessments, HAPC, regulations, resources. Shouldn’t have to dig through big docs for information!
- Councils should post habitat policies

Other ideas include:

- Interactive research priorities databases (e.g. NPFMC), adding fishery closure areas/shapefiles to EFH maps, ensure most updated map is easily available
Approaches for obtaining and sharing data for EFH designation

• Councils rely heavily on FSCs and ROs for data, and other groups (i.e., states, academics, Sea Grant, ENGOs)
  ▪ NOAA has other tools - for other studies, pubs, gray literature
• To refine EFH designations, need better habitat use/benthic data
  ▪ e.g., PFMC Habitat Use Database, NCCOS benthic data
• Habitat suitability modeling could be used to refine and describe habitat use
  ▪ Can include many data streams (e.g., fish-dependent or independent, oceanographic, benthic, sediment, etc.)
  ▪ Reliability of output depends on data quality - need to validate and characterize uncertainty
• For EFH triggers, refining for level 1 and 2 data is important
• Expanded map definitions in uncertain data situations is ok
• Limited use of direct ecosystem-based modeling at this stage
Wrap up and Workshop Report

- Archive notes and presentations for later reference
- Summarize discussion and findings at a high level in a workshop report to provide to the CCC for their November meeting
- Complete development of toolkits around goal setting, policy development
- Refine CCC Habitat Workgroup workplan – what are issues of shared interest across Councils that we can tackle together?
- Refine regional workplans – what are issues to address within our region?
Regional Action Plan components

- What are improvements that could be implemented to the existing tools and processes for collaboration in your region? What new collaboration tools might be useful to develop?
  - For each Council? For NMFS?
- What steps are needed to turn those ideas into action?
  - How much work is involved in developing the tool?
  - By whom - who needs to be involved?
    - Council staff? Council members/committee? Regional partners (those at this meeting, or others?) FSC staff?
  - If there are multiple ideas, how are you planning to prioritize among them?
    - E.g., report to Council for feedback on priorities, or internal discussions with Council/RO/FSC staff
  - Timeframe for action
Thank you to the workshop steering committee for their work ahead of the Portland meeting, and to all the participants for an engaged discussion. Special thanks to Heather Coleman at NOAA Fisheries HCD for administrative support!
NEFMC Habitat Policies and Goals
Recognizing that all species are dependent on the quantity and quality of their habitat, it is the policy of the New England Fishery Management Council to promote and encourage the conservation, restoration and enhancement of the habitat upon which living marine resources depend. This policy shall be supported by four policy objectives:

1. Maintain and enhance the current quantity and quality of habitats supporting harvested species, including their prey base.

2. Restore and rehabilitate fish habitats which have already been degraded.
3. Create and develop fish habitats where increased availability of fishery resources will benefit society.

4. Modify fishing methods and create incentives to reduce the impacts on habitat associated with fishing.

These objectives are based on ensuring the sustainability of harvested species and optimizing the societal benefits of our marine resources. The Council shall assume an active role in the protection and enhancement of habitats important to marine and anadromous fish.
Goals: The Council supports policies for US energy development that will sustain the health of marine ecosystems and fishery resources while minimizing the risks to the marine environment and fisheries.

Council Policy on Wind Energy: Recommends specific practices for construction, engagement, and evaluation of environmental effects.

Council Policy on Offshore Oil: The Council is committed to the effective stewardship of the marine fisheries and associated habitats in the New England region. The environmental risks associated with offshore oil development and operations are not consistent with the Council’s vision for healthy and productive marine ecosystems supporting thriving, sustainable marine fisheries. Renewable energy, if implemented in a manner which minimizes impacts on fish habitat and fisheries, may be more consistent with the Council’s vision for sustainable fisheries. IF development proceeds, recommends specific practices.
MAFMC Policies

• Impacts of Fishing Activities on Fish Habitat ([link](#))
• Non-Fishing Activities ([link](#))
  ▪ General policies
  ▪ Wind Energy
  ▪ Offshore Oil
  ▪ Marine transport
  ▪ Liquefied Natural Gas
  ▪ Coastal Development
Considerations

- Policies may identify an approach/procedures to follow when engaging on non-fishing impacts issues
  - For example, the NEFMC has told GARFO we are most interested in hearing about and potentially engaging on the following:
    - Offshore projects: all projects, including energy development projects, cables and pipelines, mining, etc.
    - Nearshore/Estuarine Projects: focusing on large scale projects, including transportation and port development projects
  - Is it worth thinking about how to prioritize this engagement?

- Policies may also include guidance to action agencies
  - I.e. evidence based best practices or recommendations for analysis
  - What is the level of evidence to support a statement?

- Some elements are value judgments (i.e. offshore oil/gas policy)
Questions

• What topics are of interest to the Committee?
  ▪ Transport, LNG, coastal development?
  ▪ Additional issues that come to mind include submarine cables (energy, telecommunications), sand mining, expansion of offshore wind to floating installations.

• How to develop requisite knowledge base amongst Council, staff, stakeholders?

• How to engage the Habitat Advisory Panel? Outside experts?

• Who participates in the initial writing?