



New England Fishery Management Council

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Council Previews Deep-Sea Coral Amendment Analysis; Addresses Marine National Monument Overlap Issues

The New England Fishery Management Council received a briefing yesterday from its Habitat Committee regarding preliminary Deep-Sea Coral Amendment analyses covering: (1) potential impacts of fishing activity on corals; and (2) available fishery effort and revenue data.

The Council also made two decisions related to the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument, which President Obama established on Sept. 15, 2016 using his authority under the Antiquities Act of 1906. Although the President designated the monument, his proclamation directed the Secretary of Commerce, in consultation with the Secretary of the Interior, to manage the activities and species within the area under the provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and other federal laws.

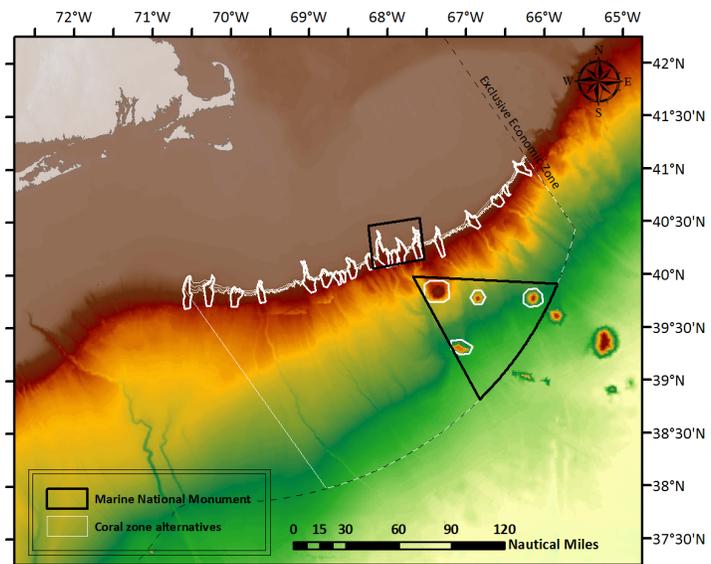
In an Oct. 21 letter to the Council, John Bullard, head of the National Marine Fisheries Service's Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, asked the Council to amend its fishery management plans to "reflect the action of the President and implement the appropriate fishing regulations for the Marine National Monument."

The Council discussed the request and decided not to develop its own amendment since it did not designate the monument. This means the Commerce Department will fulfill the President's charge through a secretarial amendment.

Our objective is to complete the action and implement the necessary regulations within two years.

— John Bullard

Bullard said public hearings would be held under the secretarial action and any proposed amendments would be sent to both the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils for "consideration and comment."



Map created November 10, 2016, NEFMC Habitat Plan Development Team

The Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument (bold black outline) overlaps the following deep-sea canyons and seamounts contained in the New England Council's Coral Amendment: Oceanographer, Filebottom, Chebacco, Gilbert, and Lydonia Canyons; Bear, Retriever, Physalia, and Mytilus Seamounts; and parts of the broad-zone alternatives.



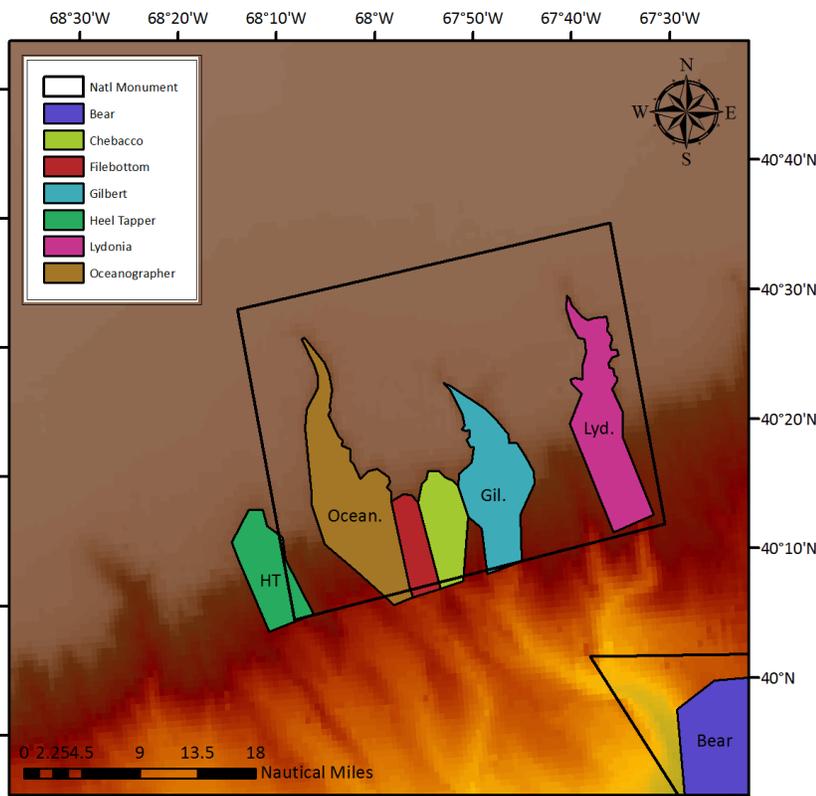
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The Council also debated a motion it had postponed during its September meeting to move all proposals in the Deep-Sea Coral Amendment that overlap with the Marine National Monument to the “considered but rejected” portion of the amendment.

After considerable debate, the Council voted to keep the overlapping alternatives in place for further consideration and analysis, noting that it was important to move forward with the coral protection process it had begun before the monument was designated.

Regarding the current list of alternatives in the coral amendment, the Council did vote to add an additional option to the mix.

For background, the Council is proposing to protect corals through the development of two types of coral zones – discrete areas and broad areas, which are defined as follows.



Map created November 14, 2016 NEFMC Habitat Plan Development Team

Depicted above in more detail is the canyon section of the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument (bold black outline) and discrete coral management zones (solid shading). – NEFMC graphic

- **“Discrete Areas”** designate narrowly defined coral zones in the Gulf of Maine, for single canyons, and on individual seamounts; and
- **“Broad Areas”** designate a coral zone along the entire shelf-slope region between the US/Canada Exclusive Economic Zone boundary and the New England/Mid-Atlantic Council boundary.

Broad zones are meant to prevent the expansion of fishing effort into additional deep-water habitats. The Council is considering various minimum depth contours for defining these zones.

Today the Council added a new 900-meter option to the current list being analyzed, which already includes 300-meter, 400-meter, 500-meter, and 600-meter depth contours.



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The Council further debated whether to continue developing potential lobster trap/pot restrictions in the inshore Gulf of Maine coral zones, which are offshore the state of Maine's waters near the Outer Schoodic Ridge area and west of Mt. Desert Rock.

The Maine Department of Marine Resources and Maine lobstermen requested that the Council provide an exemption for lobster and crab fishing within these zones, arguing that the inshore lobster fishery in this area is the primary economic driver for two Downeast Maine coastal counties encompassing at least 15 harbors.



– University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, School for Marine Science and Technology photo

The Council acknowledged the importance of these coral zone areas to the lobster fishery but was not prepared to completely eliminate lobster gear restrictions from consideration at this stage of the amendment process. Instead, it will continue to develop inshore Gulf of Maine coral zone alternatives that may restrict these gears but will include an option to exempt lobster trap/pot fishing.

Visit the New England Council's habitat webpage at: <http://www.nefmc.org/management-plans/habitat>. The draft coral amendment is available directly at: http://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/4.-161104_Coral_Amendment.pdf. For more information contact Habitat Coordinator Michelle Bachman at (978) 465-0492 ext. 120, email mbachman@nefmc.org.

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