



New England Fishery Management Council

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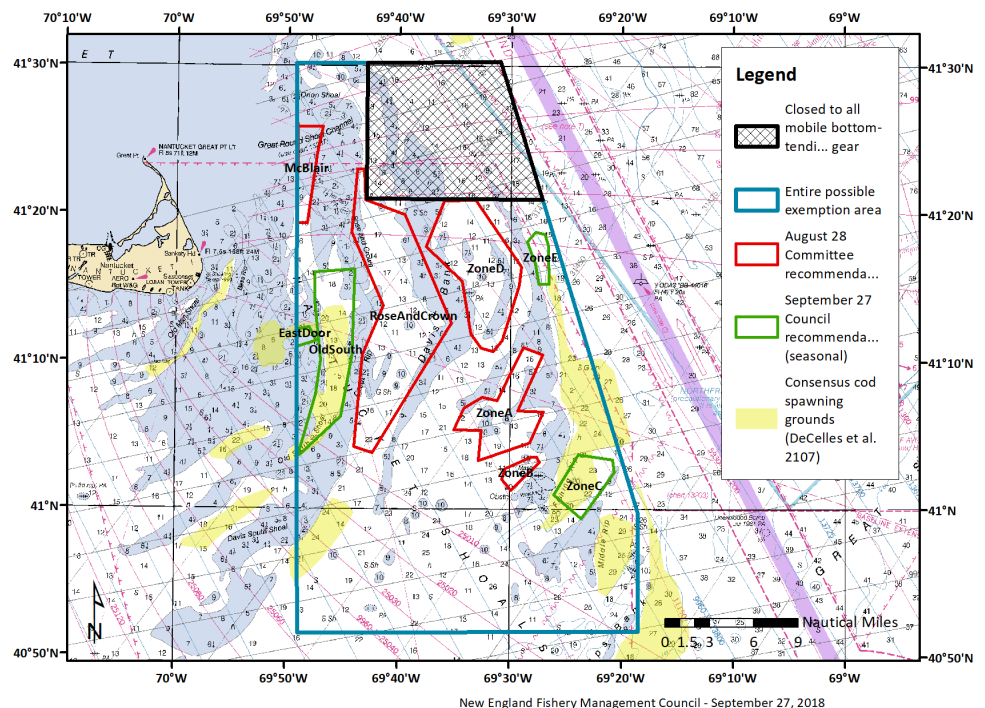
Council Forwards Clam Dredge Framework Alternatives for Analysis; Proposed Great South Channel HMA Exemptions

The New England Fishery Management Council has tasked its Habitat Plan Development Team (PDT) with analyzing five areas within the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area (HMA) where surfclam dredge fishermen potentially could continue to fish year-round. The PDT also was directed to analyze four additional areas for potential seasonal exemptions. The surfclam fishery currently is allowed to operate in all but the northeast corner of the HMA under a one-year exemption that expires April 9, 2019. The Council is working on a Clam Dredge Framework to consider options for allowing continued surfclam fishery access to non-sensitive habitat in the HMA. Since implementation of the Council's Omnibus Habitat Amendment 2 on April 1, 2018, the HMA has been closed to all other mobile bottom-tending gear.

The potential exemption areas being analyzed by the PDT were proposed by industry. At its June meeting in Portland, ME, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS, NOAA Fisheries) expressed serious concerns about the initial alternatives developed by the Council's Habitat Committee. The agency questioned whether any of those proposals could be approved in a final framework.

Consequently, the Council asked the surfclam industry itself to bring back new alternatives that did not impact sensitive habitat and potentially could be considered as clam dredge exemption areas.

Industry members, working together, proposed nine new



The five areas that will be further analyzed as potential year-round clam dredge exemption areas within the Great South Channel HMA are outline with solid red lines on the map above – McBlair, Rose and Crown, Area A, Area B, and Area D. Four other areas putlined in green will be analyzed as seasonal closures – East Door, Old South, Zone C, and Zone E. The exemptions would apply from March 1 to August 31. These four areas would be subject to a six-month closure to protect spawning codfish. The Council has expressed concern about potential overlap with cod spawning grounds, which are colored in yellow.

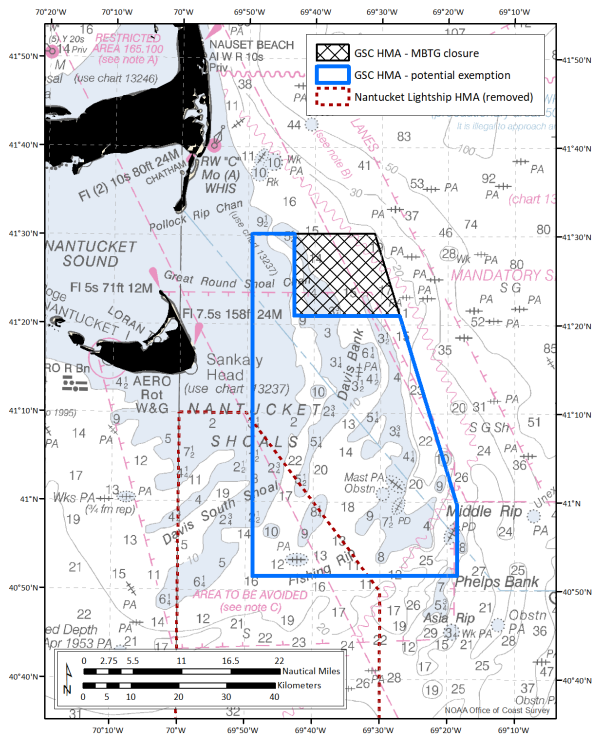


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areas. The Habitat Committee recommended advancing five of those nine for further analysis as year-round exemption areas. On September 27 during its meeting in Plymouth, MA, the full Council supported the recommendation and further voted to request analysis of the other four industry-proposed areas as March 1-August 31 seasonal exemption areas. During the other six months, the seasonal areas would be closed to protect cod spawning grounds. The Council then voted to include an alternative in the framework that would exempt mussel dredges within the same areas identified for potential surfclam dredge exemptions. The PDT will analyze this alternative as well.

The PDT, at the request of the Habitat Committee, also is analyzing the feasibility of creating a rotational management program for the exemption areas, which would enable industry members to fish within the areas for a specified amount of time and then let the areas recover for several years.

Additionally, industry members independently are working with Coast Guard and enforcement officials to investigate the possibility of increasing vessel monitoring system (VMS) polling rates on selected vessels to test whether boats can operate efficiently and be tracked within small, irregularly shaped exemption areas.



Clam Dredge Framework - Map credit: NEFMC - Date: April 2, 2018

Great South Channel Habitat Management Area

What's Next?

The Council's Enforcement Committee and Habitat Committee each will meet in early November to discuss and make recommendations on the framework, and the PDT will continue to work on ongoing analyses.

The Council is scheduled to take final action on the framework during its December 4-6, 2018 meeting in Newport, RI.

Clam Dredge Framework Statement of Work

"The Council intends [...] 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 [...] 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."

- For more information, contact Michelle Bachman, the Council's habitat coordinator, at (978) 465-0492, ext. 120, mbachman@nefmc.org.
- All habitat-related materials used during the Council's September 2018 meeting can be found at [Habitat Report](#). Also visit [September 24-27, 2018 NEFMC meeting, Plymouth, MA](#).