



# New England Fishery Management Council

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## Deep-Sea Coral Amendment to Provide Sweeping Habitat Protection, Including in Canyons and Seamounts Monument

The New England Fishery Management Council's Omnibus Deep-Sea Coral Amendment, which has been approved by NOAA Fisheries and is expected to become effective this summer, will provide sweeping protections for concentrations of fragile corals and prevent the expansion of fishing effort into areas where corals are likely to be present. The [amendment](#) applies to two regions.

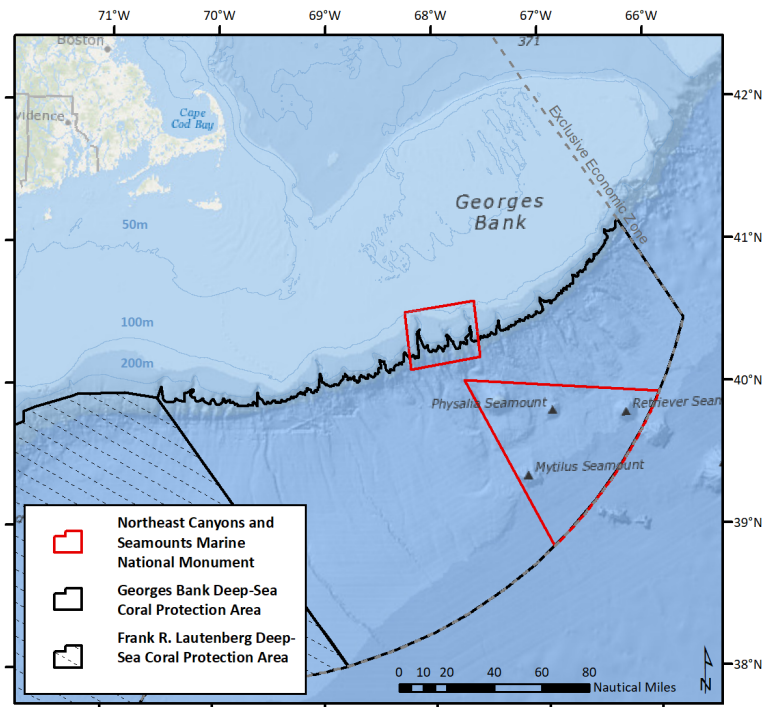
- **The Continental Slope and Deep-Sea Canyons South of Georges Bank:** This action protects deep-water corals and their sensitive habitat beginning at a depth of 600 meters and extends to the 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone limit. The new protection zone encompasses 25,153 square miles, including 82% of the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument (see map).
- **The Gulf of Maine:** This action protects corals at [Outer Schoodic Ridge and Mt. Desert Rock](#) by prohibiting fishing with trawls and dredges at both sites, and it creates a research area in Jordan Basin.

### Marine Monument Designation

The Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument was [created on September 15, 2016](#) by a Presidential Proclamation, which included a ban on commercial fishing within the monument area. Fishermen in the lobster and deep-sea red crab fisheries, however, were given seven years to phase out their operations.

The proclamation superseded the Council's ability to manage fisheries through its usual process under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) within the marine monument's boundaries.

A second Presidential Proclamation was issued on June 5, 2020 – the [Proclamation on Modifying the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument](#).



*The New England Council's Omnibus Deep-Sea Coral Amendment protects the area above outlined in black, which includes 82% of the marine monument area outlined in red. – NEFMC graphic*



# New England Fishery Management Council

This second proclamation removed the prohibition on commercial fishing and allowed management of fisheries within the marine monument to revert to the Council through the MSA process.

“We’ve said from the beginning that fishery management councils are best suited to address the complicated tradeoffs involved in managing fisheries, and we appreciate regaining our control to do so in the monument area,” said Council Chairman Dr. John Quinn.

However, the Council has been concerned by some of the news coverage surrounding this most recent Presidential Proclamation. Several articles indicated that fishing in the marine monument will be unrestricted and lead to “devastating” habitat impacts and the resumption of destructive fishing practices.

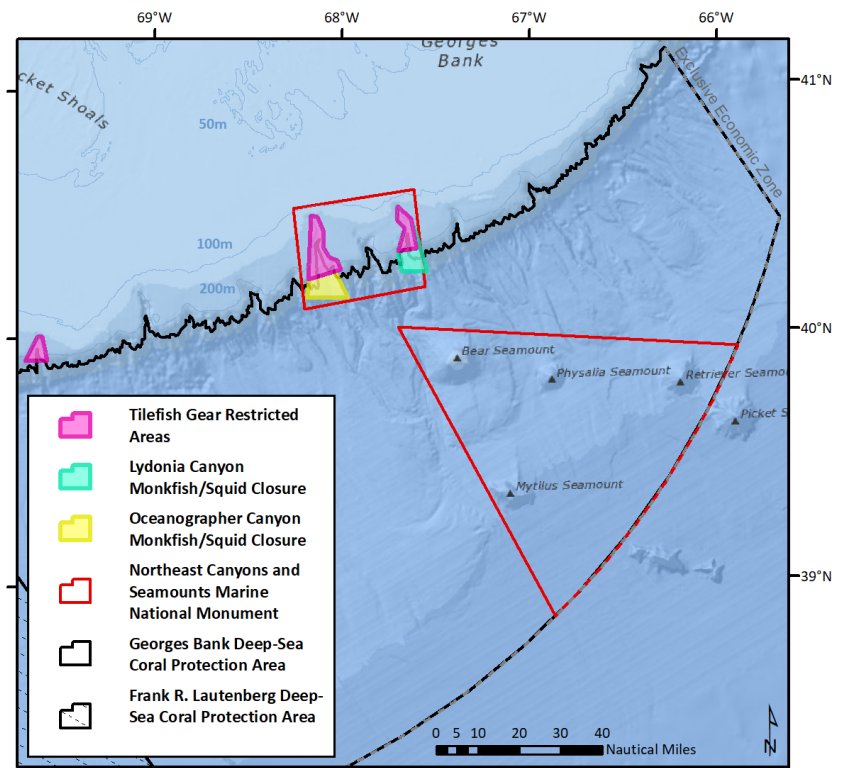
“This is not true at all,” said Tom Nies, the Council’s executive director. “The monument area will not be ‘wide open to industrial fishing.’”

In the canyons and seamounts region, the Council’s Coral Amendment will:

- **Prohibit** the use of bottom-tending commercial fishing gear within the designated deep-sea coral area, including otter trawls; beam trawls; hydraulic dredges; non-hydraulic dredges; bottom-tending seines; bottom longlines; pots and traps; and sink or anchored gillnets; and
- **Protect** the majority of coral habitats occurring in the canyons and on the slope in the New England region. The protected area will encompass 75% of plotted occurrences of corals, 75% of estimated soft coral habitat based on a habitat suitability model, and 85% of the areas with slopes greater than 30°. Steep slopes are a strong predictor of coral occurrence.

The prohibition on the use of bottom-tending gear types will provide **substantial** protection for deep-sea corals from being damaged by commercial fishing activities.

The Council provided one exemption for red crab pots. The small-scale deep-sea red crab fishery has only four active vessels, and the canyons and slope are vital to its operation.



**Monkfish/Squid Closures and Tilefish Gear Restricted Areas have been in place in the canyons area of the marine monument for more than a decade. Between these existing restrictions and the Council’s Coral Amendment measures, only 10% of the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument will be open to commercial fishing. No known fishing activity occurs on the seamounts. – NEFMC graphic**



# New England Fishery Management Council

Given the scale of fishing activity off the East Coast, commercial fishing within the marine monument area is relatively minor. But for certain fisheries – squid, tilefish, red crab, lobster, and tuna, to name the most prominent ones – the area remains important.

“The Council worked hard to walk that fine line between providing strong habitat and coral protections in the area while balancing the social and economic impacts to the industry,” said Executive Director Nies.

“We don’t think the recent criticism from the environmental community since the announcement of the second monument proclamation is entirely warranted,” he said. “Existing fishery management measures provide strong protections for Lydonia and Oceanographer Canyons, and with the Coral Amendment, we’re preventing commercial fishing from expanding beyond its historical footprint. The Council took this step while carefully weighing the associated impacts. We look forward to the implementation our amendment.”

*“I am pleased to inform you that NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, on behalf of the Secretary of Commerce, approved the New England Fishery Management Council's Omnibus Deep-Sea Coral Amendment as recommended by the Council. This is an important action that establishes protection for fragile deep-sea corals while balancing the needs of the valuable fisheries that we manage.”*

*– Regional Administrator Mike Pentony  
in his November 20, 2019 letter to  
Council Chairman Dr. John Quinn*

## QUICK FACTS

- Recreational fishing has been allowed in the monument area from the beginning and will be allowed in the 600-meter zone under the Council’s Omnibus Deep-Sea Coral Amendment.
- The New England, Mid-Atlantic, and South Atlantic Councils signed a [memorandum of understanding](#) in 2013 to address deep-sea coral protection and management coordination issues.

## Key Coral Amendment Documents

- The Omnibus Deep-Sea Coral Amendment is available [here](#).
- Here is the [letter](#) informing the Council that NOAA Fisheries had approved the amendment.
- The proposed rule for this action is [here](#).
- Visit the Coral Amendment [library](#) for the complete archive of related documents.



*The above collection of coral photos appears on the cover of the Council’s [Omnibus Deep-Sea Coral Amendment](#). Photo credits are listed on page 2 of the document.*