



New England Fishery Management Council

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John F. Quinn, J.D., Ph.D., *Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 3, 2018
TO: Habitat Committee
FROM: Doug Grout, Habitat Committee Chairman
SUBJECT: Charge to Committee for January 9, 2018 meeting

There will be a Habitat Committee meeting at the Four Point by Sheraton in Wakefield, MA, on **Tuesday, January 9, 2018**. The purposes of this meeting are to:

- (1) Discuss next steps stemming from the January 3 NOAA Fisheries decision on Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment 2. This will include a discussion about how the decision on the amendment might influence 2018 management priorities, and a discussion of alternatives development for the trailing action to consider clam dredge exemption areas on Nantucket Shoals.**
- (2) Review an updated coral management zone alternative including boundary changes and impacts analysis. The Committee will then recommend final preferred deep-sea coral alternatives to the Council for action on January 30.**
- (3) Discuss recent updates related to offshore wind and oil and gas development, and recommend specific projects for the Council to comment on during early 2018.**

OHA2 and trailing actions

NMFS' decision on OHA2 was released on January 3. This Committee meeting is an opportunity to review the decision (Document 3a), and discuss whether there are any adjustments to 2018 Council priorities that should be considered. Most of the measures in the amendment were approved. Exceptions include portions of the Georges Bank habitat management alternative and portions of the Great South Channel/Southern New England habitat management alternative. Specifically, on Georges Bank, NMFS approved changes related to CAI, i.e. removing the CAI groundfish area on a year-round basis, removing the two habitat closures, and designating the southern of the two habitat closures as a DHRA. Separately, in the spawning section of the amendment, NMFS approved designation of a winter/spring spawning closure in the northern part of CAI.

On eastern Georges Bank, however, NMFS disapproved the measures recommended by the Council. Going forward, given the measures that were disapproved, Closed Area II will remain in effect year-round, as will the Closed Area II habitat closure area. In addition, the Georges Shoal HMA will not be

designated. Separately, in the spawning section of the amendment, NMFS approved a seasonal spawning closure with the same boundaries as CAII. Combining the decisions on both sections of the amendment, the result is that CAII will remain closed year-round, with restrictions associated with the existing groundfish closed area, the existing habitat closed area, and the new spawning area added together. If you have specific questions about the implications of the amendment decision, please forward them to Council staff and we will seek clarification prior to the meeting.

The clam framework is a trailing action to OHA2. Given the decision on OHA2, the scope of this action is now limited to the Great South Channel HMA only. The PDT has been gathering data to support development of alternatives for clam dredge access in two habitat management areas. Staff will provide an update on the types of information being considered (document 3b). Staff will also outline the range of alternatives that might be considered, and the process that might be used to develop these alternatives. This meeting would be a good time to confirm the scope of the alternatives, and discuss the process and timing of the action.

Coral Amendment

This section of the meeting is the most time-sensitive given pending Council action, and will take most of the time allotted on the agenda. The Council made final decisions on portions of the coral amendment in June, holding over decisions on coral zones overlapping the canyon/slope/seamounts for a future meeting. Staff will update the Committee on the changes made to Option 7 (Documents 4a, 4b, 4c) and the estimated impacts of that option, combined with Option 6 (Document 4d). This meeting is an opportunity for the Committee to recommend a preferred coral zone alternative for the canyons and slope prior to final Council action on January 30. The Habitat Advisory Panel reviewed these updates jointly with the PDT on December 20.

Offshore wind

This agenda item will include a short briefing on ongoing offshore wind development activities, building on the information provided to the Council on December 5 (Document 5). As noted previously, there are many opportunities for engagement in this process and more to come as activity on specific projects increases. The Committee will discuss which issues to comment on, prioritizing the list of issues if possible. Areas to comment on could include additional wind energy area lease areas, any construction and operations plans submitted to BOEM, and BOEM's science priorities related to offshore renewable energy.

Meeting Materials

As they become available, the documents listed below will be posted to www.nefmc.org, and paper copies will be provided at the meeting, as well as any additional meeting materials. If you have any questions about the documents, please contact Michelle Bachman (mbachman@nefmc.org; 978-465-0492 x120). Earlier versions of the coral amendment items are available with the materials from the joint AP/PDT meeting held on December 20. These items (in particular the PDT memo) will be updated prior to the Committee meeting.

1. Tasking memo from Chairman Doug Grout (*this document*)
2. Meeting summaries
 - a. AP motions from joint AP/PDT meeting, 12/20/17
 - b. Draft Joint AP/PDT meeting summary, 12/20/17

- c. Habitat Committee meeting summary, 10/04/17
- 3. Omnibus Habitat Amendment 2 and trailing actions
 - a. Letter to Council on OHA2 decision
 - b. OHA2 approved map
 - c. Staff presentation on clam framework
- 4. Coral amendment
 - a. Staff presentation on Option 7 updates
 - b. PDT memo – development and analysis of updated Option 7 broad zone
 - c. Map book – updated Option 7
 - d. Draft coral amendment
- 5. Offshore wind
 - a. Staff presentation on upcoming issues of interest
 - b. Information on BOEM’s draft proposed program for oil and gas leasing on outer continental shelf
- 6. Correspondence