

Habitat Committee Report

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**NEFMC Meeting
December 1, 2020
Via Webinar**



Outline for today's report

- General updates: offshore wind and other topics
- Brief review of habitat policy backgrounders (documents 4 and 6)
- More detailed review of habitat policy documents (documents 5 and 7)
 - Council: Discuss and approve cable and aquaculture policies
- Presentation from Chris Schillaci, GARFO, on Aquaculture Opportunity Areas, roles for the Council in that process, and specific offshore projects in the pre-application phase (documents 8-12)
 - Council: Questions and discussion
 - Council: Opportunity to develop comment letters on AOAs and projects

Offshore wind updates

- ROSA Council meeting Nov 23
 - Discussed monitoring funds tied to procurement in NY and NJ, data management, priorities for next year including medium-term strategic plan
 - Interim monitoring guidelines expected early 2021
- Report from the RODA/NOAA/BOEM Synthesis of the Science workshop expected summer 2021
 - Other review efforts as well – NREL, NYSERDA workshop/regional wildlife science entity, ICES working group (can use to inform energy policy updates)
- Maine's announced a pilot floating wind project ([link](#))
- NEFSC efforts on survey mitigation including cost estimates ongoing
- Coast Guard's PARS studies for NJ/DE and N. NY Bight ongoing

Offshore wind permitting and projects

- Vineyard Wind FEIS December; ROD expected January 2021
- South Fork DEIS expected January 2021
- Eight other COPs @ BOEM in sufficiency review phase, more in development and expected to be given to BOEM next year
- Will need to be strategic about developing Council comments, given large number of projects
- NMFS staff continue to be heavily engaged in NEPA process/review for projects as a cooperating agency

Other updates

- Northeast Regional Habitat Assessment
 - Almost halfway through three-year project
 - Data inventory substantially complete, including metadata summaries; initial development of single species and joint habitat models; inshore habitat evaluation (seagrass, marsh, oysters) ongoing
 - Team meetings next week
 - Many productive meetings with collaborators especially on inshore habitat issues
- Northeast Regional Ocean Council
 - Report with recommended updates to fishery data coming soon; updates next year
 - Involved in discussions about planned marine life data updates; also planning for inclusion of NHRA products on the data portal
 - Best practices work group initiative is ongoing
- Stellwagen Bank NMS
 - Revising their management plan – helped to develop a list of strategies for research, interagency coordination, education and outreach, and maritime heritage protection

Habitat policies

- Purpose
 - Education, i.e. better understand these activities and approaches to mitigate effects
 - Facilitate consultation, i.e. develop a blueprint for comments and Council engagement on individual projects
- Topics
 - Submarine cables including buried or surface lay (not those in water column) for both electrical and data transmission
 - Aquaculture, both nearshore and offshore
- Audience
 - Council, as we consult on projects
 - NOAA Fisheries, other federal agencies, state agencies, developers, public

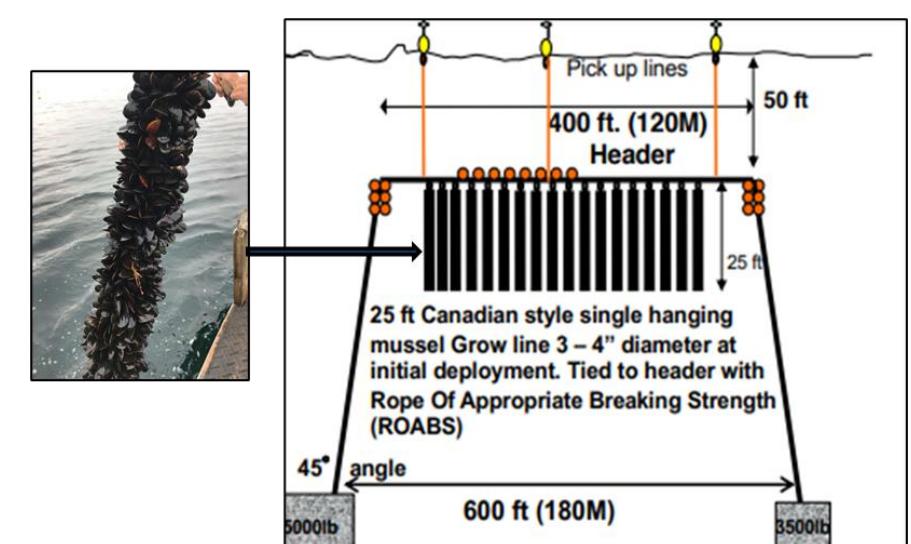


Development process

- Working with the PDT, AP, Committee, other experts (Nov 2019-Oct 2020):
 - Identified literature on environmental effects, reports, best management practices
 - Drafted and reviewed background documents
 - Presented backgrounders to Committee and AP
 - Drafted policies
- Committee and AP reviewed policies and recommended to Council for approval (November 17)
- Council review and approval (today)
- Next steps: work with partners to disseminate policies, identify effective communication channels for receiving information about projects, apply policies to formal and informal comments

Aquaculture backgrounder

- Activity overview
 - Species cultured
 - Areas where aquaculture occurs
 - Permitting and authorization process (federal and state)
- Potential impacts on species and habitats
 - Positive impacts
 - Adverse effects (fish, shellfish, interactions between managed species and aquaculture)
- Potential interactions with other marine and coastal activities
- References and best management practices



Cable backgrounder

- Activity overview
 - Types of cables
 - Route selection and survey
 - Installation, monitoring, repair, decommissioning
 - Permitting, environmental review, and operating standards
 - Extent of activity in New England
- Potential impacts on species and habitats
 - Mechanical disturbance, sedimentation, reef effects
 - Noise, electromagnetic fields, chemical contamination, heat
- Interactions with other marine and coastal activities
- References



Tetra Tech



Ocean News & Technology Magazine

Introduction section of both policies

- States scope of activities the policy pertains to
- Mentions overarching NEFMC habitat policy and the Council's role in EFH and HAPC designation and consultation
- States that the Council is seeking development compatible with the protection of Council-managed species and their habitats, and with commercial and recreational fishing activities
- Emphasizes early and often approach, and the importance of considering cumulative effects
- Identifies audiences for the policy

Aquaculture principles

1. Site and design projects in the context of ecosystem functions and services
 - Consider distribution of specific sensitive habitats, etc.
2. Adopt operational practices to reduce environmental effects
 - Secure gear, use native/naturalized species when possible, etc.
3. Consider cumulative effects
4. Contribute positively to local coastal economies
5. Develop in the context of other sectors, policies, and goals
 - Consider distribution of fishing grounds and potential for adverse interactions, start with pilot scale projects, use high quality data to understand other uses
6. Clear and ongoing communication is important

Cable principles

1. Evaluate environmental characteristics of cable corridor during design phase
 - Consider distribution of specific sensitive habitats, etc.
2. Bury rather than laying on seabed. Use appropriate cable protection materials.
3. Avoid areas of substantial mobile bottom tending gear use
4. Use installation techniques that minimize impacts
5. Coordinate routes where possible
6. Minimize operational impacts
7. Monitor cable
8. Plan for decommissioning
9. Clear and ongoing communication is important

Approval and next steps

- Questions? Discussion? Suggested edits?
- Approval will lead to inclusion in operations handbook – could revise over time if needed via Council action
- Existing aquaculture policy – some overlaps with new one – keep, retire? See page 1 [here](#); don't need to decide today
- Continue a dialog with NOAA Fisheries on how to best work together to provide input on specific projects, and on aquaculture spatial planning in general
- May want to share policies with the agencies we contacted over the summer about the Council's EFH consultation role
- As with offshore wind, expect we would work with MAFMC on issues of shared interest

Thank you!

Questions? Comments?