



## New England Fishery Management Council

50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492 | FAX 978 465 3116

Eric Reid, *Chair* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

## MEETING SUMMARY

### **Habitat Plan Development Team (PDT)**

February 22, 2023

2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

#### *Agenda*

The PDT met to discuss goals and objectives for the Northern Edge Habitat/Scallop Management Framework. An initial draft was developed by Council habitat and scallop staff. Input from the Habitat and Scallop PDTs will be discussed further and reconciled during a joint meeting of both teams on March 14 in Boston, MA.

#### *Meeting attendance*

PDT members included Michelle Bachman (Chair), Peter Auster, Sharon Benjamin, Jessica Coakley, Jenny Couture, Geret DePiper, Fiona Hogan, Julia Livermore, David Packer, Sabrina Pereira, Carl Wilson. Additional Council staff attending included Sam Asci, Jamie Cournane, Robin Frede, and Angela Forristall. Other attendees included Eric Reid (Council/Habitat Committee Chair), Melanie Griffin (Scallop Committee Chair), Lou Forristall, Travis Ford, and Shannah Jaburek (NOAA GARFO), and Drew Minkiewicz (Fisheries Survival Fund).

#### *Northern Edge Habitat-Scallop Framework*

The chair reviewed the meeting agenda and provided background information on the issue, which included the history of spatial management on Georges Bank, development and partial approval of Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment 2 (OHA2), work done on this topic since OHA2 completion, and a framework for issues to consider during development of the action. She then reviewed the goal and objectives drafted by habitat and scallop staff. She explained that the Scallop PDT was concurrently reviewing the goal and objectives, and that next steps would be for the two PDTs to meet jointly in person to discuss further, and hopefully reconcile any differences. The Habitat and Scallop Advisory Panels and Committees will review the joint PDT recommendations in late March, prior to a Council discussion in mid-April.

A PDT member asked for clarification about the priorities approved by the Council. There is a scallop priority and a habitat priority. The scallop priority is:

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*With the Habitat Committee, develop an action for access to the Northern Edge HMA, including development of an access area program for a modified area. The habitat priority is complementary: With the Scallop Committee, develop an action for access to the Northern Edge HMA, including development of an access area program for a modified area. Both focus on developing an action to consider access. Of course, any framework will consider and analyze a no action alternative.*

The PDT asked for clarification about involvement by other teams – specifically the Groundfish PDT. The chair noted that the initial plan was staff-to-staff coordination, but that we could engage the team with specific questions or requests if needed. The PDT member wondered if early engagement would allow an opportunity for groundfish experts to flag issues or generate questions we might not generate on our own. The Groundfish PDT chair noted that their team has some members who are biologists and would be well-suited to contribute. One issue to consider is the revised Atlantic cod stock structure.

The PDT suggested the following revisions to the draft goal and objectives:

- Change the language from gear conflicts to gear interactions, which is more neutral
- Add a reference to scallop biomass, or yield, in the goal.
- Add that changes to habitat management area boundaries might also be considered.
- Separate development of scallop access area boundaries and consideration of HMA revisions into separate objectives.
- Combine the habitat considerations (vulnerability, complexity, function for managed species) in one objective.
- Refine the bycatch objective and provide some specific ideas for species or groups of species to focus on.
- Consider defining one objective about interactions, covering both bycatch and gear interactions. These were kept separate for now, but the idea of combining them will be flagged for the joint PDT discussion.

Audience member and Habitat Advisor Drew Minkiewicz commented that he didn't feel a bycatch-related objective was needed, since it is already a national standard that must be considered when updating fishery management plans. He also suggested clarifying the goal as being to define access areas within and/or outside existing areas, vs. within and outside. The PDT agreed with the latter suggestion and clarified the language for the related objective as well. The PDT retained the bycatch objective.

### ***Other business***

None was discussed. The PDT adjourned at approximately 3:15 p.m.

### ***Follow up items***

- Clean up edits to goals and objectives.
- Compile data and information to support discussion at in person March 14 joint meeting.