



New England Fishery Management Council

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

## MEETING SUMMARY

### Habitat Plan Development Team

November 8, 2022

1:00-2:15 p.m.

#### *Agenda*

The PDT met to discuss information to support Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) designation updates, and brainstorm ideas for how to organize Council work on this issue.

#### *Meeting attendance*

PDT members included Michelle Bachman (Chair), Peter Auster, Sharon Benjamin, Jenny Couture, Geret DePiper, Rachel Feeney, Fiona Hogan, David Packer, Doug Potts, and Alison Verkade. Sabrina Pereira from GARFO HESD also attended.

#### *Discussion*

After a short introduction by the chair, she reviewed a slide deck intended to spur discussion about the EFH updates. The presentation summarized EFH requirements of Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) and highlighted recent and near-term work that would support these efforts, which include:

- Model outputs and fishery independent data compiled for the Northeast Regional Habitat Assessment (NRHA).
- Updates to the Fishing Effects model, with fishing effort data through 2021.
- Updates to the gear effects literature review database (contract planned for 2023).

The chair noted that MAFMC just initiated an EFH update omnibus amendment in October, and to the extent possible, the Councils would share expertise and ideas about how to make the above updates and integrate NRHA products.

The PDT asked questions and provided information and feedback throughout the presentation. Key points from this discussion are noted below.

- The chair clarified that non-federal fishing includes Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC)-managed fisheries outside federal FMPs.

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- The required information about non-fishing related activities that may adversely affect EFH would incorporate recent changes to the scope and scale of offshore wind and aquaculture development since Omnibus Habitat Amendment 2 (OHA2).
- The PDT asked about scope of a gear effects literature review. NEFMC, MAFMC, and NPFMC will be working with a contractor during 2023 to make the database used for the Swept Area Seabed Impact and Fishing Effects Model vulnerability assessments available online, updated with new literature. We can talk further about whether it would be possible to catalog other literature (e.g., review papers) as part of that contract.
- The PDT agreed the most useful way to think about these EFH updates would be as framework adjustments to Omnibus EFH Amendment 2, actions developed through the habitat committee and PDT, in consultation with other FMP groups as needed.
  - These frameworks could cover a select number of species, or one framework could cover all 28 species managed by NEFMC.
  - Given that the goal is to review designations every five years, if a subset of species is addressed across multiple actions, it might be worth scoping out three actions, where roughly a third of the species managed by the council are addressed in years 1, 2, and 3, with no EFH-related actions in years 4 and 5.
  - We will need to figure out the workflow and amount of time and effort required to move from NRHA model outputs and other information to a draft of an updated EFH designation. It would be productive to pilot one or two species before planning an action, to see how much time might be required.
    - A multi-year plan for updates might be completed once this pilot work is done.
  - Other PDT's and Committees could be involved once a draft designation or designations related to that FMP are developed.
  - There are various ways to group species, if the updates are broken into multiple actions. Some ideas discussed include:
    - By relevance to EFH consultation process.
    - By climate vulnerability of species or their habitats.
    - By recent range shifts, i.e., update species first that are most likely to require a more substantial revision to the EFH maps.
      - An analysis prepared for the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary (SBNMS) condition report was cited as one example of a product that might be used to understand range shifts/changes in occurrence/abundance in surveys.
    - By species where there are other new sources of information.
    - By species which are data poor and/or would use alternative data sources and be less reliant on trawl survey data (which is the primary data input of the NRHA products).
  - The EFH review process includes both consideration of new data that would suggest revisions to the designation, as well as looking across designations to ensure that adverse effects of fishing on EFH continue to be minimized. We

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would need to discuss the best approaches to completing both elements of the review.

- The chair noted that the Council identified a 10-year target in OHA2 for reviewing habitat management areas and other spatial management measures.
- The initial step that we are thinking about in the short term is more focused on the scientific review of information to support EFH designations.
- There was some discussion about making EFH designations more reflective of changes, for example considering shifts in distribution, and the rate at which those shifts are occurring, when drawing EFH maps.

### *Other business*

The chair noted that in addition to this EFH review item, two additional items on the list of potential Council priorities for 2023 relate to management of adverse effects of fishing on EFH. Specifically, adjusting management measures for the Northern Edge of Georges Bank, and identifying information needs to support management of the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area. A group discussion of these issues would be useful early next year, depending on what the Council adopts for 2023 work items. Also, Alison Verkade noted that this might be her last meeting on the PDT, as she is moving into a new role at NOAA Fisheries Headquarters Office. PDT members wished her well. The meeting adjourned around 2:15 p.m.

### *Follow up items*

- Revise slides for use at upcoming Habitat Committee meeting
- Schedule future meetings on this topic depending on outcome of priorities discussion