



New England Fishery Management Council

50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492 | FAX 978 465 3116
E.F. "Terry" Stockwell III, *Chairman* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

Statement by
E.F. "Terry" Stockwell III
New England Fishery Management Council Chairman
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Providence Marriott Downtown, 1 Orms Street, Providence, Rhode Island

As the Chairman of the New England Fishery Management Council, I'm pleased to be here, to provide information to NOAA and the Administration about the Council's activities, who we are and what we do, particularly with respect to protecting New England's most fragile marine resources.

The Council has long recognized the unique characteristics of canyon and seamount habitats. While most of the fishing managed by the Council is conducted on the continental shelf and not within the canyons --- and to the best of our knowledge, there are no active fisheries on the seamounts --- we have and will continue to recognize the sensitivity of corals and other deep-sea animals to fishing impacts.

Tonight, I will provide a brief history of the New England Council's actions, including those of our fishery management partners, as NOAA and the Administration examine protection for the offshore canyons and seamounts in the New England region.

- Over a decade ago, the New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils jointly took an important first step toward minimizing the impacts of fishing gear on sensitive marine habitats in New England by approving closures for monkfish trawl and gillnet gear in large portions of Lydonia and Oceanographer Canyons. A decade later, those protections remain firmly in place while other expansions are under development.

- In 2009, the shallower portions of Oceanographer and Lydonia, as well as Veatch and Norfolk Canyons to the west and south, were closed to all mobile bottom-tending gears through the Mid-Atlantic Council’s Tilefish Fishery Management Plan. The tilefish closures apply to vessels fishing in New England Council and Mid-Atlantic Council-managed fisheries and focus on vulnerable areas between 100 and 300 meters deep.
- Meanwhile, during reauthorization of the Magnuson Act in 2006, Congress granted discretionary authority to the regional fishery councils to include measures in their management plans that could protect deep-sea corals from damage caused by fishing gear.
- Beginning in 2010, the New England Council began intensive work on a program that further recognized the sensitivity of corals and other deep-sea animals to fishing impacts. Although initially envisioned as part of its Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Amendment, in 2012 the Council chose to temporarily set-aside the deep-sea coral initiative given the complexity of the EFH action.

The Council took final action on the EFH Amendment this spring. The EFH Amendment, if approved by NOAA Fisheries, will designate habitat areas of particular concern, otherwise known as HAPCs, in eight canyons and on two seamounts¹, including some of the areas that are under consideration as National Marine Monuments.

Briefly, the HAPCs are subsets of designated essential fish habitat that provide an important ecological function, encompass rare habitat types, are sensitive to human stresses, and are located in areas with current development or the potential for future development. While the HAPC designations do not restrict fishing activities, they are an indication of the Council’s intent to give these areas special consideration during the

¹ EFH Amendment proposed canyon HAPCs, northeast to southwest: Heezen, Lydonia/Gilbert/Oceanographer, Hydrographer, Veatch, Atlantis/Alvin, Hudson, Toms/Middle Toms/Hendrickson, Wilmington, Baltimore, Washington, and Norfolk. The canyons between Heezen and Alvin are within the New England region; those canyons south and west of Alvin (Hudson-Norfolk) are in the Mid-Atlantic region. Seamount HAPCs proposed in the EFH Amendment include Bear and Retriever. Additional seamounts in the New England Seamount chain are deeper and do not contain designated EFH.

development of future fishery management actions. These designations are also important in the context of NOAA's EFH consultation process, during which the agency uses HAPCs to focus their conservation recommendations for federally-permitted activities that could affect essential fish habitat.

- In 2013, a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by the Chairs of the South Atlantic, Mid-Atlantic, and New England Fishery Management Councils to coordinate the protection of deep sea corals off the east coast of the United States from Maine to eastern Florida. The MOU serves as a framework for cooperation during the development and implementation of measures to protect deep sea corals. It also includes strategies to promote effective coordination of deep sea coral conservation efforts among the east coast councils.

- Starting next week, the Council will resume active discussion of its Deep-Sea Coral Amendment. To date, the action identifies possible coral zones overlapping each of the canyon and seamount HAPCs that are within the New England area of jurisdiction (Heezen-Alvin canyons and Bear and Retriever seamounts). In addition, the coral amendment identifies five other canyons and two additional seamounts as possible coral management zones². The Council is also evaluating a broad coral protection zone that extends from just beyond the shelf break to our exclusive economic zone boundary³. Various fishing gear restrictions are being considered for the coral zones, such as restrictions on bottom-tending gears.

Substantial amounts of new data collected since 2013 will help the Council to design coral management zones in a way that balances conservation of vulnerable deep-sea animals with access for fishing operations along the shallow, landward margins of the canyons. Through its very public process, and using the expert technical advice provided

² The additional coral zones that are not designated as HAPCs include Nygren, Munson, Powell, Heel Tapper, and Welker canyons, and Mytilus and Physalia seamounts.

³ This zone could have a landward depth boundary starting at around 300-500 meters, and would potentially cover an area between 28,000-29,000 mi².

by its plan development team, the Council will consider diverse perspectives and make use of the best scientific information available.

Finally, I would like to speak about the Council's work on Cashes Ledge. The Council has restricted fishing activities in a 530 mi² area for more than 15 years through its Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan.

The closure area was first implemented seasonally in 1999. The area encompasses Cashes Ledge and the Ammen Rock Pinnacle, Cashes Basin, Fippennies Ledge, and Sigsbee Ridge. In 2004, the Council adopted it as a long term closure to all fishing gears that catch groundfish, and added an overlapping closure to all mobile bottom-tending gears on Cashes Ledge and Ammen Rock.

During final action on the EFH amendment mentioned earlier, the Council voted to maintain the Cashes Ledge Closure Area as-is and went further, designating a new mobile bottom-tending gear closure on nearby Fippennies Ledge. In addition, the Council closed 6 mi² around Ammen Rock to all of the fishing activities it manages. This includes closure to gears not currently restricted on Ammen Rock, such as mid-water trawls and recreational fishing for groundfish.

I make these comments to highlight the fact that the rich and unique habitats of Cashes Ledge that have been well-described by others have been recognized and protected by the New England Fishery Management Council for many years.

Going forward, the Council will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of its management approaches for conserving unique and vulnerable marine habitats. I thank you for your time, and would be happy to answer any questions you might have about our work.

