

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council, SSC, and AP
FROM: Chris Oliver *Chris*
Acting Executive Director
DATE: January 29, 2001
SUBJECT: HAPC Stakeholder Process

ESTIMATED TIME
1 HOUR

ACTION REQUIRED

Receive summary report on the HAPC stakeholder meetings.

BACKGROUND

The Council is working to develop a comprehensive and iterative approach to habitat protection involving researchers, stakeholders and management agencies. Stakeholder meetings are a way to get input from local communities and fishermen typically not involved with the Council process.

The first habitat stakeholder meetings were held on January 10 in Sitka and January 12 in Yakutat. The purpose of the meetings was to exchange information on the distribution and importance of gorgonian coral and sponge habitat, and discuss management options to conserve this habitat area of particular concern (HAPC).

Staff will report on the results of these stakeholder meetings. A written summary of the Sitka and Yakutat meetings is attached as Item C8(a). If these meetings are deemed successful, the Council may consider holding additional stakeholder meetings in other areas of the state where gorgonian corals occur (South of the Kenai Peninsula, and the Western Aleutians).

**HABITAT AREAS OF PARTICULAR CONCERN
STAKEHOLDERS MEETING SUMMARY**

prepared by NPFMC and NMFS staff

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The first habitat stakeholder meetings were held on January 10 in Sitka and January 12 in Yakutat. The purpose of the meetings was to have an open public discussion on HAPC and the importance of coral and sponge habitat as potential HAPC areas. Our task was to get input from local communities and stakeholders typically not involved in the Council process. We were requesting public input in two areas in regards to this: 1) Where are these coral and sponges located beyond what we have documented? and 2) how best to protect them; does anything need to be done? The intent was to obtain feedback for the Council, and to begin a dialogue on these issues.

Both meetings began with an overview which included the following: presentation of HAPC and the importance of gorgonian corals by staff, Cathy Coon; current HAPC coral research by NMFS-Auke Bay Lab, slides and video from Linc Freese; and a video of NMFS experimental trawl research presented by Eric Jordan, AMCC. Key questions and concerns were raised by both communities on gorgonian coral / sponge HAPC designation as well as other habitat concerns and are highlighted in the adjacent box..

Key concerns at HAPC Stakeholder meetings

Sitka

- Longline gear has minimal effect on coral and sponge habitat.
- More research is needed on coral and impacts by fisheries.

Yakutat

- Local fleet has no impact on coral and sponges
- Concerned about scallop fishery impacts on crab habitat.

**SITKA MEETING:
January 10, 2001**

Agency staff and Council member participants:

Linda Behnken NPFMC member
Cathy Coon NPFMC, staff
Matthew Eagleton NMFS/HCD/Anchorage
Linc Freese NMFS/ABL
Nina Mollett NMFS/SFD
Tori O'Connell- Alaska Department of Fish & Game

Approximately 70 participants and included AMCC outreach coordinator, Eric Jordan, and several members. Fisherman, community members, and students from the Marine Biology class at Sheldon Jackson college. Meeting was held at Northern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association at 7pm and lasted 3 hours. The following questions and comments summarizes the content of the meeting.

From Fishers:

- Why is this group talking here with us [longliners] on corals (HAPC) when the largest impacts are from bottom trawling gear and scallop dredgers?
- Need to talk with the folks in Kodiak and the trawlers from lower 48 who have the biggest impact
- Our gear does not cause much damage and your video only shows a few pieces of damaged coral. It is hard to tell if these were damaged by line gear.
- We know there are fish in these areas, but we do not set gear on deep coral areas because it slows our gear hauling and damages gear. We usually do not set on that type of location twice.
- We set to the side of these areas: on the shelf or low relief areas.
- Given we are having little if any, measurable impact, we do not think setting aside area for protection would help or is necessary.
- We need to plot the depth, current, bottom substrate, and any other common factors that discovered Gorgonian (Red Tree Coral) patches have in common so we can extrapolate where other patches might be located.
- In the video you saw the 7 ft. halibut swim among the corals; need you ask why we fish there?
- One fisherman was angry, talked extensively. He said that foreign fleets decimated the ocean floor for 25 years; US drag fisheries since 1976 have had a free run—they've caused all this damage and now you come around 50 years afterwards. The Council has been so slow—it's ludicrous. It's very frustrating from a fisherman's point of view...factory trawlers destroy not just the habitat, they take juveniles and everything. Tickle chain cuts 300 ft wide swath. It wouldn't help to ban trawling here. We're lucky we don't have a lot of habitat here...Advised talking to trawlers, "the people who have done the most damage."
- Same fisherman talked about a vessel he was aware of that was taking coral about 15 years ago.

From College Students:

- If you know there are adverse impacts to habitat from bottom trawling, why do you allow this gear to fish? Seems ridiculous to continue to harm these habitats when we know better.
- After researching these type of impacts to habitats from areas all over the world, we think protecting sensitive habitats is worthwhile. However if there is no proof of a negative impact, that makes it very difficult to agree to protections which would effect people's livelihoods.
- NMFS and the State need to further research habitat. Cost is no excuse. Just get it done.
- Really important to protect habitat; long-term costs, need community support.
- Should close these areas to threats from fishing and to distinguish the effects of different gears.

Other statements from those present:

- Unfortunately the discussion started in the middle of the presentations and I think we missed out on some good discussion afterwards, since it was 10pm and a lot of people left and most other groups were silent.
- There were a number of questions about Linc's presentation and general questions on HAPC research.
- There are so many more sponges than corals, why are we focusing on corals?
- The meeting contained good, informal discussion. All appeared to think the meeting was interesting.
- Like all things, a picture is worth a thousand words. The submarine pictures and video are worth millions rolled into a presentable format.
- Go to Kodiak and other places and talk with them, how to deal with Western Aleutians.
- The feds need to look at the impacts to these corals from the gears that can cause the damage; bottom trawls and dredges.

- Thanks for the chance to discuss and the video.

Questions/Statements for Linc Freese (NMFS) on coral habitat:

- What were the most predominant red rockfish in that area? (Answer: sharp chin, POP)
- Are there high relief areas that do not have coral and still have rockfish?
- Fisherman stated that the area where Linc studied has had longlining for the last 20-25 years and they wanted to know what was the impact if any observed on the gorgonians by longline gear. (Linc said he was going to map the locations of the gear, to that of damaged coral, to make some general correlations from his specific study site.
- Fishers wanted to know the correlation to the longline fishery and the percentage of biomass vs percent of damage.
- DGPS technology allows vessels to specially hit or miss an area when fishing. Some yelloweye fisheries occur near or on top of the coral habitat on the Fairweather grounds, with 1/2" line.

AMCC community outreach coordinator Eric Jordan explained that 13 of the 15 board members are commercial fishermen. He presented their objectives:

- Inform and get the local groups involved with fishery issues and provide a place for them to turn, if needed.
- Maintain that certain habitats are needed for productive fisheries.
- We all need to think about the areas we fish and how to avoid certain habitats and impacts.
- Commercial fishing can occur in areas with the right gear.

Yakutat participants in Sitka included: Tom Maloney (mayor), Bert Adams Sr. (Tlingit-Haida council), Greg Indreland, YTI manager fish processor (Yat-Tat Kwaan).

YAKUTAT MEETING

January 11, 2001 (preparatory meeting)

Summary of pre-meeting with the Yakutat Tribal Government at (Tlingit-Haida tribe) about 15 people attended.

- Bert Adams Sr. said he listened to the meeting in Sitka. He felt he was now educated on coral issues, and heard that habitat policy measures were coming to the surface. He felt the Sitka meeting gave him a heads up to what was going to happen in Yakutat. He wanted the tribe to be prepared to attend the public meeting and have good comments for Council staff.
- Greg Indreland, YKI plant manager (speaking for himself), Yakutat Fisheries. Showed map with the locations of coral based on the NMFS trawl survey. He talked about the people of Yakutat getting involved and becoming a part of the solution. He noted that some fishing practices do affect coral and other fragile habitat, which need protection. He said that most importantly the community should be involved, and that all the information the community provided would be taken back to the Council.
- Mayor Tom Maloney (speaking for himself) reiterated that a lot of studies still needed to be done, especially if EFH legislation has the power to result in fishery closures. He was particularly worried about possibility that the presence of kelp and mussels would result in closing all the fisheries inside Yakutat Bay.

- Eric Jordan, outreach coordinator with AMCC, stated that AMCC goals are to protect ecosystem diversity, and that AMCC can aid the community with a goal if they have one.
- Caroline Hall on the board of YTK (Yak-Tat Kwaan) group said that there was a lot of misinformation being spread among the community. There was much public concern in town that fishery closures were contemplated that would affect their livelihood and, in essence, the town's existence. She expressed the group's concern that this was the government's first step towards closures in the area, although it was advertised as a stakeholder meeting.
- Cathy Coon, NPFMC staff gave a quick clarification on why the Council was in Yakutat, stating that there were no actions imminent, but that there had been lawsuits on EFH by some environmental organizations. Talked about background of HAPC and coral and how the meeting was going to be framed for the following day.

YAKUTAT MEETING
January 12, 2001

Agency staff participants:

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| Cathy Coon | NPFMC, staff |
| Matthew Eagleton | NMFS/HCD/Anchorage |
| Linc Freese | NMFS/ABL |
| Nina Mollett | NMFS/SFD |

Attendance was 40 people, mostly fishermen and year-round residents of Yakutat. Meetings began with presentations, with questions and discussion held to the end (based on Sitka experience). The following questions and comments summarizes the content of the meeting.

- Several members of the community expressed concern over the effects of the scallop fishery on Dungeness crabs and tanner crabs. Although there is no evidence of this effect from the observers of these scallop vessels, there is proof on the beaches, according to members of the community. During rough weather the boats come into shallower waters to fish, and the waves bring in crushed carasses of the young crab onto the beach.
- Steve Henry of Sitka Sound Seafood, Yakutat and Greg Indreland of YKI would like to know what are the best steps for the Yakutat community to become involved in the Council process, in order to stop nearby bottom trawling and the scallop fishery, which they said has destroyed the crab industry. They are confused on how to proceed with in the most effective manner. They would like to know if the Council could put pressure on the State Board of Fisheries in regards to restricting the scallop fishery near Yakutat waters. Additional interest was expressed a Gulf of Alaska Crab FMP, so they could utilize this as a means to protect crab habitat for these fisheries. AMCC noted that they could work on behalf of the communities on this endeavor.
- Dave Ramos, President Yakutat ANB, expressed concern over the bottom disturbance caused from the scallop fishery. He would like to see a moratorium on bottom trawl fishing around areas of Gorgonian Coral. He would like an annual report on actions that could be affecting their community.

- Mayor Tom Maloney pointed out the differences between negative bottom impacts from the scallop fishery and the two types of trawl fisheries.

Other Comments from Fishers:

- Why is this group talking here with us on corals (HAPC), when the largest impacts are from bottom trawling gear and scallop dredgers?
- Need to go talk with the folks in Kodiak and the bigger fisher groups, who create the biggest impacts.
- Our small effort and line gear does not cause that much damage.
- We know there are fish in these areas, but we do not set gear on coral areas because it slows our gear hauling and damages gear. We try to avoid these areas.
- There are probably only a half a dozen longliners out of Yakutat. They typically fish in 20-50 fathoms of water and most don't see corals. If they see coral, they mark in on their charts and move. The nature of IFQ fisheries helps to protect habitat, unlike the slam bang fishery that used to occur, under which gear setting was more careless due to time constraints.
- Most people who spoke emphasized that if fishing restrictions are needed to protect the corals,-the most effective action would be to curtail bottom trawling in areas of known coral concentrations.
- We thought this Fed group was here to shut down the area drawn on the map (ADFG stat area) to fishing in this area. We were glad to learn otherwise.
- We do not think the State is offering protection of our fisheries or habitat.
- There was general consensus about the need to restrict scallop dragging off of Yakutat - in their crab grounds. People were worried that the constant dragging is preventing recovery to crab stocks.
- People wanted to know why crab habitat in the Gulf is not considered Essential Fish Habitat.
- They also wanted to know if the Council could pressure ADF&G into restricting scallop dragging in the Yakutat crab habitat, since they signed crab management over to the State- to place some areas around Yakutat off limits to big boat scallop dredging.
- Reports of coral where fishers do not fish, Fairweather grounds and near Middleton Island (Prince William Sound).
- One fisherman thought the NMFS experimental bottom trawl video was performed with unrealistic gear, and that NMFS used this video to say bottom trawls were bad.
- Before closures occur need to answer the following. What's the impact vs. fishing effort within a specific area? How much biomass is there, and what percentage is affected by what gear type? Different fisheries have different impacts. Important to know what these are and what the potential of federal actions are.
- The same agencies should come into the communities on an annual basis and give an update on HAPC and other Council types of actions that may affect the community, such as halibut charter IFQ.
- One fisherman said that the beach is lined with dead crab, carapaces, legs, etc... when the scallopers are just offshore. No such parts are found when the dredgers are gone. Also, over the years he has set shrimp pots in these areas. He actually did a survey after noticing his catch had changed. Usually, he caught shrimp and juvenile crab spc. These crab were easily released healthy and looked like little crabs. However, when the scallop effort skyrocketed around 1993; when many vessels joined in the effort, this changed. Now, the juvenile crabs were damaged; missing legs, torn carapaces, lethargic, etc. He witnessed and recorded that 70 to 90% of the crabs in each shrimp pot were severely damaged. These are little crabs.

- One scalloper (not sure if still dredges) offered that his small dredge (<48") may have a small impact, but nothing compared to the effort going on right out in front of Yakutat. These larger scallopers are damaging large amounts of crab. He explained: when it starts to get rough, the Dungeness and tanner crabs move to deeper substrate to avoid the storm surge. These crab migrate en masse and right into the scallop dredgers that have moved in closer or are just off this area. Each wave which hits the beach contains numerous crab pieces and parts which pile up on the beach. Also, he offered that scallops can be caught with other gear such as pots and line. If the pots are baited or the mesh is tainted with a certain smell, the scallops will enter the pot. He used a modified tanner/king pot and had success. Also, he has brought them in on line gear with attractant on it.
- Eric Jordan of AMCC stated that their position is not trying to have areas closed, they are a group composed of mostly fisherman, and are here to help the communities, only if they want help, in organizing a solution for ecosystem diversity and habitat conservation. Said they would not push for any solutions that did not have community support. He made clear the group's objectives and membership base and was very professional

Summary Statements From Those Present

- Again, the meeting contained good, informal discussion and the Feds need to look at the impacts to these corals and other benthic habitats from the gears that can cause the damage; bottom trawls and dredges.
- Can this group assist us in getting our message to others? We feel our voice at the Boards are small and ignored.
- We do not like the way the State is managing our crab stocks and will not let us fish in a small, focused, local effort to sustain our living as year-round residents.
- We hope our crab stocks return, but we here did not contribute to the problems; it was bigger vessels.
- Yakutat wants some local fisheries to support the seafood industry here year round; not necessarily a big effort but a sustained or constant effort.
- Look at the large scallop dredges for some impacts.