

HABITAT COMMITTEE COMMENTS ON
GROUND FISH BYCATCH PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

The Habitat Committee (HC) heard a report on the status of the Groundfish Bycatch Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and reviewed the preliminary alternatives presented in the EIS.

Alternative 5 has the potential to reduce habitat impacts (and bycatch of benthic species) by changing fishers' behavior, reducing effort, encouraging selective fishing techniques, and decreasing the pace of the fishery.

Alternative 6 is similar to Alternative 5, but provides time and area closures. The HC is concerned that, based on the Executive Summary, the Council and public will consider the "large area closures" included in Alternative 6 (page 4-77) to mean only long-term area closures to all fishing. Given the existing wording, the HC is concerned this alternative will be misunderstood. A detailed description of area closures is presented on page 4-20 of this document. Area closures fall along a spectrum from permanent, fully-closed areas to seasonally closed areas or restrictions for certain gear types. These are valuable tools that will not be fully considered if the option is interpreted as meaning permanent, fully-closed areas.

Of these alternatives, Alternative 6 appears to offer the most potential benefit to habitat because it provides the Council a more diverse "toolbox" with which to manage fisheries.

PFMC
11/06/03