

HABITAT COMMITTEE COMMENTS ON  
GROUNDFISH ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT (EFH) ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT  
STATEMENT (EIS) ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK - FISHING GEAR IMPACT MODEL  
COMPONENT

The Habitat Committee (HC) received a presentation from Graeme Parkes (MRAG Americas) and Steve Copps (NMFS) on the fishing gear impact model to the essential fish habitat EIS. The presentation complements information provided at the April Council meeting on the EFH model. The fishing gear impacts model represents a significant advance in efforts to understand the distribution and impacts of fishing activities on habitat. We appreciate the effort and work that went into producing this document. The compilation of habitat and fishing effort databases, and investigations into habitat sensitivity and recovery rates after impacts from mobile fishing gear, identify significant information gaps that need to be filled in future data collection efforts.

There are a number of data and analytical limitations that will constrain how this model can be used (at present) by the Council:

1. It is not possible, with the data available, to establish a quantitative relationship between fishing activities and the functional value of habitat types. However, the model does attempt to portray information in a quantitative, mathematical algorithm. While absolute estimates of habitat impact and recovery cannot be derived from the available information, relative impacts will be useful for management decisions.
2. The available modeling information is limited to bottom-trawling, as this is the only gear type with a comprehensive data set that can be put into a GIS format. It is not possible to make comparisons of fishing impacts to habitat across gear types that could guide the Council in addressing habitat impacts through allocation or gear regulations.
3. There was a limited consideration of non-fishing impacts in relation to fishing impacts on EFH; therefore it will not be possible at this time to place fishing and non-fishing impacts to EFH into perspective. The HC recognizes that with limited funds and limited time this was not a primary goal of the EFH EIS team. This points out the need for future data collection and analytical efforts to address non-fishing impacts.
4. One of the Council's charges through EFH is to minimize impacts on habitat from fishing to the extent practicable. While this modeling effort is valuable in identifying areas where relative impacts are more or less severe, it is not possible to use these model results to determine where the Council needs to take action to protect habitat. In other words, the modeling effort will be helpful to the Council in addressing spatial questions related to trawl fishing; there is not sufficient information to help the Council determine how subtle changes in gear attributes will translate into habitat sensitivity and recovery.

Despite these limitations, the EFH fishing gear impacts modeling effort allows us to identify relative impacts to EFH for single species as well as ecological assemblages due to trawling. By itself, this is a significant advance in our understanding.

The HC is concerned that while a great deal of effort has been put into modeling and data collection, there is very little time before the September Council meeting for development of alternatives.

PFMC  
06/14/04