

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON
TRAWL RATIONALIZATION (TRAWL INDIVIDUAL QUOTA [TIQ] PROGRAM)

The Habitat Committee (HC) reviewed the proposed revised Goals and Objectives (Agenda Item E.4.b) and noted that the original wording and intention of both Goal 1 and Objective 3 were changed. These sections have omitted reference to furthering environmental benefits and minimizing ecological impacts. In addition, nothing in the guiding principles acknowledges the importance of minimizing habitat impacts. The HC recommends adding a guiding principle to minimize negative impacts on habitat, and restoring an explicit mention of environmental concerns in Goal 1 and Objective 3. These issues are important for the reasons below.

Overall, these new management tools need to take broader impacts on habitat into consideration. This is appropriate given the Magnuson-Stevens Act's call for "integration of ecosystem consideration into fishery management." The HC recommends that any new program incorporate this goal.

The TIQ program has potential for both positive and negative ecological impacts. For example, negative impacts from area management could include a shift in fishing effort to sensitive habitats. Additionally, any bottom-tending gear can have habitat impacts, so impacts of gear switching should be considered. On the positive side, increased efficiency can reduce fishing effort and reduce the fishing footprint, minimizing bycatch and habitat impacts.

The TIQ program's proposed goals and objectives therefore, should be broad enough to address these issues and reduce potential negative impacts on habitat. The program must be broad enough not only to consider the immediate effects on the fishing fleet, but on the larger context in which this change is being implemented. For example, it is important to ensure that area management is flexible enough to adapt to changes in species distributions and habitat types that will occur in response to changing ocean conditions related to global climate change.

In Section 3, General Management, the HC recommends that the Council consider incorporating a statement about access to information needed for management, including information on fishing effort as it relates to habitat. For example, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council has a mandatory data collection system related to their individual quota programs. The development of the TIQ program offers the opportunity to enhance and expand our data collection activities and establish criteria for making such information available for research and management. Enhancing our data collection activities will improve our ability to conserve habitat.

If the Council moves forward with a TIQ program, the HC would like to ensure that it is one where fishermen have a stake in decreasing impacts on groundfish habitat, reducing bycatch, and sustaining a healthy ecosystem.