

HABITAT AREAS OF PARTICULAR CONCERN (HAPC) PROPOSAL

Date: January 9, 2004

Name of Proposer: Marine Conservation Alliance

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Please check applicable box (es): <input type="checkbox"/> GOA Groundfish FMP <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BSAI Groundfish FMP <input type="checkbox"/> Scallop FMP <input type="checkbox"/> BSAI Crab FMP

Title of Proposal. South Amlia/Atka coral and rockfish HAPC in the eastern Aleutian Islands

HAPC Site Location. The proposed HAPC site is south of Amlia and Atka Islands, extending to 174 degrees 30 minutes West Longitude. The proposed HAPC site is delineated in light red on NOAA chart 16480 in Figure P1-1.

Habitat Type and Species Information. This proposed HAPC was identified by trawl skippers who possess a wealth of experience and knowledge of the bathymetry of the Aleutian Islands (AI). These captains believe the proposed site has extensive high-relief hard coral stands and is good rockfish habitat. Although trawling has occurred around the margins, the core of this area has not been extensively trawled, at least since domestic fishing commenced. Figure P1-2, taken from the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Alternative 5b analysis, indicates a portion of the proposed site (shaded in blue) has been trawled in recent years. Sections of the proposed area on the western and eastern margins are not outlined in blue this indicating that they would have been closed under Alternative 5b.

Overall, we believe only a small amount of trawl catch has actually come from the delineated area, and catches in adjacent areas, which are not geographically distinct under Alternative 5b's use of 5 x 5 kilometer blocks, are the main reason the actual delineated area is listed as open (blue). Additionally, the eastern portion of the proposed site would have been part of the "closed" area, but this did not result from the area being untrawled. Undoubtedly, this outcome was based on extrapolated coral bycatch calculations done for EFH EIS Alternative 5b analysis (see note, Figure P1-2). Data suggest this area has high abundance of rockfish according to the historical Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) study of Fritz, *et al.* (Figure P1-3), where the highest 25% of rockfish CPUEs are plotted for trawl and longline rockfish hauls. Additionally, rockfish catch data prepared by NMFS for Oceana's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request suggest the proposed HAPC has an abundance of rockfish, to the extent it has been fished in the 1990-2002 period (Figure P1-4). While there are no survey data to establish that the area has abundant stands of hard corals, knowledgeable fishermen who have fished around the margins of this area believe the area likely has significant stands of hard corals. Some fishermen have stated that they can apparently identify high-relief coral habitat in portions of the western extension by "down sounders" alone although not everyone agrees that corals can be seen in this manner.

Summary Statement of the Proposal. An area south of Atka and Amlia Islands extending west to 174 degrees, 30 minutes West Longitude as delineated in Figure P1-1 is proposed for HAPC designation based on information from captains that the area likely contains high-relief hard coral stands and rockfish habitat. A set of steps is proposed to map the area and develop restrictions on bottom trawling while preserving fishing opportunities in this area, to the extent practicable, once the geographic extent of any vulnerable high-relief hard coral areas that are rockfish habitat have been established. Any fishing restrictions should incorporate an experimental design to increase understanding of how rockfish use habitat and how fishing affects the productivity of hard coral habitat.

Statement of Purpose and Need. The purpose of this proposal is to address the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's (NPFMC) HAPC priority of identifying high-relief hard coral stands that are habitat for rockfish. Trawlers with extensive experience in the Aleutian Islands believe this area meets the NPFMC's HAPC priority. The purpose of the proposal is to 1) designate the area as HAPC in accordance with the Council's priorities; 2) prioritize mapping via submersible exploration and rockfish abundance evaluations to identify the exact locations of high-relief hard coral stands within the area designated; and 3) develop appropriate restrictions on bottom trawling to protect high-relief hard coral rockfish areas within the AI HAPC sites while preserving fishing opportunities to the extent practicable, while at the same time designing and conducting applied research to increase understanding of how rockfish use habitat and how fishing affects the productivity of that habitat.

Objectives of the Proposal. The objective of this proposal is to address the NPFMC's HAPC priority. The proposed area fits the NPFMC's 2003-04 HAPC priority based on available data because it is relatively unfished (Figure P1-2), and based on trawl catches of rockfish before 1990 and in recent years, appears to have an abundance of rockfish and good habitat for rockfish and other demersal managed species (Figures P1-3 and P1-4). Once the area is mapped to demonstrate concentrations of hard corals and rockfish occur within sites and establish the level of existing fishing and non-fishing effects within these sites, the sites would lend themselves well to zoning for fishing and control areas to evaluate the effects of fishing as well as habitat associations of rockfish with fished and un-fished habitat.

Describe How the Proposal Addresses the each of the 4 HAPC Considerations (50CFR 600.815):

The **IMPORTANCE** of the ecological function provided by the habitat.

The extent to which the habitat is **SENSITIVE** to human-induced degradation. Research has shown fishing can modify high-relief coral habitat but the implications of such modifications as they occur from the fishing gears used in Alaska and the low intensity of fishing effort as it occurs off Alaska are not known.

Whether, and to what extent, the activity **STRESSES** the habitat type. The sites in this proposal meet the 2003 HAPC priority it is largely untrawled and the bottom appears suitable for concentrations of hard corals and rockfish abundance. Some groundfish longline and pot fishing likely occurs within these sites, but the extent of this is not known at this time.

The **RARITY** of the habitat type. (*Mandatory requirement*). Fishermen believe this site is likely unique because the western portion has very high-relief bathymetry and fishing around the margins of that area has occasionally encountered large hard corals. Additionally, the area is believed to have an abundance of adult and juvenile rockfish.

Describe any Proposed Solutions to Achieve These Objectives. The site should be prioritized for submersible mapping so any appropriate restrictions on bottom trawling can be developed to protect the high-relief coral habitat that may occur within these designated HAPC sites. Once the area is mapped to establish existence of high-relief hard coral abundance areas used by rockfish, and once the level of existing fishing and non-fishing effects on the area are observed and categorized, these areas should be zoned to protect coral/rockfish habitat from bottom trawling while preserving fishing opportunities to the extent practicable. Protection measures should incorporate experimental designs to increase our understanding of how rockfish use hard coral habitat and how fishing affects the productivity of that habitat. This area is large and encompasses varied habitat, so might lend itself well to studies of fishing

and non-fishing areas within the HAPC, so as to increase understanding of how fishing affects the productivity of managed species.

Describe any Proposed Management Measures for the HAPC. 1. Designation of HAPC, meeting NPFMC's 2003 priority. 2. Prioritization for submersible mapping and rockfish abundance evaluation within HAPC sites. 3. Eventual development of appropriate restrictions on bottom trawling to protect high-relief hard coral and rockfish areas within these proposed sites, while preserving fishing opportunities to the extent practicable. 4. Development of controlled research to learn more about how rockfish and other managed demersal species associate with and use habitat, how fishing affects that use and productivity, how different levels of fishing intensity and gear effects influence productivity of high-relief hard coral habitats.

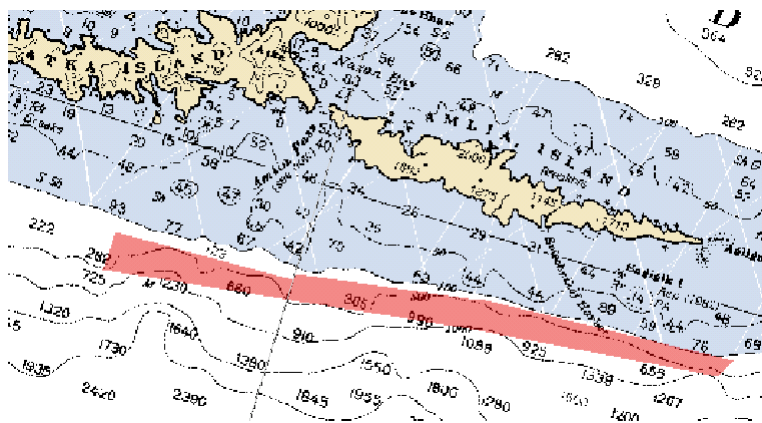
Identify any Expected Benefits to Habitat or FMP species. This area may be an important hard coral abundance area with rockfish habitat and, although portions of it have been trawled, the portions with the most varied bathymetry likely have not been trawled extensively. If the steps outlined in this proposal are implemented, rockfish and other Fishery Management Plan (FMP) species could benefit with only minimal impacts on groundfish trawlers and communities dependent on trawling.

Identify Fishery, Stakeholders, and/or Communities, which may Benefit from the Proposed HAPC. Proposed sites may be important hard coral abundance areas with excellent rockfish habitat that has not received much trawl effort in recent years. If the steps outlined in this proposal (mapping, zoning of trawling within HAPC, research on habitat use, and how fishing affects productivity) are implemented, rockfish and other FMP species could benefit with only small direct impacts on trawl fishermen and communities that depend on trawling. The portion of this proposed HAPC that falls within the Seguam Foraging area (a sea lion protection zone) is presently closed to fishing for pollock, cod, and Atka mackerel. The only known trawl activity that might be affected by future management measures in that area is the fishery for Pacific Ocean Perch. Impacts on fixed gear fisheries are not known. Data (such as EFH EIS 5b analysis) are not available to evaluate effects on fixed gear fisheries if restrictions developed for these were eventually applied to fixed gear fisheries.

Support Data or Information Sources. NOAA chart 16480; knowledge and information volunteered at November and December 2003 meetings by trawl captains who target cod, Atka mackerel, and rockfish in the Aleutian Islands, Portions of NMFS' analysis of AI proposal 5b in 2003 EFH EIS; Fritz, *et al.*'s CPUE study, 1998 (NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-AFSC-88); rockfish catch data prepared by NMFS for Oceana (2003 FOIA).

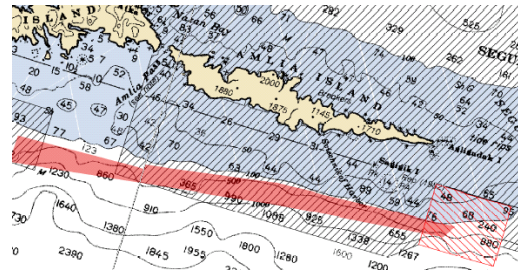
Figures P1-P4 for south Amlia- Atka proposed HAPC

Figure P1-1: South Amlia/Atka proposed HAPC



Proposed HAPC area
overlaid on NOAA chart
16480

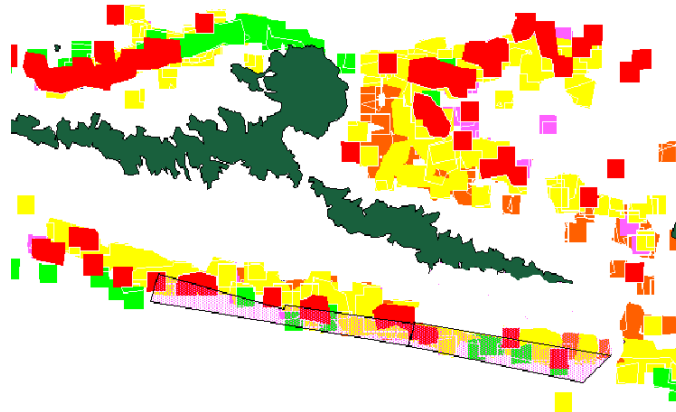
Figure P1-2: Use of EFH Alt. 5b open area analysis to evaluate if proposed South Amlia/Atka HAPC is a core fishing area.



Explanation: Areas indicated in black marks were “open areas” in the 5b analysis because substantial trawling occurred during 1990-2001. Note also that eastern portion of proposed area (in red hash marks) is a fished area but would have been omitted from the set of “open areas” in 5b due to coral bycatch rates (in particular, we think due to one tow with a high extrapolated coral bycatch)

Figure P1-3: Highest quartile rockfish CPUE data from Fritz et al. CPUE study

- Rougheye - trawl
- Shortraker - longline
- Shortraker - trawl
- Rougheye - longline
- Northern rockfish - trawl
- POP - trawl
- HAPC sites



South Amlia Atka proposed HAPC

