

# HABITAT AREAS OF PARTICULAR CONCERN (HAPC) PROPOSAL

Date: 1/10/04

Name of Proposer: Alaska Draggers Association,  
Alaska Groundfish Data Bank, & Groundfish Forum

Affiliation: Trawl associations with member companies  
that fish the GOA

Address: ADA P.O. Box 9 Kodiak, AK 99615  
AGDB P.O. Box 788 Kodiak, AK 99615  
GFF 4241 21<sup>st</sup> Ave West, Suite 200 Seattle, WA 98199

Please check applicable box: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOA Groundfish FMP <input type="checkbox"/> BSAI Groundfish FMP <input type="checkbox"/> Scallop FMP <input type="checkbox"/> BSAI Crab FMP
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**Title of Proposal.** Middleton Island rockfish HAPC in the West Yakutat regulatory area of the Gulf of Alaska

**HAPC Site Location.** The proposed HAPC site is south of Middleton Island. The proposed HAPC site is delineated in light red on NOAA chart 500 in Figure P1-3 and is the most Easterly red block. This area is identical to one of the proposed closure areas that were delineated in alternative 5a for the Essential Fish Habitat EIS.

**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 Gulf of Alaska. These captains believe the proposed site is good rockfish habitat. This HAPC site is located on the GOA slope area, one of the GOA bottom type features considered important for rockfish. Bottom trawling has occurred in this area but not extensively, at least since domestic fishing commenced. GOA Figure P3-2 data suggest that this area has high abundance of rockfish according to historical Fritz et al. CPUE study 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 request also suggest that the proposed HAPC site has an abundance of rockfish to the extent that it has been fished in the 1990-2002 period (GOA Figure P3-3). We know of no information to demonstrate whether high-relief hard coral stands exist at this proposed site, however, the relatively rocky and rough bottom found at this site makes it a relatively good candidate for finding hard corals and rockfish habitat.

## Summary Statement of the Proposal.

An area is south of Middleton Island as delineated in Figure P1-3. The HAPC designation is proposed based on information from trawl captains that the area is likely rockfish habitat and relatively unfished. A set of steps is proposed to map the area and develop restrictions on bottom trawling while preserving fishing opportunities in this area once the geographic extent of rockfish habitat and the presence of high-relief hard coral stands has been established. Any fishing restrictions should incorporate an experimental design to increase our understanding of how rockfish use habitat and how fishing affects their productivity.

## Statement of Purpose and Need.

The purpose of this proposal is to address the NPFMC's HAPC priority. The Council is interested in proposals identifying habitat for rockfish and high relief hard coral stands in areas that are relatively unfished. Trawlers with extensive experience in the GOA believe this area meets the NPFMC's HAPC priority. The purpose of the proposal is to designate the area as HAPC, prioritize submersible mapping efforts to identify whether high-relief hard coral stands exist, and evaluate the benthic features in this section of the GOA slope. Appropriate fishing restrictions on bottom trawling to protect rockfish habitat within the area while allowing fishing to continue where appropriate, and lastly to design and conduct

applied research to increase our 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 HAPC site is an area south of Middleton Island. The area fits the NPFMC’s 2003-04 HAPC priority based on available data because it is relatively unfished and based on trawl catches of rockfish before 1990 and in recent years, the area appears to have an abundance of rockfish and good habitat for rockfish and other demersal managed species (GOA Figures P3-2 and P3-3). Once the sites are mapped to establish where the concentrations of hard corals and rockfish occur within sites and the level of existing fishing and non-fishing effects within these sites, the sites would lend itself 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 that fishing can modify bottom substrate 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 site in this proposal meets the 2003 HAPC priority. It is largely untrawled and the bottom appears to be 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 slope area of the GOA was determined to have the highest fishing intensity of any bottom feature in the GOA. It is unknown how fishing as it occurs off Alaska affects the productivity of FMP species. Designating a GOA slope area that is relatively unfished that is thought to have an abundance of adult rockfish would allow experimentation regarding these issues.

The **RARITY** of the habitat type. The EFH EIS analysis concluded that GOA slope is a relatively heavily fished feature in the GOA. The proposed HAPC site is thus relatively rare as it is relatively unfished by trawls despite the fact that data suggest that it has concentrations of rockfish. Additionally, the trawl industry believes this area has relatively rocky and high- relief bathymetry. Some scientists believe hard corals can be abundant in areas with these characteristics.

**Describe any Proposed Solutions to Achieve These Objectives.**

The site should be prioritized for submersible mapping so that appropriate restrictions on bottom trawling can be developed to protect the high-relief hard coral habitat (if any) that may occur within this designated HAPC site. Once the site is mapped to establish habitat type and 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 practical. Protection measures should incorporate experimental designs to increase our understanding of how rockfish use hard coral habitat and other habitats and how fishing affects the productivity of that habitat.

**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. 3. Eventual development of restrictions on bottom trawling to protect high-relief hard coral and rockfish areas within these proposed sites while preserving fishing opportunities to the extent practical. 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 habitats.

**Identify any Expected Benefits to Habitat or FMP species.**

This site may be important rockfish habitat that may meet the North Pacific Council's HAPC priority. If the steps outlined in this proposal are implemented, we believe that rockfish and other FMP species could benefit with only minimal impacts on groundfish bottom trawlers and communities dependent on trawling.

**Identify Fishery, Stakeholders, and/or Communities, which may Benefit from the Proposed HAPC.**

Proposed sites may be 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, we believe that rockfish and other FMP species could benefit with only small direct impacts on bottom trawl fishermen and communities that depend on trawling.

**Support Data or Information Sources**

*(List data sources, information resource, literature, and any traditional knowledge for the proposal.)*

NOAA chart 500; knowledge and information volunteered by trawl captains who target rockfish and deep flatfish in the GOA at stakeholder meetings in 2001/2002 for the development of EFH alternatives; Fritz et al. CPUE study 1998 (NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-AFSC-88); rockfish catch data prepared by NMFS for Oceana (2003 FOIA).

Figure P1-P3: Proposed GOA HAPC sites displayed on NOAA chart 500

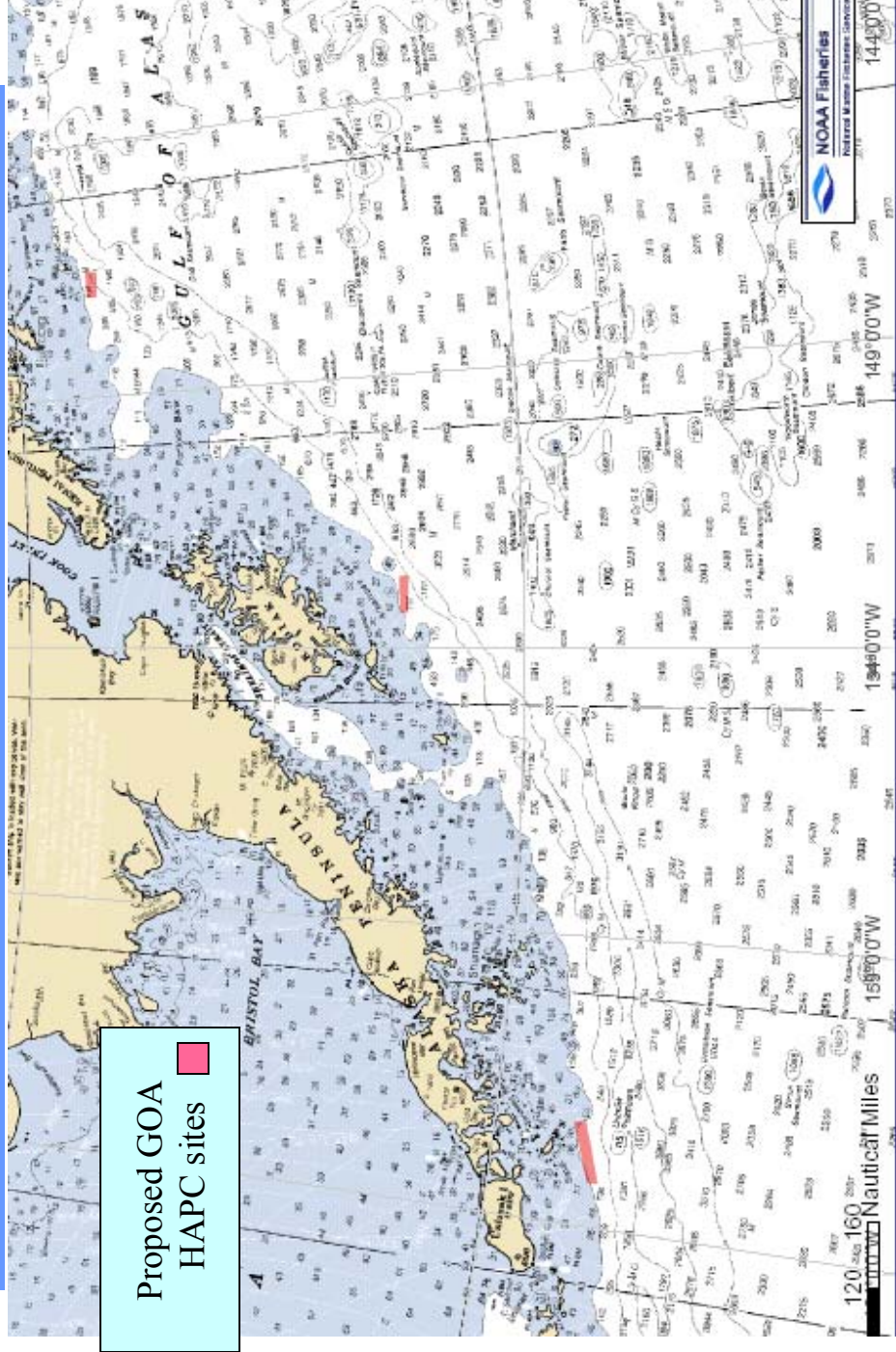


Figure GOA P1-2 Highest quartile rockfish CPUUE data from Fritz et al. CPUUE study for Sanak Island HAPC site

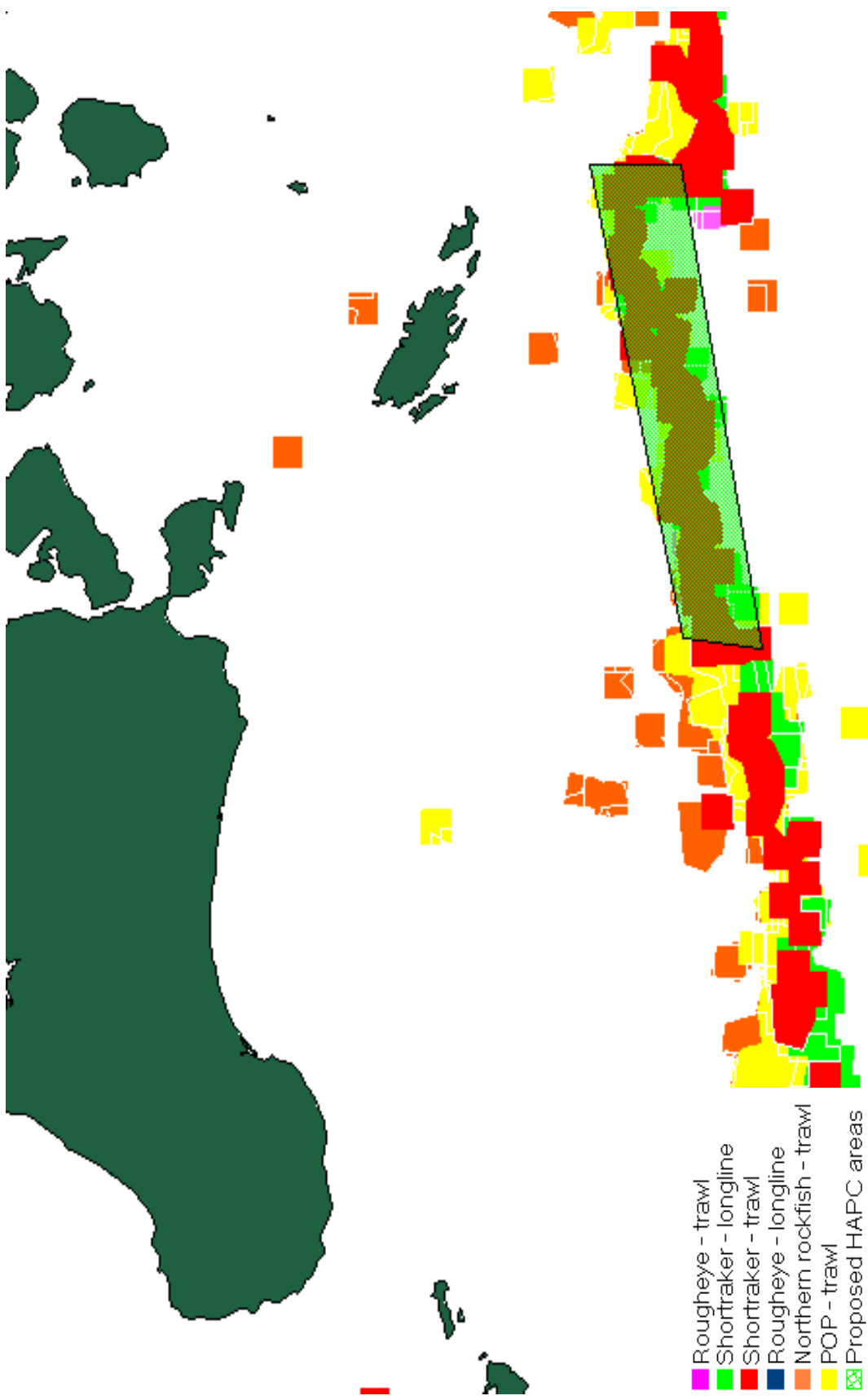


Figure P1-3: Rockfish catch rates for Sanak Island HAPC site (annual average 1990-2002 for 10x 10 kilometer blocks) based on Oceana's FOIA request data

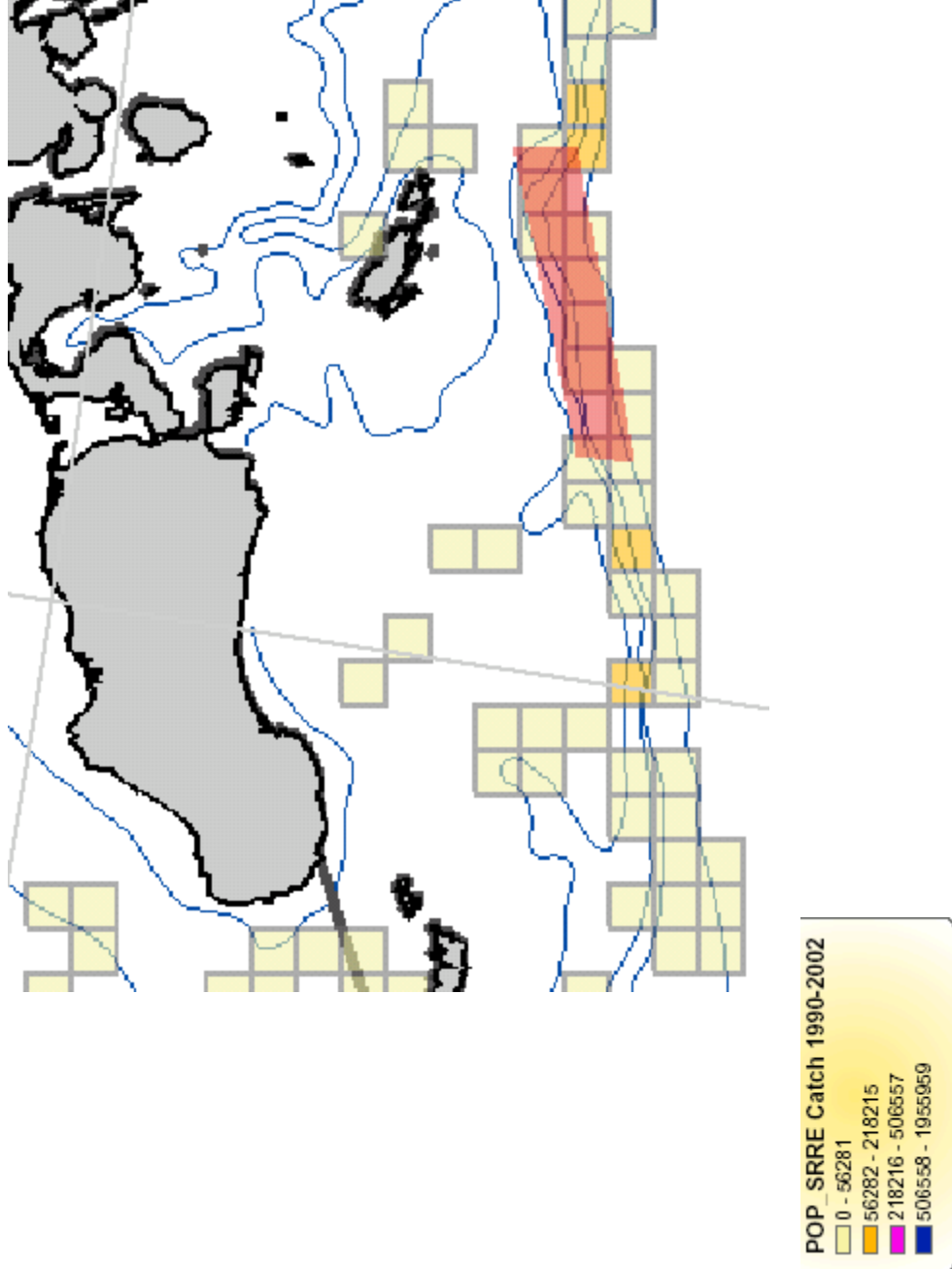


Figure GOA P2-2 Highest quartile rockfish CPUE data from Fritz et al. CPUE study for Albatross HAPC site

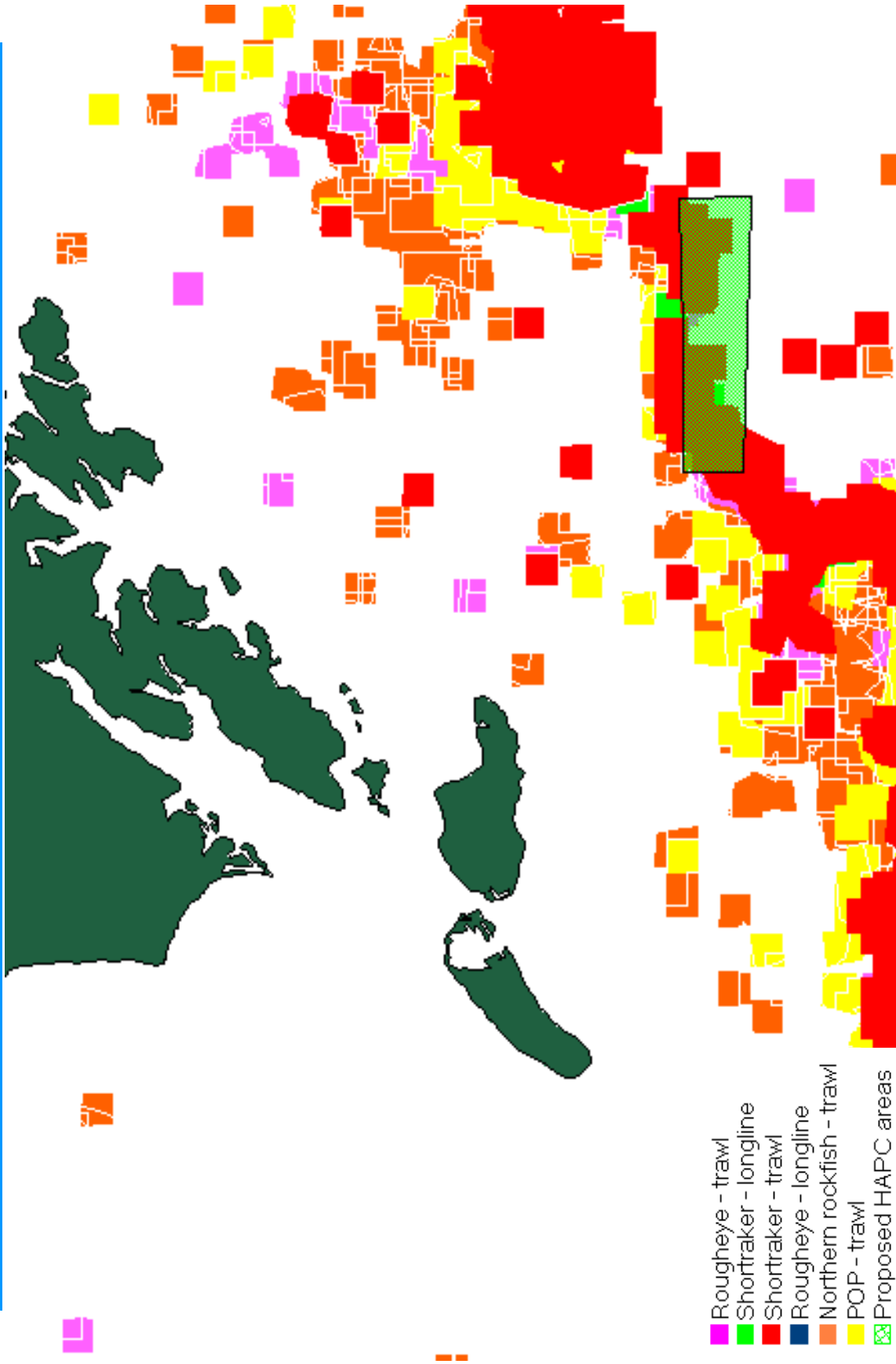


Figure P2-3: Rockfish catch rates for Albatross HAPC site (annual average 1990-2002 for 10x 10 kilometer blocks) based on Oceana's FOIA request data

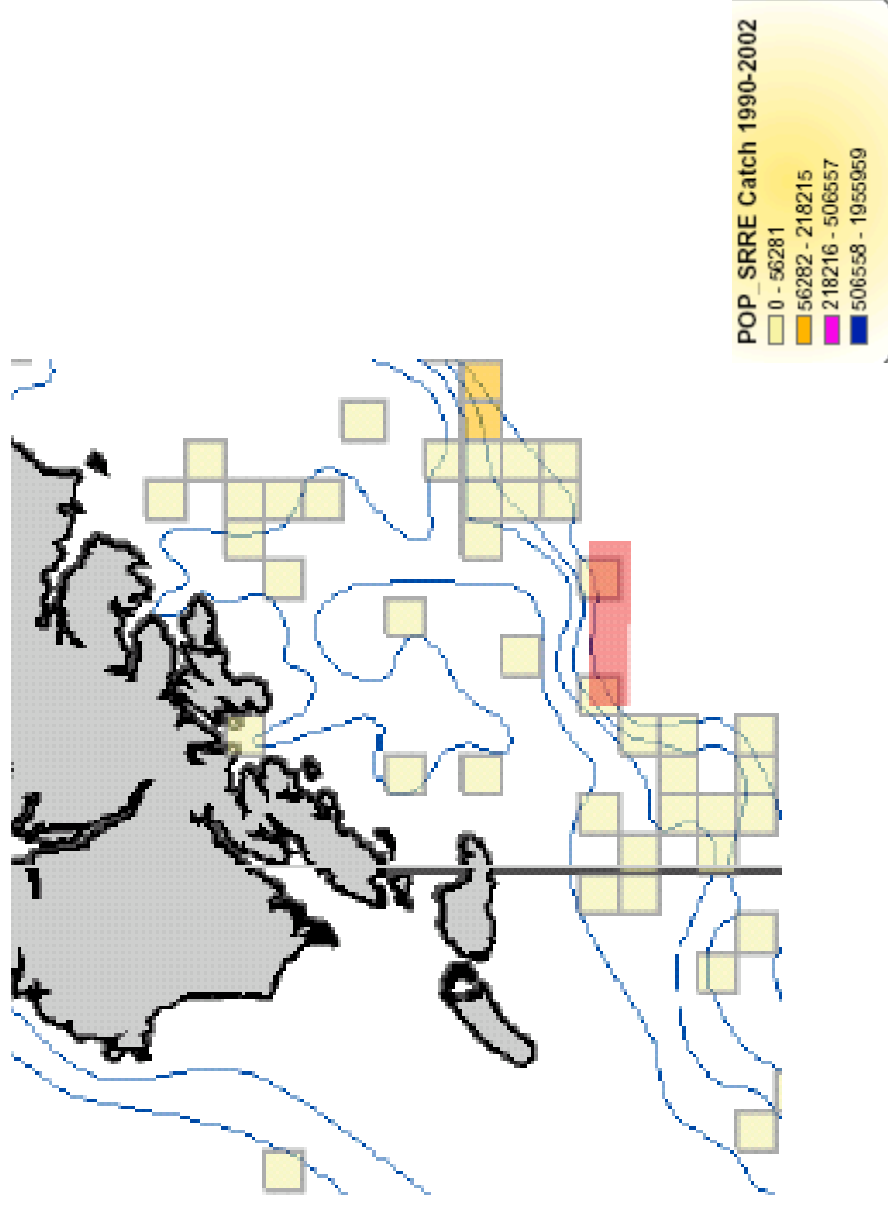




Figure GOA P3-2 Highest quartile rockfish CPUUE data from Fritz et al. CPUUE study for Middleton Island HAPC site

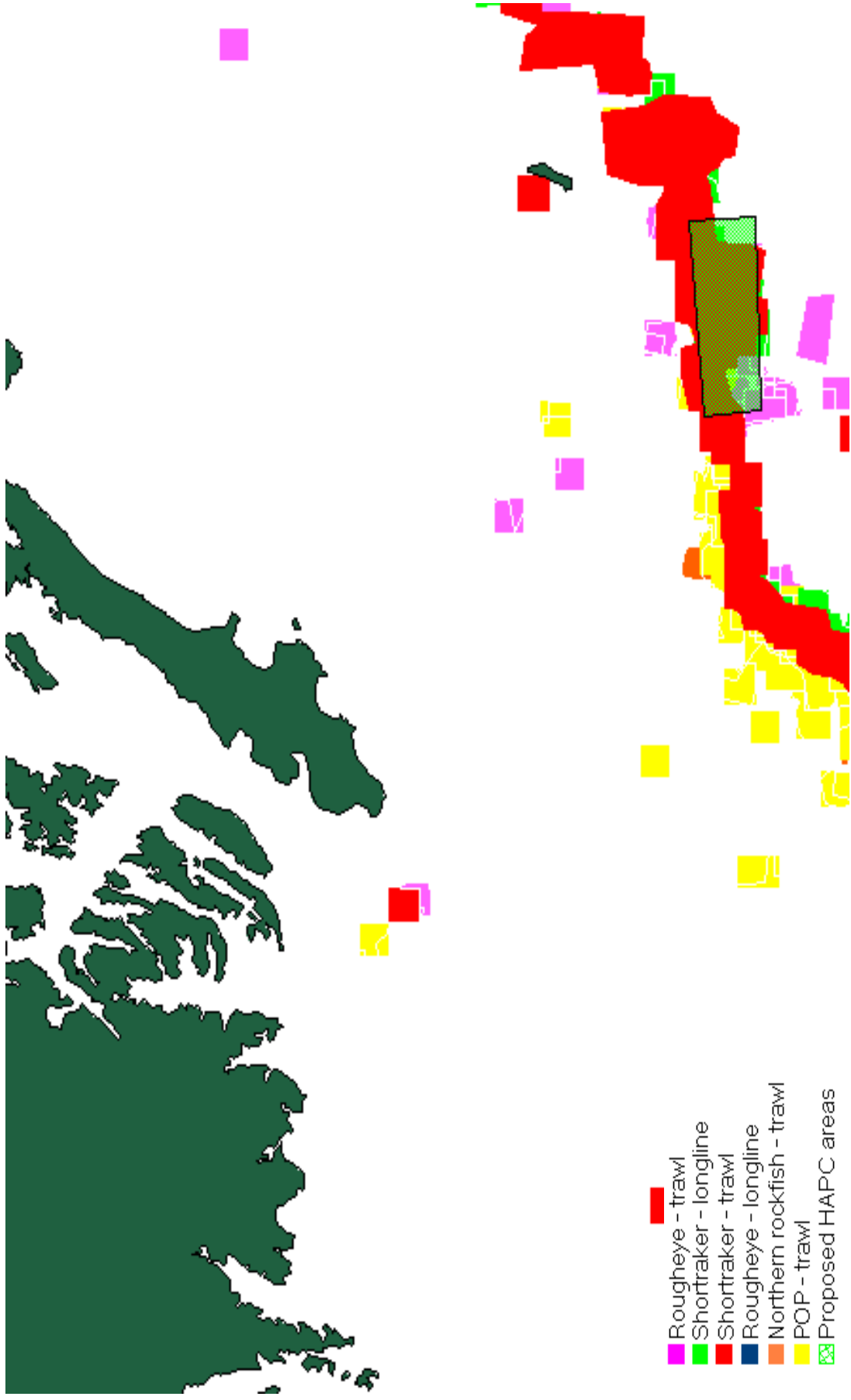


Figure P3-3: Rockfish catch rates for Middleton Island HAPC site (annual average 1990-2002 for 10x 10 kilometer blocks) based on Oceana's FOIA request data

