

**Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee
Cold Water Corals (CWC) Report
March 22, 2005**

The Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC) approved on March 22, 2005 via e-mail, the Cold Water Corals Working Group-report as submitted below and based on the oral report submitted to MAFAC on January 14, 2005.

CWC Working Group Members:

Tom Billy

Chris Dorsett

Bob Fletcher

John Forster

Ricky Grigg

Gordon Helm

Tom Hourigan

Alvin Osterbeck

Ralph Rayburn

Mike Sissenwine, Chief Science Advisory, NOAA Fisheries (portion of discussion)

SUMMARY DISCUSSION:

Discussion began with a focus on the earlier presentation by Mike Sissenwine, specifically slides 24-26 of his PowerPoint.

Topic #1 – “Research Priorities”

1. Discussion on research targets and priorities.

- Considered mapping of known or suspected habitats with high concentrations of cold-water coral communities was seen as a first priority. This is consistent with the Ocean Commission Report Chapter 21 and the first item of the Oceana Petition. A sub-priority in this area is recommended to be areas of known exploitation or damage.
- Considered dropping the use of “commercially” from the term “commercially-exploited species” and leave only “exploited species.”
- Considered adding the understanding of keystone and exploited targeted species as well as the deepwater corals’ contribution to species diversity.
- Considered addition of interaction between mobile and sessile species. Felt this was included in the “Understanding of ecological function ...” target item.

- Considered need for a comprehensive review of previous research (past 200 years) to be undertaken and vigorously incorporated into current documents and activities on this issue.
- 2. Priorities are appropriate with consideration of the comments noted above.**
- Issues also addressed on need for financial resources to support cold water coral research.

Topic #2 – Policy and Management

3. Discussed the use of terms protection v. conservation. Discussion centered on whether “protection” means an absolute abstention of activity.

- Primary reasons for protection. Some feeling that there may be insufficient information to make a distinction for the reasons, but based on input received it appears appropriate to protect these resources as more information is assembled on this issue.
- Change charismatic to “intrinsic value” as possible reason for protection.

4. Discussed the need for precaution and when it should be applied.

- Questioned how to minimize impact to coral as an inclusive or an exclusive protection initiative. – i.e. – restrictions on expansion in bottom tending gear areas until data indicates no coral is present or allow expansion into new areas and take action when coral is found.
- Considered the use of experimental fishing permits with conditions (e.g. requiring ROVs, observers, side scan sonar, etc.) to manage expansion of bottom tending gear into areas previously un-fished. In areas of known cold-water corals, considered establishing conditions on activities that will protect these assemblages.

5. Discussion of potential legislation initiatives.

- Look at legislative options for highlighting cold-water corals.
- Consider stand alone legislation, or an appropriate vehicle scheduled for reauthorization, that would:
 - Focus attention on research and national policy on cold-water corals, but not to prescribe management measures for the protection of cold-water corals,
 - Recognize the importance of cold-water corals in an ecosystem approach to management,
 - Recognize that the management of cold-water corals should be done under a fishery management regime,
 - Grant authority for NOAA Fisheries to exercise an international leadership role on cold-water corals, and

- Review the MS-FCMA to ensure that adequate protection for cold-water corals may be exercised under that statute.

Time expired before specific management tools could be discussed: Suggestion that work group discussion and closure on issues could be accomplished before the next meeting at an appropriate venue such as the upcoming Managing our Nations Fisheries II.

ADVISORY RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following advisory recommendations are forwarded for consideration:

1. Research area recommendations:

- a. Give first priority to mapping of known or suspected habitats of high concentrations of cold-water coral communities with a sub-priority being areas of known exploitation or damage.
- b. Drop the use of “commercially” from the term “commercially-exploited species” and leave only “exploited species.”
- c. Research the keystone and exploited targeted species as well as the cold-water corals to determine their contribution to species diversity.
- d. Conduct a comprehensive review of previous research (past 200 years) and incorporate, as appropriate, into current documents and activities on this issue.
- e. With the addition of items noted in a – d, research priorities given for cold-water corals were accepted.
- f. Assess the financial value of commercial fisheries that use bottom-tending gear in areas of suspected deep-water corals.

2. Policy and management:

- a. Based on input received it appears appropriate to protect the cold-water coral resources while more information is assembled on them.
- b. Change one reason for protection from “charismatic” to “intrinsic value.”
- c. Consider the use of experimental fishing permits with conditions (e.g. requiring ROVs, observers, side scan sonar, etc.) to manage expansion of bottom tending gear into areas previously un-fished.
- d. In areas of known cold-water corals, establish conditions on activities that will protect these assemblages.
- e. Addition legislation:
 - i. Consider stand alone legislation, or an appropriate vehicle scheduled for reauthorization, that would:
 - a) Focus attention on research and national policy for cold-water corals, and after a full and informed debate, including the review conducted under e(ii), determine whether or not to prescribe management measures for the protection of cold-water corals;
 - b) Recognize the importance of cold-water corals in an ecosystem approach to management.

- c) While recognizing that some cold water corals are managed under other authorities, such as the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, in general the management of cold-water corals should be incorporated into the fisheries management regime.
 - d) Grant authority for NOAA Fisheries to exercise an international leadership role on cold-water corals.
 - ii. Review the MS-FCMA to ensure that adequate protection for cold-water corals may be exercised under that statute.
- 3. **Additional consideration:** Since time expired before discussion was completed, suggested that work group discussion and closure on issues be accomplished before the next meeting at an appropriate venue such as the upcoming Managing our Nation's Fisheries II conference.

Future Action: This is an interim final draft to be further discussed at the next full committee meeting.