



MID-ATLANTIC
FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

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PRESS CONTACT: Kathy Collins
(302) 674-2331 (ext. 253)

Mid-Atlantic Council Votes to Initiate Amendment for Deep-Sea Coral Management

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council voted to develop a plan amendment to protect deep-sea corals at their meeting in Duck, NC last week. This is the first time the Council has ever initiated an action specifically to protect corals in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Deep-sea corals provide important habitat for many commercially and recreationally important fisheries in the Mid-Atlantic. While Mid-Atlantic deep-sea coral species do not build reefs, some types are structurally complex and require hard substrates for attachment. These corals, which are important habitat areas, are thought to be particularly vulnerable to physical damage because of their slow growth rates.

“This decision demonstrates the Council’s commitment to manage and protect not only Mid-Atlantic fisheries but also the habitats that those fish rely on,” said Council Chairman Rick Robins. “Our understanding of the location and ecological significance of deep-sea corals has improved in recent years and will benefit from upcoming benthic survey work in the Mid-Atlantic region. This deep-sea coral amendment will put the Council in a position to manage these sensitive components of the marine ecosystem.”

The amendment would include provisions for developing management measures to protect areas with high densities of deep-sea corals. These areas were identified in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions during the development of the New England Fishery Management Council’s Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Amendment. The amendment was initiated in 2005 to develop a comprehensive plan that will minimize adverse effects of fishing on deep-sea corals and other areas of EFH.

To date, efforts to identify and protect deep-sea coral areas have involved collaboration between the Mid-Atlantic and New England Councils. In order to preserve the continuity of the process, the Council also voted last week to develop a memorandum of understanding between the Mid-Atlantic, New England, and South Atlantic Councils. This will allow the councils to coordinate broad-scale deep-sea coral management measures.

A more detailed summary of the meeting can be found online at:
http://mafmc.org/press/2012/April_2012_Council_Report.pdf