



New England Fishery Management Council

Press Backgrounder

Special Habitat Designation Approved For Juvenile Cod

Newburyport, MA

September 26, 2007

Based on concerns over the status of cod stocks in the Northeast, the New England Fishery Management Council took action last week to designate a 4,500 square nautical mile swath of ocean as a Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) for juvenile cod. At its fall meeting in Plymouth, MA a clear majority of Council members voted to approve the area which is located east and south of Cape Cod and Nantucket and encompasses a fishing hot spot known as the Great South Channel.

Commenting on the potential importance of the decision, Council Habitat Committee Chairman Sally McGee said, "Given that the Council designated two other HAPCs for juvenile cod in June, the Great South Channel HAPC is key to taking a comprehensive approach in allowing protection where and when necessary for all of the main juvenile cod grounds in the Northeast." An HAPC established for juvenile cod on northern edge of Georges Bank in 1998 will remain in place.

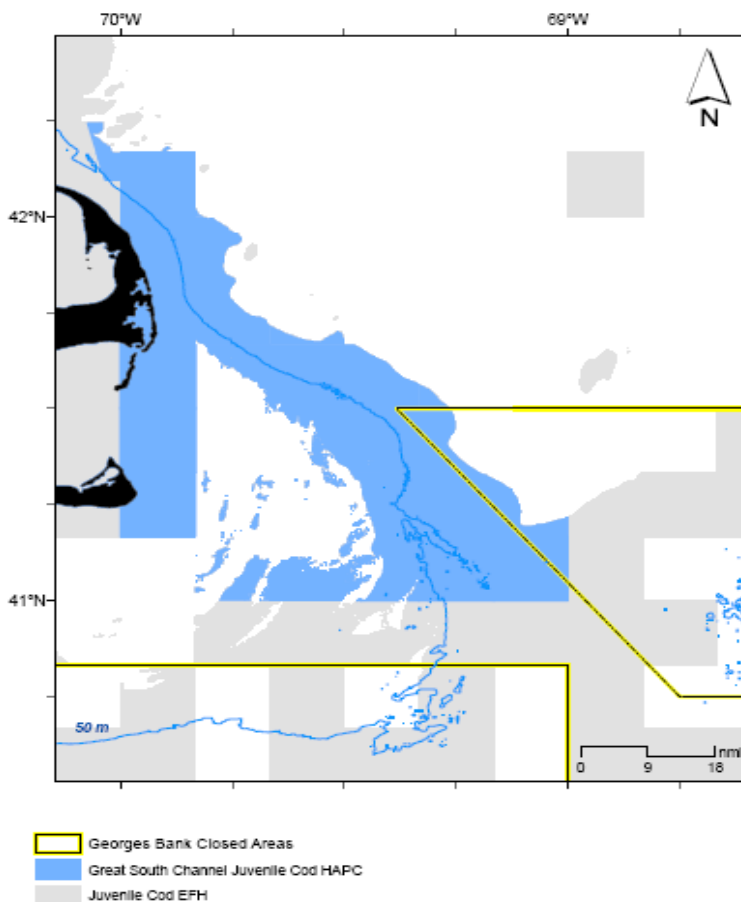
While peer-reviewed stock assessments indicate that cod populations are trending upward, the pace of stock rebuilding has been slow for nearly a decade, principally due to poor recruitment (a measure of young fish that survive long enough to be classified by size and age). As it waits for a report on cod and other important species not due out until August or September 2008, the Council felt strongly enough about the issue that it encouraged and solicited HAPC proposals focusing on juvenile cod essential fish habitat. Habitat Areas of Particular Concern allow a fishery Council to highlight specific habitat areas with extremely important ecological functions and/or that may be sensitive to disturbance from fishing or other human activities.

But the HAPC designation alone does not limit fishing or restrict other activities that could have a negative impact on the productivity of fish stocks. If they are determined to be necessary, consideration of measures to minimize the impacts of fishing on essential fish habitat within any of the HAPCs or portions of the areas will be done on a case-by-case basis, depending on the sensitivity of the habitat as well as the level and nature of the activities. As required for all Council actions, consideration will be given to the social and economic impacts of any restrictions. Following designations, any rules that could affect fishing will be developed over the next 18 months and will be the subject of public hearings.

Because the Council also is bound by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to use the best available science to support its management decisions, it used both scientific data and analyses provided by its Habitat Plan Development Team. The group includes prominent scientists from a number of New England universities and institutions, as well as staff ecologists and scientists from several state and federal agencies, including NOAA Fisheries' science centers in Woods Hole, MA and Sandy Hook, NJ.

During its decision-making process, the 18 voting Council members used the distribution of juvenile cod catches obtained from fish monitoring surveys conducted over the most recent 25-year period to define a sub-set of the entire area in which juvenile cod are most abundant. Video of habitat types provided by the School of Marine Science and Technology at UMASS, Dartmouth as well as U.S. Geological Survey sediment samples contributed to refining the boundaries of the HAPC by confirming the location of important hard bottom substrates for young-of-the-year cod as well as the presence of sandy gravel bottom in which older juvenile cod aggregate.

Juvenile Cod Habitat Area of Particular Concern



A memorandum to the Habitat/MPA/Ecosystems Committee dated 9/30/06 discusses the justification for designating the Great South Channel HAPC. It can be found at <http://www.nefmc.org/habitat/index.html> and takes a few moments to download.

For more information about the New England Fishery Management Council go to: www.nefmc.org.

Council Contacts:

Patricia Fiorelli, Public Affairs Officer
Christopher Kellogg, Deputy Director
Paul Howard, Executive Director
John Pappalardo, Council Chairman

#