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Mid-Atlantic Council Names Deep Sea Coral Protection Area in Honor of Senator Frank Lautenberg

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council has voted to name a new deep sea coral protection area in honor of the late Senator Frank Lautenberg, a five-term United States senator from New Jersey who was responsible for several important pieces of ocean conservation legislation. The proposed *Frank R. Lautenberg Deep Sea Coral Protection Area* encompasses more than 38,000 square miles of federal waters off the Mid-Atlantic coast.

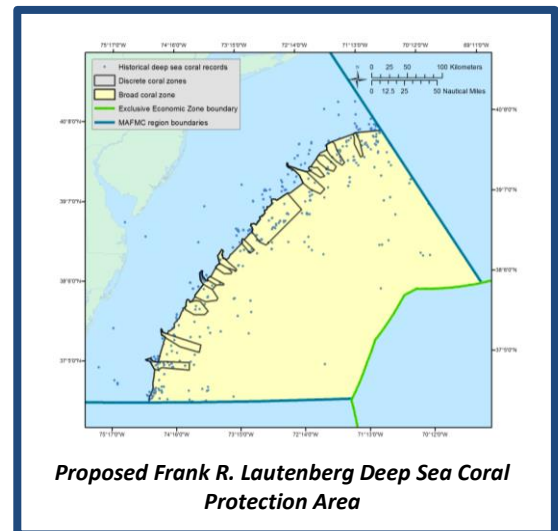
Senator Lautenberg was a champion for ocean stewardship and worked with particular determination to establish protections for deep sea coral ecosystems. He authored several provisions included in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act of 2006, including a discretionary provision which gave regional fishery management councils the authority to protect coral habitat areas from fishing gear.

Last year the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council became the first of the U.S. councils to use this authority when it approved an amendment to establish a deep sea coral protection area off the Mid-Atlantic coast. The Council's Deep Sea Corals Amendment, which is pending review by the Secretary of Commerce, includes measures to restrict bottom-tending fishing gear such as trawls, dredges, bottom longlines, and traps within the bounds of the protection area.

“Senator Lautenberg was steadfast in his advocacy for the protection of deep sea corals in the marine environment,” said Rick Robins, Council Chairman. “Naming this deep sea coral protection area provides the Council with a rare opportunity to honor and memorialize Senator Lautenberg’s legislative leadership in this important area of marine science and conservation.”

Although he advocated for stronger measures to protect fragile deep sea habitats, Senator Lautenberg emphasized the importance of balancing conservation objectives with the needs of the fishing industry: “I do not want to prevent fishermen from trawling. There are many areas where it is appropriate, but surely we can set aside some of the most fragile coral habitats and protect them from destruction.”

The Council strived to achieve this balance by developing the amendment through a collaborative process involving participation from a wide range of stakeholders. The specific boundaries of the deep sea coral protection area were refined during a workshop attended by fishermen, advisory panel members, scientists, and environmental advocates, resulting in a broad consensus.



In 2011, remarking on the impact of the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act, Senator Lautenberg said: “I am proud that the law included my language to safeguard deep sea corals—which are sometimes known as the ‘rainforests of the ocean’ because of the diversity of species that call them home. We know that we must ensure the sustainability of fisheries—not just for the health of our oceans, but for the continued success of the U.S. fishing industry.”

Senator Lautenberg passed away in 2013 at the age of 89 as the Senate’s oldest member and last surviving veteran of World War II.