

Dear Rick,

I'm writing to ask the MAFMC to support the recommendation of the FMAT to exempt the red crab fishery from any prohibitions on fishing in the discrete zones that are under consideration in Amendment 16 to the Squid, Mackerel and Butterfish Fishery Management Plan. After more than 40 years of red crab fishing along the same narrow strip of bottom along the outer edge of the Continental Shelf, there is no evidence of any damage to coral ecosystems in the areas that we have fished.

As you know, the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires that any fishery closures to protect deep sea corals from physical damage from fishing gear must be based on the best scientific information available; must include criteria to assess the conservation benefit of the closed area; must establish a timetable for review of the closed area's performance that is consistent with the purposes of the closed area; and must be based on an assessment of the benefits and impacts of the closure.

The only scientific study of the impact of trap fishing on corals cited in NOAA's Technical Memorandum NMFS-NE-181 (Characterization of the Fishing Practices and Marine Benthic Ecosystems of the Northeast U.S. Shelf, and an Evaluation of the Potential Effects of Fishing on Essential Fish Habitat) concludes that "4 wk of simulated commercial pot fishing had no negative effect on the abundance of attached benthic epifauna."

Similarly, a study cited in the New England Fishery Management Council's draft Omnibus Habitat Amendment concludes that "damage caused by traps was not statistically significant between the fished and unfished areas at this site."

Because of the way we fish along the continental shelf any closure will surely reduce revenue and increase costs for the red crab fishery as well as create a safety issue during times of bad weather. I find it very unfortunate that an amendment to one fishery's FMP can be capable of having such a negative impact on another fishery especially without any supporting analysis. I can't envision criteria to assess the conservation benefit of closing the areas to red crab fishing when no harm to corals has been demonstrated.

I'm proud that the red crab fishery was the first fishery on the Atlantic Coast to be certified as sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council. The red crab fishery employs over 150 people at sea and on shore in both Massachusetts and Virginia. It is gratifying to me that we have done this for more than 40 years with no apparent impact on the habitat, as demonstrated by the extraordinary images in the "Pathways to the Abyss" video.

In closing, I would like to quote directly from the FMAT meeting summary of May 2015:

**"Ultimately the FMAT agreed that given the severe potential economic impacts from prohibiting red crab fishing and the limited spatial extent of the fishery within the proposed zones, an exemption in the discrete zones would be justifiable"**

I sincerely ask the council to support the recommendation of the FMAT to exempt the red crab fishery from any closures.

Respectfully,

Jon Williams