



MID-ATLANTIC

FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 17, 2015

PRESS CONTACT: Mary Clark
(302) 674-2331 (ext. 261)

Mid-Atlantic Council to Hold Workshop on Deep Sea Coral Zone Boundaries

Final Action on Amendment Scheduled for June Council Meeting

RALEIGH, NC - The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council voted during [its meeting](#) last week to postpone final action on its Deep Sea Corals Amendment in order to allow for further analysis of the alternatives and to provide additional opportunities for stakeholder input. In the coming months, the Council will convene a workshop with its advisory panels, coral experts, and other stakeholders to review and potentially refine the discrete protection areas being considered. The Council is scheduled to take final action on the amendment during its meeting in Virginia Beach, VA on June 9 – 11.

The Council initiated the Deep Sea Corals Amendment in April 2012 to address the potential impacts of fishing activity on deep sea corals. The amendment includes options to restrict the use of certain types of fishing gear in two types of deep sea coral zones. *Broad zones* encompass large, less heavily fished areas and are largely intended to prevent the expansion of fishing activity. *Discrete zones* encompass smaller areas of known coral presence. The Council could implement restrictions in one or both types of zones.

The amendment has received considerable attention from the public. More than 120,000 individuals and organizations submitted comments and petitions during the public comment period, underscoring the historic nature of the amendment. Although the majority of comments expressed support for deep sea coral protection, the Council received a substantial number of comments from the commercial fishing industry requesting that additional analyses be conducted prior to a final decision. Many comments from the fishing industry also urged the Council to give the advisory panels another opportunity to comment on the specific areas being considered for designation as deep sea coral zones.

After extensive discussion and review of public comments, the Council voted unanimously to postpone final action on the amendment and to convene a workshop that will focus on refining the boundaries of the discrete deep sea coral zones. This will be the second workshop associated with the amendment—the [first](#) was held in April 2013.

“The Council’s decision to delay final action is reflective of our commitment to ensuring that stakeholders are effectively engaged in all Council decisions,” said the Council’s Chairman Rick Robins. “Although there is clear and overwhelming public support for our efforts to protect deep sea corals, it became clear last week that many people felt that the workshop, additional review, and analysis would ultimately put the Council in a better position to achieve the objective of the amendment.”

Workshop invitees will include the Squid, Mackerel, and Butterfish Advisory Panel, the Ecosystems Advisory Panel, members of the Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT), Council members, coral scientists, and other interested stakeholders. The workshop will be followed by additional analysis and review by the FMAT. Additional information about the workshop and future public comment opportunities will be posted on the [Deep Sea Corals page](#) of the Council’s website.