

## NEAFC request on appropriateness of NEAFC bottom fishing closures

### Advice summary

ICES advises that all of the currently closed NEAFC RA [Regulatory Area] subareas continue to support VME habitats, VME elements, and VME indicators. If these closures were to be removed and bottom fishing to occur, there would be a risk of significant adverse impacts.

### Request

*ICES is requested to consider whether significant adverse impacts on VME are still considered likely in the closed NEAFC RA [Regulatory Area] sub-areas listed below.*

### Elaboration on the advice

Table 1 summarizes the advice for each specific closure area. ICES (2017a) advises that one existing closure should be enlarged. ICES has previously advised on a modification of boundaries within EU waters for a site that overlaps into NEAFC waters. It was also noted that closures that do not overlap with existing fishing areas may provide protection from the potential impacts of exploratory fishing (Figure 1).

### Basis of the advice

#### Background

*The NEAFC Recommendation 19:2014 on the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems in the NEAFC Regulatory Area includes regulations prohibiting bottom fishing activities in the following areas according to Article 5, within the coordinates as defined in Annex 2 of that Recommendation:*

*(a) Northern MAR Area; (b) Middle MAR Area (Charlie-Gibbs Fracture Zone and sub-Polar Frontal Region); (c) Southern MAR Area; (d) Altair Seamount; (e) Antialtair Seamount; (f) Hatton Bank 1; (g) Rockall Bank; (h) Logachev Mounds; (i) West Rockall Mounds; (k) Southwest Rockall Bank; (l) Hatton-Rockall Basin; and (m) Hatton Bank 2.*

#### Methods

A total of 13 NEAFC Regulatory Area closures were examined. Edora's Bank was not included as it is not presently being reviewed by NEAFC. Each area was considered in relation to (a) the scientific basis for the original closure, (b) new information that may have become available since the closure was established, and (c) implications of the new information regarding the adequacy of the closure for the protection of VMEs.

### Sources and references

ICES. 2012. Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2012. ICES Advice 2012, Book 1. 156 pp.

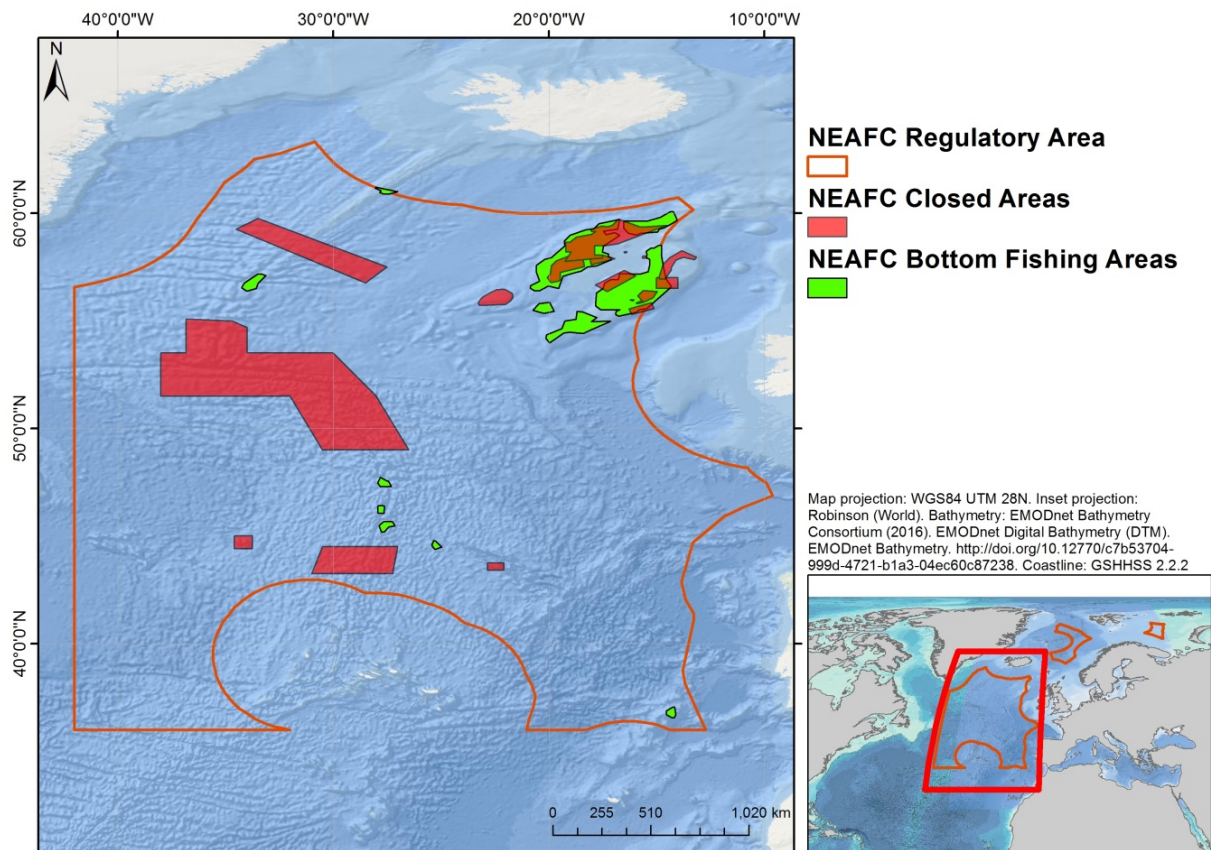
ICES. 2017a. NEAFC request on new information regarding vulnerable habitats in the NEAFC Regulatory Area. *In* Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2017. ICES Advice 2017, vme.neafc.

ICES. 2017b. Report of the ICES/NAFO Joint Working Group on Deep-water Ecology (WGDEC), 20–24 March 2017, Copenhagen, Denmark. ICES CM 2017/ACOM:25. 119 pp.

NEAFC. 2015. Rec 09 2015: Recommendation on amending Recommendation 19:2014 (Protection of VMEs). Accessed 15-06-2017 at <https://www.neafc.org/rec/2015/09>.

**Table 1** Summary of the review of NEAFC VME closures under NEAFC Recommendation 19:2014, as amended by Recommendation 09:2015 (NEAFC, 2015)

Area	Year closed	Basis for closure	New evidence on presence of VME	New evidence on absence of VME	Closure encompass VMEs	Evidence for expanding boundaries	Overlap with existing fishing areas
Northern Mid-Atlantic Ridge (MAR) – Area (a)	2005–2009	VME element (Ridge feature)	No	No	Yes	No	No
Middle Mid-Atlantic Ridge (MAR) – Area (b)	2005–2009	VME element (Ridge feature) & VME indicators	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Southern Mid-Atlantic Ridge (MAR) – Area (c)	2005–2009	VME element (Ridge feature) & VME indicators	No	No	Yes	No	No
Altair Seamount – Area (d)	2005	VME element (Seamount)	No	No	Yes	No	No
Antialtair Seamount – Area (e)	2005	VME element (Seamount)	No	No	Yes	No	No
Hatton Bank – Area (f) & (m1 & m2)	2007–2015	VME element (Bank feature) & VME indicators	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Northwest Rockall – Area (g)	2007	VME habitats & VME indicators	Yes	No	Yes	<b>Yes</b>	Yes
Southwest Rockall (Empress of Britain Bank) – Area (g1)	2008	VME habitats & VME indicators	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Southwest Rockall – Area (k1) and (k2)	2013	VME indicators	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Logachev Mounds – Area (h)	2007	VME habitats & VME indicators	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
West Rockall Mounds – Area (i)	2007	VME indicators	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Hatton Rockall Basin (cold seep) – Area (l1)	2015	VME habitats & VME indicators	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Hatton Rockall Basin (sponge area) – Area (l2)	2015	VME habitats & VME indicators	Yes	No	Yes	<b>Yes</b>	Yes



**Figure 1** VME closures (red areas) and existing fishing areas (green areas) within the NEAFC Regulatory Area (red line outline). The inset highlights the portion of the NEAFC Regulatory Area that contains VME closures and existing fishing areas.