

## NEAFC request on appropriateness of NEAFC bottom-fishing closures

### Advice summary

ICES advises that the current NEAFC bottom-fishing closure areas are still appropriate to protect VMEs, based on cumulating evidence of VME occurrence within these areas.

The reopening of such closures to bottom fishing would present a risk of significant adverse impacts to VMEs, in particular as evidenced for mobile bottom-contacting gear.

### Request

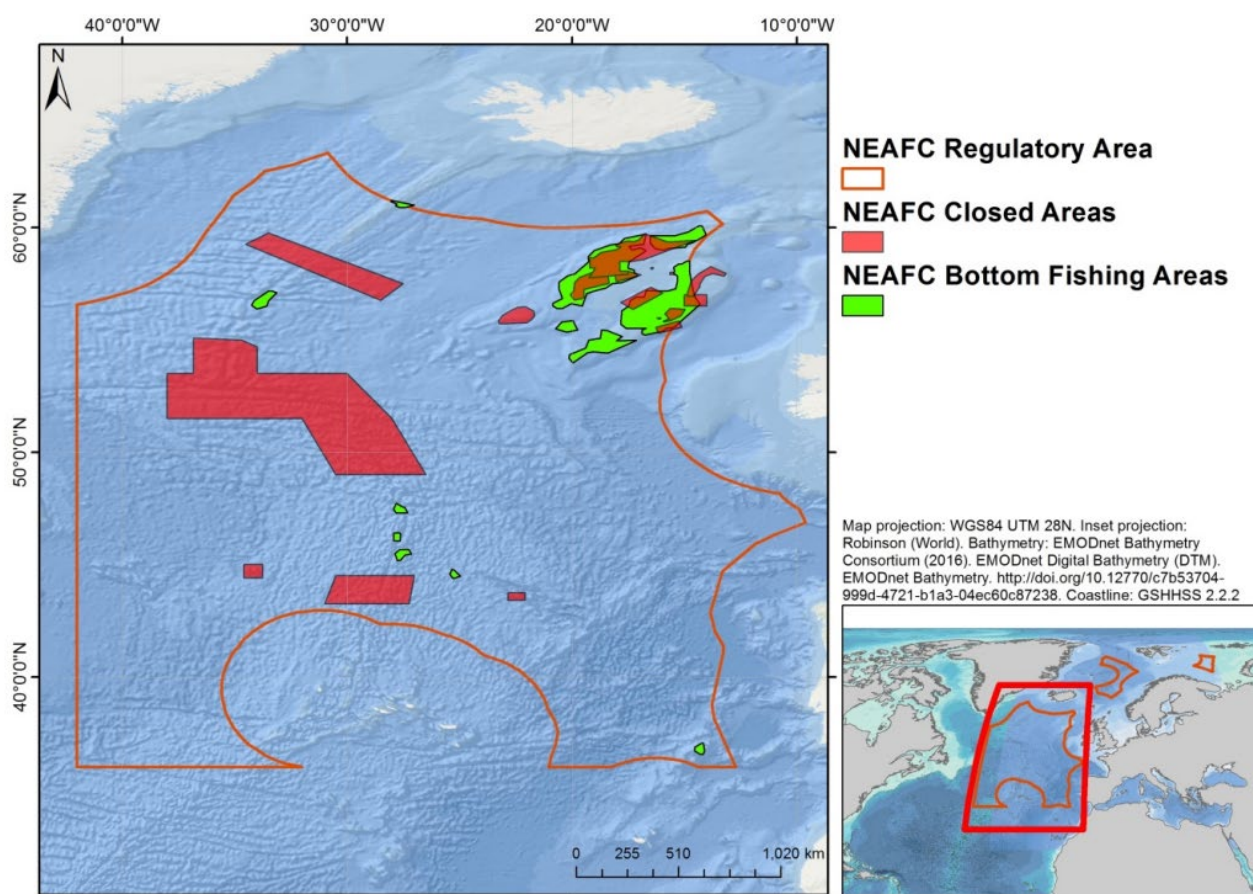
*ICES is requested to consider whether significant adverse impacts on vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) are still considered likely in the closed sub-areas (a) - (m):*

- (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;*
- (j) Edora's bank;*
- (k) Southwest Rockall Bank;*
- (l) Hatton-Rockall Basin; and*
- (m) Hatton Bank 2.*

### Elaboration on the advice

Table A1 summarizes new information and advice for each of the existing bottom-fishing closure areas within NEAFC Regulatory Area (RA) 1. This new evidence of VME presence was observed in five of the 14 NEAFC bottom-fishing closure areas (Table 1).

ICES advises that the NEAFC closures for VME protection which are located outside existing bottom fishing areas provide protection from the potential impacts of exploratory fishing (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** NEAFC Regulatory Area 1 with NEAFC bottom-fishing closures for VME protection (NEAFC closed areas) and NEAFC bottom-fishing areas.

## Basis of the advice

### Background

NEAFC Recommendation 19 2014 (as amended), on the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems in the NEAFC Regulatory Area, includes regulations prohibiting bottom-fishing activities in the areas (a)–(m) under review, according to Article 5, and within the coordinates as defined in its Annex 2. According to Article 10, second paragraph, the closures shall be in force until 31 December 2022. Before that time, the measure shall be reviewed by NEAFC with the intention of extending the period that the closures are in force, unless the review concludes that the continued application of either the measure or parts of the measure are not required.

### Results and conclusions

Since 2017, there was a total of 175 new records of VME presence and no VME absence records within existing NEAFC RA bottom-fishing closure areas (ICES, 2022a). These new evidence of VME presence was observed in five of the 14 NEAFC bottom-fishing closure areas (Table A1).

Cumulating evidence of VME presence, together with no evidence of VME absence, indicates that current bottom-fishing closure areas remain appropriate to protect VMEs. ICES advises that all of the current NEAFC RA bottom-fishing closures remain closed to support the protection of VMEs. The reopening of such closures to bottom fishing, in particular as evidenced for mobile bottom-contacting gear, would present a risk of significant adverse impacts to VMEs.

## Methods

ICES considered the scientific evidence available for each of the 13 NEAFC bottom-fishing closure areas since the last review (ICES, 2017). Each area was considered in relation to (a) the scientific basis for the original closure, (b) new evidence of VME presence and VME absence, and (c) implications of the new evidence regarding the adequacy of the closure for the protection of VMEs.

## Additional information

ICES is aware that new data on VME occurrence exist for some of the NEAFC bottom-fishing closure areas. The provision of these data to ICES will strengthen the evidence base for future advice. Data acquisition within NEAFC bottom-fishing closures is only reliant on dedicated sampling effort, which may explain comparatively limited VMEs reporting for these areas. ICES notes that methods to estimate VME absences within existing closure areas need to be further investigated.

## Sources and references

ICES. 2017. NEAFC request on appropriateness of NEAFC bottom fishing closures. *In* report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2017. ICES Advice 2017, sr.2017.11. <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.18686699>

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ICES. 2022a. ICES/NAFO Joint Working Group on Deep-water Ecology (WGDEC). ICES Scientific Reports. 4:75. 68 pp. <http://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.21196066>

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## Annex 1

**Table A1** Summary of the 2022 review of NEAFC RA bottom-fishing closures for the protection of VMEs. VME records can be classified into VME habitats, VME indicators, and absence of VME data (see ICES Technical Guidelines 2021).

Area	Year closed	Basis for closure	New evidence on presence of VME	New evidence on absence of VME	Closure considered appropriate
Northern Mid-Atlantic Ridge (MAR) – Area (a)	2005	VME element (ridge feature)	No	No	Yes
Middle Mid-Atlantic Ridge (MAR) – Area (b)	2005	VME element (ridge feature) & VME indicators	Yes	No	Yes
Southern Mid-Atlantic Ridge (MAR) – Area (c)	2005	VME element (ridge feature) & VME indicators	No	No	Yes
Altair Seamount – Area (d)	2005	VME element (seamount)	No	No	Yes
Antialtair Seamount – Area (e)	2005	VME element (seamount)	No	No	Yes
Hatton Bank – Area (f) & (m1 & m2)	2007–2015	VME element (bank feature), VME indicators	No	No	Yes
Rockall Bank (including Northwest Rockall and Southwest Rockall Empress of Britain Bank) (g)	2007–2008	VME habitats & VME indicators	Yes	No	Yes
Southwest Rockall – Area (k1) and (k2)	2013	VME indicators	No	No	Yes
Logachev Mounds – Area (h)	2007	VME habitats & VME indicators	Yes	No	Yes
West Rockall Mounds – Area (i)	2007	VME indicators	No	No	Yes
Edora's Bank – Area (j)	2013	VME element (Bank feature) & VME indicators	No	No	Yes
Hatton Rockall Basin (cold seep) – Area (l1)	2015	VME habitats & VME indicators	Yes	No	Yes
Hatton Rockall Basin (sponge area) – Area (l2)	2015	VME habitats & VME indicators	Yes	No	Yes