

**34th ANNUAL MEETING - SEPTEMBER 2012****Recommendations from the WGFMS-VME to the Fisheries Commission**

The FC Working Group of Fishery Managers and Scientists on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (WGFMS-VME) met on 11-13 September 2012 in Bergen, Norway and agreed on the following recommendations:

Lists of VME indicator species and elements

1. The WG **recommends** that the list of VME indicator species and VME elements prepared by the Scientific Council (Tables 1 and 2 of the SCS 12/19, p. 37-39, Annex 1) be adopted in conjunction with the proposed revisions to Article 15 of the 2012 NCEM, as contained in FCWG-VME Working Paper 12/3 (Revision 4) (Annex 2). These tables should be appended as Annexes in the NCEM.

Assessment of bottom fishing activities

2.1 The WG **recommends** that FC request SC use the revised Annex 1.E.V of the NCEM to guide development of their workplan related to reassessment of fishing activity with respect to Significant Adverse Impact (SAI) on VME and would note that this assessment is a single component of the broader EAF Roadmap being developed separately by SC.

2.2 The WG **recommends** the adoption of the proposed Annex I.E.V of NCEM as contained in WG WP 12/5 Revised (Annex 3).

Exploratory Fishing

3. The WG **recommends** the adoption of the revised provisions relating to Exploratory Fishing in Chapter II of the NCEM, as contained in FCWG-VME Working Paper 12/3 (Revision 4) (Annex 2).

Thresholds (see Annex 4 FCWG-VME Working Paper 12/7 Revised)

4.1. The WG **recommends** 60 kg of corals excluding sea pens, inside and outside the footprint.

4.2. The WG **recommends** that FC consider adopting revised encounter thresholds outside the fishing footprint of 7 kg of sea pens and 300 kg for sponges.

4.3. The WG **recommends** that the FC, considering the distribution of sea pens and the practical considerations associated with a value of 7 kg for a threshold, consider additional area closures to significant concentration of sea pens, and/or introduce a 7 kg threshold inside the footprint.

4.4. The WG **recommends** 300 kg threshold for sponges inside the fishing footprint. This measure should be reviewed if refinements to the existing closures take place.

Working Group Terms of Reference, Fisheries re-assessment (see Annex 5 FCWG-VME Working Paper 12/6 Revision 2)

5. Recognizing that the Performance Review Panel has noted the usefulness of increasing communication between SC and FC, and recommended further development and consolidation of the EAF Roadmap, the WG **recommends** that FC modify the Terms of Reference for this WG to expand its mandate to include broader aspects of EAF as part of the future dialogue between SC and FC.

Annex 1. Lists of VME Indicator Species and Elements

Table 1. List of VME Indicator Species.

Benthic Invertebrate VME Indicator Species			
Common name of taxonomic group	Known Taxon	Family	Phylum
Large-sized sponges	<i>Iophon piceum</i>	Acarinidae	Porifera
	<i>Stelletta normani</i>	Ancorinidae	
	<i>Stelletta</i> sp.	Ancorinidae	
	<i>Stryphnus ponderosus</i>	Ancorinidae	
	<i>Axinella</i> sp.	Axinellidae	
	<i>Phakellia</i> sp.	Axinellidae	
	<i>Esperiopsis villosa</i>	Esperiopsidae	
	<i>Geodia barretti</i>	Geodiidae	
	<i>Geodia macandrewii</i>	Geodiidae	
	<i>Geodia phlegraei</i>	Geodiidae	
	<i>Mycale (Mycale) lingua</i>	Mycalidae	
	<i>Thenea muricata</i>	Pachastrellidae	
	<i>Polymastia</i> spp.	Polymastiidae	
	<i>Weberella bursa</i>	Polymastiidae	
	<i>Weberella</i> sp.	Polymastiidae	
	<i>Asconema foliatum</i>	Rossellidae	
	<i>Craniella cranium</i>	Tetillidae	
Stony corals (known seamount species may not occur in abundance in the NRA)	<i>Lophelia pertusa</i>	Caryophylliidae	Cnidaria
	<i>Solenosmilia variabilis</i>	Caryophylliidae	
	<i>Enallopsammia rostrata</i>	Dendrophylliidae	
	<i>Madrepora oculata</i>	Oculinidae	
Small gorgonian corals	<i>Anthothela grandiflora</i>	Anthothelidae	Cnidaria
	<i>Chrysogorgia</i> sp.	Chrysogorgiidae	
	<i>Radicipes gracilis</i>	Chrysogorgiidae	
	<i>Metallogorgia melanotrichos</i>	Chrysogorgiidae	
	<i>Acanella arbuscula</i>	Isididae	
	<i>Acanella eburnea</i>	Isididae	
	<i>Swiftia</i> sp.	Plexauridae	
<i>Narella laxa</i>	Primnoidae		
Large gorgonian corals	<i>Acanthogorgia armata</i>	Acanthogorgiidae	Cnidaria
	<i>Iridogorgia</i> sp.	Chrysogorgiidae	
	<i>Corallium bathyrubrum</i>	Coralliidae	
	<i>Corallium bayeri</i>	Coralliidae	
	<i>Keratoisis ornata</i>	Isididae	
	<i>Keratoisis</i> sp.	Isididae	
	<i>Lepidisis</i> sp.	Isididae	
	<i>Paragorgia arborea</i>	Paragorgiidae	
	<i>Paragorgia johnsoni</i>	Paragorgiidae	
	<i>Paramuricea grandis</i>	Plexauridae	
	<i>Paramuricea placomus</i>	Plexauridae	
	<i>Paramuricea</i> spp.	Plexauridae	
	<i>Placogorgia</i> sp.	Plexauridae	
	<i>Placogorgia terceira</i>	Plexauridae	
	<i>Calyptrophora</i> sp.	Primnoidae	
<i>Parastenella atlantica</i>	Primnoidae		

	<i>Primnoa resedaeformis</i> <i>Thouarella grasshoffi</i>	Primnoidae Primnoidae	
Sea pens	<i>Anthoptilum grandiflorum</i> <i>Funiculina quadrangularis</i> <i>Halipteris cf. christii</i> <i>Halipteris finnarchica</i> <i>Halipteris sp.</i> <i>Kophobelemnion stelliferum</i> <i>Pennatula aculeata</i> <i>Pennatula grandis</i> <i>Pennatula sp.</i> <i>Distichoptilum gracile</i> <i>Protoptilum sp.</i> <i>Umbellula lindahli</i> <i>Virgularia cf. mirabilis</i>	Anthoptilidae Funiculinidae Halipteridae Halipteridae Halipteridae Kophobelemnidae Pennatulidae Pennatulidae Pennatulidae Protoptilidae Protoptilidae Umbellulidae Virgulariidae	Cnidaria
Tube-dwelling anemones	<i>Pachycerianthus borealis</i>	Cerianthidae	Cnidaria
Erect bryozoans	<i>Eucratea loricata</i>	Eucrateidae	Bryozoa
Sea lilies (Crinoids)	<i>Trichometra cubensis</i> <i>Conocrinus lofotensis</i> <i>Gephyrocrinus grimaldii</i>	Antedonidae Bourgueticrinidae Hyocrinidae	Echinodermata
Sea squirts	<i>Boltenia ovifera</i> <i>Halocynthia aurantium</i>	Pyuridae Pyuridae	Chordata

Table 2. List of VME indicator elements.

Physical VME indicator elements	
Seamounts	Fogo Seamounts (Div. 3O, 4Vs) Newfoundland Seamounts (Div. 3MN) Corner Rise Seamounts (Div. 6GH) New England Seamounts (Div. 6EF)
Canyons	Shelf-indenting canyon; Tail of the Grand Bank (Div. 3N) Canyons with head > 400 m depth; South of Flemish Cap and Tail of the Grand Bank (Div. 3MN) Canyons with heads > 200 m depth; Tail of the Grand Bank (Div. 3O)
Knolls	Orphan Knoll (Div. 3K) Beothuk Knoll (Div. 3 LMN)
Southeast Shoal	Tail of the Grand Bank Spawning grounds (Div. 3N)
Steep flanks > 6.4°	South and Southeast of Flemish Cap. (Div. 3 LM)

**Annex 2. Amendments to Chapter II of the NAFO CEM – clarification
of provisions related to the exploratory bottom fishing activities – Chapter II
Bottom Fisheries in the NAFO Regulatory Area
(FCWG-VME Working Paper 12/3, Revision 4)**

Article 15 - Purpose and definitions

1. The purpose of this Article is to ensure the implementation by NAFO of effective measures to prevent significant adverse impacts of bottom fishing activities on vulnerable marine ecosystems known to occur or likely to occur in the Regulatory Area based on the best available scientific information. For the purposes of this Article, NAFO will take into account the guidance provided by the FAO in the framework of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and any other internationally agreed standards, as appropriate.
2. The term ‘bottom fishing activities’ means bottom fishing activities where the fishing gear is likely to contact the seafloor during the normal course of fishing operations.
3. The term "existing bottom fishing areas" (“footprint”) means that portion of the Regulatory Area where bottom fishing has historically occurred and is defined by the coordinates shown in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 4.
4. The term “exploratory bottom fishing activities” means bottom fishing activities conducted in unfished bottom areas, or bottom fishing activities with significant changes to the conduct or in the technology used in the existing bottom fishing areas.
5. The term "unfished bottom areas" means other areas within the Regulatory Area which are not defined as existing bottom fishing areas.
6. The term “vulnerable marine ecosystems” has the same meaning and characteristics as those contained in paragraphs 42 and 43 of the FAO International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries in the High Seas.
7. The term “VME indicator species” refers to species of coral identified as gorgonians, *Lophelia*, and sea pen fields; crinoids; erect bryozoans; sea squirts; cerianthid anemone fields; and sponges that constitute sponge grounds or aggregations. The current list is attached as Part VI of Annex I.E.
8. The term “VME element” refers to topographical, hydrophysical or geological features which potentially support VMEs including slopes, summits and flanks of seamounts and knolls and canyons as described in the Annex of the FAO International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries in the High Seas. The current list is attached as Part VII of Annex I.E.
9. The term "significant adverse impacts" has the same meaning and characteristics as those described in paragraphs 17-20 of the FAO International Guidelines for the Management of Deep Sea Fisheries in the High Seas.
10. The term “encounter” means catch of a VME indicator species above threshold levels as set out in Article 20.3. Any encounter with a VME indicator species or merely detecting its presence is not sufficient to identify a VME. That identification should be made on a case-by-case basis through assessment by relevant bodies.

Article 16 - Seamount, Coral, and Sponge Protection Zones

1. Until December 31, 2014, no vessel shall engage in bottom fishing activities in any of the areas defined by connecting the following coordinates (in numerical order and back to coordinate 1), subject to the exception foreseen in paragraph 2.
2. A request to conduct exploratory bottom fishing activities, in any of the areas defined by paragraph 1, shall be in accordance with Article 18 and the Exploratory Protocol (Part IV of Annex I.E).
3. If a vessel fishing in any of the areas defined in paragraph 1 encounters a VME indicator species, as defined in Article 20.3, interim encounter provisions as set out in Article 20.2 will apply.
4. Until December 31, 2014, no vessel shall engage in bottom fishing activities in the following area in Division 3O defined by connecting the following coordinates (as illustrated in Figure 2).
5. Until December 31, 2014, no vessel shall engage in bottom fishing activities in the areas defined by connecting the following coordinates (as illustrated in Figure 3).

6. The measures referred to in Article 16.5 shall be reviewed in 2014 by the Fisheries Commission, taking account of the advice from the Scientific Council and the Working Group of Fishery Managers and Scientists, and a decision shall be taken on future management measures.
7. Contracting Parties are encouraged to the extent possible to record all coral and sponge catch in their annual government and/or industry research programs and to consider non-destructive means for the long-term monitoring of coral and sponges in the closed areas.

Article 17 Map of existing bottom fishing areas

Article 18 – Exploratory bottom fishing activities

1. Exploratory bottom fishing activities shall be conducted in accordance with the exploratory protocol set out in Parts I-IV of Annex I.E.
2. Contracting Parties whose vessels wish to engage in exploratory bottom fishing activities shall communicate a ‘Notice of Intent to Undertake Exploratory Bottom Fishing’ (Annex I.E, Parts I and IV) to the Executive Secretary together with the assessment required under Article 19(2) (i).
3. The exploratory bottom fishing activities may start only after they have been authorized in accordance with Article 19bis.
4. Contracting Parties shall ensure that vessels flying their flag and conducting exploratory bottom fishing activities have a scientific observer on board.
5. Contracting Parties shall within 3 months of the completion of the fishing trip provide an ‘Exploratory Bottom Fishing Trip Report’ of the results of such activities to the Executive Secretary for circulation to the Scientific Council and all Contracting Parties.

Article 19 - Assessment of proposed exploratory bottom fishing activities

- Assessment for proposed exploratory bottom fishing activities in the Regulatory Area shall follow the procedure below:

i. The Contracting Party proposing to participate in exploratory bottom fishing activities shall submit to the Executive Secretary information and preliminary assessment of the known and anticipated impacts of the bottom fishing activity which will be exercised by the vessels flying its flag on vulnerable marine ecosystems.

That assessment shall be sent no less than two weeks in advance of the opening of the June meeting of the Scientific Council. It shall address the elements as set forth in Part V of Annex I.E.

The Executive Secretary shall promptly forward these submissions to the Scientific Council and the Fisheries Commission.

ii. The elaboration of that assessment shall be carried out in accordance with guidance developed by the Scientific Council, or, in the absence of such guidance, to the best of the Contracting Party’s ability.

iii. At the meeting of the Scientific Council immediately following the submission of the information and preliminary assessment, the Scientific Council shall undertake an assessment of the submitted documentation, according to procedures and standards it develops and, taking into account the risks of significant adverse impacts on vulnerable marine ecosystems. The Scientific Council may use in its assessment additional information available to it, including information from other fisheries in the region or similar fisheries elsewhere.

The Scientific Council shall in line with the precautionary approach, provide advice to the Fisheries Commission on possible significant adverse impacts on vulnerable marine ecosystems and on the mitigation measures to prevent them.

Article 19bis Management measures on exploratory bottom fishing activities and for the protection of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems

1. The Working Group of Fishery Managers and Scientists on VMEs shall examine the advice of the Scientific Council delivered in accordance with Article 19(iii) and shall make recommendations to the Fisheries Commission in accordance with its mandate.
2. The Fisheries Commission shall, taking account of advice and recommendations provided by the Scientific Council and the Working Group of Fishery Managers and Scientists on VMEs concerning exploratory bottom fishing activities, including data and information arising from reports pursuant to Article 20 adopt conservation and management measures to prevent significant adverse impacts on vulnerable marine ecosystems. These may include:
 - i. allowing, prohibiting or restricting bottom fishing activities;
 - ii. requiring specific mitigation measures for bottom fishing activities;
 - iii. allowing, prohibiting or restricting bottom fishing with certain gear types, or changes in gear design and/or deployment; and/or
 - iv. any other relevant requirements or restrictions to prevent significant adverse impacts to vulnerable marine ecosystems.

Article 19ter – Evaluation of exploratory bottom fishing activities

1. At its meeting immediately following receipt of the ‘Exploratory Bottom Fishing Trip Report’ circulated in accordance with Article 18(5), the Scientific Council shall evaluate the exploratory bottom fishing activities. Taking into account the risks of significant adverse impacts on vulnerable marine ecosystems, the Scientific Council shall, in line with the precautionary approach, provide advice to the Fisheries Commission on the decision to be taken in accordance with Article 19ter(3).
2. The Working Group of Fishery Managers and Scientists on VMEs shall examine the advice of the Scientific Council delivered in accordance with Article 19ter(1) and shall make recommendations to the Fisheries Commission in accordance with its mandate.
3. The Fisheries Commission shall, taking account of advice and recommendations provided by the Scientific Council and the Working Group of Fishery Managers and Scientists on VMEs, either to:
 - i. Authorise the bottom fishing activity for part or all of the area in which exploratory bottom fishing was carried out and include this area in the existing bottom fishing areas (footprint), or,
 - ii. Discontinue the exploratory bottom fishing activity and, if necessary, close part or all of the area where which exploratory bottom fishing was carried out, or,
 - iii. Authorise the continued conduct of exploratory bottom fishing activity, in line with Article 18 with a view to gather more information.

Article 20 - Interim Encounter Provision

Contracting Parties shall require that vessels flying their flag and conducting bottom fishing activities within the Regulatory Area abide by the following rules, where, in the course of fishing operations, evidence of vulnerable marine ecosystems is encountered:

1. Existing bottom fishing areas
 - i. Vessels shall quantify catch of VME indicator species.
 - ii. if the quantity of VME indicator species caught in a fishing operation (such as trawl tow or set of a gillnet or longline) is beyond the threshold defined in paragraph 3 below, the following shall apply:

- The vessel master shall report the incident to the flag State Contracting Party, which without delay shall forward the information to the Executive Secretary, including the position that is provided by the vessel, either the end point of the tow or set or another position that is closest to the exact encounter location, the VME indicator species encountered, and the quantity (kg) of VME indicator species encountered. Contracting Parties may if they so wish require their vessels to also report the incident directly to the Executive Secretary. The Executive Secretary shall archive the information and report it to all Contracting Parties. The Contracting Parties shall immediately alert all fishing vessels flying their flag.
- The vessel master shall cease fishing and move away at least 2 nautical miles from the endpoint of the tow/set in the direction least likely to result in further encounters. The captain shall use his best judgment based on all available sources of information.
- The Executive Secretary shall make an annual report on single and multiple encounters in discrete areas within existing bottom fishing areas to the Scientific Council. The Scientific Council shall evaluate and, on a case-by-case basis the information and provide advice to the Fisheries Commission on whether a VME exists. The advice shall be based on annually updated assessments of the accumulated information on encounters and the Scientific Council's advice on the need for action, using FAO guidelines as a basis. The Fisheries Commission shall consider the advice in accordance with Article 19.4.

2. Unfished bottom areas

- i. Vessels shall quantify catch of VME indicator species. Observers deployed shall identify corals, sponges and other organisms to the lowest possible taxonomical level. The Exploratory Fishery Data Collection Form found in Part III of Annex I.E shall be used (templates).
- ii. If the quantity of VME indicator species caught in a fishing operation (such as trawl tow or set of a gillnet or longline) is beyond the threshold defined in paragraph 3 below, the following shall apply:
 - The vessel master shall report the incident without delay to its flag state Contracting Party, which shall forward the information to the Executive Secretary, including the position that is provided by the vessel, either the end point of the tow or set or another position that is closest to the exact encounter location, the VME indicator species encountered, and the quantity (kg) of VME indicator species encountered. Contracting Parties may if they so wish require their vessels to also report the incident directly to the Executive Secretary. The Executive Secretary shall archive the information and without delay transmit it to all Contracting Parties. The Contracting Parties shall issue an immediate alert to all vessels flying their flag.
 - The vessel shall cease fishing and move away at least 2 nautical miles from the endpoint of the tow/set in the direction least likely to result in further encounters. The captain shall use his best judgment based on all available sources of information.
 - The Executive Secretary shall at the same time request Contracting Parties to implement a temporary closure of a two mile radius around the reporting position. The reporting position is that provided by the vessel, either the endpoint of the tow/set or another position that the evidence suggests is closest to the exact encounter location.
 - The Executive Secretary shall make an annual report on single and multiple encounters in discrete areas within existing bottom fishing areas to the Scientific Council. This report should also include reports from the exploratory bottom fishing activities conducted in the last year. The Scientific Council at its next meeting shall examine the temporary closure. If the Scientific Council advises that the area consists of a vulnerable marine ecosystem the Executive Secretary shall request Contracting Parties to maintain the temporary closure until such time that the Fisheries Commission has adopted conservation and management measures in accordance with Article 19bis.2. If the Scientific Council does not conclude that the proposed area is a VME, the Executive Secretary shall inform Contracting Parties which may re-open the area to their vessels.
 - The Executive Secretary shall make an annual report on archived reports from encounters in unfished bottom areas to the Scientific Council. This report shall also include reports from the exploratory

bottom fishing activities that were conducted in the last year. The Scientific Council shall evaluate the information and provide advice to the Fisheries Commission on the appropriateness of temporary closures and other measures. The advice should be based on annually updated assessments of the accumulated information on encounters as well as other scientific information. The Scientific Council's advice should reflect provisions outlined in the FAO guidelines. The Fisheries Commission shall consider the advice in accordance with Article 19bis.2.

3. For both existing bottom fishing areas and unfished bottom areas, an encounter with primary VME indicator species is defined as a catch per set (e.g. trawl tow, longline set, or gillnet set) of more than 60 kg of live coral. For unfished bottom areas, an encounter with primary VME indicator species is defined as a catch per set (e.g. trawl tow, longline set, or gillnet set) of more than 400 kg of sponges. For existing bottom fishing areas (the "footprint"), an encounter with primary VME indicator species is defined as a catch per set (e.g. trawl tow, longline set, or gillnet set) of more than 600 kg of sponges. These thresholds are set on a provisional basis and may be adjusted as experience is gained in the application of this measure.

Article 20bis: Reassessment of bottom fishing activities

1. The Scientific Council, with the co-operation of Contracting Parties, shall identify, on the basis of best available scientific information, vulnerable marine ecosystems in the Regulatory Area and map sites where these vulnerable marine ecosystem are known to occur or likely to occur and provide such data and information to the Executive Secretary for circulation to all Contracting Parties.
2. Fisheries Commission will in collaboration with the Scientific Council and the Working Group of Fishery Managers and Scientists on VMEs conduct a reassessment in 2016 and every 5 years thereafter of bottom fishing activities, or when there is new scientific information indicating a VME in a given area. Following the assessment, the Fisheries Commission shall take the necessary actions to protect VMEs.

Article 21 – Review

The provisions of this Chapter shall be reviewed by the Fisheries Commission at its Annual Meeting in 2014.

Annex I.E Templates for the conduct of exploratory bottom fishing activities

IV. Exploratory Protocol

The Exploratory Protocol shall consist of:

- A harvesting plan which outlines target species, dates and areas. Area and effort restrictions should be considered to ensure fisheries occur on a gradual basis in a limited geographical area.
- A mitigation plan including measures to prevent significant adverse impact to vulnerable marine ecosystems that may be encountered during the fishery.
- A catch monitoring plan that includes recording/reporting of all species caught, 100% satellite tracking and 100% observer coverage. The recording/reporting of catch should be sufficiently detailed to conduct an assessment of activity, if required.
- A data collection plan to facilitate the identification of vulnerable marine ecosystems/species in area fished.

V. Assessment of Bottom Fishing Activities <new text of WP 12/5>

VI. List of VME indicator species <table to be inserted>

VII. List of physical VME indicator elements <table to be inserted>

Annex 3. Assessment of Bottom Fishing Activities
(FCWG-VME Working Paper 12/5, Revised)

Proposed Recommendation from VME WG to FC concerning Assessments

Recognizing that the current terms of reference of the WGFMS on VMEs is focused on VMEs, the WG would recommend FC consider revising Annex I E V as suggested below. This revision highlights the connections between ecosystem considerations noted by SC and the assessment of SAI on VMEs requested by FC. The WG underscores the specific nature of the assessment being considered while acknowledging how it supports broader application of EAF.

Recommends that FC request SC use the revised Annex I E V to guide development of their workplan related to reassessment of fishing activity with respect to SAI on VME and would note that this assessment is a single component of the broader EAF Roadmap being developed separately by SC.

Proposed Annex I.E. Section V. Assessment of Bottom Fisheries Activities.

V. Assessment of Bottom Fishing Activities

Assessments should consider the best available scientific and technical information on the current state of fishery resources.

Assessments should address, *inter alia*:

1. Type(s) of fishing conducted or contemplated, including vessels and gear types, fishing areas, target and potential bycatch species, fishing effort levels and duration of fishing (harvesting plan);
2. Existing baseline information on the ecosystems, habitats and communities in the fishing area, against which future changes are to be compared;
3. Identification, description and mapping of VMEs known or likely to occur in the fishing area;
4. Identification, description and evaluation of the occurrence, scale and duration of likely impacts, including cumulative impacts of activities covered by the assessment on VMEs;
- 4bis Consideration of VME elements known to occur in the fishing area; (New paragraph)
5. Data and methods used to identify, describe and assess the impacts of the activity, the identification of gaps in knowledge, and an evaluation of uncertainties in the information presented in the assessment;
6. Risk assessment of likely impacts by the fishing operations to determine which impacts on VMEs are likely to be significant adverse impacts; and
7. The proposed mitigation and management measures to be used to prevent significant adverse impacts on VMEs, and the measures to be used to monitor effects of the fishing operations.

Annex 4. Thresholds

(FCWG-VME Working Paper 12/7, Revised)

Existing measures

The VME WG notes that the 60kg threshold for corals would be retained, other than for sea pens, if the recommendations below are accepted.

Proposed Recommendation from VME WG to FC concerning Thresholds Outside the Fishing Footprint

Recognizing the advice from SC concerning sea pens and sponges, the VME WG recommends that FC consider adopting revised encounter thresholds outside the fishing footprint of 7kg for sea pens and 300 kg for sponges.

Proposed Recommendation from VME WG to FC concerning Thresholds Inside the Fishing Footprint – sea pens

The VME WG notes that the situation inside the fishing footprint is more complex, especially in light of advice for a 7kg threshold for sea pens and that two approaches are currently available and being used: closed areas or encounter protocol.

The VME WG also noted the SC observation that as locations of concentrations of benthic VME indicator species become increasingly well-defined through survey and mapping efforts, appropriate closed areas are put in place, and re-assessed through the annual surveys. Under these conditions, the encounter provisions within the footprint become redundant. The VME WG further noted that such a situation may be emerging for corals and sponges within the footprint where management decisions have been taken or are being considered to close areas. The VME WG acknowledged that UNGA Resolution 61/105 calls for encounter provisions within the suite of measures to protect VMEs. The VME WG additionally noted that SC considers that management through the closure of areas with significant concentrations of VMEs is the most effective measure for protecting VMEs in the NRA.

With the time available to the VME WG, mapping of possible refinements to the closed areas for consideration by the FC was not possible. The WG noted however that these closures could be through modifications or refinements of some of the existing closures or some additional targeted closures.

The VME WG recommends that the FC, considering the distribution of sea pens and the practical considerations associated with a value of 7 kg for a threshold, consider additional area closures to protect significant concentrations of sea pens and/or introduce a 7kg encounter threshold.

Proposed Recommendation from VME WG to FC concerning Thresholds Inside the Fishing Footprint – sponges

The VME WG noted the approach recommended for sea pens and recommends that FC consider a similar approach for sponges. The VME WG recommends 300kg as an encounter threshold for sponge. This measure should be reconsidered if refinements to the closed areas are adopted.

Annex 5. Broadening of Working Group Terms of Reference
(FCWG-VME Working Paper 12/6, Revision 2)

Proposed recommendation from VME WG to FC

Recognizing that the Performance Review has noted the usefulness of increasing communication between SC and FC, and recommended further development and consolidation of the EAF Roadmap

The WGFMS-VME recommends that FC modify the ToR for this working group to expand its mandate to include broader aspects of EAF as part of the future dialogue between SC and FC.