

NOAA FISHERIES

Pacific Islands Regional Office

Essential Fish Habitat and Consultation



What is Essential Fish Habitat (EFH)?

EFH is defined as those waters and substrate necessary for federally managed species to spawn, breed, feed, and/or grow to maturity. It is the legal tool that National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) uses to manage marine habitat to ensure that the federally managed species identified by the fishery management councils have a healthy future.

Why has EFH been designated?

Species require healthy habitat to survive and reproduce. In 1996, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA; 16 U.S.C. 1855(b)) was amended to establish a new requirement to identify and describe EFH to protect, conserve and enhance EFH for the benefit of the fisheries.

Where has EFH been designated?







EFH has been designated, as per the table below, for all the federally managed species referred to as the Management Unit Species (MUS) in our Pacific Islands Region. EFH is described in detail in the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plans, available on the Council's website (www.wpcouncil.org).

What is a Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC)?

HAPC are subsets of EFH that merit special attention because they meet at least one of the following 4 criteria:

- 1) provide important ecological function;
- 2) are sensitive to environmental degradation;
- 3) include a habitat type that is/will be stressed by development;
- 4) include a habitat type that is rare.

HAPC are afforded the same regulatory protection as EFH and do not exclude activities from occurring in the area, such as fishing, diving, swimming or surfing.

Management Unit Species (Groups)	EFH for eggs and larvae	EFH for juveniles and adults
Bottomfish 	Water column down to 400 meters depth from shoreline out to the 200-mile U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) boundary	Water column and all bottom from shoreline down to 400m depth
Seamount Groundfish 	Water column down to 200 meters depth of all EEZ waters bounded by 29°–35° N and 171° E–179° W	Water column and bottom from 200 meters to 600 meters depth, bounded by 29°–35° N and 171° E–179° W
Pelagics 	Water column down to 200 meters depth from shoreline out to EEZ boundary	Water column down to 1000 meters depth from shoreline out to EEZ boundary
Precious Corals 	Known precious coral beds in the Hawaiian Islands located at: Keahole point, between Milolii and South Point, the Auau Channel, Makapuu, Kaena point, the southern border of Kauai, Wespac bed, Brooks bank bed, and 180 Fathom Bank	
Coral Reef Ecosystem 	Water column and all bottom down to 100 meters depth from shoreline out to EEZ boundary	
Crustaceans 	Lobsters/crab: Water column down to 150 meters depth from shoreline out to EEZ boundary Deepwater shrimp: The outer reef slopes between 300-700 meters depth	Lobsters/crab: Bottom from shoreline down to 100 meters depth Deepwater shrimp: Outer reef slopes between 550-700 meters depth

EFH Consultation

Who should consult with NMFS on EFH?

Federal agencies which fund, permit or undertake activities that may adversely affect EFH are required to consult with NMFS regarding the potential effects of their actions on EFH and to respond to NMFS conservation recommendations.

What is an “adverse effect” to EFH?

An “adverse effect” to EFH is anything that reduces the quantity and/or quality of EFH. It may include a wide variety of impacts such as:

- direct impacts (e.g., contamination or physical disruption);
- indirect impacts (e.g., loss of prey, reduction in species’ fecundity); or
- site-specific / habitat wide impacts, including individual, cumulative or synergistic consequences of actions.

What is an EFH Assessment?

An EFH Assessment is a document that evaluates the effects of a proposed action on EFH. It should include:

- 1) a description of the proposed action;
- 2) an analysis of individual and cumulative effects of the action on EFH, the managed species, and associated species such as major prey species, including affected life history stages;
- 3) the action agency’s view regarding effects on EFH; and
- 4) a discussion of proposed mitigation, if applicable.

The EFH assessment can be provided to NMFS within an existing environmental document (e.g. Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement) or as a standalone document. The level of detail in the EFH Assessment should be commensurate with the level of impact to EFH.

What are EFH Conservation Recommendations?

NMFS provides EFH Conservation Recommendations to a Federal action agency for its action that may adversely affect EFH. These recommendations are intended to help an action agency avoid and minimize impact to EFH and, when there is unavoidable impact, offset this impact.



EFH consultations steps:

1. The action agency provides notification of the action to NMFS.
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2. The action agency submits an EFH Assessment to NMFS.
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3. NMFS reviews the EFH Assessment.
- ↓
4. NMFS provides EFH Conservation Recommendations to the action agency.
- ↓
5. The action agency responds to NMFS.

Checklist

If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, your agency is required to consult with NMFS regarding the potential effects of your actions on EFH.

- Is your Federal agency **funding** an activity that may adversely affect EFH?
- Is your Federal agency **permitting** an activity that may adversely affect EFH?
- Is your Federal agency **undertaking** an activity that may adversely affect EFH?



For more information:

Contact NOAA NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office EFH Coordinator, Danielle Jayewardene at Danielle.Jayewardene@noaa.gov, or visit our website at: www.fpir.noaa.gov/HCD/hcd_efh.html

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