ICES Advice for 2017
Vulnerable deep-water habitats in the NEAFC Regulatory Area

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ACOM Chair
ICES has reviewed new evidence for the occurrence of vulnerable marine ecosystems in the NEAFC Regulatory Area. There are no changes to 2014 ICES advice.

While the majority of bottom fishing takes place within NEAFC’s existing fishing areas, there is some evidence of fishing activity happening within areas closed to protect VME habitats as well as outside existing fishing areas on the Hatton and Rockall banks.
A total of 487 new records that indicate the presence of vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) were submitted to ICES in 2015. Approximately one third of these were from inside the NEAFC Regulatory Area.

ICES does not recommend any changes to previous advice on fisheries management based on these new records.
ICES advice in 2014 stated “ICES advises on the occurrence of VME indicator species including cold-water coral and sponges on the Josephine seamount, the southern part of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, and on Hatton Bank. Advice on new boundary for the existing closure on the southern Mid-Atlantic Ridge is provided”
There was strong evidence that fishing with bottom-contacting mobile gear occurred within the “Haddock box” on Rockall. ICES has advised previously that this box also protects VMEs, ICES therefore advises NEAFC considers applying VME restrictions to further portions of this box in addition to the current closure to conserve juvenile haddock.
The systemic issues with gear coding of vessels trawling for redfish in midwater over the Reykjanes ridge continue within the NEAFC VMS data.

ICES recommends that the gear coding of VMS data be improved.

Tracks coded in the NEAFC VMS dataset for 2015 as bottom trawl to the west of the Reykjanes Ridge. This area is too deep for bottom trawling and is an area with a midwater redfish trawl fishery.