

**TERMS OF REFERENCE
of the
INTERAGENCY BOARD ON
DEEP-SEA CORAL AND OTHER VULNERABLE MARINE ECOSYSTEMS
JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE ON OCEAN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

A. Official Designation

An Interagency Board on Deep-Sea Corals and other Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems is hereby established by the Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology (JSOST) to enhance interagency cooperation on deep-sea coral and other vulnerable ecosystems.

B. Purpose and Scope:

The purpose of the Board is to advise and assist the JSOST on matters related to deep-sea coral (also known as deep-water or cold-water coral) ecosystems and other deep-sea biogenic communities. This action fulfills the *Ocean Action Plan* direction to “*determine which agency or agencies should take the lead in coordinating the Federal government management and research activities with respect to deep-sea corals.*” The Board will support the call for increased efforts to “Research, Survey, and Protect Deep Sea Coral Communities” in the *Ocean Action Plan*, and calls for increased research on resources in deep water settings in the *Ocean Research Priorities Plan and Implementation Strategy*. Initial emphasis will be on deep-sea coral ecosystems, but may expand to include other deep-sea biogenic communities, such as sponge fields and chemosynthetic communities, as necessary.

The following list includes areas of work within the scope of the Board:

- Coordinate interagency research planning, including a strategy to map the locations of deep-sea coral, sponge, and chemosynthetic habitats and characterize associated fish and invertebrate communities (relative abundance, community structure, habitat associations, physical and chemical parameters).
- Coordinate development of consistent maps and other research products to support deep-sea coral management strategies, building upon existing efforts and the mapping strategy identified above.
- Coordinate research to understand and model the basic biology, ecology, and paleoecology of these ecosystems, including tools to accurately predict the distribution and health of deep-sea coral communities.
- Coordinate research related to human activities, including socio-economic aspects, and impact on areas with known or suspected deep-sea coral habitats and methods to mitigate impacts of human activities.

Revised based on JSOST decision to extend the BOARD (10/29/08)

- Enhance coordination of delivery of information needed by managers (e.g., NMFS and regional fishery management councils, National Marine Sanctuaries, Minerals Management Service) for possible management action.
- Engage the international research community to strengthen existing collaborations and support identified science needs (e.g. needs identified by Regional Fishery Management Organizations).
- Work with existing education and outreach programs/entities to increase public awareness of these and other deep-sea resources, and provide a forum for stakeholder input into the Federal interagency deep-sea coral research planning process.

C. Requirements and Products:

- Provide coordinated interagency advice to NOAA as it begins implementation of the Deep-Sea Coral Research and Technology Program. (April – December 2009).
- Coordinate interagency scientific review of major strategic documents dealing with deep-sea corals that are currently under development, including NOAA's *Deep-Sea Coral and Sponge Research and Management Strategy*. The draft five year Plan was made available for comment by agencies and the public in October 2008.
- Prepare an initial strategy for mapping the locations of deep-sea coral, sponge, and chemosynthetic habitats based on agency priorities and mandates, in coordination with the Board member agencies and the non-Federal community. September 2009.
- Coordinate Federal agency preparation for, and participation in, the 4th International Deep Sea Coral Symposium. December 2008. The Board will review the outcomes of the Symposium and provide recommendations on how this information may shape future U.S. science efforts on these ecosystems (April 2009).
- Coordinate with NOAA and the Department of State to review progress of the Regional Fishery Management Organizations and other multilateral institutions in addressing significant adverse impacts to vulnerable marine ecosystems (October 2009).
- Report to JSOST on results of work conducted by agencies during FY 2009 (December 31, 2009).

D. Membership:

All JSOST member agencies, including ex-officio members, may be represented on the interim Board. Agencies, cabinet departments and executive offices not represented on the JSOST may be represented on the interim Board as required. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Department of the Interior (DOI) will co-chair the interim Board.

E. Private Sector Interface

The Board on Deep-Sea Corals and other Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems may solicit and receive advice from non-Federal entities, as consistent with the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

F. Termination Date:

At the request of the Board, JSOST has approved a 12-month extension for the Board's mandate beyond December 31, 2008 to allow for several key activities to be accomplished by the Board. Unless renewed by the Co-chairs of the JSOST prior to its expiration, the Board shall terminate no later than December 31, 2009.

G. Determination:

We hereby determine that the formation and extension of the mandate of the interim Board on Deep-Sea Corals and other Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems is in the public interest in connection with the performance and duties imposed on the Executive Branch by law, and that such duties can best be performed through the advice and counsel of such a group.

Annex 1: Completed Activities: June 2007 – October 2008 (From initial Terms of Reference)

- Coordinated informal interagency review of the Report to Congress on actions to implement the new *Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program* mandated by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act of 2006. This Report was submitted to Congress in March 2008.
- Coordinated initial interagency scientific review of major strategic documents dealing with deep-sea corals:
 - NOAA's *Deep-Sea Coral and Sponge Research and Management Strategy*.
 - USGS' *Strategic Science for Coral Ecosystems*.
- Enhanced coordination in the planning and initial implementation of the MMS/USGS/NOAA program on *Exploration and Research of Northern Gulf of Mexico Deepwater Natural and Artificial Hard Bottom Habitats with Emphasis on Coral Communities: Reefs, Rigs and Wrecks* ("Lophelia II Study").
- Coordinated with NOAA and the Department of State on the development of U.S. positions that influenced the successful development of *International Guidelines on Deep Sea Fisheries on the High Seas* by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. These *Guidelines* addressed fishing impacts on vulnerable marine ecosystems including deep-sea corals, and are guiding subsequent management measures by action by Regional Fishery Management Organizations.
- Reported to JSOST on results of work conducted by agencies during FY 2007 (November 2007) and FY 2008 (August 2008).