

## Proposal to protect all seamounts at fishable depths in the NAFO Regulatory Area

Submitted by Oceans North and the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition

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### Background

NAFO first identified seamounts as VME elements in 2008 and provided initial protections in 2006, demonstrating important leadership in the management of straddling stock fisheries, related habitats, and the implementation of UN General Assembly resolutions on deep-sea fisheries. Additional closures were agreed in 2017 to complete the New England seamount chain protection measures. While NAFO has made considerable progress in protecting seamounts at fishable depths within the NAFO regulatory area, there remain seamounts at < 2000m depth that are unprotected (Figure 1).

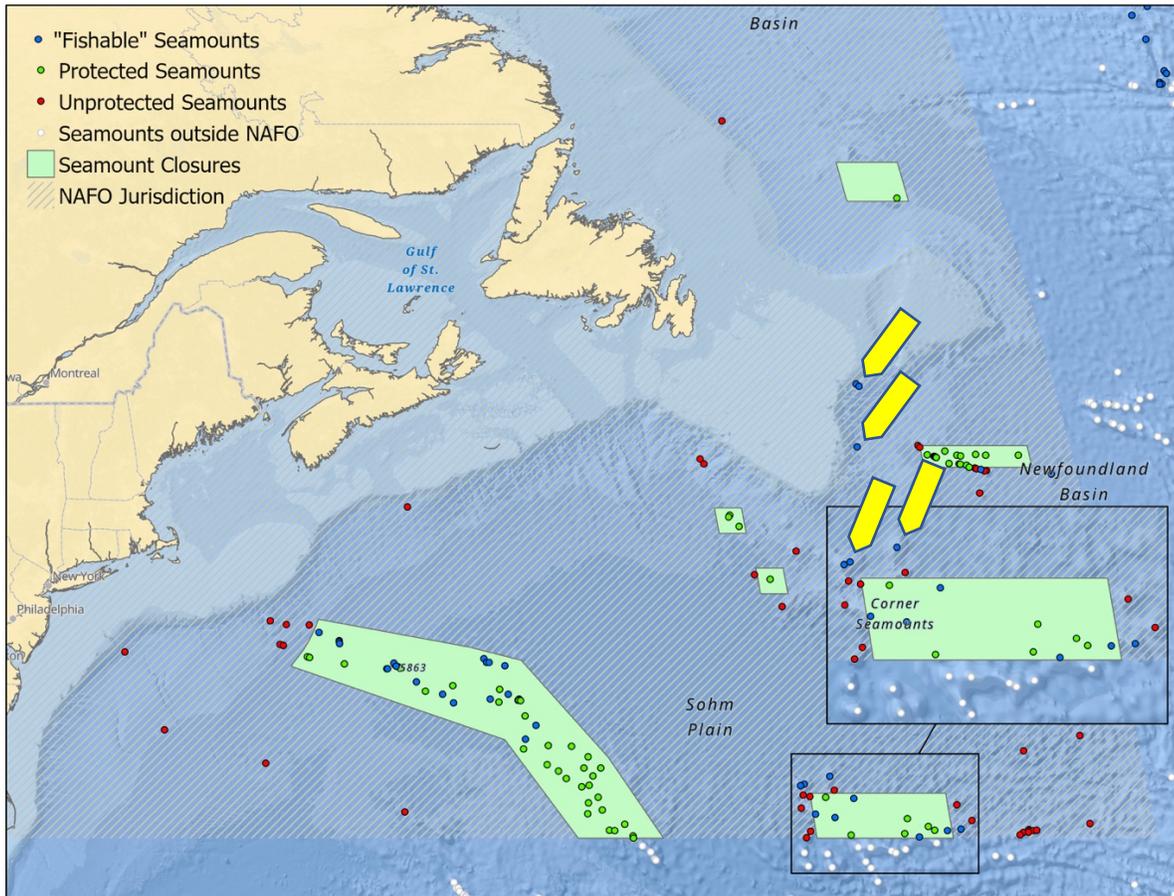
### Rationale

In August 2020, the UNGA will begin a review of progress by States and RFMOs in the implementation of bottom fishing measures adopted in Sustainable Fisheries Resolutions 61/105, 64/72, 66/68 and 71/123. While NAFO will review all existing bottom fishing measures in 2020 and complete updated impact assessments in 2021, NAFO can make significant progress this year by closing the remaining seamounts at fishable depths to bottom fishing to protect VMEs. Not only would this show NAFO Contracting Parties' continued commitment to implement the UNGA resolutions in time for the 2020 review, it would also demonstrate NAFO's commitment and capacity to deliver on key international biodiversity commitments related to the CBD 2020 Aichi targets, conserving biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction in the context of the ongoing UNGA BBNJ negotiations, and the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 on oceans, in particular target 14.2 which commits States to “*sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans*” at the UN Oceans & SDG 14 Conference in June 2020.

**Recommendation: NAFO Contracting Parties agree at the 2019 Annual Meeting 23-27 September to protect all seamounts at fishable depths by closing all remaining seamounts in the Corner Rise seamount area to bottom fishing and the seamounts on the slope of the Grand Banks which are not yet within existing VME closed areas.**

*“Deep-sea ecosystems associated with seamounts, ridges, and other topographic features are now and will increasingly be subjected to multiple stressors from habitat disturbance, pollutants, climate change, acidification and deoxygenation. Studies to date on these impacts have been limited and considered in isolation. The scientific understanding of how these stressors may interact to affect marine ecosystems remains particularly poorly developed...the widespread destruction of deep-water benthic communities due to trawling has presumably reduced their ecological and evolutionary resilience as a result of reduced reproductive potential and loss of genetic diversity and ecological connectivity. The synergistic influence of these factors is unknown at present.” UN 1st World Ocean Assessment, Chapter 51 - Biological communities on seamounts and other submarine features potentially threatened by disturbance.*

**Figure 1. NAFO Seamount protections as of September 2019 in the NAFO regulatory area. (Map produced by Marine Conservation Institute, seamount data as per Kim & Wessel 2011).<sup>1</sup> Arrows highlight unprotected seamounts at fishable depths.**



<sup>1</sup> Kim, S.-S., and P. Wessel (2011), New global seamount census from the altimetry-derived gravity data, *Geophys. J. Int.*, 186, 615-631. [KWSMTS v0.1 is downloadable in either ASCII or KML format.](#)