

DSCC Intervention to SPRFMO on Habitat Suitability Models

Jan 25 2021

Mr. Chair,

SC-8 found that the habitat suitability models have high statistical skill in classifying suitable VME taxa habitat. However, there is great uncertainty in translating model outputs to estimates of abundance and distribution of VME taxa on the seafloor, as well as issues of potential model over-prediction leading to over-optimistic estimates of protection for some taxa.

This is a very concerning finding, and we have submitted a paper that outlines the steps we consider are essential to respond to this finding.

We are concerned by the observation by New Zealand that the model represents the best available science. The SC findings show that the model was inadequate for the purpose of managing bottom fisheries to prevent SAIs on VMEs, and therefore left VMEs vulnerable to damage by bottom trawling.

For these reasons we have recommended that the bottom trawl fishery on seamounts and other underwater features be suspended until the uncertainties can be resolved and the management of the fishery can demonstrably be shown to prevent SAIs on VMEs.

We will leave our other comments for later.

Thank you

