

**Offshore Seafloor and Seep
Sampling Program (2017-
2027) Environmental
Assessment Amendment –
Addendum 2**

Response to Additional Review
Comments



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Fugro Canada

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Report

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General Comments
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1.0 GENERAL COMMENTS

1.1 Fisheries and Oceans Canada

As previously noted, there are some important habitat forming corals (e.g. bamboo coral) and sponges (*Geodia* and some glass sponges) that are more prevalent on soft substrates and they may not be detected using multi-beam echosounder and side scan sonar. As previously noted, the commitment to not sample hard bottom areas will not fully mitigate potential interaction with coral and sponge aggregations especially those that may occur on soft bottom substrates. Given this, and given the fact that seabed sampling will occur within NAFO coral and sponge vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) that are currently closed to bottom contact fishing, it is expected that a greater level of scrutiny and associated protection/mitigation would be employed within such areas. Our expectation is still that visual confirmation (if remotely operated vehicle is not possible then by drop camera photos or footage) of the benthic character / presence of coral or sponge aggregations at planned sea bed survey locations within NAFO VMEs would be obtained prior to employing the sea bed corer to ensure that relevant CNLOPB mitigation / avoidance measures with respect to setbacks from any identified coral and sponge aggregations would be followed. This has not been reflected in the response provided by Fugro.

Fugro commits that visual confirmation of the benthic character / presence of coral or sponge aggregations at planned sea bed survey locations within NAFO VMEs would be obtained prior to employing the sea bed corer or heat flow probe, to adhere with relevant C-NLOPB mitigation / avoidance measures regarding setbacks from identified coral and sponge aggregations would be followed.

Visual confirmation would be used for the 2018 survey activities and in subsequent years unless a suitable alternative benthic habitat mapping solution is identified and agreed with C-NLOPB.

This commitment would seem to remove the potential for physical interaction with coral and sponge aggregations, therefore we consider the mitigation proposed on June 22 to cap the number of core and heat flow samples within the VMEs to be redundant. If C-NLOPB agrees that it is redundant we would request that the cap not be included as a required mitigation.

