

Offshore Seafloor and Seep Sampling Program (2017-2027) Environmental Assessment
Amendment Addendum (June 22, 2018)

GENERAL COMMENTS

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO)

- 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 (VME's) 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.