In response to the ever-increasing demands placed on marine habitats across many sectors of the U.S. economy, and due to our poor understanding of the dependence of marine fisheries on habitat availability and condition, the Marine Fisheries Habitat Assessment Improvement Plan (HAIP) was published in May 2010. The Plan was the product of two years of preparation by scientists in each of the six NMFS Science Centers and the Office of Science and Technology. The HAIP is predicated upon the understanding that gaps in NMFS’ habitat science constrain our attempts to achieve sustainable fisheries. The Plan is
intended to help close those gaps and be the foundation for a nationally-coordinated fisheries-focused habitat science program.

The HAIP is centered on several goals to support sustainable fisheries, including the reduction of habitat-related uncertainty in stock assessments, and the incorporation of ecosystem considerations and spatial analyses. Although the HAIP has not to date generated a large, steady line of funding as was the case for the Stock Assessment Improvement Plan, the agency has provided some funding targeting initiatives aimed to enhance stock assessments through marine habitat research. This science has been diverse and is delivering data focusing on habitat characterization and mapping, vulnerability of species to degrading habitat condition, metabolic rates and behavior in relation to habitat condition, and affinity of species to dynamic 3-dimensional habitat. These findings can be used to improve survey design, the accuracy of models and more generally the breadth of information to support fisheries management decisions. Multiple examples are given to illustrate the utility of this information to enhance stock assessments.