

FISHERY STEWARDSHIP AREAS

A proposal to the Pacific Fishery Management Council

Rod Fujita and Chris Kubiak
Environmental Defense

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Under the current fisheries management regime, individual fishermen and fishing communities cannot benefit directly from conservation because all fishermen in a sector throughout the PFMC's jurisdiction are managed under the same allowable catch and trip limits. In addition, some fishing communities or groups of fishermen suffer reduced fishing opportunities as a result of overruns by other fishermen or groups. This contributes to high discard rates, inefficiency, inequity, reduced fishing opportunities due to the regional nature of sampling and stock assessments (too highly aggregated to accurately assess local populations), and lack of access to productive stocks that could be harvested if discard rates are reduced. One important part of the solution to these serious management problems will be the devolution of research and a certain amount of management responsibility to smaller areas of jurisdiction through area management, with strong mechanisms to ensure accountability to standards and criteria to meet FMP objectives.

Recognizing the need for a full discussion of this concept, we make the following proposal to start the dialogue. We also acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of Barry Cohen, who first developed this concept.

We propose that the Pacific Fishery Management Council develop a streamlined process (e.g. experimental fishery permits) that would allow fishing communities to implement area management by creating Stewardship Areas. All fishing in Stewardship Areas would be assessed and managed by a Stewardship Council made up of appropriate stakeholders. The Council would be strictly accountable to achieving all objectives and standards set forth in applicable FMPs. Stewardship Areas would also be empowered to adopt special regulations subject to approval by PFMC and NOAA-Fisheries, including: (1) high levels of observer coverage or other means of independently observing total catch; (2) full retention; (3) allowable catch levels and trip limits adjusted to reflect local scientific assessments; (4) trip limits adjusted to reflect total catch mortality (landings and discards) and individual bycatch reduction performance. Local fishermen could buy, sell, or exchange permits and IFQ under the aegis of a Harvest Cooperative established for the Stewardship Area. In addition, the Harvest Cooperative would be eligible for shares of the catch granted by the Community Stabilization Holdback program should it be established under the groundfish trawl IFQ program. This share of the catch would become an asset of the Harvest Cooperative, which could distribute it to Coop members, use it as an incentive to attract joint fishermen/processor ventures, etc. Non-fishing holders of permits or IFQ would also be eligible to be full members of Harvest

Cooperatives subject to the rules established by the PFMC, NOAA-Fisheries, the Harvest Cooperative, and the Stewardship Area.

The special regulations associated with Stewardship Areas will create strong incentives to reduce bycatch, thereby increasing fishing opportunity. Observer coverage or other mechanisms (e.g., "black box" video cameras) will allow the collection of total catch (landings plus discards) data; vessels demonstrating lower discard rates would receive larger trip limits. Full retention would also create a strong incentive to reduce bycatch, because all landings would count against trip limits and of course unmarketable fish would yield no financial return (but would impose costs on fishermen). Other conservation measures, such as voluntary reductions in catch or additional habitat protection, could result in longer term benefits of increased stock and habitat health and/or could be rewarded more directly with harvest priority (e.g., increased IFQ allocation) or other means.

Local scientific assessments of fish populations (which would be more frequent and intensive than triennial surveys) and ecological linkages will allow for greater resolution in the calculation of allowable biological catch and optimum yield for the Stewardship Area, and a greater linkage between data and catch limits. A harvest cooperative associated with a Stewardship Area could assume financial responsibility for securing grants and generating other types of revenue (e.g., landings assessments) to fund the necessary research, monitoring, and enforcement measures. In general, the Stewardship Areas would allow local fishermen to benefit from their own conservation actions, creating incentives for stewardship and resulting in reduced bycatch and more fishing opportunity.