

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON OLYMPIC COAST NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY (OCNMS) CONDITION REPORT

A request was made to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to review the scientific merits of the Condition Report that is under development by the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary (OCNMS). The Council specifically requested review of portions of the report that pertain directly to fisheries management. OCNMS Superintendent Carol Bernthal and Dr. Stephen Gittings from the Office of the National Marine Sanctuary Program gave a short presentation and asked the SSC for feedback on data resources, rating descriptions, and our thoughts on 3 of 17 status evaluation questions: sustainable fishing, key species status, and human activities affecting living resources. OCNMS is using this opportunity to establish consultation with the Council early in their process, which may eventually lead to changes in the Condition Report prior to external peer review.

Condition Reports for all Sanctuaries are a new requirement of the National Marine Sanctuary Program. They will be updated every five years to identify data gaps, prioritize monitoring needs, and evaluate progress toward meeting Sanctuary goals. The Condition Report questions, format, performance measures and scoring system to evaluate condition are established and not subject to change.

A full analysis of the content of the document was not possible due to late delivery of the document and lack of specific performance metrics. However, the SSC has comments on the process leading to the status evaluations as well as the content of condition factor number 10.

Comments on the process:

1. The report is comprehensive in scope and considers many critical aspects of Sanctuary condition.
2. Some of the available fisheries data for the region have been incorporated, although National Marine Fishery Service survey and fishery data were not fully utilized.
3. The process is not transparent. Status evaluations are based on expert opinion. Qualitative condition “scores” and general trends are ultimately determined by the OCNMS staff. It is not clear how experts were chosen or how many contributed to each status evaluation.
4. Methodology based on expert opinion, without a good sense of how data inform that opinion, is not a scientific process.
5. Workshops on particular issues such as fisheries status and impacts may improve the process of data integration and status evaluation.

Comments on report content:

The OCNMS requested SSC guidance on Question 10, “What is the status of environmentally sustainable fishing and how is it changing?” The OCNMS gives the condition and trend of sustainable fishing practices an “Undetermined” rating.

1. This is one of few condition indicators that can be quantified based on available fisheries data.
2. The term “ecosystem integrity” is not defined or quantified.
3. Trend evaluation largely depends on the baseline used for evaluation. In the past 5 years most groundfish stocks show indications of improvement and fisheries management directed at sustainability and habitat protection have clearly improved.
4. The SSC disagrees with the final statement of this section of the report (Agenda Item I.2.b, Supplemental OCNMS Draft Condition Report, page 32): “All these considerations lead to uncertainty about the long-term sustainability of groundfish fisheries as currently practiced off Washington (p. 32).”

PFMC
04/09/08