

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
GROUND FISH ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT (EFH) MODIFICATIONS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) heard from Mr. Brad Pettinger concerning two Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) proposals that have been submitted. One from the Fisherman's Marketing Association (FMA) and the other from Oceana.

The GAP discussed the FMA, Eel River Canyon proposal and concluded that it should be approved for further consideration. It is believed that this is a minor modification and results in a situation more closely related to original agreements between trawl and conservation representatives during original actions for EFH. This would restore original trawl areas frequented by locally based vessels.

Next was a discussion of the Oceana proposal, Grays Canyon and Olympic2. It was viewed as a very aggressive expansion of existing EFH. This would remove trawl area in which most has very little sponge habitat. It was also noted that most of the proposed area is within the tribal U & A and therefore would only affect non-tribal fishermen should the tribes choose not to honor these new closures. This could result in limited or no actual habitat protection. There was little evidence contained within the proposal referring to socioeconomic impacts or any comprehensive collaborative efforts involving area harvesters. These areas are important to the trawl fleet. Lastly this EFH expansion was not viewed as an emergency situation as it is now protected in part by the rockfish conservation area (RCA) and therefore could be adequately addressed at the normal 5 year review of EFH. The GAP recommends that this proposal not be approved for further consideration.

There was some discussion in reference to expansion of EFH in general. How much protection does the EEZ need? How much shift in areas of effort will trigger further reduction of fleet sizes caused by local depletion? The GAP feels that there will always be a marine resource that needs protection through fishery closures. It is requested that the Council address the issue of limits to habitat protection closures. The original agreement on EFH closures was said to protect the trawl footprint as well as habitat. The GAP believes any expansion of EFH should not be considered until a full analysis of the status of existing EFH is completed.

PFMC
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