

## HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON GROUND FISH ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT (EFH) MODIFICATIONS

The Habitat Committee supports the Essential Fish Habitat Review Committee's (EFHRC) determination that the Eel River Canyon and Olympic 2/Grays Canyon proposals have sufficient technical merit to warrant further consideration. The EFHRC did a good job of identifying ways the proposals could be improved and recommending additional sources of information.

These first two proposals are instructive in that one is a request to expand a boundary, another to reduce the closure area. This will help provide guidance for adjustments to the Terms of Reference (TOR) document and the process that may be needed in the future.

A mechanism for evaluating the urgency of socio-economic and natural resource impacts is needed in order to assess the appropriateness for addressing the proposals in the interim process. HC suggests the Council consider these proposals in light of their socio-economic or natural resource impacts, and in consideration of the precautionary principle.

The HC noted that the EFHRC review provided the following suggestions to current applicants. These issues may need to be emphasized in future proposal requests:

- Differentiate between information that was available in 2005 and information that has been developed in the interim.
- More investigation into the effects of specific gear types on specific habitat types. For Eel River Canyon, effects of mobile fishing gear on soft bottom sediment habitats were recommended for investigation; for Olympic 2/ Grays Canyon, the EFHRC recommended more literature review on effects of fixed bottom contact gear on coral and sponge habitat.
- Proponents should provide specific information regarding the size of the geographic area involved in the proposal. (The HC also commented that fishing effort as well as geographic extent was relevant).
- Both proposals fail to consider the costs to fixed-gear fisheries in terms of competition, displacement, and gear conflict.
- In general, additional information about socioeconomic effects should be requested from the applicant.
- Applicants should be asked to develop a plan to monitor the success of the action, if taken. The EFHRC noted that ongoing groundfish observer and vessel monitoring programs would provide some elements of a monitoring plan.

In the case of Olympic 2/Grays Canyon, the HC notes that this proposal for boundary updates provides a focus for coordination and collaboration on research along the coast of Washington, especially within the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary (OCNMS). The EFHRC made

several specific recommendations for ways in which the applicants can use other research data to improve the proposal. The OCNMS is currently undergoing a management plan review in which research coordination is a major topic under consideration. HC also notes the NOAA activity around deep sea corals that provides another forum for coordination. HC urges Oceana, OCNMS, NOAA, state fish and wildlife, tribes, and others to take this opportunity to come together to coordinate research to the mutual benefit of all data users.

In summary, the HC supports moving both proposals forward in the interim review process, but withholds judgment on whether we believe habitat is appropriately protected by either proposal until we have further information.