

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT
ON NATIONAL SYSTEM OF MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

The Habitat Committee (HC) reviewed information about the national system of marine protected areas (MPAs) and had the following comments.

The HC supports the activities of cataloging, coordinating, and collaborating that form the foundation of the National System of MPAs. We see potential benefits such as achieving national recognition for Council implementation of area-based protections, bringing resources to the table that can support Council ecosystem management initiatives, and resulting in more rigorous review of Federal activities that are proposed to occur in these areas.

The HC supports including all sites identified in the August 14, 2009 letter (from Acting NMFS Regional Administrator, Barry Thom, to the Pacific Council) in a public review draft for nomination to the national MPA system, and recommends the Council also consider nominating its other management zones that are not currently on the list, but which meet the national MPA system criteria.

Appointing areas to this system is expected to be an ongoing process, so this will not be the only opportunity to add, remove, or alter nominated sites. Acting now would benefit the Council by acknowledging previous Council actions in implementing place-based area management.

The implementation plan notes that *“the Framework lays out the processes for identifying conservation gaps in the national system ... and developing recommendations for new or enhanced MPAs through collaborative ecosystem-based MPA planning ... However, neither the Order nor the Framework provides authority to designate or establish new MPAs or alter protections afforded by existing MPAs.”* Despite this, the HC had a lively debate on the potential implications of participating in the national system. For example, it is still not clear what will be entailed in “collaborative ecosystem management,” or how development of an “effectiveness strategy” will guide management of MPAs. Further clarification of these points would be beneficial.

PFMC
09/13/09