

## HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON UNMANAGED FORAGE FISH PROTECTION

The Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) appreciates the Council's efforts to implement the Fishery Ecosystem Plan via completion of the first Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) Initiative to protect unfished and unmanaged forage fish. These forage species are important prey for species managed under each of the four Council Fishery Management Plans (FMPs), including the HMS FMP:

- Round herring, *Etrumeus teres*
- Thread herring, *Opisthonema libertate*, *O. medirastre*
- Mesopelagic fishes of the families *Bathylagidae*, *Gonostomatidae*, *Myctophidae*, and *Paralepididae*
- Pacific sand lance, *Ammodytes hexapterus*
- Pacific saury, *Cololabis saira*
- Silversides, *Atherinopsidae*
- Smelts of the family *Osmeridae*
- Pelagic squids (families: *Cranchiidae*, *Gonatidae*, *Histioteuthidae*, *Octopoteuthidae*, *Ommastrephidae* except Humboldt squid, *Onychoteuthidae*, and *Thysanoteuthidae*)

The HMSMT recommends the Council approve the Preliminary Preferred Alternative (Alternative 2) for the forage fish initiative and the draft amendatory language to the HMS to add Shared Ecosystem Component (EC) species, as provided in Agenda Item E.4.b, EWG Report. The ecosystem benefits of these species as forage for high-value target finfish catch species likely outweighs their potential value in directed fishery harvest, due to potential negative population impacts on existing directed fisheries limit availability of forage.

The HMSMT would like to point out that this prohibition on developing directed commercial fisheries on these species does not prevent landings in currently authorized fisheries. This aspect was further discussed in the Supplemental NMFS Report under Agenda Item E.4.b and may require additional qualification in the rule-making process.

Directed fisheries on the forage species proposed for protection do not currently exist in Federal waters. However, in light of the possible future need to address potential requests to develop a commercial fishery for Shared EC species, the HMSMT recommends adoption of a Council Operating Procedure under Agenda Item I.4.