

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON EXPANSION OF GULF OF FARALLONES AND CORDELL BANK NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES

Dr. Lisa Wooninck, Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, provided a summary regarding the proposed expansion of the Gulf of the Farallones and Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuaries. Despite the scoping comment period having closed on March 1, 2013, comments from the Council and its advisory bodies provided during the April meeting will be accepted and considered. The Habitat Committee (HC) supports the underlying intent of the proposed expansion to protect important habitat and the associated ecosystem functions. However, before the HC can make a recommendation whether or not to support the expansion, we believe the following issues need to be evaluated in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

- Since the basis for a boundary expansion is tied directly to the need to protect the resources in the important upwelling zone off Point Arena, the specific geographic boundary of this zone and its relation to the two sanctuaries should be evaluated.
- An analysis of what habitat protection measures, in addition to those already existing through Endangered Species Act (ESA), Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), etc., would be provided by the proposed expansions.
- The HC discussed a list of activities of concern, including oil and gas exploration, alternative energy development, desalination, dredging and disposal, and the use of sonar, especially for military exercises, that could be regulated by the sanctuaries or other permitting authorities, such as the California Coastal Commission and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It is unclear which activities would be prohibited within the sanctuaries, allowed through an individual sanctuary permit, or regulated under other permitting authorities. Because some flexibility may be appropriate regarding specific activities (e.g., dredge disposal and beneficial reuse of the material), the regulation of these activities under Sanctuary authority should be analyzed in the EIS.
- To protect ecological functions within the Sanctuary, new activities that can be sited elsewhere should be analyzed before they are allowed in the sanctuary, using an alternatives analysis.
- Analyze the efficacy of water quality protections, such as those implemented by the Gulf of Farallones and the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary programs, and consider incorporation of such protections into these expansions.
- The HC supports an evaluation of activities that would improve the relationship between fishermen and the sanctuaries. For instance, the sanctuaries should consider conducting collaborative research with local fishermen that takes advantage of their knowledge of local habitats.
- Future comment periods for the Draft EIS and Proposed Rule should be scheduled to allow review and comment by the Council.