

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON CALIFORNIA CURRENT ECOSYSTEM REPORT INCLUDING INTEGRATED ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT

The Habitat Committee (HC) received a briefing from Phil Levin and Correigh Greene (National Marine Fisheries Service) on the Annual State of the California Current Ecosystem (CCE) Report, Integrated Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) Phase II Report and current IEA work.

The HC appreciates the extensive effort required to compile and synthesize ecosystem information in these reports for use by the Council, and believes the two reports are valuable assets that the Council can use as it continues to make progress towards integrating ecosystem information into its management decision-making framework. The following points highlighted in the Annual State of the CCE Report were of particular interest to the HC:

1. From late 2010 to 2012, the trophic Pacific transitioned from weak La Niña to El Niño Southern Oscillation-neutral conditions.
2. Strong upwelling occurred in 2012 for southern and central California and in 2013 for the whole coast, indicating higher primary productivity.
3. Copepod biomass and diversity indicate generally average to favorable conditions for secondary production in the CCE.
4. Survey catches indicate that Northern anchovy abundance is reduced along much of the coast recently; however, a number of other forage fish populations have responded positively to productive conditions.
5. Most salmon populations examined are near their average escapement, but trends are mixed: three populations show increasing trends, six show downward trends, and three show no trends.
6. The mean trophic level of groundfish exhibited a declining trend south of Cape Mendocino, but has been largely stable since 2009 throughout the CCE.
7. In response to the poor condition of sea lion pups at rookeries and a high level of strandings, National Marine Fisheries Service declared an “unusual mortality event” of California sea lion pups in March 2013.
8. Non-fisheries human activities in the CCE that may negatively impact the ecosystem are generally low with stable or declining trends. Nutrient input is an exception: it is elevated, although it shows a declining trend at the coast-wide scale.

With the goal of keeping the Annual State of the CCE Report to a succinct and manageable level, the HC finds the topic descriptions and display of data to be in a useful, easily interpreted, and easily understandable format that clarifies current status and trends compared to long-term trends.

Looking toward the future, it would be beneficial for the IEA Team to engage directly with Council advisory bodies to plan ecosystem scenarios that are useful for Council management. This would enhance future planning of IEA Team activities. The HC looks forward to continued integration of ecosystem-based information into the Council process and hopes to work closely with the IEA Team to enhance this process. Further, the HC strongly supports continued annual reports on the State of the CCE to help inform specific management decisions.