

## GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT SYNTHESIS REPORT AND REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) appreciated receiving a presentation from Drs. Michele McClure, Waldo Wakefield, and Ole Shelton from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) on the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Synthesis Report. That report provides an impressive summary of the available information in a concise and understandable format. We expect the data provided will be useful to the Council in considering proposed changes to EFH designations and/or management measures.

While it is beneficial to have the available new information distilled in this way, the GMT highlights that there are important limitations to the analyses that should be recognized. For instance, there is relatively little information available for all life history stages or indeed most of the stocks within the Fishery Management Plan. Moreover, the information on presence/absence comes primarily from the NWFSC trawl survey that occurs in the summer, meaning that habitat use from other seasons is likely underrepresented. Likewise, the trawl survey does not sample all available habitats, as shown by the yelloweye rockfish distribution maps, and the difference the visual survey data makes to the predictive modeling. This underscores the importance of visual surveys in understanding the habitat needs of some rockfishes. The visual surveys used in the Synthesis Report have covered only a limited part of non-trawlable habitat on the coast.

Nonetheless, the summary of areas and habitat types protected as well as fishing pressure for those areas and habitats is useful. It appears that the Council and NMFS were largely successful at “freezing” the trawl footprint, and pressure has not changed much since 2006. The GMT notes, however, that information from the rationalized trawl fishery is not yet available and may have quite a different pattern from what was seen under bimonthly cumulative limits.

Lastly, we think that some of the metrics produced for this EFH review (e.g. prey species and cumulative fishery pressure analysis) could be helpful indicators for the Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement and follow-ups to it if resources allow for regular updating.