



March 19, 2013

Mr. Dan Wolford, Chair
Pacific Fishery Management Council
7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101
Portland, OR 97220-1384

RE: Agenda Item D.6, Groundfish Essential Fish Habitat

Dear Mr. Wolford and Council members:

As part of this April 2013 briefing book, Oceana is happy to submit a new report, *Important Ecological Areas Seafloor Habitat Expedition off the Southern Oregon Coast* (see Agenda Item D.6.d Public Comment 2). This report synthesizes and summarizes in a publically-available format the data we extracted from high definition seafloor habitat footage taken during Oceana's June 2011 research cruise off southern Oregon. During the course of that expedition, we executed 17 dives at depths ranging from 28 to 228 meters and we collected 13.5 hours of video of seafloor habitats and managed fish species.

While this public report is new, we previously submitted information and data on this research to the Pacific Fishery Management Council and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Information about the research was included in the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Review Committee's Phase I Report,¹ which we submitted in response to the agency's July 2011 data request. We subsequently provided all of the data included in this report in Geographic Information System (GIS) format to NMFS and Council staff at the September 2012 PFMC meeting with the understanding that it would be included in this 5-year review. We have also worked with NMFS staff to ensure that it will be incorporated into the NMFS EFH synthesis that will be presented at the April 2013 Council meeting. Last, we provided this data to NOAA's Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program for inclusion in the National Deep-Sea Coral and Sponge Geodatabase.

This research represents the first *in situ* observations of the habitats and fish species in the Cape Arago region and the first observations at the Coquille Bank EFH Conservation Area since the area was designated in 2005. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has previously surveyed the Orford Reef area and Hixon and Tissot (2007) reported on the effects of bottom trawling in soft sediment habitat areas immediately adjacent to the Coquille Bank EFH conservation area. In our research, we documented corals at 15 of the 17 dives and sponges at 16 of 17 dives, significantly adding to the direct observations of coral and sponge locations in this region. Some of the reefs we surveyed previously had no records of corals or sponges. We documented 13 different managed groundfish species and overall we saw 2,299 individual fishes

¹ PFMC September 2012., Agenda Item H.6.b, EFHRC Report, at 136

Mr. Dan Wolford, PFMC
Groundfish Essential Fish Habitat
Page 2 of 2

including widow rockfish, canary rockfish, yelloweye rockfish, lingcod and other managed and unmanaged fish species.

The areas we surveyed are biologically diverse, contain sensitive habitat features, and they are clearly essential fish habitat for managed fish species. Some of these areas are likely important nursery habitats for overfished species like yelloweye and canary rockfish. Importantly, the areas studied in this report represent key areas of interest where new data now exists that was not available in the initial round of EFH deliberations. We will continue to pay close attention to these areas as we develop our proposals in response to the Council's upcoming Request for Proposals for modifications to existing EFH management. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to contact me or my colleague Geoff Shester about any questions you may have regarding this report.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Enticknap', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Ben Enticknap
Pacific Campaign Manager and Senior Scientist

References:

Enticknap, B., G. Shester, M. Gorny, and M. Kelley. 2013. Important Ecological Areas Seafloor Habitat Expedition off the Southern Oregon Coast. Oceana Pacific. March 2013. See: PFMC Agenda Item D.6.c Public Comment 2, April 2013

Hixon, M.A., and B.N. Tissot. 2007. Comparison of trawled vs untrawled mud seafloor assemblages of fishes and macroinvertebrates at Coquille Bank, Oregon. *Journal of Experimental Marine Biology and Ecology*. 344: 23-34.