



March 29, 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 5-year Review

Dear Chairman Wolford and Council members:

As organizations intimately involved in the development of Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Conservation Areas off the U.S. West Coast we express our continued interest in the long-term protection and responsible management of groundfish EFH. We support the Pacific Fishery Management Council's Groundfish EFH 5-year review process, and we urge the Council to approve and release the Request for Proposals (RFP) as currently drafted at this meeting. It is important that the Council approve the RFP and move forward with the 5-year review process as the success of EFH management depends on iterative improvements based on new information and new science.

The draft RFP is the product of significant work by the Essential Fish Habitat Review Committee (EFHRC) and has benefited from input from various stakeholders and the Council. It strikes an appropriate balance between rigor and flexibility—requiring a set of essential information to be contained in each proposal, while also encouraging and allowing for more detailed proposals. Proposers have the option of providing detailed analysis, but are not precluded from submitting proposals if they are unable to do such analysis.

We concur with the EFHRC's conclusion that the Phase I Report presents substantial new information and new analyses of previously available information relevant to EFH management. This new information has become available since the Council made its final decision on EFH measures in 2005. In particular, there is substantial new information relevant to the criteria the Council used as the basis for EFH Conservation Areas, including new locations and shapes of rocky reef habitats, biogenic habitats (e.g., corals and sponges) as well as fishing effort. We commend the National Marine Fisheries Service and the EFHRC for making this data publicly available in a variety of formats, as it is now accessible to a much wider audience of stakeholders.

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act contains a clear mandate to “minimize to the extent practicable adverse effects on [EFH] caused by fishing” 16 U.S.C. § 1853(a)(7). This mandate requires incorporation of the best available science and the primary vehicles for ensuring compliance on an ongoing basis are the required 5-year reviews of EFH. *See id.* § 1855(b)(1)(A); 50 C.F.R. § 600.815(a)(10). Requesting input from stakeholders, partner agencies, and Tribes will provide the Council with a broad range of ideas and input on how the new information developed since 2005 can be used to better minimize fishing impacts on EFH. This is all part of refining management in an

adaptive, iterative manner—precisely the process envisioned by the Magnuson-Stevens Act. By approving the RFP and moving forward with the EFH 5-year review process, this Council can help ensure vibrant, productive fisheries for generations to come. We hope to see the Council continue its leadership on EFH management, and we look forward to participating as partners in this important process.

Sincerely,



Geoffrey Shester, Ph.D.
Oceana
99 Pacific Street, Suite 155C
Monterey, CA 93940



Greg Helms
Ocean Conservancy
1528 Castillo Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101



Seth Atkinson
Natural Resources Defense Council
111 Sutter Street, 20th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94104