

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON MANAGING OUR NATION'S FISHERIES 3 CONFERENCE FOLLOW-UPS AND UNRELATED LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

Managing Our Nation's Fisheries Findings

The Habitat Committee (HC) continued to consider habitat/ecosystem related findings from the Managing Our Nation's Fisheries 3 (MONF) Conference. At this May 2013 conference, 128 findings were produced. Since this meeting, Council staff have organized these findings into a matrix (H.1.a, Attachment 1) by the following categories: legislative/statutory, regulatory/national standards, and policy/best practices.

Rather than "Establish ecosystem Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) at the Council level," the HC recommends the Council forward to the Council Coordination Committee, the finding "Ensure inclusion of ecosystem scientists on the SSC to facilitate scientific consideration of ecosystem issues as they arise."

HC members considered more in depth the MONF Session 2 legislative/statutory findings that addressed broad ecosystem-based management considerations (H.1.a, Attachment 2). The HC recommends the Council prioritize the MONF session two findings and provide additional specifications as follows:

Medium Ppriority

- "Address rebuilding requirements when environmental conditions may be a predominant factor in a stock's decline"
- "Link ecosystem-based management scales to fisheries management and governance (e.g., Revise National Standard 3 (Management Unit))." The HC understands this to mean allowing regional management when strong science and local factors dictate that this is the best method available, for example to avoid local depletion of stocks and habitat impacts, and to enhance local stewardship.

High Priority

- "Consider a national standard for habitat: Minimize adverse impacts on essential fish habitat (EFH) to the extent practicable"
- Combine "Establish a new national standard to ensure adequate forage base" AND "Require explicit consideration of the impact of forage fish to the ecosystem and fishing communities to inform optimum yield and annual catch limit decisions" to form a comprehensive forage base finding. This would be an integral part of an ecosystem-based management approach.
- "Prohibit new forage fisheries until scientific and management evaluations are conducted"
- Amend the final finding to read as follows "Strengthen EFH consultation process TO (not and) ensure compliance with, and effectiveness of, existing laws and recommendations." The HC recommends that during EFH consultation, NMFS make note of other complementary legal provisions that apply, in order to strengthen compliance. We recognize this change does not require an act of Congress, but recommend that it be included among the best practices listed in the matrix.