

ECOSYSTEM ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON DEVELOPMENT OF A FISHERY ECOSYSTEM PLAN

The Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel (EAS) met November 4th and 5th and reviewed Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council) June 2011 action and the draft Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) outline (Agenda Item H.2.a, Attachment 1) provided by the Ecosystem Plan Development Team (EPDT). The EAS appreciates the efforts of the EPDT in developing the initial outline and looks forward to working with the EPDT on the next steps. The EAS remains supportive of the FEP approach and offers the following comments and recommendations on its future development.

Draft Fishery Ecosystem Plan

Section 1.3 - Schedule and Process for Developing the FEP: The EAS is generally supportive of the proposed process, but notes that the schedule for development of the FEP and process for implementation are lengthy. The EAS recommends an accelerated schedule involving three Council meetings per year rather than two to expedite the plan's development.

Section 1.4 Schedule and Process for Annual State-of-the-Ecosystem Reporting: The EAS encourages the development of early concrete examples or case studies of how the ecosystem information could be applied. For example, a mock-up of a "hotsheet" would be useful to illustrate the form and utility of the information. A clearer label than "hotsheet" such as "Summary Ecosystem Consideration Report," would be more descriptive. The EAS also suggests that the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), the EPDT, and stock assessment authors collaborate in providing early examples of the use of ecosystem principles to improve stock assessments and better inform fishery management decisions. These examples should demonstrate how ecosystem science and/or indicators could give the Council better information for making decisions about appropriate catch levels.

Section 2.0 - Goals and Objectives: The EAS notes and continues to support the goals and objectives presented, which reflect previous discussions between the EPDT and the EAS on this topic. The EAS recommends that the FEP explicitly incorporate ecosystem principles and the four commonly held goals (avoid overfishing, maintain stability in landings, minimize impacts to habitat, and accommodate existing fisheries sectors) of the existing FMPs as well as the goal of providing adequate forage from the Coastal Pelagic Species Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The EAS recommends that this section be identified as a high priority for early completion and Council consideration.

Section 3.4 - Socio-Economic Components: Socio-economic considerations are an important element of ecosystem management. The EAS recommends, for example, that the "Summary Ecosystem Consideration Report" include a summary of relevant socio-economic issues and information.

Section 4.0 - Uncertainties of Environmental and Human-Induced Impacts to the Marine Environment: The desired benefit of an FEP is to enhance information and reduce uncertainty. This information may inform either increases or decreases in harvest opportunities. The EAS

recommends that this section also describe the scientific uncertainty and precautionary approaches currently in place.

Section 5.0 – Council Policy Priorities for Ocean Resource Management: The EAS recommends that the impacts and interactions of aquaculture on the ecosystem be included in this section of the FEP.

Section 6.2 – Science Questions for Future Consideration: The EAS recommends prioritization of the scientific questions presented to determine which species or issues should be the focus of initial research and management consideration. While the listed research is valuable, a prioritization exercise could streamline the implementation of the most critical research issues.

List of Species

Appendix A in Agenda Item H.2.a, Attachment 1 provides useful information about the status of forage fish. This first-cut analysis of global demand for forage fish indicates the possibility of future harvest pressures. The EAS acknowledges controversy in this preliminary finding. If the economics and future prospects of aquaculture is a key factor in the future exploitation of unmanaged fish, then the EAS recommends that the EPDT expand the review of the economics of developing fisheries, processing operations, and existing utilization of fish resources.

If the Council ultimately seeks to protect unmanaged species from as-yet-unformed fisheries or to ensure that exploitation on currently unmanaged species does not occur until such time as it can be demonstrated that this exploitation is sustainable and does not have substantial adverse impacts to the ecosystem or their dependent predators, the EAS recommends that:

- a) First, determine the effectiveness and support for using the Authorized West Coast Exclusive Economic Zone Fisheries and Gear (Table A2, Agenda Item H.2.a, Attachment 1) as an adequate mechanism.
- b) Second, if “a)” proves inadequate, assess the methods and merits of regulating currently unmanaged species within an existing FMP.

Finally, the EAS recommends that any future protective measures for currently unmanaged forage fish not impact the allowable catch of currently managed species.

PFMC
11/06/11