

HABITAT COMMITTEE COMMENTS ON
DEVELOPMENT OF A COUNCIL FISHERY ECOSYSTEM PLAN

The HC reviewed the Pacific Coast Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP), and commends the Council and Ecosystem Plan Development Team (EPDT) on progress with creating this plan. We offer the following comments:

Chapter 1

The HC noted that the schedule in Section 1.3 appeared ambitious but reasonable.

Regarding the schedule and process for annual state-of-the-ecosystem reporting in Section 1.4, the HC supported the idea of providing both an annual ecosystem report and brief species-group ecosystem “hotsheets.” We believe the condensed, timely information included in the hotsheets would be more useful to the Council than the full report for making management decisions. The PaCOOS quarterly reports could be used as a template for developing these reports.

Chapter 2

The HC recommends the Council condense the goal of the FEP as follows:

“The goal of this FEP is to incorporate ecosystem science into the Council’s FMPs so as to ensure a sustainable and productive ecosystem for long-term support of Pacific coast fisheries.”

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 does not cover the geological aspect of habitat, and the HC recommends this information be included.

The intent of Section 3.3 (Biological Components and Relationships of the CCE) is unclear, and the HC is concerned that it may be overwhelming to consider all these types of complex trophic interactions. The HC recommends that the EPDT clarify the scope of this section.

Chapter 5

This chapter is designed to inform external entities about Council ecosystem priorities, but the process should also work in reverse. External state and regional processes can inform and assist the Council’s ecosystem policies and priorities, and the Council should seek out this information.

Appendix A

This section includes a list of selected lower trophic level species in the California Current Ecosystem. The EPDT noted that the lowest trophic order organisms (e.g., phytoplankton and

zooplankton) are likely too small to be of interest as fisheries targets, but that the Council may be interested in the status of these species as indicators of ecosystem health or potential predictors of available harvest levels of FMP species. In this context, the HC believes that crab larval abundance collected in nearshore waters and estuaries is a valuable indicator, and should be considered.

The HC suggests expanding the list of species to include benthic invertebrates that would be considered forage species. In addition, the HC recommends adding the abalone, razor clam, and sea urchin fisheries to Table A-2.

General Comments

Unlike other FMPs, there is no annual status report planned for the FEP, and therefore, there is no mechanism for tracking FEP performance. The HC recommends a regular status report on how the Council's ecosystem management approach affects Council managed fisheries. This report could be similar to other SAFE reports or the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's Aleutian Islands Plan.

Finally, the HC notes that because the plan will likely be iterative, the EPDT could continue to serve an important role after the plan is completed.

PFMC
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