

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON ECOSYSTEM-BASED MANAGEMENT

The Habitat Committee (HC) reviewed the report by the Ecosystem Workgroup on pathways for protecting unmanaged forage fish. Essential fish habitat (EFH) designations consider prey as a component of EFH, and the ecosystem-based management concept is broadly consistent with other topics the HC regularly reviews.

In this respect, the HC recommends the Ecosystem Trophic Role pathway (2.2.1) because it is consistent with an ecosystem-based management approach and improves flexibility for the Council to invoke protections and enact other management actions. As noted in the report, these unmanaged forage fish are of questionable marketability, so Alternative 2.1 (the no action alternative) and others may be sufficient to protect unmanaged forage fish stocks. We also note that designating unmanaged forage species as ecosystem component species would allow for bycatch reduction measures. The report noted low bycatch for most species except smelt (in the pink shrimp trawl fishery) and squid (in several fisheries). In this respect, the HC points to the Pew comment on keeping three additional families of squid in the definition of unmanaged forage fish. The public comments on unmanaged forage fish were voluminous, commending the Council for proactively pursuing this issue. The HC recommends the Council select a preliminary preferred alternative at this meeting so that they can finalize this issue.

PFMC
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