

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON GROUNDFISH ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT REVIEW

The Habitat Committee (HC) discussed the proposed essential fish habitat (EFH) review process and schedule. The HC identified some timeline issues with the schedule and offers the following comments and recommendations on the review process:

1. The HC notes a discrepancy between the Situation Summary and the proposed schedule regarding timeline for submission of proposals for new and adjusted areas. The proposed schedule indicates the submission deadline is November 19, 2010, while the Situation Summary indicates April 2011. However, as we suggest below, this deadline should be advanced further into the process.
2. The two-path approach may not be necessary, given that the longer time period of Path 2 is likely warranted for even “minor” adjustments to existing designations. A more protracted timeline will allow more time for informed and constructive input from interested parties. Additionally, the definition of minor adjustments is subjective.
3. This process will likely set a precedent for subsequent EFH 5-year reviews; therefore, an established framework would provide structure and consistency for subsequent reviews. The HC suggests the following:
 - a. The current schedule should provide formal notice and adequate time for agencies, academia, and the public to prepare for and engage in the process, including time to prepare and contribute new information.
 - b. A formal public notice should be issued. The notice should describe the triggers/thresholds that would warrant either modifications to existing EFH designations or evaluation of new EFH proposals.
 - c. The current proposed schedule does not lend itself to considering new information (e.g., updated west coast seafloor map for benthic habitats, emerging threats to EFH) early enough to inform the extent and magnitude of the EFH process. While not all new information is available to the current process, there should at least be a placeholder in the framework for identifying and reviewing available new information. This would provide an opportunity to evaluate what data/information could be useful and the level of effort necessary to incorporate this information.
 - d. New proposals should not be solicited, nor modifications to existing EFH designations proposed, until *after* new scientific information has been identified and evaluated.
4. Since new habitat and species-habitat information has emerged in the last five years, the EFH Review Committee should weigh the costs and benefits of rerunning the Habitat

Suitability model and/or risk model. However, the initial model development was very expensive and may be cost-prohibitive to rerun.

5. The HC agrees with the draft proposed changes to the Council Operating Procedure for the EFH review process, with the changes recommended above.

PFMC
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