

SALMON ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON PROTECTING UNFISHED AND UNMANAGED FORAGE FISH SPECIES INITIATIVE

The Salmon Advisory Subpanel (SAS) recognizes the importance of forage fish to a wide variety of Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) managed species, including salmon, and to the greater marine ecosystem. The SAS supports prohibition of new directed fishing on currently unmanaged, unfished forage species in Federal waters until the Council has adequately assessed scientific information relative to any proposed fishery and considered potential impacts to existing fisheries, fishing communities and the marine ecosystem.

Catch of the Initiative 1 forage species within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) currently is mostly bycatch. However, worldwide demand for forage species is growing rapidly to supply the expanding aquaculture industry. Given limited potential for increased fishmeal production from traditional lower trophic level species, prices for fishmeal and fish oil will continue to rise, making the prospect for fisheries developing on the minor forage species more attractive.

The SAS wants to ensure that the Council evaluates the ecological, social and economical costs and benefits of developing a new forage fish fishery before deciding whether to authorize a long-term fishery.

Therefore, the SAS recommends adopting Alternate 2.2.1 (from Agenda Item I.1.a, Attachment 1) in which all of the subject species would be identified in all four fishery management plans (FMPs) as ecosystem component species. This would provide recognition that, as a group, these species serve as prey for many higher order California current ecosystem (CCE) predators, including marine mammals, seabirds and many fish species including those in the Council's FMPs.

Under alternative 2.2.1 (the Ecosystem trophic Role Pathway), should a request for an exempted fishing permit be presented to the Council, consideration would be given as to how a new fishery for that species would affect species within each FMP. Stakeholders representing each FMP would provide comments to the Council that support or disapprove of the new fishery. As an example, a proposed forage fish fishery off Washington's coast might heavily affect salmon and groundfish, but have little effect on most coastal pelagic species (CPS). Alternatively, a proposed forage fishery off the southern California coast would have no impact on salmon but might directly influence CPS and highly migratory species (HMS). Fishery, social, and economic analyses relative to the newly proposed forage fish fishery should focus on impacts to the potentially affected FMPs.