

HABITAT STEERING GROUP COMMENTS ON GROUNDFISH STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

After reviewing the minutes of the January 10-11, and March 5 meetings of the Ad Hoc Groundfish Strategic Plan Implementation Oversight Committee (SPOC), the Habitat Steering Group has the following comments.

First of all, we would like to commend the SPOC for prioritizing the issues to be addressed in implementing the strategic plan and further agree with the four themes which were highlighted as high priority:

- Capacity Reduction
- Harvest Policy
- Marine Reserves
- Science

Second, the HSG recognizes the budget limitations of the Council and the costs associated with developing siting criteria for marine reserves. However, we would like to encourage the Council to proceed with Phase II and to use available resources (through the work of federal and state agencies, Council staff, and Council advisory bodies) to do as much groundwork as possible, in the event the Council does not receive additional funding in the near-term.

For example, the state agencies and NMFS and others could work together (through the Council's Marine Reserve Development Team) to inform fishers and the public about what the Council is doing to implement the strategic plan by developing and mailing fact sheets, hosting public meetings, attending industry association meetings, and posting information on their respective websites. This is part of "Task II: Initial Outreach" of the Project to Support the Council's Consideration of Marine Reserves for the West Coast (Exhibit F.2 Attachment 4).

We also note that the SPOC requested preparation of a summary of the agencies and organizations that are currently moving forward to develop marine reserves—"who has funding and who is doing what." The HSG is planning to assemble this information at its June meeting and could present it to the Council then.

In light of the SPOC's discussion on regulatory incentives to minimize impacts on habitat, the HSG would also like to work with NMFS and the Groundfish Advisory Panel (GAP) to develop a workplan on fishing gear impacts to essential fish habitat and alternative measures to address gear impacts. In addition, the HSG could work with NMFS to begin identifying habitat areas of particular concern for groundfish.

Recommendations:

1. We would like to request that the Council proceed with Phase II and to use available resources to do as much groundwork as possible on marine reserves by convening a meeting of the Marine Reserve Development Team (identified on page 7 of the SPOC's January meeting minutes) to:
 - Begin implementation of the Initial Outreach tasks,
 - Review the other tasks developed at its February 13 meeting and determine which other tasks the Council can proceed on in the interim, and
 - Develop a plan to proceed with those tasks.

This would allow the Council to remain an active participant in marine reserve efforts.

2. With regard to recommendation #1, we request that the Council schedule a Marine Reserves discussion on the Council's June agenda to include a presentation of the Interim Phase II Plan by the Marine Reserve Development Team, and a summary of current West Coast marine reserve efforts by the HSG. In the HSG's comments on agenda item C.1. (Marine Reserves) earlier this week, the HSG also recommended that the Marine Reserve Development Team review the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary

(CINMS) information. The Marine Reserves Development Team could be the coordinating advisory body to compare the CINMS alternatives with Council goals and objectives and develop criteria for proposed marine reserves developed outside the Council process.

3. We request that NMFS staff work with the HSG and GAP to develop a workplan on fishing gear impacts to essential fish habitat and alternative measures to address gear impacts. The HSG has a placeholder on its June agenda to receive an update from NMFS on this effort.

PMFC
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