

HABITAT STEERING GROUP COMMENTS ON THE REBUILDING PLAN STATUS REPORT

The December 7, 2000, letter from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to the Pacific Council (Exhibit F.7., Attachment 3) suggests components to be included in rebuilding plans to meet fishery management plan (FMP) requirements for overfished species. The suggestions include:

“A description of the geographic distribution of the stock, particularly noting any habitat needs, and whether that habitat is adversely affected by human activity (fishing or non-fishing).”

The Habitat Steering Group (HSG) would like to endorse this suggested inclusion for all Council rebuilding plans. In June 1999, the HSG requested the Council include habitat information, such as essential fish habitat data, bottom typing, catch and logbook, and ocean condition data into Council rebuilding plans. This was done for the rebuilding plans for lingcod, Pacific ocean perch, and bocaccio, but was inadvertently left out of the canary rockfish and cowcod plans. In our November 2000 report to the Council, the HSG requested this oversight be corrected before the final plans are sent out to NMFS for review.

In addition, a goal for habitat protection was added to the rebuilding plans for canary and cowcod rockfish. The HSG believes that a goal for habitat protection and an objective toward achieving that goal should be included in all of the Council's rebuilding plans.

Further, given the elements of the Council's Strategic Plan for Groundfish which includes marine reserves as a management tool, and the primary objectives adopted by the Council for marine reserves, it would be helpful if rebuilding plans considered whether the use of marine reserves is a feasible tool for that overfished species or not. One of the problems associated with establishing marine reserves for groundfish is that they may work for some species more effectively than for others. Having the recommendation in the rebuilding plan as to whether marine reserves could contribute toward the rebuilding of that particular species (based on its life history parameters and stock distribution) would greatly assist the Council as it proceeds with using marine reserves as a management tool.

Recommendations:

1. We would like to request that habitat information, such as essential fish habitat data, bottom typing, catch and logbook, and ocean condition data be included in the canary, cowcod, darkblotched, and widow rockfish plans and all future Council rebuilding plans.
2. We request that habitat goals and objectives be included in the darkblotched and widow rockfish rebuilding plans and in future Council rebuilding plans as well. Suggested language for a goal and objectives follows:

Goal - To protect the quantity and quality of habitat necessary to support the stock at healthy levels in the future.

Objectives -

- Identify any critical or important habitat areas and implement measures to ensure their protection.
 - Identify fishing and non-fishing activities that are adversely impacting EFH and implement measures to avoid or minimize those impacts.
3. We request that rebuilding plans contain a section which evaluates the feasibility of the use of marine reserves as a rebuilding tool for that overfished species.
 4. Finally, the HSG needs adequate time to review habitat portions of rebuilding plans to provide recommendations to the Council before the Council adopts the final plans. Specifically, we request that the adoption of the canary rockfish and cowcod plans be delayed, at a minimum, until June.