

HABITAT STEERING GROUP REPORT ON
THE REBUILDING PLAN MATRIX FOR GROUND FISH SPECIES
DECLARED OVERFISHED AND REBUILDING PLANS

1. Habitat Steering Group (HSG) Comment on Rebuilding Plan Matrix (Exhibit C.5 Attachment 1)

The HSG reviewed and discussed the matrix and would like to commend Council staff for organizing this information. As part of the discussion the HSG members expressed the following concerns:

- Only 23 of 83 Council-managed groundfish species have been assessed and of the 23, 8 (including yelloweye rockfish) have been designated as overfished. This is indicative of a larger picture of ecosystem and management problems.
- Because of the diversity of geographic and bathymetric distributions of these species, it is imperative the Council embrace a regional conservation strategy.
- The new direction identified in the Groundfish Fishery Strategic Plan lays the groundwork for the long-term commitment to the recovery of these stocks critical to the regional fisheries. Fish and habitat protection and restoration is essential to this long-term recovery.

The HSG recognizes the increasing complexity of groundfish management. However, we feel it necessary to reiterate the need for an ecosystem approach to management and habitat protection. To that end, the HSG urges the Council and NMFS to move forward in designating Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC), identifying the effects of gear on habitat, and developing marine reserves. Many HSG members want to strongly emphasize the potential role of marine reserves in recovery of overfished species. This tool, in conjunction with other fishery management strategies, will provide long-term insurance for ecosystem protection and species recovery.

2. HSG Comment on Rebuilding Plans (Exhibit C.5 Attachment 2)

The HSG reviewed the latest draft of the canary rockfish rebuilding plan and makes the following comments:

First, we would like to commend Council staff on their effort to incorporate HSG requests for data into the latest draft of the canary rockfish rebuilding plan. We provide the following comments.

The HSG requests:

1. Section 3.5.1 on page 12, "Important Habitat Areas" be expanded to include more specific habitat type and location information such as could be provided by, but not limited to, the Geographic Information System (GIS) information proposed for development.
2. A section describing "trophic interactions" be included in all rebuilding plans.
3. Information discussing the use of marine reserves as a management tool for rebuilding overfished stocks exist as a distinct section in all rebuilding plans.
4. The GIS information proposed in this document be completed and included prior to final approval.
5. As stated in our June report to the Council, fish communities and habitat now untrawlable due to the large footrope restriction should be monitored to document the effect on canary rockfish and its habitat.

Finally, given the increasing number and complexity of rebuilding plans and resulting increase in staff workload, the HSG recommends the creation of a committee to coordinate the development and review of the rebuilding plans. Advantages of forming this committee include dissemination of the workload associated with these plans as well as an increased ability to assemble and utilize all available information in a timely manner.

PFMC
09/12/01