

HABITAT STEERING GROUP COMMENTS ON  
THE DRAFT HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Habitat Steering Group discussed the essential fish habitat (EFH) descriptions contained within the draft highly migratory species (HMS) fishery management plan (FMP). It was noted that the HSG's request to include prey species in the legal EFH definitions was addressed.

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Southwest Regional staff indicated the direction received from NMFS headquarters relative to HMS EFH definitions was to use static geographical areas, rather than having variable areas based on changes in sea surface temperature. It was noted that the Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) FMP contained variable EFH definitions, and the question was raised about the need for consistency. The HSG also discussed the possible benefits of having static areas versus variable areas, and could not identify any, other than its possible potential in consultations to address such activities as offshore dredge dumping.

After further discussion on the EFH language in the draft plan, the HSG has the following recommended changes:

- The HSG requests the EFH chapter contain a section regarding Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPCs) with a statement that clearly states whether HAPCs were explored for the various management unit species, and whether they will be developed in the future.
- The HSG also requests the EFH chapter contain a section regarding marine reserves or the use of closed areas as habitat protection measures. The HSG realizes that closed areas may not necessarily be feasible for HMS given their highly migratory behavior, but would like the HMSPDT to have a discussion and note its conclusions in the plan.

PFMC  
03/14/02