

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON
THE UPDATE ON OTHER MARINE RESERVES PROCESSES

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) reviewed the various activities occurring in California, Washington, and Oregon in regard to marine reserves.

In the case of California, the GAP notes that California's "Marine Life Protection Act" (MLPA) has established an elaborate process to seek public input and scientific evaluation of potential marine reserves. Since these reserves may have an impact on management decisions, the GAP believes it is important for the Council to keep abreast of MLPA activities. This could be done by designating one or more liaisons between the Council and California.

The GAP also offers the following comments in regard to marine reserves in general.

There is an unprecedented level of concern by all West Coast fishery participants regarding the preliminary groundfish management measures being proposed for 2003 by the Council. The message is clear and sobering. In effect, the Council may be required to close nearly all the continental shelf to all fishing by both commercial and recreational fisheries. Even the most liberal management measures will create widespread economic hardship and bankruptcy for many participants and sectors of our traditional fisheries. In a worst case scenario there will be an economic disaster in coastal communities from San Diego, California to Bellingham, Washington which will dwarf that experienced by the collapse of the East Coast fishing industry and support infrastructure. It is a foregone conclusion at this point in time that, at a minimum, there will be large closure areas coast wide which will eclipse any of those proposed thus far by proponents of no-take marine reserves. With respect to the effect on the currently depressed economy, it doesn't take much imagination to conclude what the outcome of fishery closures of this magnitude will wreak on our future coastal economy.

The prospect of imposing no-take marine reserves on top of or along side of the pending areas closed to fishing is intolerable and is absolutely void of one shred of scientific or economic justification at this time. There is virtually no add-on benefit of marine reserves to our marine environment which can be scientifically quantified at this time in the face of these pending closure areas. It is also a foregone conclusion that implementation of no-take reserves will exacerbate impacts on some species by concentrating fishing effort on what few areas which may remain open to fishing. As a final point of concern, many respected scientists agree the use of no-take reserves have dubious value as a management tool when that area has existing conservation driven management in place. This point is particularly relevant to most of our West Coast managed groundfish species and the current gear regulations which minimize the effect of bottom contact by participants in those fisheries.

Is there need for no-take marine reserves in the future? Many of us involved in the fishery management arena agree that a case may be made for some limited reserves, given credible scientific rationale and justification. Do we need to rush into implementation of marine reserves without science based qualifying criteria predicated on the fact that it makes some folks feel good? Absolutely not! The GAP recommends in the strongest terms possible the Council not recommend establishment of any additional marine reserves at this point in time. The GAP believes this should be the Council's policy until clearly defined criteria and science based justification for implementation of marine reserves can be identified at an appropriate place and time in the future.

Finally, the GAP strongly recommends the authority of NMFS to regulate fisheries within national marine sanctuaries not be compromised by any marine reserve designation or changes in sanctuary management plans.