

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON THE GROUND FISH FISHERY
MANAGEMENT PLAN ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) reviewed the work being done on developing an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the essential fish habitat section of the Pacific groundfish fishery management plan.

The EIS will require the collection and analysis of a significant amount of data before it can be used effectively. Much of this data will need to come from individual fishermen who are familiar with the bottom topography in the areas in question as well as the geographic and temporal distribution of fish stocks.

Ideally, the data now being collected should be "ground-truthed" through a series of port meetings, similar to what was done in developing the lines being used for depth-based groundfish management. The EIS development team is sympathetic to this approach, but noted to the GAP that both time and funding impose considerable constraints.

The GAP notes there are readily available means to gather detailed information, including using the assistance of Sea Grant. Oregon Sea Grant in particular has been more than cooperative in arranging meetings of the sort that could help the EIS team.

In regard to time, while there are certain court-ordered deadlines, the majority of the GAP believes that both the plaintiffs and the defendants in the essential fish habitat case have shown a desire to allow more time to complete the task if doing so will result in a better product. The majority of the GAP recommends the Council ask the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries to pursue an extended time line so that a better product can be developed.

A minority of the GAP notes the need for a delay in the time line has not yet been demonstrated and that it is premature to request such a delay. Further, a request for a delay should be initiated by NMFS in the context of the entire legal decision, which involves several Council plans.

Finally, the GAP recommends the Council convene an ad hoc technical team consisting of appropriate Council advisory body members - including members of the GAP who are familiar with the areas in question - to assist the EIS team in analyzing the data they have available.

PFMC
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