

HABITAT COMMITTEE COMMENTS ON  
ARTIFICIAL REEFS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

The Habitat Committee (HC) heard a presentation from Mr. George Steinbach of CARE (California Artificial Reef Enhancement Program), which advocates converting oil platforms in Southern California to artificial reefs. There are 26 platforms, 23 of which are in federal waters and are due for decommissioning over the next decade.

If oil platforms are retained in some form as habitat enhancement, the choice of whether or not to allow fishing near the structure may dramatically impact their potential benefits as habitat.

There is a large amount of information on this topic, especially from the Gulf of Mexico, but many uncertainties remain as to whether they provide management and habitat benefits applicable to Council-managed stocks (e.g., such questions as if they are aggregating devices versus enhancing larval settlement). The platforms currently serve as habitat for many species, but have altered prior habitat. There are proposals to use platforms not only for artificial reefs, but also for aquaculture, research platforms, ecotourism, liquefied natural gas terminals, and other purposes. Because there are a number of relatively similar structures, they offer a potential use as a research tool for a variety of purposes.

There are fishery management issues associated with leaving platforms in place. There are positive and negative implications for habitat, commercial and recreational fisheries, and overfished species. We are prepared to delve further into this emerging issue at the Council's request.

PFMC  
03/11/04