

## GROUND FISH ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT ANALYTICAL MODEL

Situation: Since the Council's last briefing on the Pacific Coast Groundfish Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in June, 2003, analytical methods for mapping the distribution of habitat types have been substantially completed (see C.6.b, Attachment 1 and 2), and progress has been made on the analytical component for evaluating fishing-related habitat impacts. The Ad Hoc Groundfish Habitat Technical Review Committee (TRC) held a teleconference on August 4, 2003; and subsequently convened a workshop in Santa Cruz, California, November 20-21, 2003, to review progress to date and provide advice on further development of these two analytical components. The Groundfish Subcommittee of the Scientific and Statistical Committee met February 23-24, 2004 in Seattle, to review the Analytical Framework and reported to the full Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) with their recommendations during the March Council meeting. Exhibit C.6.c, Attachment 1 is the SSC Groundfish Subcommittee's review of the EFH designation component of the Analytical Framework.

The Council has three tasks before it as part of this agenda: (1) to hear an update on further changes in the EIS development schedule; (2) to hear from the EIS project team, the SSC, and other advisory bodies who may comment about the status of the Analytical Framework and decide whether to approve its use identifying designations for groundfish EFH; and (3) assign the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement Oversight Committee (EIS Oversight Committee) the task of developing a range of alternatives for the EIS EFH, according to the revised schedule.

Exhibit C.6.b, Attachment 3 presents the revised timeline; C.6.b, Attachment 4 is the previous timeline. The key changes occur over the next six months and are in response to delays in completing the impacts modeling component of the Analytical Framework. (These changes will not keep NMFS from meeting its court-mandated deadline of completing the EFH EIS by April 2006 when publication of the final rule implementing the Council-recommended alternative is published.) For this reason, the EFH EIS project team is splitting the task of developing and approving EIS alternatives into two steps. The first step is to identify the range of alternatives for EFH designation. The team would like to hold a meeting with the Oversight Committee in advance of the next Council meeting (June 2004) to develop the preliminary range of alternatives. The SSC Groundfish Subcommittee would also meet during this time period, if logistically possible, to review the completed fishery-related habitat impacts model component of the Analytical Framework. Based on SSC advice, the EIS project team will deliver the completed impacts model component for approval by the Council at the June meeting. At that meeting, the Council would then be in a position to consider approving EFH designation alternatives for further analysis, along with adoption of a completed impacts model. A second meeting of the Oversight Committee would then be convened in advance of the September Council meeting to develop a range of alternatives for mitigating impacts to EFH and designating habitat areas of particular concern (HAPCs). In September, the Council would adopt the final set of alternatives—including both designation and mitigation options—for further analysis in the EIS.

The SSC is scheduled to provide advice to the Council as to the use of the EFH identification component of the Analytical Framework for developing and evaluating the alternatives that will be included in the EFH EIS. During this agenda the EIS project team will also report to the Council on the current status of the Framework and its use in developing EIS alternatives.

The Council may wish to discuss the logistical issues related to assigning the Oversight Committee the EIS alternative formulation task and their first meeting. During this meeting the Oversight Committee will work with the EFH EIS team and outputs from the EFH designation component of the Analytical Framework to craft a set of alternatives. Approximately two days would be needed for this task. Ideally, this meeting could occur at about the same time as the SSC Groundfish Subcommittee meeting to review the impacts component of the Framework. This would allow the team to work with both groups.

**Council Action:**

- 1. Approve using the EFH identification component of the Analytical Framework to develop alternatives for EFH designation.**
- 2. Authorize the Groundfish FMP EIS Oversight Committee to develop a preliminary range of alternatives for the EFH EIS.**

**Reference Materials:**

1. Exhibit C.6.b, Attachment 1: Pacific Coast Groundfish EFH Analytical Framework.
2. Exhibit C.6.b, Attachment 2: Appendices to EFH (on CD-ROM).
3. Exhibit C.6.b, Attachment 3: Revised Draft Timeline and Major Milestones for the Environmental Impact Statement on Essential Fish Habitat for Pacific Coast Groundfish.
4. Exhibit C.6.b, Attachment 4: Previous Draft Timeline and Major Milestones for the Environmental Impact Statement on Essential Fish Habitat for Pacific Coast Groundfish
5. Exhibit C.6.c, Attachment 1: A Review of Analytical Portions of the Environmental Impact Statement for Designating Groundfish Essential Fish Habitat; A Report of the SSC Groundfish Subcommittee (DRAFT)

**Agenda Order:**

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|---|-------------|
| a. Agendum Overview   | Kit Dahl    |
| b. NMFS Report  | Steve Copps |
| c. SSC Report   | Kevin Hill  |
| d. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies  |             |
| e. Public Comment   |             |
| f. <b>Council Action:</b> Approve EFH Identification Model, and Authorize Groundfish FMP EIS Oversight Committee to Develop a Preliminary Range of Alternatives |             |