

HABITAT COMMITTEE COMMENTS ON GROUND FISH
ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
ANALYTICAL MODEL

The Habitat Committee (HC), jointly with the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel and Groundfish Management Team, heard a status report on the Groundfish Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) modeling effort. The presentation was given by Mr. Steve Capps (NMFS), Mr. Graeme Parkes (MRAG Americas), and Ms. Allison Bailey (TerraLogic GIS). This update emphasized the EFH designation component of the model. The impacts component is still under development.

The HC would like to commend the EFH Team on their efforts to compile and synthesize the extraordinary amount of data to characterize the distribution of fish stocks relative to habitat types. We believe this tool is a significant step forward in assisting the Council in identifying EFH, recommend the Council endorse this modeling effort, and recommend the Council move to the next step of assessing impacts. The inclusion of information on nearshore, bay, and estuarine environments (e.g., kelp beds, eelgrass beds) strengthens the GIS database, and will be critical in consultations. As information on nearshore and estuarine habitat utilization, especially by juvenile life stages, becomes available in the future, it can be incorporated to strengthen the model.

We recommend the EFH Team provide a measure of the data quality on the maps, so policy makers can weigh their decisions while considering various levels of uncertainty.

The HC believes this project provides a useful, long-term tool for dealing with other groundfish management issues – for example, bycatch monitoring, estimating impacts of time and area closures, and locating marine reserves. We recommend NMFS fund this project to its completion, and the Council and NMFS support efforts to make it useful for addressing other management issues.

PFMC
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