

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE STATEMENT ON UPDATE ON  
MISCELLANEOUS MARINE PROTECTED AREAS ACTIVITIES

Dr. Churchill Grimes briefed the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) on efforts to integrate marine protected area (MPA) concepts with those of fisheries science and fisheries management. In particular, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Santa Cruz Lab and the NOAA National Marine Protected Areas Center – Science Institute (NMPAC-SI) are convening a technical working group to develop the scientific information necessary to integrate MPAs within the broader context of fisheries. Expertise within this working group will be broadly based. Members will include ecologists, stock assessment scientists, economists, and policy experts. Working group projects will be multidisciplinary from inception rather than the more traditional approach of carrying out research along disciplinary lines and attempting to integrate findings only after the fact. Previous SSC statements and the SSC’s “white paper” on marine reserves have advocated such an approach. The SSC supports the formation of the NMPAC-SI working group and suggests that, if invited, members of the SSC’s Marine Reserves Subcommittee should be encouraged to participate fully in the working group.

Dr. Grimes also presented a comprehensive list of MPA topics for possible consideration by the working group. Nearly all of these topics are important and it may be difficult to prioritize the list. From the SSC’s perspective, it may be less important to struggle with priorities than to ensure that whatever projects are first pursued, they be approached in an integrated fashion, cutting across the appropriate disciplines. A project that may be of particular interest to the Council is the development of a flexible stock assessment model that explicitly allows MPAs to be used as one of several tools available in its forward projection module. Such a model would allow the Council to examine the effect of MPA-based management in conjunction with more traditional management measures.

The SSC recognizes the NMPAC-SI is a national program and as such, will be dealing with many diverse issues from across the nation. It will be important to maintain the “West Coast” perspective in this process. Case studies focusing on the Channel Islands, for example, may be ideally suited to keep West Coast specific issues at the forefront.

Finally, the SSC encourages Dr. Grimes or other NMPAC-SI steering committee members to periodically update the SSC on the working group progress and related issues.