

GROUND FISH ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
STATEMENT —PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES

In response to litigation, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) evaluating: (1) the designation of essential fish habitat (EFH) and habitat areas of particular concern (HAPC) for species in the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP), (2) measures to mitigate fishing impacts to EFH, and (3) adaptive management measures to enhance knowledge about the location, characteristics and function of EFH, and to better understand fishing and non-fishing impacts to EFH. In support of this effort, NMFS developed a comprehensive risk assessment, which includes data and analytical tools organized within a geographic information system (GIS). In April 2004, the Council reviewed and approved for use the EFH designation component of the analytical framework. In June 2004, the Council found that the fishing impacts model, a second component of the analytical framework, currently could not be used in its entirety, although a Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) review found that elements of the model, such as gear- and location-specific habitat sensitivity and recovery indices, could be used independently. (See *Review of Fishing Impacts on Groundfish Essential Fish Habitat—A Report of the SSC Economics and Groundfish Subcommittees*, Agendum C.6.c.)

At the direction of the Council, the Ad Hoc EFH EIS Oversight Committee (EFH EISOC) met August 16-18, 2004 to develop a preliminary range of alternatives for the Council to consider adopting for analysis. The EFH EISOC developed four sets of alternatives: eight EFH designation alternatives, eight HAPC alternatives, 13 alternatives with measures to mitigate the adverse impacts of fishing on EFH, and three enhanced monitoring alternatives. The report of the EFH EISOC, containing a statement of the purpose and need for the proposed action and summary descriptions of each alternative, is provided under Agendum C.6.b. Two alternatives, HAPC alternative eight—designate areas around oil production platforms, and impact mitigation alternative 11—designate a no-trawl zone on the central California coast, are based on proposals submitted by members of the public. (Letters and materials in support of these proposals are included under Agendum C.6.d).

It should be noted that under the settlement agreement in the aforementioned lawsuit, the plaintiffs (Oceana) may submit a set of alternatives to be evaluated in the EIS and considered by the Council. Such a set of alternatives is not specifically identified in the EFH EISOC report.

Once the Council has adopted a preliminary range of alternatives, the EFH EIS drafting team will begin analyzing them. According to the current schedule, this analysis, contained in a preliminary draft EIS (DEIS), will be made available to the Council for their November 2004 meeting, at which time the Council would identify their preferred alternatives. The revised settlement agreement between NMFS and the plaintiffs stipulates that NMFS must publish a DEIS for public comment by February 5, 2005.

Council Action:

Adopt a range of alternatives for analysis in a preliminary DEIS.

Reference Materials:

1. Agendum C.6.b, EFH EISOC Report 1: Report of the Ad Hoc EFH EIS Oversight Committee.
2. Agendum C.6.c, SSC Report: SSC Economics and Groundfish Subcommittees Report.
3. Agendum C.6.d, Public Comment: Letters and attached materials from Dr. Milton Love (University of California at Santa Barbara), Mr. George Steinbach (California Artificial Reef Enhancement Program), and Mr. Chuck Cook (The Nature Conservancy).
4. Agendum C.6.b, Supplemental EFH EISOC Report 2.

Agenda Order:

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| a. Agendum Overview | Kit Dahl |
| b. EFH Oversight Committee Report | Phil Anderson |
| c. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies | |
| d. Public Comment | |
| e. Council Action: Adopt Range of Alternatives for Preliminary DEIS Analysis | |

PFMC
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