

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON
CORDELL BANK, GULF OF FARALLONES, AND MONTEREY BAY
NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES

The Habitat Committee (HC) received the letter from the National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP) and understands the NMSP needs specific direction from the Council regarding responsibilities and timeframes.

As noted in our March comments regarding Cordell Bank, the HC urges the Council to move forward by drafting regulations using appropriate Council authorities, as per Option 4 (Agenda Item G.2.a, Attachment 1). Under Option 4, the regulations would prohibit bottom longline gear and other bottom tending gear and meet some of the National Marine Sanctuary (NMS) objectives for habitat protection from fishing impacts. We also urge the Council to establish a timeline for this process. The majority of the HC supports change of the NMS's document to appropriately deal with non-fishing impacts.

In March, the HC supported changing the Monterey Bay National NMS's designation document to include Davidson Seamount as part of the NMS because of the NMS's ability to protect this fragile and coral rich area from non-fishing impacts.

We also supported the proposed prohibition of fishing activities below 3,000 feet, as it will not affect any current commercial or recreational fisheries. It is unclear whether fishing regulations to accomplish specific resource protections within NMSs are best drafted under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act or under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). This question should be analyzed within the NMS draft environmental impact statement process. If the Council chooses to address this issue through MSA processes, the Council should provide the NMS with information showing how the MSA can be effectively used to achieve NMS goals and the associated timeline.

The HC endorses the Gulf of Farallones Islands NMS proposal to amend its designation document as per Option 4 in Agenda Item G.2.a, Attachment 1.

PFMC
04/07/05