

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON TENTATIVE ADOPTION OF 2007-2008  
GROUNDFISH FISHERY SPECIFICATIONS/MANAGEMENT MEASURES AND  
AMENDMENT 16-4

John Field of the Groundfish Management Team briefed the Habitat Committee (HC) on the potential opening of parts of the California Cowcod Conservation Area (CCA) to certain gears. The HC had concerns that the parts of the CCA that may be opened contain black corals, which are highly sensitive to disturbance.

A portion of the CCA (CCA East) has already been identified in the Groundfish Essential Fish Habitat Environmental Impact Statement as an ecologically important area. However, new information described in the groundfish annual specifications for 2007-2008 (Tissot et al. 2006) notes that high concentrations of newly described species of black corals are found in both the Potato Bank and Santa Barbara Island areas. Information is sparse regarding the associations of groundfish with habitat-forming invertebrates and coral. However, given the vulnerability of this habitat and the limited coverage of the Tissot survey, we urge the Council to maintain the status quo. At a minimum, we urge the Council to consider an option that would leave closed the high-density coral areas described in the paper.

Modifying the CCA demonstrates the complexities involved in multi-species management; taking one action, such as opening these areas, would affect a number of rockfish and other species. Maintaining a stable CCA provides an opportunity to develop an ecosystem management approach over time, although this was not the original purpose for creating the CCA.

PFMC  
6/13/06