

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON ECOSYSTEM FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) supports the development of the Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan (EFMP) as a means by which the Pacific Council can integrate area management, marine protected areas and marine reserves under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The GAP also recognizes that Marine Protected Areas are just one element of the EFMP, which is a broader way to implement the Council's move towards ecosystem-based fishery management as recommended by the newly reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA).

The GAP expressed great trepidation over what ecosystem-based management might actually mean for the Council, and thus about the evolution of an Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan. The GAP does recognize that several actions taken by the Council are in line with ecosystem-based management, including protecting the food web (krill ban) and the precautionary approach taken in protecting habitat through the essential fish habitat process. In addition, the GAP is eager for essential fishery and ecosystem information, and recognizes the EFMP may be a useful vehicle for research into such critical issues as area-based total allowable catch (TAC) setting and better understanding what the most appropriate harvest level might be for forage fish given their importance in the food web.

Among other things, the EFMP could serve to:

I. Provide Essential Fishery Information: An EFMP can provide essential information for stock assessments and management decisions, such as:

- Predator – Prey relationships.
- Understanding the relationships between surface fish and bottom fish in deep water reserves.
- Oceanographic conditions.
- Monitoring and evaluation of existing reserves at the Channel Islands, for example.
- Marine Mammal issues.
- Monitoring and evaluation of de facto reserves like the Cowcod Conservation Area and Rockfish Conservation Area.
- Provide guidance for management decisions and stock assessments.
- Water quality and pollution.

II. Establish Council authority to regulate the water column for species not currently managed under Council FMPs: There needs to be a way that the Council can create marine protected areas if necessary. An EFMP can cut across all fishery management plans to do this. There is currently a dispute between the National Marine Sanctuaries (NMS) and MSA about whether Councils can create no-take reserves. The EFMP needs to encompass existing FMPs. Numerous proposals have been received by the Council from the NMS, under the guise of habitat protection, to close areas to fishing, and ultimately to gain the authority for the NMS to regulate fishing under their designation

documents. The GAP is not in favor of new reserves until we evaluate the effectiveness of existing reserves at the Channel Islands and MLPA-created marine protected areas in meeting their objectives and providing essential fishery information. The reserves we have now need to start functioning to serve fishery management decisions.

Recommendations:

1. The GAP recommends the formation of a Plan Team comprised of advisory panel members and technical staff. The GAP is concerned about the consequences of this Plan, and afraid that a model with so many variables as an EFMP could result in further constraints on fisheries. We do understand that oceanographic conditions play a key role in stock abundances, but we don't want to find ourselves in a situation where we are looking at the clouds to make management decisions. Before we proceed, there needs to be a review of past Council actions that move toward ecosystem-based management; for example: the ban on krill fishing.
2. Stakeholders should be involved from Day One in the EFMP.
3. We strongly feel that existing reserves and marine protected areas be used for research that improves fishery management decisions.
4. Request a report from the North Pacific Council about their ecosystem management plan and for staff to compile ecosystem-related documents relevant to the West Coast, for example, the CALCOFI "State of the California Current" ecosystem report.
5. The GAP is concerned about the cost associated with an EFMP. However, the NMS have funding for these goals and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission can serve as a conduit for NMS and private funding that can create essential fishery information for stock assessments and management decisions.
6. Research priorities: area based TAC settings; appropriate harvest rates for forage fish.

PFMC
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