

## GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM (GMT) REPORT ON ECOSYSTEM FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

The GMT recognizes the value of a management tool that could more easily address issues that have repercussions across fishery management plans (FMPs), such as essential fish habitat issues, marine protected areas, and possibly trophic interactions (such as the krill fishery ban). An ecosystem FMP (E-FMP) or a fisheries ecosystem plan (FEP) are two possible vehicles for developing such a tool. There are also potential benefits in developing an ecosystem status and trends document, to inform the Council community of relevant changes in climate, ocean and ecosystem conditions. One potential template for such a document could be the “State of the California Current Ecosystem” report produced annually by the CalCOFI consortium. Such a report might benefit from a status review of federally and state managed fisheries (e.g., markets, participation, area management measures, conservation concerns) for which effort shifts and other interactions are commonplace.

An E-FMP or FEP could also provide a more integrated regulatory framework to address many of the spatial management issues that are increasingly necessary in the existing management regime. For example, the inseason action for groundfish adopted in March of this year created a rockfish conservation area (RCA) configuration that is substantially more complex than other recent spatial management measures. Tactically, this made sense as it allowed the Council to stay within optimum yields (OYs) for rebuilding species while providing modest economic opportunities to existing fisheries. However, the GMT has frequently recommended that a more strategic consideration of the cumulative consequences of spatial management measures be undertaken, and that efforts be made to develop information to support more refined area management approaches. The GMT also notes that the area-based management analysis proposed as part of the trawl individual quota (TIQ) process could prove valuable in moving this effort forward. An E-FMP could also provide a vehicle for greater evaluation of habitat and species distribution that might facilitate future spatially explicit management decisions, such as management strategy evaluation (MSE) (see Agenda Item C.5.a, Supplemental Attachment 4).

Another strategic issue could be that of ecosystem shifts and long term rebuilding targets. The current management regime is based on rebuilding targets that assume equilibrium resilience, in other words, that stocks can rebuild to levels near the  $B_{MSY}$  proxy within some extended period of time. Yet in the face of a highly dynamic ecosystem and potential cumulative effects of past fishing (including depletion and subsequent recovery of marine mammals, or cultivation/depensation processes), such rebuilding targets could be unachievable. A review of such considerations (including the results of spatially explicit multispecies models) could inform the Council of appropriate management goals in the face of such challenges. More explicit consideration of predator-prey relationships among harvested species and across fishery management plans could inform the management process.

The Council staff white paper on this issue (Agenda Item C.5.a, Attachment 1) suggests that an exploratory plan development team comprised of members of existing FMP management teams to consider options that would complement, but not replace, existing FMPs. The GMT would recommend that this development team include representation from other advisory bodies as well. The GMT considers this approach to be reasonable in the near term. The GMT also

recommends that the Council consider types of ecosystem science information that would best inform current and future management. For example, one element of a gradual implementation of a more formal ecosystem management process could be to schedule presentations over a series of meetings that would serve to educate the Council community on the types of ecosystem information and analyses that would benefit ongoing management actions. This approach would be consistent with balancing current workload priorities while still moving towards an ecosystem approach to fisheries management.

#### GMT Recommendations

Provide guidance for the development of an exploratory plan development team comprised of members of existing advisory bodies to consider ecosystem management options that would complement, but not replace, existing FMPs.

Schedule presentations in future Council agendas to inform the Council community of ecosystem status and trends or other relevant ongoing research.

PFMC  
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