

COUNCIL OPERATING PROCEDURE FOR REVIEWING AND INCORPORATING PROPOSED CHANGES TO GROUND FISH ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT

The determination of groundfish essential fish habitat (EFH) and habitat areas of particular concern (HAPC) in Amendment 19 to the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan was a complex and comprehensive process. It required extensive planning, coordination, and review; as well as considerable mapping and data manipulation capabilities. To respond to changes over time, the amendment provided for establishing an oversight committee to review proposed modifications to groundfish EFH and HAPC, as well as a requirement for an overall review of EFH and HAPC designations, and information on fishing and nonfishing EFH impacts at least every five years, or, in the present case, by no later than May 2011.

Minor changes in groundfish EFH and HAPC designations, or in the areas closed to certain types of fishing gear, may be amenable to consideration within a schedule that is linked to the Council's biennial groundfish management process. However, any major changes and the five year review are likely to demand a level of expertise and complexity that must be carefully planned and executed.

The overall five year review will entail a significant Council workload and any individual proposals for withdrawals or additions to groundfish EFH will likewise need careful consideration within the context of complete coordination of up-to-date fishery information and groundfish EFH. This would be difficult or unlikely to be achieved in a piecemeal approach that looks at individual proposed changes whenever they arise.

The overall five-year review task is also likely to require a level of expertise in the groundfish EFH Oversight Committee that extends well beyond that contained within the present Council advisory bodies. In developing the original EFH proposal, the Council utilized a Groundfish Habitat Technical Review Committee (GHTRC). This committee included Northwest and Southwest Science Center personnel, university professors involved in Geographic Information System habitat mapping, fishermen, and other experts. A similarly constituted committee would likely be most effective in performing the required overall five year review and incorporating any other extensive proposals for change as well.

The Council has considered establishing a groundfish oversight committee at previous meetings. At the April 2007 meeting, the Council tasked staff with developing a draft Council Operating Procedure (COP) for adoption at the June 2007 Council meeting. Final action is scheduled at this meeting to provide for member appointments over the summer and time for the committee to meet to review new information and make written recommendations by mid-October for the November Council meeting briefing book.

Attachment 1 contains a proposed COP to guide the Council's review of groundfish EFH and implement the specific requirements contained in Amendment 19. The attachment provides a two-tiered approach that recognizes the diversity of the review issues. Attachment 2 contains pertinent excerpts from the groundfish FMP which guide the EFH review process.

Council Action:

1. Adopt a final COP to guide review and modification of groundfish EFH.

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item B.4.a, Attachment 1: COP—Groundfish EFH Review and Modification.
2. Agenda Item B.4.a, Attachment 2: Excerpts from Current Groundfish FMP Regarding Changes to EFH.

Agenda Order:

- a. Agenda Item Overview
- b. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
- c. Public Comment
- d. **Council Action:** Adopt a Final COP

John Coon

PFMC
05/25/07