

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON WEST COAST GOVERNORS' AGREEMENT (WCGA) ON OCEAN HEALTH

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) believes the West Coast Governors' Agreement on ocean health is a positive attempt to coordinate regional management efforts. It appears to be an effort to emulate what has already been occurring with fishery management for many years. We are hopeful that it is not an attempt to usurp a collaborative process that has been successfully prosecuted for a long period of time. Fishery management has long been a cooperative effort involving the public, industry, state, federal, and congressional entities.

The GAP believes that fishery management groups and processes should be an integral part of this approach to addressing ocean health. Statements that reflect this sentiment should be included in this agreement. This process should maintain the political transparency and scientific scrutiny required within fishery management. It is vitally important for all stakeholders to be intimately involved in shaping these policy issues.

We have specific comments on the following priority areas within the Governors' Agreement:

Healthy ocean and coastal habitats.

A strict definition of the term 'healthy' must be established. What and who defines a healthy ocean?

Effective implementation of ecosystem-based management.

Promote funding for the existing ecosystem based management activities that are underway at state and federal fishery management agencies. All proposed new activities (aquaculture, wave energy, etc.) should be required to comply with all federal and state environmental regulations.

Expanded ocean and coastal scientific information, research, and monitoring.

This is critical for rational and sustainable (MSA) use of ocean resources. Uncertainty with data comprises a major hurdle in ensuring sustainable (MSA) fisheries. Funding constraints lead to fishery constraints. Uncertainty diminishes when capacity to collect information increases. When considering new proposals for ocean use, a complete inventory of all existing ocean activities must be compiled in order to assess the true impacts

Increased ocean awareness and literacy among the regions citizens.

The public has a right to receive information about the processes involved with the sustainable harvest of ocean resources. Objective discussions about this issue are often missing from public outreach efforts relating to marine resources.

Fostering sustainable economic development of coastal communities.

Fisheries should be a top priority as should any economic activity that is already in place. This would be an excellent opportunity to change the focus from one of funding fishery constraints to one of investing in fishery economic health and opportunity.

There are continuing and future concerns regarding jurisdictional conflicts that exist in state and federal waters. The GAP recommends that this agreement address these issues. Example: Coastal Zone Management Act, National Marine Sanctuaries Act vs. Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. It is recommended that NOAA General Counsel review this agreement and provide clarification on this issue.

PFMC
11/05/07