

## PROPOSED PROCESS FOR INITIATING THE REVIEW OF POTENTIAL CHANGES TO GROUNDFISH ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT CLOSURES

In June of 2007, the Council approved Council Operating Procedure (COP) 22 to guide the review process for considering changes to groundfish essential fish habitat (EFH). This procedure for the review and implementation of changes is a new process which has not had the benefit of prior experience. COP 22 contains most of the needed Council direction based on the understanding of the issue at the time of its adoption. However, the Council requested a review of the current state of knowledge of the needs and timing for the process and additional assessment of the details involved in the process. On the basis of that review, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and Council staffs recommend holding COP 22 in abeyance and instead use a modified approach to initiate the EFH review procedure as outlined below.

### **EFH Review Procedure Recommendations**

1. The Council identifies initial EFH Oversight Committee (OC) membership positions at the April 2008 Council meeting:

Membership Specifically Identified by COP 22:

Scientists

- 2 from NMFS Science Centers
- 2 from Conservation Entities
- 2 At-large (with marine habitat and mapping expertise)

Industry Representatives

- 2 Bottom Trawl

Others

- 1 Enforcement Consultant

If Needed for a Specific EFH Issue

- Appropriate member(s) of the Council's advisory bodies or appropriate expert

Additional Membership Possibilities:

- NMFS NWR representative
- NMS representative
- Other?

2. Council staff formally solicits nominations to the EFHOC following the April 2008 Council meeting.
3. Council appoints initial EFHOC at the June Council meeting.
4. EFHOC meets prior to or at the September Council meeting to accomplish the following tasks for Council approval at the September meeting:
  - a. Appoint a Chair and Vice Chair;
  - b. Review and recommend a revised COP 22 as needed to clarify and establish:
    - 1) Committee charge,
    - 2) Schedule and process for the five-year review,

- 3) An adjusted schedule, criteria, and process for submission and review of proposed EFH changes within the five-year period,
  - 4) Any other recommendations deemed appropriate by the EFHOC.
5. The Council adopts a revised COP 22 at the September Council meeting.
  6. The Council solicits proposals for potential EFH changes prior to the five-year review in accord with the approved schedule and convenes the EFHOC as needed.
  7. The Council selects which proposals to formally consider, appoints specialized EFHOC positions as necessary, and proceeds with the process described in the revised COP 22.

### **Additional Comments**

NMFS has determined that solely from the standpoint of meeting a five-year review deadline, a comprehensive EFH review need not begin until 2011 (Five years from final implementation of the original EFH closures). Several marine habitat mapping efforts are in progress or scheduled for the near future that will likely provide considerable new data in time for a 2011 review. Less expansive proposals for change may warrant consideration such as areas of deep water coral and sponge habitat within the Olympic National Marine Sanctuary. Such proposals can likely be handled with an initial interim process which will also provide the Council and EFHOC with experience from which to better handle the more complex overall five-year review.

PFMC  
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