

ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT ON GROUND FISH
ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT (EFH) REVIEW PROCESS

The recently established Essential Fish Habitat Review Committee (EFHRC) met for the first time during the current Council meeting on September 9 and 10. The Committee's primary tasks for this meeting were to 1) review and modify the EFHRC Council Operating Procedures (COP) 22, clarifying and establishing the EFHRC's charge, and developing procedures and schedule for both short-term EFH reviews and a long-term overall review of the EFH description, habitat areas of particular concern (HAPC) designations, and information on both fishing and nonfishing impacts in the fishery management plan (FMP) which is to be initiated at least once every five years; and 2) elect a Chair (Waldo Wakefield, NOAA NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center), and Vice Chair (Megan Mackey, Pacific Marine Conservation Council).

The EFHRC has modified COP 22 into an updated draft for the Council's review, including substantive changes to the time line and action items for both the short-term and five-year reviews (see tables below). In reviewing and updating the draft review procedures, the EFHRC made every effort to ensure that the schedule and flow of the review procedures was coordinated with the Council's schedule, and in even years, the groundfish biennial management specifications process. There was considerable discussion about whether the review cycle should follow an annual or a biennial schedule and an annual cycle was deemed most appropriate.

The EFHRC began work on developing terms of reference for the proposal and proposal review processes during the current meeting. The EFHRC plans to complete this task this fall. The EFHRC considers the terms of reference important in order to inform the public of Council expectations for EFH related proposals.

During the EFHRC's deliberations, there were recommendations for expanding the committee's roster to include a representative from the tribes and someone with socioeconomic expertise as needed.

Significant changes were made to COP in the area of the composition of the committee to reflect the current composition of the committee and to facilitate the review process.

The EFHRC looks forward to engaging in this process.

An edited version of the COP 22 is attached with strike outs. A final version is also attached.

Draft EFH review processes with time lines:

Short-Term EFH Reviews	
Timing	Action
October	EFHRC meets with Habitat Committee to review new information and produce a compendium of reports and assessments (science focus).
November	Discuss policy implications, set priorities, and solicit general and specific proposals. Determine if there is a need to advance the periodic five-year review process.
February	Proposals due for April briefing book deadline; EFHRC meets to review proposals with proponents.
April	EFHRC briefs advisory bodies and develops recommendations to Council. Council takes final action to develop modifications to EFH/HAPC, sets process and schedule. Even Years: Council may include proposed modifications among a range of alternatives prepared for the next biennial groundfish management period for public review.
September/June	Review regulatory language, make final recommendation to Council.
June Council Meeting of Even Numbered Years	Council makes its final recommendations for implementation by NMFS in January of next odd year.

Five-Year Review	
Timing*	Action
March 2006	Groundfish Amendment 19 record of decision was signed by NMFS revising EFH designations, and starting the five-year review period.
November 2010	EFHRC determines the scope for the upcoming periodic five-year review based on EFH modification and evaluation since March 2006 and development of new information.
March 2011	EFHRC meets to initiate the process to conduct the five-year review for Council approval. The EFHRC will develop recommendations for public review, NEPA compliance, data and model requirements, schedule for completion, and other relevant issues needed for specifics of the periodic review.

*This table describes the initial five-year review beginning in 2011; subsequent reviews would follow five years after approval.

PFMC
09/10/08