

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON MONTEREY BAY NATIONAL MARINE PROTECTED AREA PROCESS

The Habitat Committee (HC) heard a summary of the status of marine protected area (MPA) planning in the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS or Sanctuary). In the Sanctuary's August 26 letter to the Council, Superintendent Michel reiterated that the Sanctuary is moving ahead with planning MPAs in the Federal waters of the Sanctuary, and emphasized their focus on addressing the Sanctuary's ecosystem management goals and working collaboratively with the Council, NOAA Fisheries, California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), and stakeholders to integrate the Council's management objectives and ecosystem goals. The Sanctuary maintains that it does not intend to manage or regulate Council-managed fisheries. Any actions that would affect fishing would be discussed with National Marine Fisheries Service, the Council, and CDFG.

The Sanctuary is engaged with the Northwest and Southwest Fisheries Science Center in developing an Integrated Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) tool to address multiple management needs. The IEA evaluates the interaction of various environmental variables, including socioeconomics, with respect to MPAs and other management measures.

The HC makes the following observations and recommendations:

- An ecosystem assessment tool that adequately incorporates fishery science and socio-economic information is imperative.
- The HC encourages the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to be engaged in the development and testing of the IEA tool to help validate and verify the tool's usefulness for Council management. SSC involvement, combined with a public outreach effort explaining the IEA, will help increase Council stakeholder confidence in the MPA planning process.
- Stakeholders continue to express concern that the Sanctuary is extending their jurisdiction into fisheries management. The Sanctuary should continue active outreach efforts to stakeholders on their MPA planning process.