

# PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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September 25, 2000

Ms. Barbara Moore, Director  
National Undersea Research Program  
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Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dr. Raymond C. Highsmith, Center Director  
West Coast & Polar Regions Undersea Research Center  
University of Alaska, Fairbanks  
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Fairbanks, AK 99775-7220

Dear Ms. Moore and Dr. Highsmith,

The purpose of this letter is to convey support for the research taking place on Heceta Bank which is funded by the National Undersea Research Program.

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) is a federally mandated entity created by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) in 1976. Its primary role is the management of fisheries conducted within federal waters off Washington, Oregon, and California. Subsequent congressional amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Act in 1986, 1990, and 1996 added emphasis to the Council's role in fish habitat protection. The 1996 amendments directed the Council to identify and describe EFH "essential fish habitat," the habitat essential to the spawning, breeding, feeding or growth-to-maturity of the managed fish species.

The current situation in the groundfish fishery of declining stocks and resulting economic hardship experienced by industry prompted the Council to develop a strategic plan for the fishery. It is hoped the serious changes proposed in the document, including major reductions in fishing effort, use of marine reserves as a management tool, and prioritization of research needs, will result in healthy fish stocks and economically profitable fisheries sustainable for the long term.

We believe that information resulting from the Heceta Bank research will (1) result in a more quantitative approach for mapping EFH, (2) provide a model approach for characterizing and quantifying habitat associations of benthic animals, and (3) help refine stock assessment survey design. This information will assist in improving the management of West Coast groundfish. This research also provides a unique opportunity to examine the possible impacts of bottom fishing at a critical place on the outer continental shelf of the Northwest United States.

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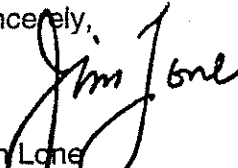
Such research efforts will assist the Council in meeting the new EFH mandates in the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

Information from this research will also aid the Council in meeting goals listed in our strategic plan for the groundfish fishery. These include:

1. Promoting scientific research on the impacts of fishing gear on various habitat types and the feasibility of habitat restoration.
2. Creating cooperative partnerships between state, federal and private foundations and entities to collect and analyze the scientific data needed to manage groundfish.

The tools utilized for data collection in this project, the Delta submersible and ROPOS Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV), could contribute significantly to the management of West Coast groundfish and complement the traditional survey method of bottom trawling by providing stock information from untrawlable areas. For the reasons outlined in this letter, we convey our support for this research and urge you to continue your funding support. In addition, the Council process would greatly benefit from further research in other areas of the West Coast. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



Jim Lone  
Council Chair

FR:kla

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