

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON FISHERY ECOSYSTEM PLAN INITIATIVES

In light of the upcoming Council action on Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) initiatives, the Habitat Committee (HC) considered three initiatives with habitat components:

- A.2.2 Bio-Geographic Regions Identification and Assessment,
- A.2.4 Cross-Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Essential Fish Habitat (EFH), and
- A.2.8. Cross –FMP Effects of Climate Shift.

We have the following comments on the three initiatives:

- Bio-Geographic Regions Identification and Assessment Initiative: The HC supports advancing this effort to further define whether and how the subdivision could improve management decisions. As part of the Integrated Ecosystem Assessment (IEA), NMFS recently published a report (“Selecting and Evaluating Indicators for Habitats within the California Current Large Marine Ecosystem”) that is relevant to this initiative, as many climate drivers have different effects at the subdivision level.
- Cross-FMP EFH Initiative: The HC agrees with the findings that the entire suite of actions in the initiative is too costly at this time with little benefit; however, advancing select components of this initiative would add value to the FMP process. These components are:
 - EFH products common to all FMPs, for example research needs and non-fishing threats to EFH. (NMFS has begun to develop the information needs for non-fishing threats and, pending continued funding, this would be available for application to all FMPs.)
 - Connect existing databases and expand tool development (e.g., NMFS’ Habitat Use Database and the Groundfish Habitat Distribution Models) to pool resources and streamline the EFH process to support multiple EFH reviews.
- Cross–FMP Effects of Climate Shift Initiative. We support advancing this initiative and recommend that it also emphasize assessments of the climate shift on habitat (e.g., sea level rise, ocean acidification, freshwater, nearshore, and pelagic habitats).
- Future Habitat Initiatives: NMFS has produced the Habitat Assessment Improvement Plan (HAIP) to develop habitat science and its connections to fisheries. The HC notes that within the President’s proposed budget, there is an increase of \$5 million for habitat assessments to promote the understanding of the importance of inshore and offshore habitat on the productivity and recovery of fisheries and protected species. The HC recommends development of an initiative that would connect with this work to improve and promote habitat science in FMP development and management decisions. The HAIP provides the basis for developing this initiative in the FEP.