

UNMANAGED FORAGE FISH PROTECTION FINAL ACTION

In April 2013, the Council adopted a Pacific Coast Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) for the U.S. Portion of the California Current Large Marine Ecosystem as a vehicle for bringing ecosystem-based principles into the Council decision-making process under its existing Fishery Management Plans (FMPs). At the same time, the Council adopted an Ecosystem Initiatives Appendix, which provides examples of how the Council could address issues that affect two or more Council FMPs or coordinate major Council policies across the FMPs to fulfill identified FEP needs.

Initiative 1 is intended to recognize the importance of forage fish to the marine ecosystem off the U.S. West Coast, and to provide adequate protection for forage fish by prohibiting directed commercial fishing for certain forage fish species, while continuing to allow incidental catch of those species. The Council is not pursuing a permanent moratorium on fishing for forage fish. Instead, the Council's objective is to prohibit the development of new directed fisheries on forage species that are not currently managed by the Council, or the States, until the Council has had an adequate opportunity to assess the science relating to any proposed fishery and any potential impacts to existing fisheries and communities.

At its April 2014 meeting, the Council chose a preliminary preferred alternative (Alternative 2) which would result in all four of the Council's FMPs being amended to bring unfished and unmanaged forage fish species into the FMPs as ecosystem component species. This multi-FMP amendment known as the Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1 (CEBA 1) will include these FMP amendments: Amendment 15 to the Coastal Pelagic Species FMP, Amendment 25 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish FMP, Amendment 3 to the Highly Migratory Species FMP, and Amendment 19 to the Pacific Coast Salmon FMP.

The Council's *ad hoc* Ecosystem Workgroup (EWG) has prepared a draft Environmental Assessment for CEBA-1 (Agenda Item E.4.a, Attachment 1) that describes the list of forage fish species, evaluates the alternatives, and provides draft FMP amendment language for each of the four FMPs, and proposes a new Council Operating Procedure (COP 24) regarding exempted fishing permits for forage fish species. At its September 2014 meeting, the Council approved the draft FMP language and COP 24 for public review. Additionally, the EWG met via webinar on February 11, 2015 and developed a report to the Council that summarizes the draft Environmental Assessment (Agenda Item E.4.a, Attachment 1) and provides EWG recommendations on final action (Agenda Item E.4.b, EWG Report).

At this meeting, the Council is scheduled to adopt a final preferred alternative, adopt final FMP amendment language, and consider new Council Operating Procedure 24. It is anticipated that the Council will discuss potential revisions to draft COP 24 under this agenda item, but formal adoption will occur under Agenda Item I.4, Membership Appointments and Council Operating Procedures on Thursday, March 12, 2015.

Council Action:

1. **Adopt a final Preferred Alternative.**
2. **Adopt final draft FMP amendment language.**
3. **Consider draft COP 24 and its potential adoption under Agenda Item I.4.**

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item E.4.a, Attachment 1; Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1: Protecting Unfished and Unmanaged Forage Fish Species, Draft Environmental Assessment.
2. Agenda Item E.4.b, EWG Report.
3. Agenda Item E.4.b, CPSAS Report.
4. Agenda Item E.4.b, CPSMT Report.
5. Agenda Item E.4.b, Supplemental Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel Report.
6. Agenda Item E.4.c, Public Comment.

Agenda Order:

- a. Agenda Item Overview Mike Burner
- b. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies and Management Entities
- c. Public Comment
- d. **Council Action:** Adopt Final Preferred Alternative and Amendment Language for Incorporating Protection of Unmanaged Forage Fish in Council Fishery Management Plans; Consider Adopting Council Operating Procedure 24 – Protocol for Consideration of Exempted Fishing Permits for Shared Ecosystem Component Species

PFMC
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