

Essential Fish Habitat Conservation and Management



Olympic Coast NMS



Oceana

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PFMC H.8 Groundfish EFH/RCA Modifications
September 2015



Goal:

Protect habitat while maintaining vibrant fisheries
on the U.S. Pacific Coast



Fish eggs attached to California hydrocoral, off Monterey.



Biogenic habitat on Big Sur Bank.

Photos courtesy of Bay Area Underwater Explorers, www.baue.org

Oceana 2013 Proposal

- Include as stand-alone alternative in range of alternatives:
 - Meets objectives of MSA
 - Meets Purpose and Need
 - Achieves dual goals of increasing habitat protections and fishing opportunities

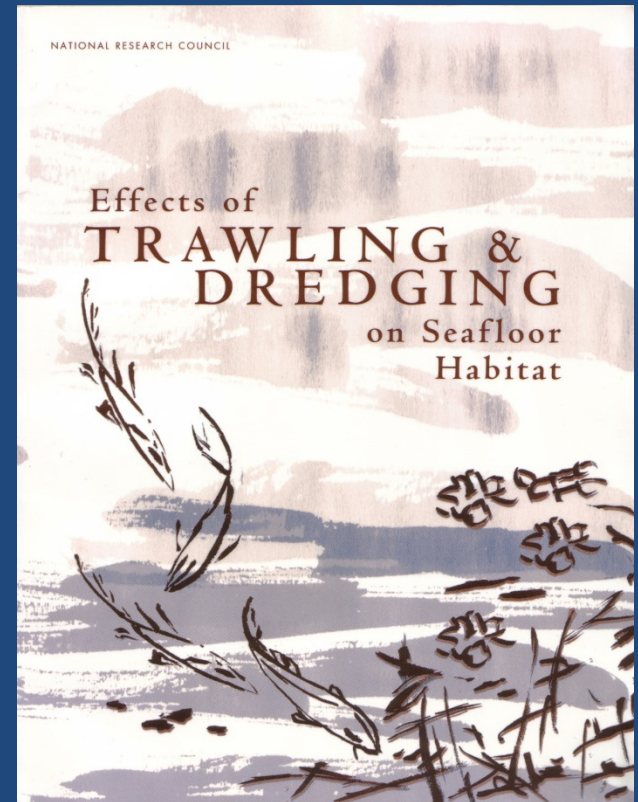


National Academy of Science Report

Effects of Trawling & Dredging on Seafloor Habitat

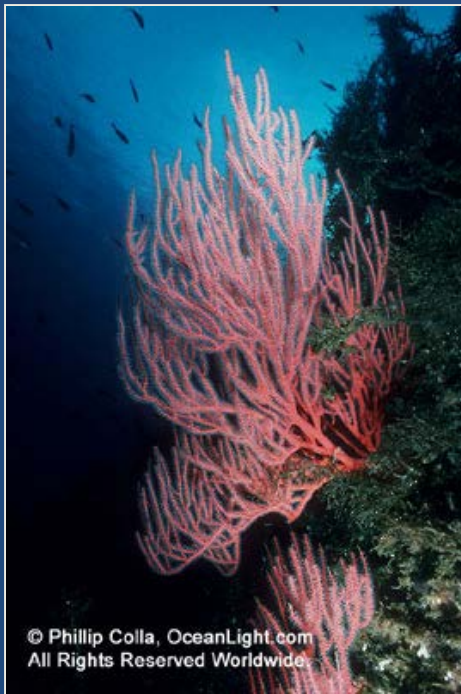
National Research Council 2002

- Bottom trawling reduces the *complexity, productivity, and biodiversity* of benthic habitats most severely in areas low natural disturbance, particularly corals and sponges
- Prioritize hard substrates
- Recommended combination of:
 - Trawl effort reduction
 - Permanent area closures
 - Gear conversion



International Scientist letter

February 2004: Over 1,100 Scientists from around the world signed a statement on Protecting the World's Deep-sea Coral and Sponge Ecosystems



“Based on current knowledge, deep-sea coral and sponge communities appear to be as important to the biodiversity of the oceans and the sustainability of fisheries as their analogues in shallow tropical seas.”

Oldest living things on Earth?

- *Leiopathes* black corals: estimated age of **4,265 years old**
- NOAA Deep Sea Coral Program:
“corals may provide habitat for some commercially important fish species and are susceptible to damage caused by bottom-tending fishing gear. Recovery from such damage may take millennia.”



NOAA

Center for Independent Experts

External peer review on evaluation of adverse fishing impacts to EFH...

- “...the use of the **precautionary approach** is paramount. This is especially true for those habitats with long recovery times e.g. hard corals and sponges.”

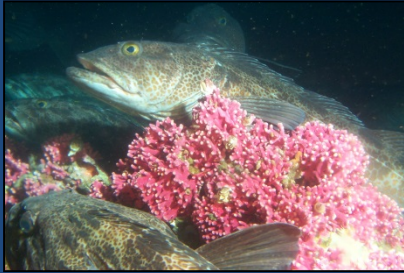
Summary report p. 18



Glass sponge and rockfish, 160 meters in the Grays Canyon Proposal Area.



Rockfish Conservation Area



Why have the RCAs worked?

- Protection from harvest
- Protection of habitat
- Breeding grounds
- Feeding areas
- Nurseries



Reopen with caution



Criteria for Oceana Proposed Changes to EFH Conservation Areas

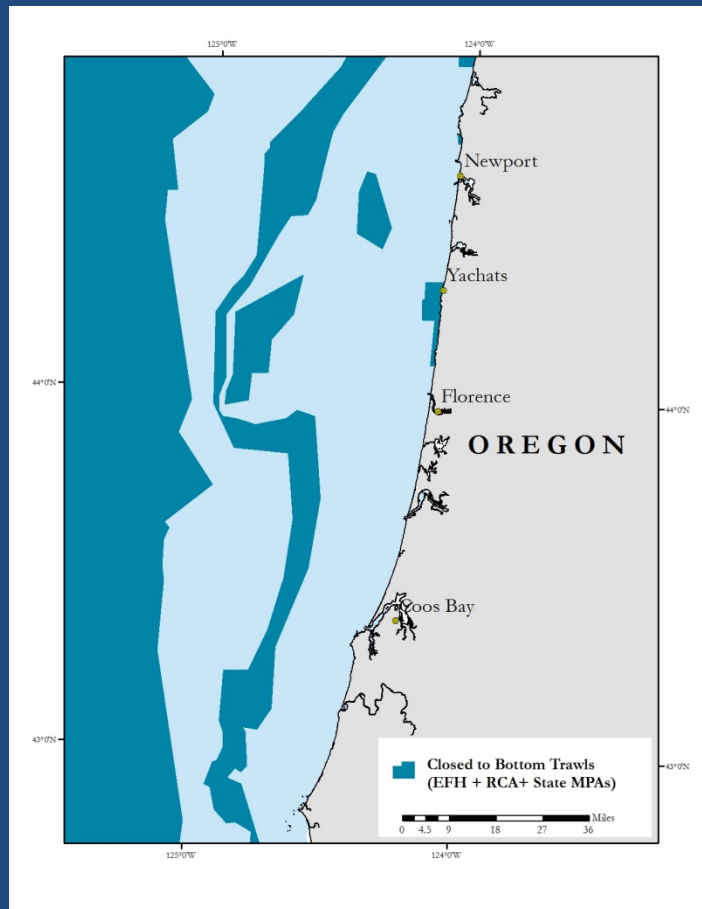
- Overall net increases in habitat protections *and* fishing opportunities
- Newly identified sensitive habitats
- Coral and sponge bycatch hotspots (NOAA Deep Sea Coral Program)
- Sensitive habitats in the trawl RCA
- Areas with very low or no trawl effort



Analyzing Cumulative Impacts: An Example

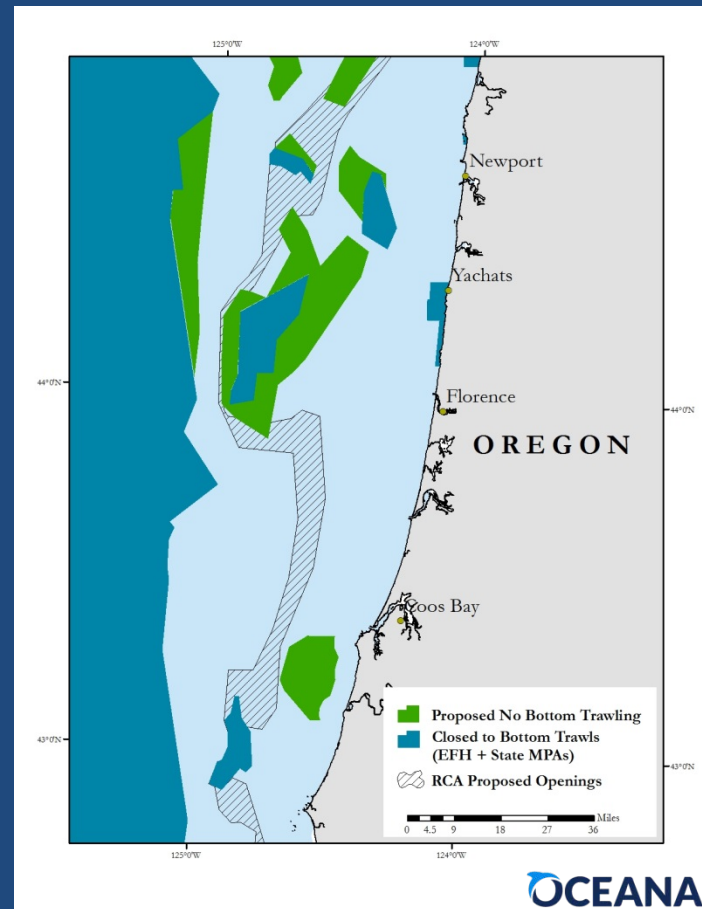
BASELINE

'STATUS QUO' YEAR ROUND
BOTTOM TRAWL CLOSURES
(EFH + RCAs + STATE MPAS)

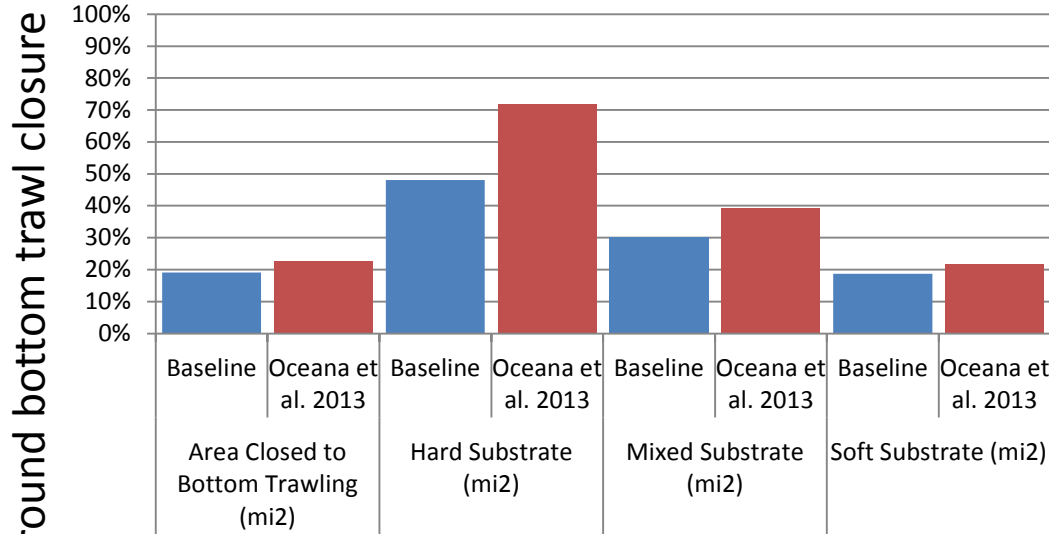


OCEANA PROPOSAL

EXISTING YEAR ROUND BOTTOM
TRAWL CLOSURES PLUS NEW EFH
REMOVING RCAs

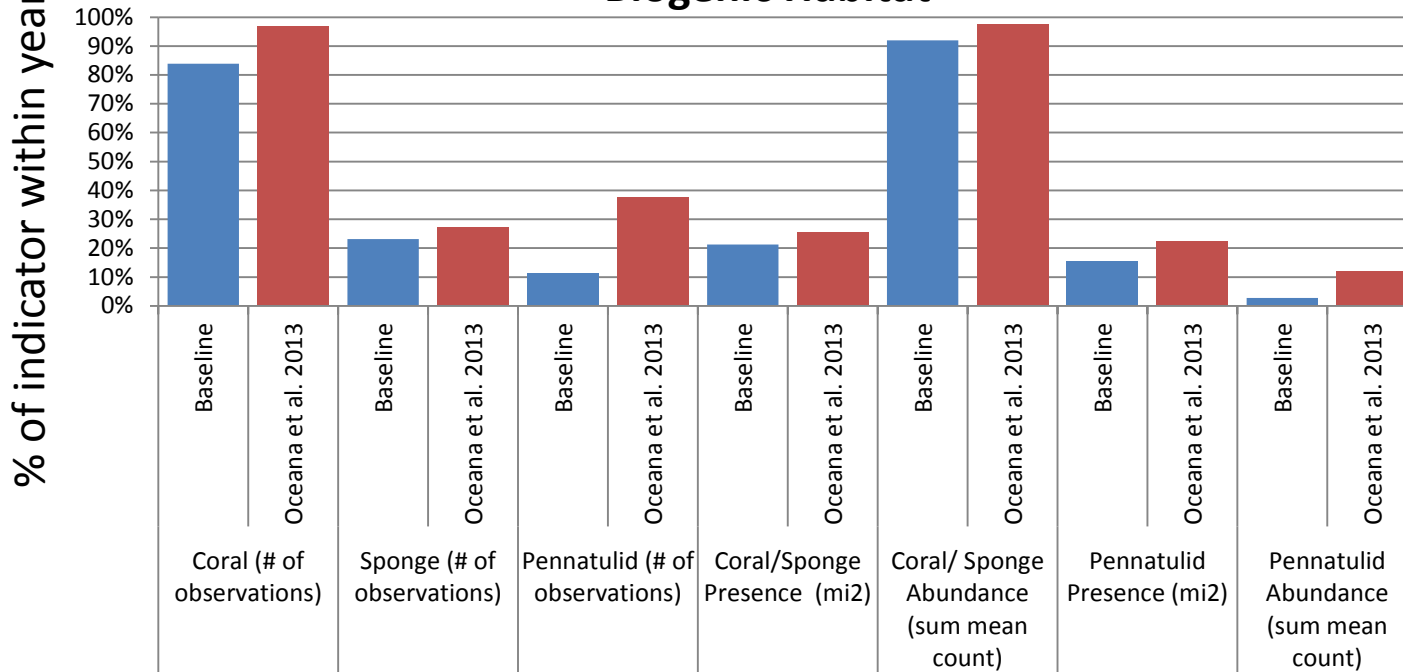


Northern Upper Slope Area and Substrate



**Increased habitat
protection across all
habitat indicators**

Biogenic Habitat

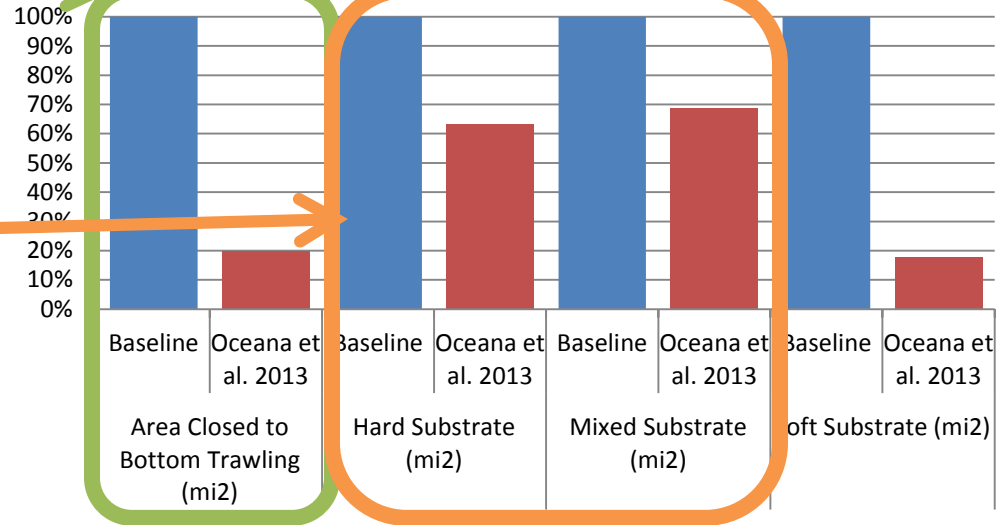


80% of RCA Reopened to Trawling

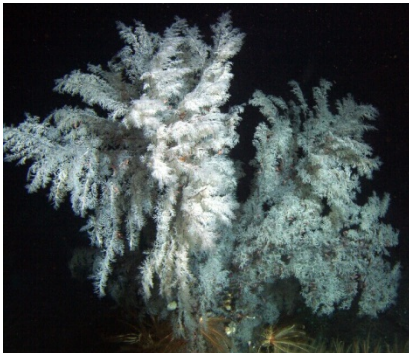
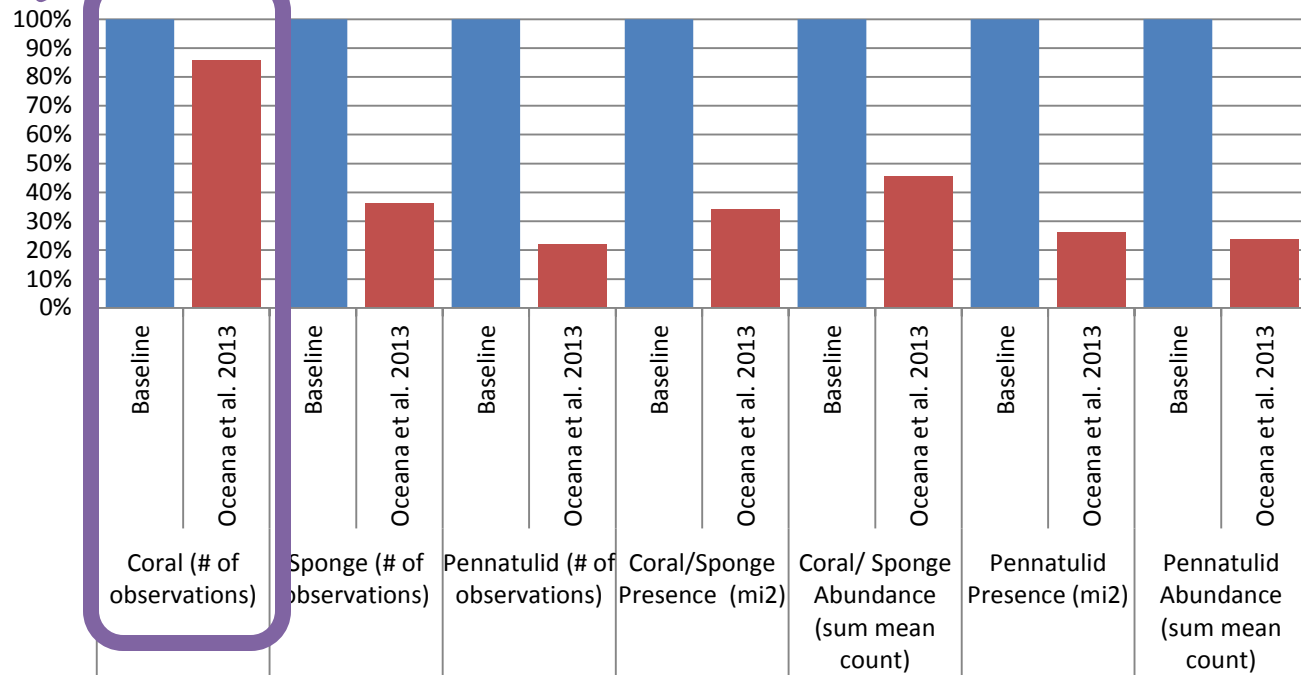
Over 60% of hard and mixed substrates remain protected

Over 80% of all identified coral observations protected

**RCA North Of 40° 10'
Area and Substrate**



Biogenic Habitat



Achieves Overall Increase in Fishing Opportunities

Northern Upper Slope

Displaced Effort based
on 2006-2010 data

Restored Effort based
on 2002-2006 data



Deepwater Habitat Conservation Area



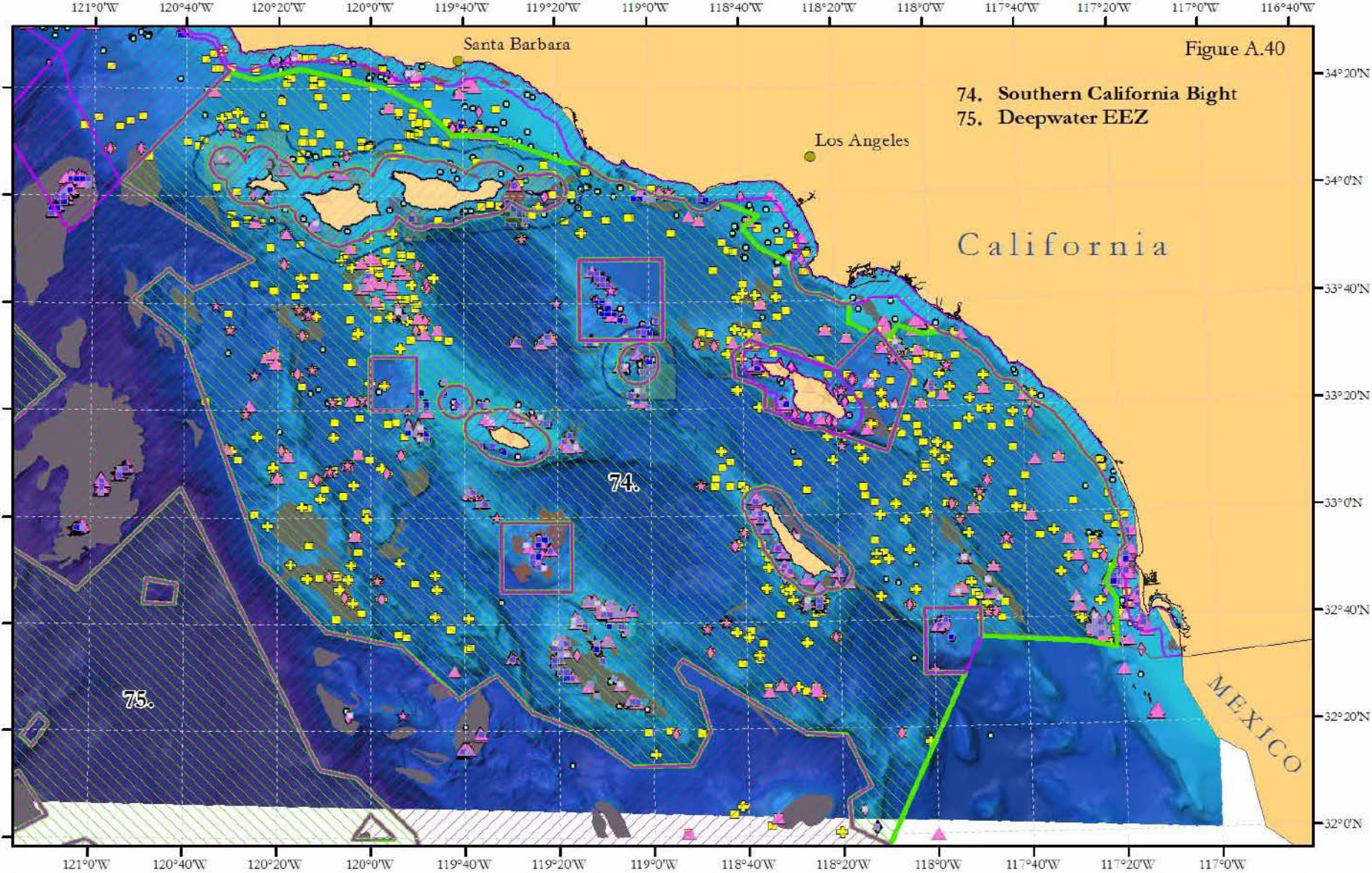
2006 MSA provisions gave Councils authority to protect this area outside EFH

Precautionary approach

195 Documented records of corals

Figure A.40

74. Southern California Bight
75. Deepwater EEZ



Substrate Type		Biogenic Habitat				Management	
Mixed	Rock	Black Coral	Gorgonian Coral	Coral & Sponge Abundance (2x2 km) Mean Sum Count		Proposed EFH Conservation Area, No Bottom Trawl	Currently Closed to Bottom Trawling (state MPAs, state trawl closures, EFH)
Coral, Other	Sea Pens/ Sea Whips	1 - 2	14 - 118	3 - 13	119 - 1147	National Marine Sanctuary	
Miles 0 5 10 20 30 40		Glass Sponge	Sponge, Other				

Common Coral and Sponge Taxa on High-relief Rock Pinnacles & Boulders off Southern California



Slide courtesy NOAA.

Recommendations

- Include “collaborative proposal” and Oceana 2013 proposal in range of alternatives
- Analyze cumulative impacts of RCA reopenings and modified EFHCAs
- Include objective: “increase overall habitat protections AND fishing opportunities”

