

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON WESTERN CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN

The Habitat Committee (HC) reviewed the Climate Science Strategy's Western Regional Action Plan (WRAP) developed by NMFS' Northwest and Southwest Fisheries Science Centers.

Climate change is relevant to questions facing the HC, particularly with respect to expected changes in essential fish habitat (EFH) and cumulative habitat stressors facing fisheries. The HC advocates research that would support guidance to protect and restore a habitat mosaic to support a changing distribution of species and habitats. For example, there is a need to understand geographic shifts in forage species and what this means to the ecosystem and fisheries. Hence, the HC supports the Ecosystem Workgroup's comments that ocean sampling be sufficient in geographic scope and depth range to help understand climate variability along the U.S. West Coast and the potential fishery and ecosystem responses. Broad geographic sampling will be necessary to provide a quantitative basis for climate-informed fisheries management.

Research that would provide guidance related to management adaptations is necessary. There is preliminary discussion within NMFS on how to address climate change impacts in the context of EFH consultations. The WRAP should identify strategies for improving consideration of climate science into management issues like EFH. Likewise, greater specificity is needed on environmental indicators that can help support the needs of the Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plan and Integrated Ecosystem Assessment.

Additionally, the findings and suggestions from the West Coast Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia Science Panel should be fully integrated with the WRAP.

As there is much applied research on climate change across many jurisdictions—from county to state to tribe to Federal groups—NMFS should play a key coordination role to identify what and where habitat/fisheries related science and monitoring is being done, and to highlight scientific gaps.