



GAVIN NEWSOM
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Mr. Phil Anderson
Chair, Pacific Fishery Management Council
770 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101
Portland, OR 97220

Mr. Chris Oliver
Assistant Administrator, NOAA Fisheries
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

RE: Support for Essential Fish Habitat Protections off California

April 2, 2018

Dear Mr. Anderson and Mr. Oliver,

I am writing to express my support for protecting the living seafloor in the Southern California Bight under the Oceana et al. proposal (Alternative 1.b). These unique deep-ocean ecosystems provide vital habitat that supports recreationally and commercially important fisheries, and have been generally untouched by human activity. Designating this area as an Essential Fish Habitat Conservation Area will protect this pristine habitat and ensure these ecosystems continue to function for the benefit of both local fisheries and environmental processes.

The ecosystems of the Southern California Bight, such as kelp forests, estuaries, and beaches, support a high level of biological diversity – and the deep ocean is no exception. Southern California's undersea geology includes rocky reefs, faults, canyons, and underwater mountains that create a unique seafloor that we are only beginning to explore and understand. Slow-growing and long-lived species of deepwater coral and sponges are unique to this habitat, but are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of bottom trawling.

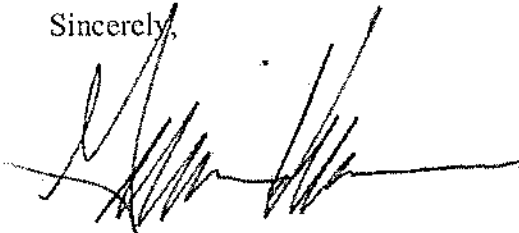
Designating this deep-sea ecosystem as an Essential Fish Habitat Conservation Area will preserve rocky substrate and habitat-forming invertebrates that are important to the foraging, reproduction, and development of recreationally- and commercially-important groundfish species. These habitat protections could indirectly benefit other fisheries by preserving ecosystem function in the complex and interconnected marine environment. Additionally, the large footprint of this protected habitat might also act as a buffer against a warming and acidifying ocean. Creating a refuge for species that are vulnerable to human impacts, such as pollution, overfishing, or climate change, can potentially lessen the impacts of these stressors, safeguarding the resilience of our marine ecosystems and fisheries.



Under the Oceana et al. proposal, designating portions of the Southern California Bight as an Essential Fish Habitat Conservation Area would have a minimal impact on fishing communities. The space that would be closed to bottom trawling encompass areas that have not been utilized by the fishery, and therefore would not displace any current fishing effort. Stakeholder involvement in the development of this proposal has been comprehensive, resulting in a management strategy that successfully balances the needs of the industry with an unprecedented level of protection for deepwater habitat.

The Pacific Fisheries Management Council has an opportunity to establish protections for deep-sea habitat that are bold in scale, yet deliberate in the preservation of current fishing effort. Freezing the footprint of trawl fishing will protect pristine deep-sea habitat that is vital to other important species, creating benefits that extend throughout the region. Ensuring the ecosystem health of the Southern California Bight, a global hotspot of marine biodiversity, is essential to maintaining vibrant fisheries in a time of rapid and extreme environmental change. Please join me in supporting a forward-thinking policy that benefits our ecosystems and fisheries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Newsom', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

GAVIN NEWSOM
Lieutenant Governor
State of California