

ECOSYSTEM WORKGROUP REPORT ON WEST COAST ECOSYSTEM-BASED FISHERY MANAGEMENT ROAD MAP IMPLEMENTATION

At this meeting, the Ecosystem Workgroup (EWG) met with the Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel (EAS) and the Habitat Committee (HC) to receive a briefing from Ms. Yvonne deReynier on the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) draft Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management Western Road Map Implementation Plan (WRIP). We thank Ms. deReynier for providing the overview of the WRIP and appreciate all the work by NMFS to develop the document.

The EWG reviewed the draft WRIP with a focus on: (1) comments we might recommend that the Council forward to the drafters; and (2) implications for the next edition of the Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) and possibly the Climate and Communities Initiative. In this report, we emphasize the first while recognizing that the two considerations are very much linked. On the second, we do note that the Council postponed discussion of the FEP review until this meeting partly out of a desire to first see the WRIP contents.

As background, NMFS prepared a Road Map document for implementing ecosystem-based fishery management (EBFM) of the California Current Ecosystem (CCE), which the Council considered at its September 2016 meeting.¹ As a reminder, the EWG expressed qualified support for the Road Map and identified actions the Council had already undertaken to implement aspects of the plan.² The EWG's major concern was that the Road Map might be overly prescriptive in terms of how progress toward EBFM should be accomplished. In addition, the EWG identified concerns regarding the level of funding that would be needed to implement all of the Road Map's action items, whether NMFS's ecosystem scientists would be trading off work on existing ecosystem science to implement aspects of the Road Map, and the role of the science coordinator.

The WRIP is intended to apply the national Road Map to the West Coast. It is identified as the first five-year phase of longer term implementation actions. The EWG is pleased that the WRIP is ultimately aimed at the guiding principles and science activities that will benefit the Council. While the focus is on the next five years, some activities will take longer (e.g., to evaluate recreational fisheries and build linkages to fisheries vulnerabilities, species, and overall risk; complete management strategy evaluations). And while we do not know the plans for keeping the WRIP as a "living document", we understand and expect that the Road Map will be updated and adjusted over this first five years for the next iteration.

At this time, we do not see anything in the WRIP that would prescribe next steps that the Council must take with the FEP or Initiative.

¹ Agenda Item D.2, Attachment 2, September 2016 <https://www.pcouncil.org/resources/archives/briefing-books/september-2016-briefing-book/#ecoSept2016>

² [Agenda Item D.2.b, Supplemental Ecosystem Workgroup Report](https://www.pcouncil.org/resources/archives/briefing-books/september-2016-briefing-book/#ecoSept2016)
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Beyond that question, the EWG considered if and how the WRIP might be helpful in guiding the Council in where to go next with EBFM. On that question, the WRIP does not appear to propose any major departures from the path the Council has been following. The WRIP appears to exist for NMFS organizational, planning, and communication purposes more so than a map for Council activities. The EWG sees this as recognition of the Council's policy role and its dedicated progress on ecosystem issues.

The Council has expressed strong interest in using ecosystem information to improve conservation and management decisions and outcomes. The progress made on this front has been achieved with considerable support and dedication from NMFS science centers, the Integrated Ecosystem Assessment team, and the West Coast Region. If there were a single overarching comment that could be made on the WRIP, the EWG would recommend that it underscore the importance of continuing the dialogue between NMFS ecosystem experts and the Council's fisheries management community even more so than the draft does now. This ongoing dialogue is how the Road Map's guiding principles will be best put to work for federally managed fisheries in the CCE.

In terms of more specific comments, we would like to offer the following:

- Guiding Principle 1
 - As FEP development is highlighted in this section of the WRIP, we suggest that the WRIP also specifically reference the Ecosystem Initiatives in Appendix A of the FEP. The Initiatives and annual ecosystem report are really what make the FEP a living plan.
- Guiding Principle 2
 - The final version of the Council's revised [Research and Data Needs document](#) is scheduled to be adopted at this meeting and identifies key research needs for the next five years. It provides considerable direction for advancing our understanding of ecosystem processes and actions by identifying gaps in information pertaining to Council management. This section of the WRIP would benefit from providing a clear link to that document as a means to focus *“inventories of EBFM mandates, priorities, drivers, risks, tools, etc.”*
 - In the bigger picture, the Council and other stewards of the CCE are dependent on NMFS and other federal resources for monitoring ecosystem conditions. The draft WRIP acknowledges the “trend toward level or decreasing budgets and declines in federal staffing” and notes NMFS plans for prioritization. We would recommend that the Council emphasize the fundamental role that monitoring and data collection plays and will play to sustainably manage fisheries and the CCE in the future.
- Guiding Principle 3
 - We support the suggestion to conduct fishing community vulnerability assessments and continue to advance ongoing work on the West Coast. The results of this work should help benefit advancement of the Council's current Climate and Fishing Communities Initiative (Initiative).

- There was very little mention in this section of vulnerabilities to ocean acidification, hypoxia, ocean temperature, and harmful algal blooms or to the effects of multiple uses of fresh water (especially when water temperatures are high and precipitation is low that affect salmon survival). Perhaps they are already covered within the risk assessments that are being proposed, but specific mention of these challenges to CCE resources and habitat would be useful.
- Guiding Principle 4
 - The action items identified in this section to explore ecosystem trade-offs appear to rely heavily on management strategy evaluation as the most appropriate tool to provide answers. Several ongoing projects were identified that should ultimately provide important insights for key fishery management plan (FMP) species. However, the EWG notes that there may be other approaches worth considering such as the concept of incorporating identification of tipping points into management which may be useful and possibly less resource intensive.
 - Explicitly explore ecosystem tradeoffs between recovering top predators (such as pinnipeds) and their recovering managed prey species (e.g., Chasco et al, 2017 <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-017-14984-8> and press release: https://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/news/features/recovering_marine_mammals_increase_pressure/index.cfm).
- Guiding Principle 5
 - Incorporation of ecosystem considerations into management advice by exploring the use of scenario planning and reference points may provide some useful approaches for advancing ecosystem-based management and building additional adaptability into management. These concepts have also been proposed in the development of the current FEP Initiative.
 - In Table 5, row 5b3: we recommend incorporating an additional step designed to also: Develop and incentivize partnerships with FMP management teams and advisors to incorporate ecosystem advice into management recommendations.
 - In Table 5, row 5b4: we recommend that the Council’s FEP and Initiative process be added as a means of identifying the best practices for incorporating ecosystem considerations into management decisions.

The EWG has no comments on the items in Guiding Principle 6.

PFMC
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