

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON FISHERY ECOSYSTEM PLAN FIVE-YEAR REVIEW - SCOPING

For future scoping of the Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP), the Habitat Committee (HC) recommends that the Council consider ways to improve coordination between the ecosystem advisory groups and the HC. There is a great deal of overlap between the HC's and Ecosystem Working Group's scopes of work. For example, the abiotic environment and habitat sections of the FEP (§3.3), nonfishing impacts (§4), and essential fish habitat (EFH) considerations are germane to the HC's role. On the other hand, the HC deals mainly with habitat of stocks in fishery management plans, and much less so with non-Fishery Management Plan (FMP) species.

It is in the Council's best interest for these two bodies to efficiently advise on fisheries management decisions and real time actions from the ecosystem-habitat perspective. Therefore, the HC recommends that the Council consider ways in which ecosystem advisory groups and the HC can better coordinate, including but not limited to:

- More joint sessions of advisory bodies. These have been used with mixed success to coordinate comments on deep sea corals and the annual State of the California Current documents. Organization of these sessions would likely fall to Council staff.
- Add new members with ecosystem expertise to management teams and the HC.
- Joint membership of members on advisory bodies to facilitate coordination among bodies. We recognize that coordinating meeting attendance could be a challenge.
- A larger advisory committee (e.g., "Habitats and Ecosystems Advisory Committee") with subcommittees, similar to the SSC's structure of committees and subcommittees.

The HC recognizes that overhauling the FEP would be a tremendous workload that might not be warranted if the FEP is not actively referenced for management needs. However, there are improvements that could be made if the FEP is revised.

The FEP should recognize that habitat and ecosystem are intrinsically related. For instance, Section 3 of the FEP characterizes habitat by structural components that are mostly constant in form (i.e., geologic, biotic, water column structure). However, as climate change progresses, ocean chemistry parameters such as temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH, and aragonite saturation can exceed a species' tolerance, thus functioning as habitat. Framing these vulnerable environmental factors in a habitat context would create a connection to the Council's EFH mandate and could help incorporate climate change planning into FMP-EFH review processes and in EFH consultations.