

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE STRATEGIC PLAN

Scott Burkhart (National Marine Fisheries Service, NMFS) presented the Draft NMFS West Coast Strategic Plan. The new agency National Strategic Plan was finalized July 25, and the regions are working on finalizing regional strategic plans by October 1, 2019. NMFS West Coast Region is looking for comments by September 20, 2019.

The HC recommends the following comments be submitted by the Council to NMFS:

General Comments:

- The current strategic plan has a conservation and habitat focus. Both the new national and draft regional plans focus on economics (e.g., energy and water developments) over sustainability and habitat. While Mr. Burkhart informed the HC that goals from the current plan will be incorporated into the West Coast Region's annual planning, the HC is concerned that this plan's change in emphasis will promote economic development over essential fish habitat (EFH) and habitat, which are primary drivers behind the sustainability and economic value of fisheries. Giving equal weight to development and economics could lead to a loss of emphasis on habitat quality and sustainability.

Specific comments:

- Add a sentence to the section entitled "Meeting the Challenge: "Use regulatory tools to protect and restore priority habitats supporting long-term sustainability of our fisheries and protected resources."

Goal 1

- Key Strategy 2 is in conflict with promoting sustainability of EFH and habitat. While Key Strategy 7 appears to be an attempt at addressing this, aquaculture may conflict with habitat sustainability.

Goal 2

- Key Strategy 2 does not identify how streamlining energy independence and national defense activities will achieve Goal 2. The strategy should be strengthened to cover habitat and EFH.
- Key Strategy 4 should be reworded or removed. The word "balance" is used improperly; protected species and habitat should be prioritized by the agency over other uses.