

COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON DRAFT COUNCIL OPERATING PROCEDURE 22 – ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT REVIEW PROCESS

The Coastal Pelagic Species Management Team (CPSMT) and the Coastal Pelagic Species Advisory Subpanel (CPSAS) participated in a webinar on August 29 to review agenda items for the September Council meeting with relevance to CPS. We received a presentation from Mr. Kerry Griffin on Agenda Item C.4, Attachment 3: Draft Council Operating Procedure (COP) 22 – Essential Fish Habitat Review Process. The CPSMT would like to thank Mr. Griffin for the presentation and thorough explanation of this agenda item and its purpose.

The CPSMT agrees that a standard COP that is general enough to encompass all the Council fishery management plan (FMP) essential fish habitat (EFH) reviews is preferable, and endorses adoption of the Draft COP 22, with minor changes in the draft language under the EFH periodic review heading to improve its clarity and implementation. It would help to stress that the purpose and objectives for the EFH review be clearly identified first, and that the “measurable objectives” be specific to habitat conservation rather than the review in the second paragraph. Those specifics of the scope and schedule for EFH review will be critical components of the process; having these clearly defined in advance will be important.

The CPSMT suggests scoping each of the two phases of EFH review separately to allow the Council to ensure that the scope and objectives as well as the schedules that are set are appropriate to each phase, if the two-phase process is utilized. In the first phase, the staff leads and subject matter experts will be identified and the schedules set for the review so that EFH reviews proceed in a thorough, efficient, and transparent process. Reviews should utilize the best available scientific information relevant to the species in the FMP, and should consider both published and unpublished information submitted in the scoping process. After the review stage is finished, proceeding with setting the scope, objectives, and schedule for the second phase, if needed, would then lead to possible changes to EFH based on the findings of the scientific information review of the first phase. In summary, the design and implementation of the COP should lead to a smooth EFH review process that provides opportunity for input from Council Advisory Bodies and the public.