

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON MARINE PLANNING

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) was briefed by Marine Planning Committee (MPC) member Mike Conroy. Mr. Conroy reviewed the draft documents that have been prepared by the MPC for Council consideration for all the proposed sites for ocean wind production along the West Coast. After discussion on the three letters (Vandenberg, Morro Bay and Humboldt) currently being considered for submitting, we agree with their content and recommend the Council forward them to the appropriate agencies.

We appreciate the comprehensive overview provided by this newly formed committee and would like to raise two additional concerns for consideration.

Our first concern is the importance of creating safe and navigable transit lanes through the wind turbine areas. All of the identified areas under consideration for offshore wind development are at least 200 square miles and are placed between ports and harbors and important albacore tuna fishing grounds, so vessels transiting to and from the tuna grounds may be forced many miles out of their way to and from port. This represents both a major safety concern (especially for a vessel in distress) and an increase in fuel cost. This would cause a significantly larger carbon footprint and make search and rescue by the Coast Guard less timely and more dangerous. We are also concerned about reports of impacts to electronics (radar, radios, etc.) from offshore wind farms on fishing vessels. The HMSAS suggest that the Council request a minimum of a 5-mile-wide transit route through the turbines, not more than 10 miles apart. We believe the sooner this issue is recognized in print, the better chance that it will be recognized as an issue of concern. The Coast Guard is conducting a [Port Access Route Study \(PARS\)](#) to evaluate safe access routes for the movement of vessel traffic proceeding to or from ports or places along the western seaboard of the United States and to determine whether a Shipping Safety Fairway and/or routing measures should be established, adjusted, or modified. The Coast Guard has established a January 25, 2022, deadline for comments on the PARS. The HMSAS suggests that the Council request that the Coast Guard provide a briefing by webinar prior to the November 2021 meeting on the status of the project to ensure recognition of the importance of transit routes through the wind turbine areas. The early November Coast Guard update would allow time for the Council to provide comments by the January deadline.

Our second concern is the potential use of important harvest areas or critical habitat (whether it be essential fish habitat [EFH], EFH Conservation Areas, or habitat areas of particular concern) that should be set aside in the wind turbine areas. Obviously, when you are setting aside 200+ miles, there will be areas of variable importance for habitat and harvest. The sooner we can get this concept established, the better chance of getting recognition.

At a minimum, the HMSAS suggest that the Council forward these concerns to the proper authorities with the other comments from the MPC.