

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON MARINE PLANNING

The Habitat Committee (HC) reviewed a number of topics, including aquaculture opportunity areas, offshore wind energy, and draft policy guidance documents, and offers the following comments.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Aquaculture Opportunity Areas (AOA)

The HC heard an update on the NOAA AOA process from Diane Windham. The [AOA Atlas](#) was published in fall 2021 and was used to determine 10 potential sites within two areas of the Southern California Bight. The Atlas itself is a peer reviewed [NOAA Tech Memo](#)¹, and not subject to public comment; however if there are comments on the Atlas they can be submitted during public scoping related to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

Ms. Windham explained that the Atlas does not include information on climate change effects nor on socio-economic impacts. These considerations would be addressed in the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS). The NEPA process will begin with a Notice of Intent (NOI) for scoping the PEIS, to be issued this spring (likely late May). When a project is proposed, additional analysis would likely be warranted and would require multiple permits and possibly require an individual project EIS. NOAA intends to time the NOI release to overlap a Council meeting, although the timing may not allow for full discussion and consideration during a Council meeting. There will be additional opportunities for public comment as the PEIS is developed. The criteria used for these potential sites are that they need to be at least 500-2000 acres to support 3-5 farms each and also 25 nautical miles or less from shore and be located in Federal waters. Additionally, other factors from the Atlas included potential constraints such as currents, temperatures, protected species and habitats, and ocean outfalls.

Marine Planning Offshore Policy Guidance

The HC discussed the *Proposed Policy Guidance for Offshore Development Activities* (Offshore Policy Document) in items C.2.a, MPC Report 2, C.2.a, EWG Report 1, and C.2.a, HC Report 1, and is submitting this supplemental report as further guidance for the Council. The HC also discussed the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) Offshore Wind Energy Policy (OWEP)² (December 7, 2021). The HC noted that the reports from the Marine Planning Committee (MPC), Ecosystem Workgroup (EWG), and HC are intended to create a Council document that can be easily shared with agencies to improve consistency in communication of policy.

The HC recommends combining the draft policy documents on habitat/ecosystem issues (C.2.a, HC Report 1) and fishery/communities issues (C.2.a, MPC Report 2) into a single Offshore Policy Document and incorporating any relevant content from the *PFMC Guidance on Agency Activities in the California Current Ecosystem* (C.2.a, EWG Report 1), referred to herein as the *CCE*

¹ https://library.oarcloud.noaa.gov/noaa_documents.lib/NOS/NCCOS/TM_NOS_NCCOS/nos_nccos_298.pdf

² <https://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/NEFMC-Offshore-Wind-Energy-Policy-December-2021.pdf>

guidance document. Additionally, following review of the NEFMC OWE, the HC recommends incorporating some of the specificity regarding the types of impacts described in that Policy. The NEFMC OWE has both content and structure that would benefit Council comment letters with guidance and policy for agencies and offshore wind developers. The HC recommends that the HC and MPC continue refining the draft offshore policy document and provide a final draft for the Council to consider at the June 2022 meeting.

As discussed in the EWG report under this agenda item and also under the Fishery Ecosystem Plan Five Year Review (Agenda Item H.1.a, EWG Report 1), the former chapter on Council policy priorities is now a stand-alone draft (C.2.a, EWG Report 1). The EWG recommends that the Council move the responsibility for drafting and maintaining the CCE guidance document to the MPC. The HC commented on this recommendation under Agenda Item H.1, and in that report **we suggest that the HC take on the maintenance and updating of this CCE guidance document.** This is recommended since the geographic scope and suite of issues covered in the CCE guidance document include freshwater habitat issues, whereas the scope of the new marine policy guidance document is focused on offshore development activities.

Offshore Wind Energy Planning

The HC discussed the two recent meetings on the Oregon Call Areas (the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) Oregon Intergovernmental Renewable Energy Task Force meeting on February 25th and the MPC-BOEM meeting on March 4th) in which BOEM presented the draft Oregon Call Areas and next steps toward designating Wind Energy Areas (WEA) and leasing off Oregon. Executive Director Merrick Burden asked that advisory bodies provide the Council with a summary of specific resource conflicts and use conflicts in the Call Areas and identify any issues with BOEM's process that can later help with the formation of comments to BOEM. The HC notes that our recommendations on BOEM's process are applicable West Coast wide.

BOEM PROCESS

Spatial planning process

Like many who commented to BOEM during the recent meetings, the HC is concerned that BOEM's process lacks a comprehensive spatial planning analysis that considers sensitive resources and important fishing areas in siting decisions at each phase of the process, and that it lacks sufficient time between phases for analyses and for stakeholder discussion on proposals. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has advised BOEM to apply the same suitability modeling developed by NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science that is used for siting AOAs for identifying regions most sensitive to development.

The HC recommends that BOEM allow additional time in its proposed schedule between the Call Area phase and the WEA phase to conduct a comprehensive suitability modeling analysis, and additional time between the WEA phase and the leasing phase for a finer-scale analysis of all ecosystem resources, fisheries and fishing to identify and minimize likely conflicts ahead of leasing.

The HC concurs with the NMFS recommendations (in comments on the [Humboldt WEA EA](#) and [Morro Bay WEA EA](#) scoping) that the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science suitability model used for siting decisions related to AOAs should be applied in BOEM's siting process throughout the West Coast. The model should be tuned to the Oregon region of interest

using data developed for BOEM in OROWindMap with sufficient weighting of habitat, species and fishery layers at both a local and Oregon-regional (not coastwide) scale.

Single Wind Farm Demonstration Project

A primary concern is the lack of a test case wind farm off the West Coast prior to the installation of multiple wind farms spanning miles on the shelf. The effects of clusters of wind farms on ocean conditions in the CCE are not yet understood. A single wind farm demonstration project would test the ability of floating wind platforms to endure harsh conditions common in the northern CCE, enable analysis of the effects of wind turbine arrays on the surrounding wind climate and determine if wind deficits affect the upwelling process that is vital to marine life in the CCE, and assess displacement of migrating species and fishing. Cable routes should also be considered in a demonstration project. ***Recommendation: BOEM should build substantial time into their schedule to allow for a single wind farm demonstration project to be operational for a period of one to two years prior to additional lease sales, and phase in additional wind farms over time. The demonstration project should study the suite of potential environmental and fishery effects from the wind farm and cable route. The results would inform the placement and spacing of additional wind farms.***

Programmatic EIS

Several comments during the MPC meeting advocated for BOEM to prepare a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which seems based on an assumption that a PEIS would provide a comprehensive, detailed analysis for all phases of the process for all areas affected. Typically, a PEIS provides a coarse description of broad categories of impacts rather than specific impacts. The scale of the PEIS analysis is typically large geographic regions (entire West Coast) or nationwide. BOEM indicated they did not favor a PEIS previously but could revisit the idea based on public interest. The Council family should understand that a PEIS could undermine what stakeholders seem to want, which is a comprehensive, detailed EIS at a sub-regional scale (i.e., Oregon south coast), for all phases combined (not split into site assessment phase, construction phase, operations phase) and include a cumulative effects analysis of multiple energy farms within the region. ***The HC recommends that rather than request a PEIS, the Council should request the specific elements of an analysis that the Council desires***

OREGON CALL AREAS – Ecosystem and Habitat Concerns

Coos Bay Call Area - the northern boundary of the Call Area overlaps the southern flank of Heceta Bank where ocean processes create a unique recirculation pattern that intensifies during summer upwelling and affects nutrient and dissolved oxygen concentrations and temperatures. “Wind wakes” created by clusters of wind farms can profoundly reduce wind speeds which may have implications for ocean conditions in the Heceta Bank region. Additional scientific information is needed prior to designating WEAs. ***The HC recommends that BOEM study the wind wake effects in the region of south Heceta Bank. In the absence of scientific information, take a precautionary approach by adjusting the northern boundary of the Call Area to avoid the south flank of Heceta Bank or avoid designating WEAs in this area. This would be consistent with the EPA National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Exclusion Area for seafood processor vessel discharges at Heceta Bank that was established to prevent exacerbating hypoxic conditions in that region.***

Bandon Call Area – the entire Coquille Bank (Bandon High Spot Essential Fish Habitat Conservation Area (EFHCA)) is in this Call Area. Coquille Bank is predominantly rocky habitat. As one of the few EFHCAs within the non-trawl RCA it has not been fished with most bottom contact gear since 2006. Dense corals occupy the bank and high concentrations of methane seep bubble plumes occur throughout the Call Area. The Council designated methane seeps as groundfish EFH under Amendment 28 for their ability to form habitat and support diverse biological communities. *The HC recommends consideration of removing the Bandon Call Area from further consideration, or avoid designating WEAs in the EFHCA and major methane seep areas.*

Brookings Call Area – the north part of the Call Area overlaps the Rogue River Reef EFHCA and rock habitat, and is situated between Rogue Canyon and Rogue River Reef, possibly to take advantage of winds associated with the canyon. Wind wakes created by clusters of wind farms installed near the canyon head could potentially reduce wind speeds enough to impede upwelling across Rogue River reef. Additional scientific understanding is needed prior to designating WEAs in this area. *HC recommendation: BOEM should study the wind wake effects in the region of Rogue Canyon/Rogue River Reef. In the absence of this scientific information, consider taking a cautionary approach by adjusting the north boundary of the Call Area to reduce proximity to the reef and potential effects to upwelling across the reef. Alternatively, avoid designating WEAs in the northern region of the Call Area.*

PFMC
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