

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON THE FISHERY ECOSYSTEM PLAN INITIATIVES APPENDIX AND NEW INITIATIVE

Over the summer, members of the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) were able to review the Ecosystem Plan Initiatives, have some discussions with members of the Ecosystem Workgroup (EWG) and Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel (EAS), and review reports from both bodies from March 2022 ([Agenda Item H.3.a, EWG Report 1, March 2022](#) and [Agenda Item H.3.a, Supplemental EAS Report 1, March 2022](#)). The GMT appreciates the EWG's efforts and acknowledges the considerable effort taken to revise and integrate the previous Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) initiatives with new ideas and recommendations coming out of the Climate and Communities Initiative (CCI) process. Below are some considerations from the GMT as the Council moves forward with the initiatives.

Overarching Considerations for the Final Initiative

The GMT agrees with the EAS that safety, flexibility in the fisheries management process, and inclusion of co-managers and all stakeholders should be included as cross-cutting and overarching components of the final initiative chosen.

Flexibility and Nimbleness in Fisheries Management

Members of the GMT participated in the CCI workshops and process. An overarching theme that stood out is the need for fisheries management to be flexible and nimble in response to changing ocean and climate conditions which is addressed in:

- *2.8 Assess Flexibility in Fisheries Management Process*: This initiative would identify ways in which Council decision-making and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) review and regulatory processes can be made more dynamic to respond to rapidly changing environmental conditions. This initiative is intended to respond to the CCI goal to develop and implement strategies for improving the flexibility and responsiveness of our management actions to near-term climate shift and long-term climate change.

The current process requires at least two to three Council meetings to take final action, followed by up to six months for regulations to be implemented by NMFS. That results in 18 months to two years for most fishery management changes to be implemented. Given the potential timeframe for environmental changes, that Council/NMFS process timeline is not going to be timely enough to allow fisheries management changes to be implemented in time to react to those environmental changes. Therefore, the Council may wish to consider how to move forward in a more timely and nimble manner.

One idea on how the Council could move forward to make fisheries management, in general, more flexible and nimble could be to utilize the statements similar to those that are contained within the Pacific halibut Catch Sharing Plan¹ (CSP). Although done for reasons other than climate change, the CSP contains a number of "if/then" statements. This allows fisheries managers to make

¹ <https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2022/04/2022-pacific-halibut-catch-sharing-plan-for-area-2a.pdf/>

changes, particularly to the recreational fisheries, in a more timely manner, reacting to how the fishery is progressing inseason. The CSP outlines what management actions can be taken should certain fishery characteristics be met, or not met.

Additionally, at this meeting the Council is scheduled to take up “Council and Process Efficiencies”. Depending on the scope and direction of that action, it could hopefully aid in the timeliness of the overall Council process in making changes to fisheries management.

The GMT would also like to point out that while the FEP Initiative 2.8 language specifies the need to address “rapidly changing environmental conditions” as a result of climate change impacts in the future, rapidly changing socio-economic conditions are likely going to be an equally important result of climate change. As climate change contributes to drought, population shifts, resource shortages, natural disasters, and more, the global economy, and more particularly the seafood industry, could be greatly impacted. As we learned from the global COVID-19 pandemic, sudden economic impacts also require flexibility and nimbleness in management.

Initiatives Prioritization

The GMT agrees with the EAS recommendation to prioritize and combine Initiatives 2.1 and 2.6 ([EWG Report 1](#)) and renaming it as the Climate-Informed Fisheries Management Initiative ([Agenda Item H.3.a, Supplemental EAS Report 1, March 2022](#)). The GMT agrees that those two initiatives are closely tied together, and therefore should be combined into one. The GMT also concurs with the EAS in recognizing the value in multiple initiatives and that a few of these initiatives are so closely connected that it is difficult to effectively work on any one in isolation.

PFMC
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