

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON MARINE PLANNING UPDATE

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a briefing on this agenda item from Mr. Mike Conroy, Ad-hoc Marine Planning Committee (MPC) Co-chair. The GAP continues to be impressed by the work of Council staff and the MPC in monitoring and engaging in complex and contentious marine planning activities and providing comprehensive and informative reports to the Council family, especially related to offshore wind (OSW).

In that vein, the GAP reviewed the June 2023 MPC reports and agrees with the recommendations of the MPC. Specifically, the GAP agrees with the MPC suggestions and recommendations related to Fishery Communication Plans (FCP) because FCPs are meant to guide and describe how developers will conduct fisheries engagement and their specific communication principles, strategies, and methods. In particular, the MPC recommendation that FCPs take a broader, regional perspective rather than site-specific in terms of impacted fisheries and communities, is critical. OSW will have region wide effects and engagement at all levels (e.g., by BOEM and offshore developers) should account for the potential scale of impacts.

The MPC also highlights the need for the Council to consider if and how the MPC will continue to exist and, if the committee continues, if changes are needed for its form and function. The GAP strongly recommends that the MPC continue to function as an ad-hoc advisory body and to maintain the current structure of the committee. The GAP continues to see high value in the work of the MPC. We recommend that Ms. Susan Chambers (with Mr. Dan Waldeck as alternate) continue to represent the GAP on the MPC. In recommending continuation of the MPC, the GAP stresses that the need for the work of the MPC is ongoing and expanding as new ocean uses are proposed that will occur in space already occupied by Council-managed fisheries. The MPC is necessary for the Council to engage effectively in region wide marine planning activities. The MPC continues to give an impactful voice to the concerns of the Council and fishery participants. Concerns of fishery participants and fishery-dependent communities go beyond site-specific displacement of fisheries relative to an OSW installation. Stakeholder concerns include (at a minimum) broader, region wide economic impacts, disruption of critically important research surveys and data time series, effects on ecosystem form and function, and effects on protected resources. Finally, the GAP emphasizes that it is important to recognize the opportunity costs borne by stakeholders to engage in the OSW planning process. It requires an enormous time commitment, time spent on OSW engagement is time not fishing, which creates economic impacts even before OSW steel is in the water. Fear and concern about the unknown long-term economic impacts of OSW also weakens interest in investing in fishery and community infrastructure. The MPC provides critical support to the Council and fishery participants; therefore, the GAP strongly recommends the MPC continue its important work.