

COASTAL PELAGIC FISHERIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON THE NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES COORDINATION REPORT

In a joint webinar on February 21 with the Coastal Pelagic Species Management Team (CPSMT), the Coastal Pelagic Species Advisory Subpanel (CPSAS) heard a presentation by Dr. Lisa Wooninck, regional policy coordinator, on the National Marine Sanctuaries (NMS) Coordination Report. The CPSAS also reviewed the report itself (Agenda Item C.3.a. NMS Report, March 2018). The CPSAS appreciates the comprehensive update on Sanctuary activities on the west coast, and the emphasis on activities germane to the fisheries managed by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council). The CPSAS welcomes the Sanctuaries' outreach and efforts to work collaboratively on the conservation of marine resources, with the understanding that fishery management is the sole mandate of the Council under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA).

The NMS Coordination Report was divided into several sections, and the CPSAS offers the following section-by-section comments for Council consideration.

Nominations

The NMS report summarized the process to nominate new NMS, and stated that two nominations had been submitted on the west coast, for which the Council has oversight: Chumash Heritage off the California central coast, and Southern California Offshore Banks. The NMS report noted widespread community support from various groups for both sanctuaries, but failed to mention that there was also substantial opposition to both nominations.

Among the opponents to the Chumash Heritage site was the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, the only federally recognized Chumash Tribe. In a letter to the Director of National Marine Sanctuaries, a long list of elected officials, organizations and members of the fishing community also requested that this site be removed from the Site Evaluation List.

The Southern California Offshore Banks proposal follows from a strong-armed campaign to designate these offshore banks as Monuments under the Antiquities Act. A large coalition of community interests, including chambers of commerce, harbor districts and both recreational and commercial fishing organizations opposed the designation then, and that opposition continues, notwithstanding the 'promise' that these new sanctuaries would not attempt to effect fishery management.

The fishing community continues to voice concerns over future Sanctuary overreach in light of past actions that generated a loss of trust. In addition, fishermen question the need for more ecosystem protection, with its related bureaucratic costs, in light of the administration's proposed serious funding cuts for existing ocean programs and the Council's continuing move toward ecosystem-based fishery management. Moreover, there is no evidence that closing more area in reserve will protect species and ecosystems from the negative effects of ocean acidification and global warming. The only realistic "cure" is to curtail carbon emissions.

Minority Statement on NMS Nominations: One CPSAS member differs from the majority of the CPSAS regarding the Nominations section of the NMS Coordination Report, and supports ONMS's ongoing evaluation and review of the Southern California Offshore Banks proposal (while noting that the Chumash Heritage proposal is not being actively reviewed by ONMS at this time). The minority member does not share the majority of the CPSAS's concern that the additional ecosystem protections associated with marine sanctuaries may not be needed. Particularly in the face of a changing climate and anomalous ocean conditions, thoughtfully designed and implemented protected areas can complement and amplify the benefits generated by the Council's important EBFM work.

Management Plan Reviews

The NMS report summarized progress to evaluate conditions in the Sanctuaries and review / update action plans. The Monterey Bay Sanctuary's new action plans include climate change, among other priorities. Climate change and related ocean acidification are the core challenge of our time, and efforts to monitor and collaborate with the OA community and Council are needed and welcome. The addition of Marine Spatial Planning to the list, however, triggers questions and concerns from the fishing community.

The Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary (CINMS) condition report update noted that the use of Council supported documents such as the Integrated Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) has improved Sanctuary ability to assess status and trends. The coordination of scientific products such as the IEA is a positive step forward to collaborate and coordinate resources for the better good of ecosystems and fisheries.

Ancillary Management Activities

Three California Sanctuaries (Channel Islands, Greater Farallones and Cordell Banks) are working to reduce ship strikes on whales by implementing voluntary vessel speed reduction programs. These efforts are worthwhile and deserve recognition. Also, the CINMS support of marine debris clean-up efforts, such as working with lobster fishermen to reduce the loss of lobster traps in the Channel Islands, and promoting best practices developed by fishermen, leads to a win-win collaboration. Sanctuary efforts to coordinate with state and federal fishery managers and fishermen to reduce risk of whale entanglement in fishing gear also help to restore trust.

Climate Change

The NMS Report highlighted several accomplishments in a Climate Smart Conservation Program led by the Greater Farallones Sanctuary. Efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are critically important goals and should be promoted widely.

The Monterey Bay Sanctuary also is serving as the lead for a NEPA review of proposed desalination plants in Monterey Bay. It is very important that any desal plants in Monterey Bay are properly sited, designed and operated to avoid damaging impacts to habitat or fish resources. The Sanctuary's oversight in this endeavor is greatly appreciated.

The report touched on several other worthwhile sanctuary activities, including:

- The Olympic coast as an ocean acidification sentinel site will be essential as open access impacts are likely to threaten coastal economies in the Pacific Northwest first.
- Habitat – seafloor mapping activities in the Channel Islands, Gulf of the Farallones, and the Olympic coast will provide greater understanding of bottom topography, enhancing navigational safety as well as understanding of marine resources.
- Groundfish essential fish habitat and Rockfish Conservation Area modifications, proposed in consultation with trawl fishermen, are another positive step toward collaborating with the fishing community. Monterey area trawl fishermen can support the Monterey Sanctuary proposal and appreciate that their concerns were heeded.

Transparent communication and collaboration between the Sanctuaries and the Council, including the fishing community, can optimize precious funding as well as enhance mutual goals of sustainable ecosystems and balanced use of marine resources. Trust remains a central issue, but with continued open communication and collaboration, progress is possible.

PFMC
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