

## ECOSYSTEM WORKGROUP REPORT ON UPDATING THE FISHERY ECOSYSTEM PLAN

The Ecosystem Workgroup (EWG) met via webinar on May 22, 2018, in part to discuss plans for updating the Fishery Ecosystem Plan ([FEP](#)). The Council finalized its FEP in April 2013 and will begin considering a review and update of the FEP at this September 2018 meeting. Since 2013, scientists have updated their work in support of ecosystem-based fisheries management (EBFM) and on our California Current Ecosystem, and the Council has made progress in integrating ecosystem information into management decision-making. National EBFM policy-making practices have also evolved and matured, often building on our Council's work under the FEP and its appendix.

The Council could update its FEP in a variety of ways and to various degrees, depending on what it wants from that update process and competing workload considerations, or choose to forgo an update altogether at this time. To help the Council consider whether and how to update the FEP, the EWG posed these framing questions to Council members, the Council's advisory body members, and the public in July 2018:

1. Have you used or referred to the FEP since the Council adopted it in 2013? If so, how?
  - a. If you are new to the Council process since 2013, have you read, or did anyone recommend you read, any part of the FEP to learn about the California Current Ecosystem or the Council process?
  - b. If you work on National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analyses, have you ever used the FEP for descriptions of the environment, or for analyses of the cumulative effects of actions on the environment? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. Which parts of the FEP do you find the most useful?
3. Are the FEP objectives in Chapter 2 still relevant now? If so, why? If not, why not?
4. Are there any parts of the FEP that you think could be removed? Or, are there parts of the FEP that you think need to be completely overhauled? If so, which parts and why? Are there any missing key concepts or sections that should be added?
5. Are you familiar with the ecosystem initiatives process? Should the Council consider revising it? If so, why and how?

The EWG proposed an August 21 webinar to receive responses from the public to these questions prior to the Council meeting so that the advisory bodies could have time to consider their own needs and perspectives prior to the September Council meeting.

In terms of the scope of review, a narrow update might include just a refreshing of the FEP's descriptive information to reflect new research and conditions of the ecosystem. A broader scope, which has been suggested in public comment and elsewhere, and would be expected to require considerably more resources, might also involve a policy level re-visitation of the FEP's goals and objectives.

In March, the Council was aware of the upcoming release of the draft NOAA Fisheries Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management Western Road Map Implementation Plan (WRIP) and discussed the possibility that it would provide guidance or ideas for the FEP. The Council will consider the draft WRIP at this meeting under Agenda Item G.1. At the time of writing, the EWG has not thoroughly reviewed the WRIP but may offer thoughts on any suggestions or implications for the FEP and a future update in a supplemental report.

### *EWG Response to Framing Questions*

The EWG is generally in favor of updating the FEP, although we recognize the possibility of competing workload concerns, particularly if the proposed update is larger in scope. A more extensive overhaul would require assistance from all the EWG members as well as potentially Southwest and Northwest Fisheries Science Center staff that are already producing Council products (e.g., the annual ecosystem report) or sit on other Council advisory bodies. The EWG has concerns that the time needed particularly from EWG members to complete that task will impact their time available to devote to advancement and completion of the Climate and Fishing Communities Initiative.

One of the tangible uses of the FEP that we are aware of is its use in Council-related NEPA analyses, including in the environmental assessment for Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1. While the scope of the descriptive information in the FEP is still relevant today, we have likely reached the point that some information would need to be updated to be useful to contemporary NEPA or other analyses. The more time that passes, the more analysts using the FEP would need to be conscientious about seeking out new and relevant research elsewhere. Utility to NEPA or other analyses or decision-making aside, hearing more from other advisory bodies and the public on the utility and scope of the descriptive sections of the FEP would be helpful.

Below, we discuss our impressions of the utility and relevance of each chapter of the FEP, with our initial suggestions on revising the FEP.

Chapter 1 of the FEP provides a Purpose and Need Statement (1.1), discusses document organization (1.2), and provides structured processes for ecosystem initiatives and for the annual ecosystem status reports (1.3 and 1.4).

Chapter 2 provides the FEP's Objectives, which are a more detailed exploration of what the FEP would do to meet its Purpose and Need. We understand that some Council process participants have previously indicated this aspect of the FEP should be revisited so that goals and objectives could be revised. While the EWG is not yet convinced that revisions are necessary, we look forward to hearing additional input on the need.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the California Current Ecosystem (CCE) from a variety of physical, biological, and socioeconomic perspectives and disciplines. The EWG finds these first three FEP chapters useful, although information and citations in Chapter 3 should be updated and some sub-sections could be deleted or new sub-sections inserted.

Chapter 4 discusses the cumulative effects and uncertainties of environmental shifts and human activities on the marine environment. This chapter was intended in part to support NEPA analyses, however, the general nature of the material renders it relatively challenging to use. There are good ideas and some excellent information in Chapter 4. We recommend that deleting Chapter 4 as a stand-alone chapter may be more appropriate, then moving some of the information and analyses into a revised and expanded Chapter 3.

Chapter 5 discusses Council CCE policy priorities across its FMPs so that those engaged in ocean resource management and policy processes external to the Council better understand and take into account Council priorities during their deliberations on activities that may affect the CCE. EWG members who participate in non-Council ocean policy-making processes find Chapter 5 to be a useful resource for those external discussions. We support retaining and updating Chapter 5 and hope that it may be useful to ongoing discussions of human activities within the CCE, particularly those that span multiple states and tribes working in the marine environment. It is possible that potential actions proposed from the Climate and Communities Initiative might be appropriately included in this chapter.

Chapter 6 broadly discusses processes for bringing ecosystem science into the Council process. Information and recommendations from earlier drafts of Chapter 6 moved from the FEP into the 2013 Research and Data Needs Document. The EWG does not yet have recommendations for updating Chapter 6, since our ideas about that Chapter will depend on how the Council and the Scientific and Statistical Committee update the Research and Data Needs Document. If the Research and Data Needs Document is compressed into a relatively brief list of future potential science work, the EWG may recommend expanding Chapter 6 to retain some of the ideas expressed in the June 2018 draft of the Research and Data Needs Document.

We recommend updating the information in the FEP Appendix A on the ecosystem initiatives process to reflect how initiatives have been addressed through the Council process since 2013. However, we continue to support the basic process of reviewing and deciding whether to proceed with new initiatives every other year, and do not recommend revising that process.

For this September 2018 meeting, the EWG recommends that the Council:

- Consider whether they have received adequate comments and suggestions from this September meeting to proceed with an update. If not, send these or other framing questions out for a longer and more deliberate public review process in preparation for further discussion at its March 2019 meeting.
- If the Council is considering reviewing and updating the FEP's objectives in Chapter 2, assign the EWG to provide a report to the March 2019 Council meeting on whether the Council is meeting the 2013 FEP objectives, and on how other fishery management councils or relevant public bodies have addressed ecosystem management objectives.
- If the Council supports reviewing and updating any section of the FEP in Chapter 3 and beyond, consider whether and when the Council will supplement EWG membership with additional resources to adequately staff the workgroup. During the original development of the FEP, the Ecosystem Plan Development Team included the following seats that are not now part of the ad hoc EWG: two representatives from the Northwest Fisheries Science Center, three representatives from the Southwest Fisheries Science Center (one of whom

was an economist) and one representative from the West Coast National Marine Sanctuaries. Their combined expertise complemented that of the existing EWG, and may be necessary should the Council choose a fairly comprehensive update.

PFMC  
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