

ECOSYSTEM WORKGROUP REPORT ON THE NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE STRATEGIC PLAN

The Ecosystem Workgroup (EWG) met jointly with the Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel to hear a briefing from Mr. Scott Burkhart on the draft National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) West Coast Geographic Draft Strategic Plan.

The EWG's primary hope for this document is that it will support improving NOAA Fisheries' funding such that we can at least return to prior survey and staffing levels. At the Council's June 2019 meeting, both the Northwest and Southwest Fisheries Science Centers provided the Council with alarming briefings on the reduced availability of funds for conducting surveys and other basic scientific data collection, and on reduced staffing levels that limit our ability to collect and analyze data (NMFS Reports under [I.1.b](#), and [F.1.b](#)). Efficient and adaptive regulation and management of our fisheries, a goal of the draft Plan, is not possible when we impede the flow of data and information into the management process.

The EWG agrees that the challenges listed in the draft Plan are the large-scale challenges faced in the region. In the section on "Meeting the Challenges," the draft Plan states that meeting the identified challenges will require that NMFS "strategically sunset low-priority activities, products, or services." The EWG is interested in more information on the low-priority activities that NMFS is sunsetting, and whether the Council will have an opportunity to comment on whether it agrees with the priority level NMFS is assigning to those activities.

We were pleased to see that implementing ecosystem-based management and integrating ecosystem considerations into stock assessments, fishery management, and aquaculture are priorities in the draft Plan. Meeting those priorities will require not just re-establishing at-sea surveys, but also increasing diet data collection and analysis, and increasing social and economic surveys and analyses.

Lastly, we note that one of the Key Strategies for Goal 2 is to "Review and streamline permitting and authorization processes for energy development and national defense, while maximizing conservation outcomes." We suggest that this sentence be amended to add "and minimizing effects on fishing practices and locations." Of relevance to that strategy, the Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plan at Chapter 5 identifies Council priorities for non-fishing activities that could affect Council-managed species and habitat. The Fishery Ecosystem Plan expresses opposition to non-fishing activities that would:

- Negatively affect habitat of species dependent on a fixed habitat type;
- Disturb or kill structure-forming invertebrates or vegetation in a manner that either prevents those species from recovering within the affected area within their mean generation times, or which reduces the known distribution of those species;
- Alter the geological structure of the habitat such that the habitat cannot maintain or recover its functionality unaided; or
- Alter the chemical composition, turbidity, or temperature of the seawater such that the habitat cannot recover to its pre-disturbance state.