

PACIFIC COAST TREATY TRIBES' TESTIMONY ON DEEPWATER CORAL

The Coastal Treaty Tribes continue to be concerned that the Coral Reef Conservation Program's (CRCP) research activities are not meeting the management needs of the PFMC or its members. Specific to the Pacific Coast Treaty Tribes; a significant portion of this research is occurring within and adjacent to the tribes' usual and accustomed areas (U&A's). As part of the Council's role in providing recommendations to NMFS regarding the management of corals and sponges, in our view, this task will be difficult and not effective with the current research design being to examine individual proposals (EFH/HAPC) or individual outcroppings. How and what information will the current research provide to the Council to assist in the development and implementation of appropriate management measures with respect to coral and sponges?

As we communicated to CRCP and Council recently, in addition to meaningful consultation with the Tribes, we believe it would be beneficial for the CRCP to work with the SSC and other Council Advisory Bodies. This type of communication would ensure that research activities meet the data standards necessary to begin to comprehensively assess the distribution, abundance, density, and diversity of coral and sponge resources in the California Current large marine ecosystem, particularly in the EEZ. This was highlighted as the primary management need in the West Coast coral workshop and would align the CRCP research activities with both the NOAA Strategic Plan and the PFMC's management requirements. We highly recommend these conversations begin during the planning phase of the next two years of the CRCP's West Coast activities

The Council has already taken steps to protect areas of known coral and sponge abundance as well as freezing the trawl footprint to protect unassessed areas as a precautionary measure. We now need to move toward inventories of these resources throughout their range to measure impacts and manage them through regional and ecosystem-wide approaches. The Tribes would like to see the Council move forward working with the CRCP to develop research activities that will meet those needs.