

## ECOSYSTEM ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON THE CONSIDERATION OF FURTHER PROTECTION OF CURRENTLY UNMANAGED FORAGE SPECIES

The Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel (EAS) reviewed the report of the Ecosystem Plan Development Team (EPDT) on this matter (Agenda Item G.1.b, EPDT Report). The EAS spent considerable time discussing the preferred options and objectives of its members and listening to public testimony, and offers the following perspectives and recommendations.

The EAS would first like to express to the Council the following three overarching consensus findings on the matter.

- A. The EAS recommends an ecosystem-based approach to forage species and their role in the food web, particularly their role in support of established fisheries.
- B. The EAS agrees on the need to assure that potential exploitation of currently unfished forage species does not imperil existing target species.
- C. EAS members differ on their perspectives on the probability of future exploitation of currently unfished forage species and therefore, our views vary about the degree of protection desirable and about the merits and costs of additional study and management.

While recognizing differences in EAS perspectives, the EAS agreed upon the following objectives regarding unmanaged forage species:

1. Exclude unmanaged forage species from commercial exploitation or expanded utilization until such time that sufficient information exists on their status and their ecological value as prey, with a particular emphasis on not adversely affecting the population status of currently exploited species.
2. Provide management flexibility to respond to new information on forage species status. Develop criteria or a process for addressing future interest in fishery development that does not preclude future viable harvest on a currently unmanaged stock or stocks.
3. Provide a mechanism for the collection of data across appropriate temporal and spatial scales to inform management of forage species. Develop a focused approach that cost-effectively targets information gathering and management attention where it will be most valuable.
4. Treat currently unmanaged forage stocks as a hedge or buffer against natural variability and fishing and non-fishing impacts on forage stocks to maximize the likelihood of a sufficient forage base in the system.
5. Forage policy needs to be crafted carefully so as to be protective of the forage base without being overly prescriptive regarding the management of existing fisheries.

Based in part on these consensus findings and to meet all of the objectives identified by the EAS, the EAS recommends the following options as a package for further management consideration.

Working from Agenda Item G.1.b, EPDT Report:

- **Option 1** – Recommend that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) update and revise the Federal List of Fisheries and Gear permitted in the West Coast Exclusive Economic Zone. **Rationale** – The list is in need of updating for a variety of reasons and would provide a notification requirement for new fisheries if revised, but it alone would

not sufficiently exclude unmanaged forage species from commercial exploitation or expanded utilization.

- **Option 3** – Use a Fishery Management Plan (FMP) amendment process to add new Fishery Management Unit (FMU) species to one or more of the Council’s current FMPs. **Rationale** – Adding FMU species to an FMP provides the clearest long-term option to achieve harvest prohibition on currently unmanaged species.
- **Option 4** – Use an FMP amendment process to add new Ecosystem Component (EC) species to one or more of the Council’s current FMPs. **Rationale** – Similar to Option 3 in providing a mechanism to prevent exploitation of unmanaged forage species while allowing the flexibility to consider the EC designation as appropriate. The EC designation has the potential to reduce the management burden.
- **Include provisions for an Exempted Fishing Permit process.** **Rationale** – Provides a mechanism for limited experimental harvest of unmanaged forage or EC species for the purpose of improving information and/or contributing to a data base on forage stocks and potential future sustainable harvest opportunities.
- **Use the Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) to identify and prioritize research needs** and provide recommendations to address data gaps with respect to forage fish, consistent with the Council’s statement of purpose and need for the FEP. **Rationale** – Provides a nexus between the FEP and Council forage policy and helps to encourage increased research on the ecology of the California Current Ecosystem.

PFMC  
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