

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
COUNCIL FISHERY ECOSYSTEM PLAN (FEP) DEVELOPMENT

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the latest version of the Pacific Coast Fishery Ecosystem Plan and the Draft Outline for an Annual State of the California Current Ecosystem (CCE) Report. Mr. Mike Burner outlined the proposed schedule for integration of ecosystem considerations into the Council.

The SSC notes that development of a description of biological, physical, geological, economic and other aspects of the CCE for the Ecosystem Plan is a formidable task and questioned whether it could be accomplished on the current schedule. The current version has missing chapters and the chapters present are often not adequate descriptions of the CCE. One example is that the material on the effects of increasing ocean temperature, acidification and areas with low dissolved oxygen in the version reviewed in November 2011 is not in the current version (but may have been moved to a chapter not yet included in the draft). A second example is the attribution of a description (on p. 8) of circulation features to a publication by Botsford and Lawrence (who are not physical oceanographers). A third is the description of bird population variability in the CCE that omits mention of the complete reproductive failure of Cassin's auklet in 2005 and the high variability in reproduction of Brandt's cormorant in the Gulf of the Farallons. There are additional examples. These suggest that the Ecosystem Plan Development Team (EPDT) should seek assistance from others with expertise in CCE processes, either through review or requests to write specific sections.

The SSC also recommends that the Draft Outline of the Annual State of the CCE should be reviewed by experts in the various areas. With regard to item IV.c, the trawl-survey referred to is likely the Groundfish Trawl Survey, and if so, the SSC cautions that selectivity and catchability be considered in formulating the Higher Trophic Level Predator Index. The SSC questioned the interpretation of item V.c, the mean trophic level of the catch, in an upwelling system where lower trophic level fish have such high population variability. With regard to item V.d, the SSC questioned how the stressors (e.g., shipping) were related to ecosystem effects. The SSC recommends that Section V be divided into benefits, stressors (including hatcheries and aquaculture releases, sewage and pollutants) and beneficial human interventions (including Marine Protected Areas).

The SSC looks forward to review of more complete, fully referenced and comprehensively reviewed versions of these two documents.