

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON COASTAL PELAGIC SPECIES ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT FIVE-YEAR REVIEW

The Habitat Committee (HC) received an overview and history of the Coastal Pelagic Species Management Team (CPSMT) report on the CPS essential fish habitat (EFH) five-year review (Agenda Item I.4.a, Attachment 1) from Mr. Kerry Griffin, Council staff. Based on the information provided in the overview and in the report, the HC believes a thorough review of new information was conducted by the CPSMT and concurs with the conclusions made in the report. In particular, the HC agrees that the new information regarding CPS habitat associations still supports the strong linkage between their distribution and sea surface temperature, and therefore, does not warrant any changes to the existing CPS EFH descriptions.

The HC supports the CPSMT plan to document the review process more thoroughly in the 2011 Stock Assessment Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report. For instance, the new information related to habitat associations for CPS should be summarized in the SAFE report to more fully support the conclusions. New information about state actions to establish Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), in part to protect squid spawning areas, should also be acknowledged. In addition, the report should document the CPSMT's conclusion that fishing activities and fishing gear impacts to EFH have not changed substantially since the last time they were analyzed, and are adequately addressed in the fishery management plan. The HC believes that adding this new information (e.g., climate change) to the 2011 SAFE Report is an integral step in documenting the review process.

The decision to not designate habitat areas of particular concern (HAPCs) for CPS should be based primarily on their strong association with thermal conditions that are inherently spatially variable. Even though HAPCs are not recommended for designation in this CPS EFH review because of the substantial uncertainty associated with identifying their spatial extent, there are topographic features or geomorphic areas important to CPS species. As noted in the krill management plan (Amendment 12), these topographic features create unique areas of high productivity where krill and predatory species (including other CPS species, salmon, groundfishes, seabirds, and whales) congregate. Such areas would be important to identify and incorporate into an ecosystem plan, allowing for more effective and comprehensive management of ecosystem resources, and should be considered for HAPC designation in future CPS EFH reviews.

Therefore, the HC recommends that the Council consider the CPS EFH five-year review process, including the gathering and evaluation of new information, to be complete, but suggests the further documentation recommended by the CPSMT.