

CWG Statement to the MBNMS SAC  
February 16, 2012  
CWG Co-Chairs: Geoff Shester and Lauren Gilligan

The Conservation Working Group (CWG) met at the MBNMS conference room in Monterey, CA on February 6, 2012.

In continuation of the CWG's work on the predator forage needs component of the MBNMS EBM Initiative, Geoff Shester gave a presentation to the Research Activities Panel at its January 13, 2012 meeting seeking input and review on the CWG's white paper on "*Forage Species Science and Management in the MBNMS*", including a draft resolution to be proposed to the full SAC. The RAP gave positive, constructive feedback and agreed to review the white paper by the end of February. The CWG approved the white paper for review and it was distributed for review on February 6. The CWG plans to incorporate the reviews and subsequently resubmit a revised white paper to the RAP by mid to late March seeking formal RAP endorsement prior to the April 19<sup>th</sup> SAC meeting. The CWG plans to present the white paper and associated resolution to the full SAC at the April 19<sup>th</sup> meeting for SAC approval as an action item.

The CWG also reiterates its recommendation and request from its previous two statements to the SAC that the SAC receive a presentation by Dr. Julie Thayer of the Farallon Institute on the issue of predator forage needs, which she developed and presented at the 2011 American Fisheries Society with National Marine Fisheries Service scientists.

In continuation of the CWG's work on the benthic habitat component of the MBNMS EBM Initiative, the CWG discussed the criteria used to develop the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Conservation Areas within the MBNMS. The literature on trawl impacts both within the MBNMS and globally, for example as examined in the 2002 National Academy of Sciences report on the Effects of Trawling and Dredging on Seafloor Habitats, identifies bottom trawl fishing as the most damaging activity to benthic habitat complexity and community structure in the MBNMS. While impacts are documented across all habitat types, impacts are greatest and most long-term in areas of hard substrate, corals and sponges, and areas of low natural disturbance. Therefore, the CWG recommends the Sanctuary focus its benthic habitat component of the EBM Initiative on reducing the impacts of bottom trawling.

As the EFH 5 year review has been cited as a key target for EBM Initiative by MBNMS leadership for the last few years, the CWG strongly recommends that MBNMS put forward its own proposal for specific modifications to Groundfish EFH management measures. The CWG urges the MBNMS focus its proposal on identifying additional areas to be closed to trawling within the Sanctuary. In selecting such areas, the MBNMS should follow the objectives adopted by the Pacific Fishery Management Council to develop the original 2006 EFH Conservation Areas (e.g., freeze the bottom trawl footprint, protect sensitive areas within the trawl footprint, etc.), as well as areas identified through the "Unique and Rare Features" activities within the EBM Initiative.

Ultimately, the goal should be to limit the spatial extent of bottom trawl fishing within the Sanctuary to those specific areas where trawling will have the minimal ecological impacts. The CWG will assist in identifying new data available relevant to these objectives.

In addition to identifying specific areas for trawl closure, the Sanctuary's proposal should consider integration of EFH measures with the new catch share program for bottom trawling, explicit incentives to reducing seafloor habitat impacts such as an "encounter clause", designating trawl closures as Habitat Areas of Particular Concern, improved enforcement of closed areas through Vessel Monitoring Systems, and exploring how "research areas" may fit into an overall proposal for the MBNMS. As stated in the December 2011 CWG statement, the CWG is currently assessing data and compiling a draft proposal for modifications to Groundfish EFH for consideration by the SAC at its April 2012 meeting. The CWG looks forward to working with other SAC members and SAC working groups to develop the proposal.

To initiate the CWG's work on water quality, Dane Hardin from Applied Marine Sciences gave a presentation on "Fecal pathogen loading to the ocean", focused on data from within the MBNMS. The presentation included data on the effectiveness of wastewater treatment plants of removing various Fecal Indicator Bacteria as well as issues related to data quality. The CWG established a water quality sub-group to be led by Steve Shimek of the Otter Project, which will work on refining the CWG's water quality focus. The sub-group will communicate with the existing water quality committee of the MBNMS.

MBNMS staff gave an update on agenda items and potential items to expect in public comment.

The CWG supports the adoption of the draft SAC letter regarding reauthorization of the Site Evaluation List, so that other areas warranting potential Sanctuary designation can be considered.

The CWG reiterates that it hopes to work closely with the SAC and other working groups so that its work can be of timely use in SAC endeavors.