North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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EFH EXCERPT: Ecosystem Committee

REPORT

January 25-26, 2022, via Zoom
https://meetings.npfmc.org/Meeting/Details/2481

Committee:

Bill Tweit (Chair)
Jim Ayers
Dave Benton
David Fluharty
Rose Fosdick
Gretchen Harrington
John Iani
Stephanie Madsen
Theresa Peterson
Jeremy Rusin
Diana Evans (NPFMC)

Agency staff attending included: Karla Bush, Malinda Chase, Sara Cleaver, Stefanie Coxe, Raychelle Aluaq Daniel, Maria Davis, Sean Eagan, Anne Marie Eich, Kate Haapala, Charlene Felkley, Kilali Gibson, Jeremy Harris, Bill Hines, Carey Kuhn, Ned Laman, Doug Limpensel, Megan Mackey, Aaron Martin, Dave McGowan, Peter Murphy, John Olson, Olav Ormseth, Jodi Pirtle, Sarah Rheinsmith, Megsie Siple, Diana Stram, Jim Thorson, Mike Williams, Molly Zaleski

Public attending included: Shannon Carroll, Ruth Christiansen, Lauren Divine, Lia Domke, Ben Enticknap, Bruce Ervin, Lilian Hart, Jamie Karnik, Nicole Kimball, Mike LeVine, Steve MacLean, Heather Mann, Steve Marx, Susan Murray, Tom Panamaroff, Mateo Paz-Soldan, Brenden Raymond-Yakoubian, Becca Robbins-Gisclair, Andy Schroeder, Michelle Stratton, Ernie Weiss, Jaylene Wheeler, Megan Williams

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EFH 5-year review: update on model development

The Committee received two presentations under this agenda item: from Dr. Jodi Pirtle and Ned Laman, on the process underway for developing the 2022 EFH 5-year review for October, and the EFH distribution model changes that have been undertaken since 2017; and from John Olson, with an overview of the effects of fishing on EFH model and its methodology and planned improvements. The Committee clarified with the presenters how to understand the new maps based on modeled Level 3 EFH information (habitat-related vital rates), and how new maps were reviewed by the stock assessment authors. For the assessment of fishing effects, at the advice of the SSC, that model will continue to use the boundaries defined by the 95% Level 1 (distribution) and Level 2 (habitat density or abundance) data by species. The Committee also discussed the grid approach for extrapolating fishing effects (5km x 5km), the limited utility of the fishing effects model to assess localized impacts or unobserved mortality, and the fact that unobserved fishing is not included in the output. Committee members noted that in comparison to 2017, the fishing effects model output indicates higher habitat disturbance in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands, though not in the GOA, which John explained is largely attributable to a coding error in 2017. It is most noticeable in the Bering Sea because of the larger volume of fully observed trawl fishing in that area, which was erroneously coded at a lower impact rate.

The Committee received written and oral public comment from Ben Enticknap (Oceana). He appreciated the ongoing progress with EFH analysis, and also expressed concern about protection of long-lived habitat features, especially in the GOA, and that the analysis underestimates those effects. He suggested several remedies for the 2022 review, as well as Council action to freeze the trawl footprint in the GOA.

The Committee valued the presentations, acknowledges the hard work and volume of new information developed by NMFS and the advances in EFH modeling, and appreciates the opportunity to provide interim input. The Committee is interested to receive a further interim presentation when new material is prepared for the SSC, currently planned for June 2022. Members of the Committee raised several areas for the EFH team to address in the 5-year review, either as changes to incorporate in the model, additional explanation for clarity, or focus topics for the next cycle of EFH research, and suggested that through this report, these also be provided to the SSC for consideration in their February 2022 review:

- Unobserved fishing data is not included in the fishing effects model; especially in the GOA, this is a large proportion of fishing effort. This seems a critical lack, and one that at least for vessels with VMS, seems possible to remedy.
- Are fixed gear (longline and pot) impacts on corals and sponges adequately factored into essential conservation measures, especially in areas of known concentration, and considering unobserved trips in the GOA and lack of VMS on some vessels/fisheries
- The fishing effects model appears to omit consideration for long-lived species (especially coral) occurring at depths of less than 300m; are there additional sources to access this information
- Fishing effects model output averages recovery rates among short- and long-lived species occurring within the same 25km^2 grid, which seems insufficiently informative for the needs of long-lived species
- How does/can the EFH review address shifting distributions, resulting from environmental and climate changes

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