

Annotated Agenda: Marine Habitat Assessments
MAFAC, Annapolis, Maryland
October 19-21, 2010

- 1. Title of Discussion:** The Habitat Assessment and Improvement Plan (HAIP) and Essential Fish Habitat (EFH)
- 2. Discussion Presenters:** Dr. Stephen Brown, Chief, Assessment and Monitoring Division, Office of Science and Technology, NMFS
- 3. Objective/Purpose:** Informational

The goal of this presentation is to inform MAFAC of the new Marine Fisheries Habitat Assessment Improvement Plan (HAIP), how it was developed, describe its goals and how assessments support fishery production, habitat management, conservation, and restoration, and to review its major recommendations.

In response to MAFAC's request from the last meeting, there will be particular focus on how the HAIP supports essential fish habitat designation and conservation.

4. Background/Synopsis:

The Marine Fisheries Habitat Assessment Improvement Plan (HAIP) recognizes the need to incorporate habitat science into every day decision-making for fisheries. Through this Plan, NMFS establishes the framework to coordinate its diverse habitat research, monitoring, and assessments and to guide the development of budget alternatives and increased support for habitat science. The HAIP has been developed by a team of scientists from NMFS Headquarters Offices and Science Centers and represents input from a variety of NMFS staff engaged in habitat science, stock assessments, and resource management. The scope of the HAIP is restricted to the 519 managed stocks and stock complexes within Fishery Management Plans, with particular focus on the 230 stocks in the Fish Stock Sustainability Index (FSSI). The conclusions and recommendations of the HAIP, however, can be applied more broadly to other managed and protected species.

The goals of the HAIP are to:

- Respond to Magnuson-Stevens Act mandates
- Improve identification and impact assessments of EFH
- Reduce habitat-related uncertainty in stock assessments and facilitate a greater number of advanced stock assessments
- Contribute to assessments of ecosystem services (*i.e.* the things people need and care about that are provided by marine systems);
- Help NOAA Fisheries to address climate change
- Support ecosystem-based management (EBM), integrated ecosystem assessments (IEAs), and coastal and marine spatial planning (CMSP)

The Plan covers all aspects of marine habitats, considers temporal and spatial scales and ecological linkages, and takes into account current data availability and state of NOAA Fisheries habitat assessments.

The Plan recommendations cover new ways of doing business (relatively cheap) to reach its goals (*e.g.* developing criteria to prioritize stocks, areas, data gaps; initiating demonstration projects; expanding engagement of partners across and beyond NOAA; and collecting more habitat data on existing surveys)

as well as the more expensive capacity building that will also be required.

Implementation of the HAIP will be directly relevant to EFH conservation by improving the science refine EFH designations and achieve more effective EFH conservation. As the central habitat conservation mandate of the Magnuson Act, EFH conservation is a critical component of the agency's goal to achieve sustainable fisheries.

Outcomes to date include increased awareness within NMFS, expanded collaboration between the Offices of Science and Technology and Habitat Conservation, new budget initiatives and the new Habitat Monitoring and Assessment capability; three stock assessment/habitat assessment pilot projects funded in FY2010; and the first National Habitat Assessment Workshop which was held in St. Petersburg, FL, in May 2010.

In the future, to continue implementation, NMFS anticipates leveraging available resources and data; prioritizing stocks, geographic areas, and data gaps; seeking support and additional funding; and building partnerships within and outside of NOAA.

5. Options listed from 1 to n:

6. Preferred Recommendation:

Record of Decision:
Decision, Next Step(s) and/or Action:
Assigned to:
Due Date: