

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Ecosystem Based Fishery Management Policy
Background

The Pacific Fishery Management Council has been considering mechanisms to introduce ecosystem-based considerations into the fishery management process since 2009. At its November 2011 meeting, the PFMC endorsed the concept of developing a Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) based on the recommendation of a plan development team formed to advise them on EBFM. MAFMC staff endorses many elements of the PFMC approach to EBFM and recommend that the Council pursue a similar approach.

The Draft FEP for the California Current Ecosystem (CCE) endorsed by the PFMC is intended to act as an "umbrella" plan to introduce ecosystem considerations in PFMC management actions in a step-wise, evolutionary fashion. The FEP was developed relatively quickly and is intended to be a "living document" which, by design, will be modified in the future as the PFMC becomes more comfortable within this new management policy paradigm. The FEP is currently an advisory document only, with the option to convert it to a regulatory document at a future date.

The FEP approach adopted by the PFMC addresses several key elements necessary for the successful implementation of an ecosystem-based approach to federal fisheries management. The first is the need to carefully develop a transition strategy to move from the current single-species focused management approach to multi-species/ecosystem one. This transitional approach will allow the Council to meet its current MSRA requirements with respect to prevention of overfishing and attainment of OY while moving towards a definition of OY which truly takes into account impacts on multiple dimensions of the environment/ecosystem, of which humans are inextricably a major component.

The second desirable aspect of the PFMC strategy is that it allows for the growth and development of EBFM policy at a rate commensurate with existing science. It is important that EBFM policy be developed in a step-wise fashion such that management policy development does not exceed current or reasonably expected advances in the science necessary to support it. Another desirable attribute of the PFMC approach to EBFM is the recognition that stakeholder involvement is imperative to success. It is also recognized that EBFM will likely require involvement of a much broader range of stakeholder interests compared to traditional fisheries management.

Based on a review of the various approaches taken around the US with respect to EBFM, staff recommend that the Council consider an approach similar to that of the PFMC. The document developed in this process would provide overall guidance to the Council with respect to the incorporation of ecosystem considerations into its current management programs. Based on that guidance, initial Council management actions with respect to ecosystem considerations would occur in a consistent, coordinated fashion, but within the existing FMP structure. The guidance document proposed would be developed to accommodate this transition to EBFM but would also be written such that it could be

converted into a regulatory document in the future. As a starting point, Staff recommend development of a purpose and need statement (see below for proposed draft).

***Draft MAFMC Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management Guidance (EBFMG) Document
Purpose and Need Statement***

The purpose of the EBFMG document is to enhance the Council's species-specific management programs with more ecosystem science, broader ecosystem considerations and management policies that coordinate Council management across its Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) and the relevant ecosystems. The EBFMG document should provide a framework for considering policy choices and trade-offs as they affect FMP species and the broader ecosystems.

The needs for an ecosystem-based fishery guidance document within the Council process are:

- 1. Improve management decisions and the administrative process associated with providing biophysical and socio-economic information on ecosystem climate conditions, climate change, habitat conditions and ecosystem interactions.*
- 2. Provide adequate buffers against the uncertainties of environmental and human-induced impacts to the marine environment by developing safeguards in fisheries management measures.*
- 3. Develop new and inform existing fishery management measures that take into account the ecosystem effects of those measures on ecosystem species, habitat, and fishing communities.*
- 4. Coordinate information across FMPs for decision-making within the Council process and for consultations with other regional, national, or international entities on actions affecting ecosystems or FMP species.*
- 5. Identify and prioritize research needs and provide recommendations to address gaps in ecosystem knowledge, particularly with respect to the cumulative effects of fisheries management on marine ecosystems and fishing communities.*

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