

CWG Statement to the MBNMS SAC
December 8, 2011
CWG Co-Chairs: Geoff Shester and Lauren Gilligan

The Conservation Working Group (CWG) met at the Santa Cruz Harbor on November 30, 2011.

In addition to CWG participants, Chris Harrold attended the CWG meeting in his role as Chair of the Research Activities Panel and as Chair of the SAC.

At the last CWG meeting, the CWG voiced interest in learning more about the functioning of the Channel Islands NMS CWG, particularly its model of receiving outside funding for CWG operations. The CWG received a presentation via teleconference on the functioning of the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary's (CINMS) Conservation Working Group from Mike Murray (Deputy Superintendent, CINMS), Linda Crop (Environmental Defense Center; Chair, CINMS CWG) and Kristi Birney (Environmental Defense Center; CWG Staff). This CWG has been particularly effective at producing original research "white papers" on key issues of interest to the Sanctuary, and drafted several effective resolutions that have been adopted by the CINMS Sanctuary Advisory Council. Upon hearing this presentation, the CWG expressed interest in seeking outside funding and resources to aid in CWG activities.

The CWG was pleased to hear that the resolution on single use plastic bags passed by the MBNMS SAC in April 2011 was also recently adopted and approved as a resolution by the CINMS SAC.

In continuation of the CWG's work on predator forage needs, Anna Weinstein of the CWG Forage Species Sub-Committee updated the CWG on the Forage Species white paper currently in progress that will provide scientific background and recommendations regarding how the Sanctuary could become more engaged in this issue, building off the Sanctuary's previous successful efforts to protect krill. The CWG plans to complete the draft white paper within the next several weeks and is slated to present its progress to the Research Activities Panel (RAP) at its January 13, 2012 meeting to seek input and review. The CWG would also hope to share this work and receive input from other working groups as appropriate. The CWG hopes to then present the draft white paper and draft a corresponding resolution both for consideration by the full SAC. In the meantime, the CWG requests that the full SAC hear the presentation by Julie Thayer on Forage Species previously given the CWG to provide background as an informational item at the February 16, 2012 SAC meeting.

To initiate the CWG's work on benthic habitat, Geoff Shester, in his role as Oceana staff, gave the CWG a presentation on the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) processes in Alaska and the U.S. west coast. The presentation discussed the key science behind existing EFH protections and NOAA's precautionary approach to protecting deep sea coral and sponge ecosystems from mobile bottom tending fishing gears, as described in the 2010 NOAA Strategic Plan for Deep-Sea Coral and Sponge Ecosystems. The presentation concluded

by discussing the current process and timeline for the Pacific Fishery Management Council's Groundfish EFH 5-year review, particularly the upcoming Request For Proposals for modifications to EFH. The CWG agreed that the EFH 5-year review was an appropriate venue and unique opportunity for the MBNMS to bring forward information gathered through the ongoing EBM Initiative (including information from the Research Areas and Unique and Rare Areas workshops), and hopes to see the MBNMS put forward its own proposal for modifications to Groundfish EFH. To this end, the CWG requests that MBNMS staff provide the SAC an update at the February 16, 2012 meeting regarding the MBNMS' work on benthic habitats as a component of the EBM Initiative, specifically how information from the Unique and Rare Areas and Research Areas workshops could inform the Groundfish EFH 5-year review. In the coming months, the CWG plans to further assess data relevant to the EFH 5-year review process and compile a draft proposal for modifications to Groundfish EFH for consideration by other working groups and the full SAC.

MBNMS staff gave an update on agenda items and potential items to expect in public comment. The CWG concluded with a discussion of future topical areas of interest, and the issue of water quality was determined to be the next major issue area for the focus of future meetings. 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.

The CWG co-chairs have finalized an application for membership to the CWG and are in the process of distributing the application to the broader MBNMS community.