

CWG Statement to the MBNMS SAC
April 19, 2012
CWG Co-Chairs: Geoff Shester and Lauren Gilligan

The Conservation Working Group (CWG) met at the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute (MBARI) in Moss Landing on April 9, 2012. The CWG has now appointed 9 official members, each serving renewable 2-year terms and has updated its description and membership on the Sanctuary website.

The CWG is glad to see that the “Working Group Updates” have moved earlier in the agenda. However, we request that these updates be placed immediately after the “Open Public Comment” agenda item at the beginning of the meeting so that the SAC can hear the updates before addressing all other substantive agenda items. This is important for the relationship between the CWG and SAC, as one of the CWG’s roles is to comment on items before the SAC on its agenda.

The CWG is also pleased to see the Forage Species informational item on the agenda and looks forward to working closely with the SAC to help determine the best pathway for Sanctuary engagement in this important topic. The CWG discussed the reviews to the Forage Species white paper at length and provided direction to the authors for incorporating the reviews. The CWG plans to submit a revised white paper to the RAP prior to the next RAP meeting, seeking an endorsement of the scientific components and factual descriptions of existing management. The CWG also seeks input from all SAC members. The CWG requests that forage species remain on the SAC agenda, such that the management of forage species would be discussed in August and the SAC would deliberate on the CWG’s proposed SAC resolution as an Action Item in October.

In continuation of the CWG’s work relative to the Pacific Fishery Management Council’s five-year review of Essential Fish Habitat (EFH), the CWG discussed the criteria used to develop the existing EFH Conservation Areas within the MBNMS. The CWG had a work session using a Geographic Information System database developed by Oceana and a Stanford University marine geologist. The CWG examined data on existing trawl closures, state marine protected areas, habitat types, coral and sponge locations, and recent trawl effort, based on data currently available. Based on this information, the CWG identified several key geographic areas for further discussion and analysis for potential inclusion in a proposal for modifications to existing Essential Fish Habitat Conservation Areas (i.e., bottom trawl closed areas). However, the CWG is aware that the EFH Review Committee will be providing additional new data within the next 4 months, and the CWG plans to review this new information to craft its areas.

The CWG also received an update from Sanctuary staff regarding recent Sanctuary meetings with current participants in the bottom trawl fishery in the Sanctuary. The CWG supports this effort and sees the Sanctuary as a useful venue for this type of regional discussions. The CWG recommends the Sanctuary focus its efforts related to Essential Fish Habitat on reducing the impacts of bottom trawling. 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 is also interested in integrating the Sanctuary's "Unique and Rare Features", and urges the Sanctuary to identify the geographic areas containing these features in a publicly available dataset, prior to the issuance of the Pacific Fishery Management Council's the Request for Proposals to modify Essential Fish Habitat, currently expected this September.

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 points out that sending this letter would not signal support for any specific area to be designated as a new Sanctuary, but rather would allow an open public process that would give a voice to those communities that would like to be part of a new Sanctuary, as opposed to the alternative "top-down" approaches to designating new Sanctuaries or Monuments.

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.