

Highlights of Forage Policy Discussion

Background and Areas of
Agreement

Background

- Commissioners asked interested parties to draft a forage policy for MRC consideration (Dec 2011)
- Dialogue initiated with:
 - CA Wetfish Producers Association and their scientific advisor
 - Herring Advisory Committee
 - Conservation NGOs
 - DFG staff
 - Commission staff
- Several areas of common ground identified
- Several areas still under discussion

Areas of Agreement

- Purpose and Need
- Definition
- Overarching Objectives

Purpose and Need

- The Commission recognizes forage species as important to the health and functioning of the California Current ecosystem, valuable in their own right and because they support populations of predators higher on the food web, of both consumptive and non-consumptive importance.
- Forage species are an integral part of the California Current Large Marine Ecosystem and are of great environmental, economic, aesthetic, recreational, educational, scientific, nutritional, social, and historic importance to the people of California.

Definition of Forage Species (for FGC policy)

Lower trophic level species that contribute significantly to the diets of larger fish, seabirds, marine mammals, and/or sea turtles during some part of their life history, thus, transferring energy and nutrients from plankton to larger predators.

(In addition to the definition, agreement has been reached as to the identity of most of the species that meet the definition.)

Objectives:

- Identify a working list and definition of California Current “forage species”.
- Recognize and articulate the importance of forage species in the context of fisheries, marine ecosystems, and the broader coastal economy.
 - (i.e. see Purpose and Need statement)
- Integrate with and complement relevant provisions of federal and state management, including existing federal FMPs and California Current Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) under development by the PFMC and state statutes (i.e. MLPA etc.).

Objectives (cont):

- Provide guidelines and/or priorities for information collection and research relevant to forage species management.
- Commission should use best available science to inform management decisions regarding forage species and broader fishery management.
- Establish and define approach for new/emerging fisheries for forage species not actively managed, including the essential fishery information (EFI) needed to support sustainable fisheries.