

## **Ecosystem Committee Report October 25, 2023 Mr. Bob Gill – Chair**

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab Q, No. 1**) and approved the minutes of the June 2023 (**Tab Q, No. 2**) as written.

### ***Ecosystem Technical Committee (ETC) Recommendations (Tab Q, No. 4)***

Staff presented the recommendations from the ETC meeting on September 2023. The ETC provided recommendations on the structure of the Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP), the proposed Fishery Ecosystem (FEI) Loop, and recommended selecting red tide as a pilot FEI to further develop the FEP process and Communications Plan.

A Committee member recommended keeping in mind that Council members get reappointed on a three-year cycle, so the FEI list could be revisited within that timeframe. The Committee member also recommended revising the FEP itself in addition of the FEI Loop. Staff responded that those revisions are part of the plan, and the FEP may be a living document that could be modified based on lessons learned. SERO staff asked about the role of an Interdisciplinary Planning Team (IPT) in the FEI Loop, given the difference in the structure of the FEP compared to other Council documents, workload, and the complexity of the FEIs. Staff responded that it is something that is still being explored. Another Committee member recommended Council involvement in the earlier steps of the FEI Loop before the work is completed.

The SEFSC asked about the process to prioritize FEIs and suggested that the Council should consider staff time, available funding, and Council actions beyond providing a comment letter to another agency. Staff responded that one of the ETC's concerns was limiting creativity on the recommended FEIs due to being outside of the Council's jurisdiction. The outcomes of the work on a FEI may not directly lead to a Council action, but may still provide useful information for the Council. Staff also mentioned that the FEP can also allow the Council to find novel ways to engage with other agencies and keep lines of communication open when addressing extra jurisdictional issues.

When discussing the Communications Plan, staff emphasized the importance of involvement from the Outreach & Education Technical Committee to engage the public in the process given the complexity of the discussion around ecosystem issues.

A Committee member asked how the ETC selected red tide as a pilot FEI and if there was another list of potential FEIs to evaluate. Staff responded that this motion steers away from the original Council motion to select up to four FEIs. The ETC thought it more effective to focus on a single FEI first, as it's likely that meaningful lessons would be learned along the way and could be incorporated into subsequent FEIs. The ETC has discussed the various steps to the FEP during multiple meetings and this effort would run at the same time that the FEP document and Communication Plan get developed. The Committee member expressed concern that red tide is not something that the Council manages and that there may be other FEIs that could be more appropriate. The ETC Chair responded that the SEFSC has completed various projects that

could help inform the Council. Relevant work is not solely limited to monitoring external water quality influences; the SEFSC has completed MSEs to understand optimal harvest strategies in light of red tide mortality, and has looked at VMS and landings data sources to evaluate shifts in fleet behavior and consolidation during red tide events. The Committee decided to continue discussions on the ETC motion during Full Council.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.