

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 30, 2018

Mr. Chris Oliver
Assistant Administrator
NOAA Fisheries
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

RE: Pacific Coast Essential Fish Habitat Conservation

Dear Mr. Oliver,

We write to express support for continued and appropriately expanded protections of marine habitats off the West Coast, including essential fish habitat (EFH). Rocky reefs, seamounts, underwater canyons and other structures, as well as living seafloor habitat like corals and sponges, all play a vital role not only in the survival and recovery of recreationally and commercially important fish, but also in supporting healthy ocean ecosystems.

In 2006, NOAA Fisheries acted to protect groundfish EFH from bottom trawling based on a unanimous recommendation from the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC). This landmark decision prevented the expansion of bottom trawling into certain previously untrawled areas and protected many known priority habitat areas, ensuring habitat conservation and vibrant fisheries.

As required by law, the PFMC and NOAA Fisheries completed their review of these protections to ensure that they are adequate in light of new science and concluded that changes to existing management are warranted. As such, the PFMC has initiated Amendment 28 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan and adopted a range of alternatives for analysis. We encourage the PFMC and NOAA Fisheries to take action that both protects critical habitat and allows for sustainable fisheries.

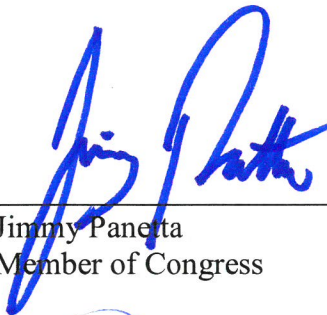
The PFMC is now considering alternatives that include reopening some the landmark EFH Conservation Areas and trawl Rockfish Conservation Areas (RCAs) that have been closed to bottom trawling for over a decade to protect depleted species of rockfish. Any decision made by the PFMC should be done in a way that considers stakeholder input, while vigorously protecting critical habitat through science-based decision making. EFH Conservation Areas and RCAs should only be reopened if such an action is well supported by sound science and would not adversely affect EFH.

We urge your strong and public support for maintaining existing protections and expanding EFH Conservation Areas for priority habitat where identified as necessary. This includes considerations of exceptional areas like the Southern California Bight, deep-sea coral and sponge hotspots off the Pacific Northwest coast, Oregon's Heceta Bank, and California's four National Marine Sanctuaries.

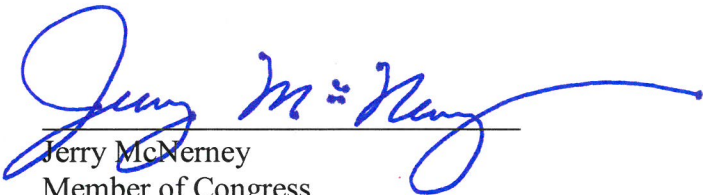
The PFMC's upcoming action offers an opportunity to safeguard ocean resources by continued protection of seafloor habitat across all regions of the West Coast EEZ. We look forward to working with you to protect valuable seafloor habitat while maintaining fishing opportunities for West Coast communities.

Thank you for your consideration and attention to this important issue.

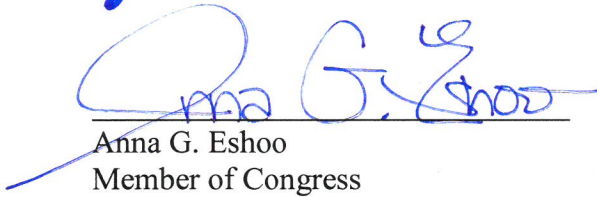
Sincerely,



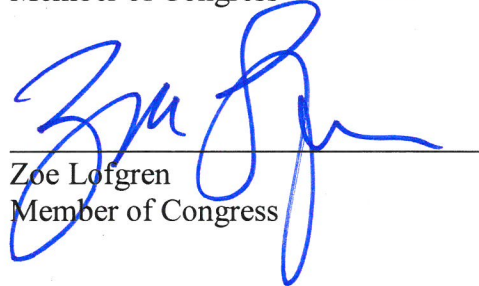
Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress




Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress



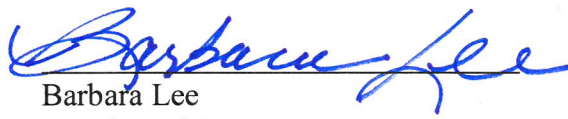
Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

cc. Mr. Phil Anderson, Pacific Fishery Management Council
Mr. Barry Thom, National Marine Fisheries Service