

STATUS OF GROUNDFISH FISHERIES AND CONSIDERATION OF INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS

Situation: In the current groundfish management program, the Council sets annual harvest targets (optimum yield [OY] levels) and individual vessel landing limits for specified periods, with the understanding these vessel landing limits will likely need to be adjusted periodically through the year in order to attain, but not exceed, the OYs. The initial vessel landing limits are based on predicted participation rates, estimates of how successful participants will be at attaining their limits for each period, and comparisons with previous years. The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) tracks landings data throughout the year and periodically makes projections based on all the information available. The GMT presents these landings data and projections to the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP), and they discuss adjustments that may be necessary and beneficial.

In 2003, the Council adopted depth-based area closures as a strategy to allow fishing opportunities with dramatically lower OYs for overfished species than in previous years. This meeting will be the first opportunity to verify the effectiveness of depth-based management in constraining total catch of overfished species. The GMT will review landings to date and other typical information in comparison to preseason expectations.

Additionally, there may be consideration for using data obtained from the first year of the NMFS West Coast Observer Program. The original target date for use of observer data in groundfish fishery management decision-making was June 2003. However, at the time of the printing of the briefing book materials, it was unclear whether observer data will be ready for use in evaluating the 2003 groundfish fisheries at this meeting. There will be a joint session between the GAP, the GMT, and the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) on the SSC Bycatch Workshop and the observer data on Monday April 7; the Council is scheduled to consider the status of the observer information under agenda item E.2 immediately preceding this agenda item.

The Council is to consider advice from the GMT, GAP, SSC, and the public on recommended inseason adjustments to the groundfish fishery and adopt tentative changes as necessary. Review of the tentative changes and final adoption of inseason adjustments to 2003 groundfish management measures is scheduled for Thursday, April 10 under agenda item E.8.

Council Action:

- 1. Consider and adopt tentative inseason adjustments, if necessary.**

Reference Materials:

1. Public comments received by March 21, 2003 (Exhibit E.3d, Public Comment).

Agenda Order:

- a. Agendum Overview
- b. GMT Report
- c. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
- d. Public Comment
- e. **Council Action:** Consider and Adopt Inseason Adjustments, if Necessary

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