

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON GROUND FISH BYCATCH WORK PLAN

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) discussed the proposed Bycatch Work Plan and the preliminary timetable presented in Table 1 of Agenda Item D.2.a, Attachment 1. The GMT considers each of the programs listed to be important in achieving the bycatch accounting and reduction objectives explored in Amendment 18. From the perspective of workload priorities, the GMT offers the following comments and recommendations:

Processes and Timing of Issues

The biennial groundfish harvest specifications and management process is mandated in the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan and is regularly scheduled for specific Council meetings, while the other Bycatch Work Plan items may have scheduling flexibility. During those meetings in which biennial harvest specifications and measures will be developed (i.e., November 2007, April 2008, and June 2008), the GMT believes that the majority of its time should be spent developing and discussing proposed harvest specifications and management measures.

The GMT is very concerned, for example, that preliminary 2009-2010 acceptable biological catch/optimum yield alternatives are adopted concurrently with selection of the preferred alternatives for the Trawl Individual Quota Program and the Intersector Allocation Program at the November 2007 meeting. If the GMT is to be fully engaged in these processes, then the GMT recommends that the processes be staggered.

Also, if the Council hopes to implement intersector allocations in the 2009-2010 management cycle, then final Council action on the Intersector Allocation Program needs to occur in advance of the management specifications development. This is not how it is currently proposed under the work plan's timeline.

The GMT also notes that there are other scheduled processes in place that will take up a significant portion of the GMT's meeting time, such as the stock assessment review process in 2007, and the annual review of exempted fishing permit (EFP) applications. These processes are in addition to those presented in Table 1 and would fall on the Council's June, September, and November 2007 agendas.

Emerging Initiatives

The GMT notes that there are emerging groundfish initiatives (Open Access Sector License Limitation, American Fisheries Act Amendment 15 development, and the Gear Switching proposal) that do not yet have dedicated processes nor timetables associated with them. If any of these items are Council priorities, then from a GMT workload perspective, the GMT needs Council guidance on their prioritization.

Summary

Each of the programs described in the Bycatch Work Plan are important to move forward on. However, the work plan is ambitious with overlapping and competing timelines. The GMT notes that intersector allocation and the TIQ Program, couple with inseason issues and the

scheduled processes noted above, could easily consume all of the GMT's time in 2007. The GMT views its current workload priorities through 2008 to be the 2009-2010 groundfish harvest specifications, the TIQ process, and the intersector allocation process necessary to implement the TIQ Program. Unless the Council re-specifies these priorities, the GMT does not foresee that it will be able to provide adequate analysis and consideration for the other topics under development.

GMT Recommendations:

1. Prioritize the groundfish management items under Council discussion: Intersector Allocation, TIQs, Amendment 10, Open Access Limitation, Amendment 15, and the Gear Switching proposal.

PFMC
11/14/06