Chapters 1 and 2 of the preliminary draft environmental assessment (EA) for a shore-based whiting monitoring program (Agenda Item D.6.b, Supplemental Attachment 2) was presented by Ms. Yvonne de Reynier during a joint Groundfish Management Team (GMT)/Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) session. The development of temporary processor regulations for the 2007 fishery that would transition into permanent rules under the amendment for the 2008 fishery is the strong point of the current draft EA. The GMT appreciates the efforts made by Ms. de Reynier, as well as Ms. Becky Renko, to bring the EA to its present form. The subsequent GMT discussion focused on two questions: (1) Do the alternatives presented in the draft EA cover the full range of issues and options that need to be analyzed as a major step towards implementing this amendment for the 2008 fishery, and 2) Are we constructing an appropriate shoreside whiting monitoring program for 2007 that will provide valuable experience and information to support the transition from an exempted fishing permit (EFP) fishery to a fully regulated Federal fishery in 2008?

The GMT views the alternatives presented in the draft EA as a sufficient preliminary starting place for encompassing the full range of analysis that needs to occur, but has the following suggestions:

1. The transition from a long running state sponsored shore-based whiting EFP program to a routine groundfish fishery under full Federal management and monitoring will be a difficult one. The state agencies have been the first line managers of this fishery for over a decade and it would be a great disadvantage to lose their expertise in the development of the amendment. The states are in the best position to identify the full function of monitoring this fishery for conversion to a Federally monitored and regulated fishery. The GMT suggests that state agency specific issues (rows in Table 2.1) need to be identified and included for each of the alternatives. Early identification of any continuing state responsibilities are crucial - unfortunately, sufficient time was not available to identify the specific issues at this meeting. The GMT recommends that an ongoing shoreside whiting workgroup be established to identify specific state responsibilities, and any remaining issues that may have been missed in the draft EA.

2. Aspects of Alternatives 3 and 4 (e.g. Federal funding for 100% at-sea observer or electronic/camera) are unlikely to be feasible in the short-term (2008 implementation) and possibly not the long-term. The GMT encourages the development of a hybrid alternative that is more realistic. A hybrid alternative developed by the workgroup would help alleviate the polarization that is already occurring, and should begin immediately for successful completion by early January 2007. Industry responsibilities are likely to increase under Amendment 10, underscoring the crucial need for industry participation in this workgroup.
3. Any discussion of Amendment 10 invariably brings about concerns regarding how the 2007 shoreside whiting fishery will be managed and monitored relative to productive steps towards the implementation of the amendment. The GMT understands that a 2007 shoreside whiting fishery EFP application has been submitted by the states under the previous EFP agenda item. Assuming that this application is accepted for the 2007 fishery, the GMT is willing to assist with an “overhaul” of the status quo EFP that will move the fishery closer to the regulatory environment that will be required under Amendment 10. The same workgroup mentioned previously could be used for this purpose as well.

GMT Recommendations:

1. Establish an ongoing shoreside whiting workgroup composed of appropriate Federal, state and industry representatives.

2. Direct the workgroup to complete the following tasks by January 22, 20071:
   
a. Identify specific state and industry responsibilities, and any remaining issues that may have been missed in the draft EA.

b. Develop a “hybrid” alternative for inclusion in the Amendment 10 analysis.

c. Overhaul the 2007 EFP requirements to more closely fit the fishery management and monitoring environment that will be required under amendment 10.

1 The workgroup will have a difficult time achieving a January 22 deadline (as the latest date – earlier would be better) for suggested additions/revisions to the Amendment 10 EA. This deadline will afford NMFS the minimum time necessary to incorporate products from the workgroup into the necessary documents for the March 2007 Council Meeting.