

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON MAGNUSON-STEVENSONS ACT REAUTHORIZATION IMPLEMENTATION

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the issue paper developed by Council staff regarding potential mechanisms designed to avoid overharvest and optimize sector fishing opportunities (Agenda Item C.2.a, Attachment 2). The GMT agreed that the approaches outlined in the paper warrant further analysis to evaluate their suitability for inclusion in the Council's management toolbox. The GMT focused their discussion on the issues of multiple year Optimum Yields (OYs) and carryover provisions. Sector-specific multi-year OYs and carryover provisions might, for example, facilitate individual roll-over of quota pounds in a trawl individual quota program, provide more opportunity to mitigate for "disaster" tows, as well as provide some protection against intersector pre-emption. However, such provisions might limit management flexibility in balancing the bycatch scorecard across sectors, or could result in greater harvest constraints at the conclusion of a multi-year OY, potentially resulting in fishery closures for extended periods. These benefits and costs, as well as other complexities associated with this approach, could be explored further in the 2009-2010 SPEX EIS.

Presently, acceptable biological catches (ABCs) and OYs for some species are set at an aggregated complex level (e.g., other flatfish). The current level of information does not support stock assessments for individual species within these complexes. The GMT would consider a requirement for Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) for individual species within the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan that do not have enough data to support stock assessments to be unfeasible. The GMT recommends that ACLs be set at the complex level for these species, with periodic review of the status of individual species within these complexes to determine if change is warranted. The GMT also suggests that the Council consider, possibly as part of a future harvest policy workshop, investigation of stock complex or assemblage assessments to better address groups of data-poor species. Another approach would be to use data-rich species as indicators for management for data poor species with similar life histories and habitat associations.

The GMT notes that the ABCs and OYs currently employed in groundfish management, and the associated precautionary approaches, meet the revised Magnuson-Stevens Act's ACL requirements for most groundfish species. One area where the current process might need to be revised to meet new ACL requirements would be for species that have been assessed to be above B_{40} , since OYs for those species are set equal to their ABCs. However, if complete inseason data are provided in a timely manner (e.g., in a trawl IQ program) and management can respond quickly (e.g., the whiting fishery), then it may be feasible to set the OY equal to the ABC. A de facto "buffer" already exists for species below B_{40} as a result of the Council's existing precautionary harvest adjustments. Otherwise, the GMT is pleased to note that the Pacific Council is ahead of the nationwide curve.

GMT Recommendations

- Analyze multi-year OYs for use in the TIQ program and/or intersector allocation.
- Set ACLs at the complex level until species specific information becomes available.
- Examine mechanisms to prevent overfishing in cases where OYs are set equal to ABCs.
- Forward Alternative 2 for setting ACLs and AMs to the Secretary for consideration as the preferred alternative (C.2.b, Attachment 1).