

THE GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON  
CONSIDERATION OF INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS

**RECREATIONAL**

*California*

California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) provided an update regarding their plan (March 07 Agenda Item E.5.e, Supplemental Groundfish Management Team [GMT] Report) to modify the California Recreational Fisheries Survey estimation programs and rerun the recreational catch projection model for 2007 using 2004-2006 estimates. The GMT was notified that the approach provided in this plan has been modified and timeline revised. Updated groundfish catch projections for the 2007 recreational fishery will be provided at the June Council meeting, but these projections will only be based upon the 2005 and 2006 estimates.

**COMMERCIAL**

***Limited Entry Trawl North of 40°10' N. latitude.***

*Non-whiting Trawl Fishery*

*Leadbetter Point to WA/OR Border - 60 fm shoreward RCA boundary*

At the March 2007 meeting, the Council asked the GMT to analyze the effect of closing the shoreward area between Leadbetter Point and the OR/WA border during period 4. The concern was that a 60 fathom shoreward trawl Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) boundary would result in increased trawl effort in shallow areas where Dungeness crab are more abundant and that the RCA boundaries adopted during the March inseason session would negatively impact soft-shelled crab, molting crab and crab fishery participants. The GMT reviewed logbook, fish ticket, and observer data to compare the impact of closing this area in period 4 against the impact of a 60 fathom RCA boundary. Available information shows that in recent years the majority of trawl effort and catch has occurred shoreward of 60 fathoms and substantial amounts of this effort and catch occur shoreward of 40 fathoms. Available observer data shows that closing this area to shore in period 4 would result in a reduction of 0.1 metric tons of canary rockfish in the non-whiting trawl fishery. Based on this information, the GMT believes that a 60 fathom RCA boundary in this area would not lead to a substantial shift in trawl effort and therefore should not result in significant increased impacts on the crab resource and on crab fishery participants.

The GMT recognizes that Dungeness crab bycatch occurs in the groundfish trawl fishery and that there are varied perceptions regarding the associated impacts upon the crab resource. While the Council manages groundfish, Dungeness crab management has been delegated to the coastal states. Therefore, trawl bycatch of Dungeness crab has received little attention in the Council process. Management measures to protect soft-shelled molting crab have been implemented for the directed Dungeness crab fishery, but have not been considered during the development of groundfish management measures. While some historical studies have been conducted in other areas, the GMT recognizes that little empirical information exists to quantify the spatial distribution, magnitude, or mortality of crab bycatch in the west coast trawl fishery. Information

currently being collected by the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (WCGOP) should help provide the basis to evaluate crab bycatch, along with other trawl bycatch issues, in establishing fishery management measures.

### **Limited Entry Trawl South of 40°10' N. latitude**

#### *Non-whiting Trawl Fishery*

##### *Chilipepper Rockfish*

The GMT received a request to consider increasing chilipepper rockfish limits in the areas shoreward and seaward of the RCAs (March 07 Agenda Item E.5.e, Supplemental GMT Report). At the beginning of 2007, chilipepper rockfish was removed from the overall 300 lb/month small footrope limit for minor shelf rockfish, and a 500 lb/month limit was established for chilipepper in order to reduce discards of chilipepper rockfish in the flatfish fisheries. The GMT will submit a data request to the WCGOP and will review chilipepper rockfish/flatfish catch ratios and bycatch correlations to explore a concern of potential targeting of chilipepper rockfish.

### **Limited Entry Fixed Gear**

#### *Minor Shelf Rockfish South of 40°10' N. latitude.*

The GMT received a request to consider a limit that combines widow, chilipepper and bocaccio rockfish for the fixed gear sectors in the southern and central California regions (March 07 Agenda Item E.5.e, Public Comment 1). The GMT notes that this proposal was mischaracterized in our March inseason statement. To clarify, the proposal includes two inseason actions for the limited entry fixed gear fishery in central California (between 40°10' N. latitude and 34°27' N. latitude) relative to chilipepper and associated shelf rockfish species. The first was to provide higher seaward chilipepper target opportunities in central California (between 40°10' N. latitude and 34°27' N. latitude) using limited entry fixed gear. The second was to modify the chilipepper trip limits for the area seaward of the RCA by recombining minor shelf rockfish, shortbelly, and widow rockfish limits. The GMT will submit a data request to the WCGOP and review the amount of chilipepper rockfish relative to overfished species seaward of the RCA south of 40°10' N. latitude.

### **Open Access Fixed Gear**

#### *Sablefish South of 36° N. latitude.*

The GMT received a request to set daily sablefish trip limits at a consistent rate of 700 lbs to allow for more efficient trip planning and sustained participation (Agenda Item E.2.e). The GMT does not support an increase in daily sablefish trip limits at this time due to concerns of increased participation in the open access fishery as a result of the proposed increase in sablefish daily trip limits and reduced salmon opportunities, as occurred in 2006. In addition, increases in the daily limit of this magnitude have resulted in dramatic increases in participation in the past. The GMT suggests delaying any recommendations until such time that we can evaluate salmon fishery participation and if needed, revisit this issue at the June Council meeting.

## **Open access and limited entry fixed gear lingcod trip limits**

### *Lingcod*

The GMT received a request to increase lingcod cumulative trip limits in the nearshore and offshore areas north and south of 40°10' N. latitude (March 07 Agenda Item E.5.e, Supplemental GMT Report). The GMT analyzed the available data and found that very few vessels attained their lingcod limits. For those vessels landing lingcod in 2005 and 2006, approximately 12% approached the limited fixed gear limit and 20% for open access. In 2007, open access lingcod limits were increased by 100 lbs/month. The GMT is concerned that any increase in lingcod limits and subsequent targeting may result in increased bycatch of canary and yelloweye rockfish. With regard to open access, since the number of participants in this fishery is unlimited, any increase in lingcod limits could lead to a rapid expansion in the fishery without any corresponding accountability measures for bycatch of overfished species. Since the current limits are not being attained in either the open access or limited entry fisheries, the GMT does not support an increase to the current limits.

### GMT Recommendations

The GMT recommends no changes to the current fishery structure.

PFMC

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