

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON FINAL CONSIDERATION OF INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) has the following comments and recommendations for final inseason action.

1. A majority of the GAP continues to recommend that the Council reopen the whiting fishery on October 1st. In addition, the GAP recommends increasing the widow bycatch cap to 275 mt for the whiting fishery.

A majority of the GAP believes this recommendation is justified for several reasons, including the economic benefits to coastal communities with minimal biological impacts if the fishery takes place outside 150 fathoms. Twenty-two percent of the shorebased sector's allocation remains and just over 40% of the catcher/processor allocation remains unharvested. Under 5% of the mothership sector allocation remains unharvested. If the whiting fishery is not reopened on October 1st, the unharvested whiting represents \$25,000,000 in lost value.

Shoreside fishery

Value

There are 19,501 metric tons of unharvested whiting remaining in the shorebased allocation. At a price of \$.08/pound, this results in approximately \$3,438,416.00 in exvessel value to coastal fishermen. With a multiplier of 2.5 this results in over \$8.5 million dollars to rural coastal communities. The GAP estimates that the ports of Newport and Astoria in Oregon and Ilwaco and Westport in Washington would benefit greatly from the reopening of this fishery. We estimate that up to nine hake processing plants could buy whiting if the season is reopened.

Experience

The GAP also estimates that about 20 vessels may participate if the fishery is reopened. The criticism that fishermen will hug the 150 fathom line or that shoreside fishermen are not experienced with fishing outside 150 fathoms so this may result in increased are unfounded. Whiting fishermen will fish where the whiting are congregating outside 150 fathoms, the fact that the 150 line is in place is immaterial. Many shoreside whiting fishermen also fish in the at-sea mothership fishery as well as the non-whiting limited entry trawl fishery. The bottom line is that they are experienced with fishing outside 150 fathoms.

Costs

We heard testimony that 100% observer coverage in Alaska can run from \$15,000 - \$20,000 a month per observer. Observers may be unavailable. Two observers for every vessel, as was suggested during testimony yesterday could cost as much as \$40,000 per month. We also heard testimony that fuel costs will increase fishing costs outside of 150 fathoms. More fuel will be burned getting to the grounds as well as searching for fish in the offshore fishery. While during the regular season vessels were utilizing \$1500 of fuel a day – we estimate that could easily double to \$3,000/day. Between observer costs and fuel, it could cost upwards of \$4,500/day just to fish. There are also the increased costs of reinstalling the cameras.

Delayed openings

Doling out small amounts of bycatch and revisiting this issue in November is not an acceptable option. The next Council meeting is during the beginning of November. That means that the fishery would likely not open again until December 15th. Stopping and starting the fishery is inefficient. Fishing for whiting in November and December is both dangerous due to weather and futile as well – as generally the fish are no longer on the grounds during this time frame.

Processor Considerations

Several hundred employees are utilized during the hake season. Reopening the fishery allows shorebased processing plants an opportunity to maintain crews through the season until crab begins.

Weather days

October 15th is when the weather out of Newport starts getting rough and dangerous. This runs true up the coast to Westport. Not only is it more dangerous to fish under these conditions it also becomes difficult to find fish – these fish are migratory and scatter following storms.

Catcher/Processor Sector

There are 28,481 mt of unharvested whiting remaining in the catcher/processor allocation. This represents a gross value of approximately \$15,000,000. If the fishery reopens the catcher/processor sector anticipates 5 catcher/processor vessels will participate. Combined, those vessels would employ approximately 600 crew. If the fishery is not reopened, approximately \$3-4 million in income would be foregone.

The GAP believes that the ability for the agencies to close the fishery when the bycatch cap is projected to be reached is very viable. Beginning in 2007, there was real-time reporting for all sectors and information on catches was reported. Instead of waiting for the bycatch cap to be actually reached it is supposed that the agency would close the fishery on the projection of a bycatch cap being reached. The majority of the GAP believes that the buffers in the scorecard for depleted species associated with the whiting fishery are sufficient to absorb any uncertainty surrounding activities that occurred earlier in the primary season.

A minority of one remains concerned that the catches in the scorecard are reflective of minimum discard estimates and that there is significant uncertainty associated with events that occurred during the primary season and that the impacts on depleted fisheries could be much larger. Given concerns brought up by enforcement, this minority wants to ensure that all discard events are accounted for should the fishery be reopened.

2. The GAP unanimously supports the limited entry non-whiting trawl fishery adjustments presented by the GMT including adjusting the RCA boundaries north of Cape Alava and Humbug Mountain to Cape Arago.