

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE MAGNUSON-STEVENSON REAUTHORIZATION ACT (MSRA)

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) considered the implications of the proposed rule on Implementation of the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act (MSRA). As noted in the letter from the PFMC staff to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) dated April 17th, 2008, implementation of annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AMs) will not drastically change the structure of the current groundfish management framework. The GMT considered implementation of AMs, organization of species complexes within the Fishery Management Plan (FMP), and establishment of ACLs and AMs.

Definition, interpretation, and application of the term “fishery” and its relevance to ACLs

The proposed rule describes the fishery as target species, non-target species kept for sale or personal use, and overfished non-target species that are not for sale or personal use. Other groundfish stocks may be classified as ecosystem components: species that are not targeted by the fishery but are occasionally caught. Classification of species in the FMP will be necessary to conform to the proposed rule.

The GMT supports the guidelines regarding stock complexes that are similar in distribution, life history, and vulnerability to the fishery. The proposed rule states that the list of species within each complex (e.g. nearshore, shelf, and slope rockfishes) should be evaluated in terms of these criteria. Re-organization of the current stock complexes will require a considerable amount of effort. The team requests that participants in the upcoming NMFS workshop on ACLs for data-poor stocks (scheduled for early 2009) provide guidance on this topic.

Under the proposed rule, if an ACL were exceeded, an overage could roll over into the next year. In a volatile fishery an overage in the ACL could be applied toward the next season and potentially pre-empt the next season before it has begun. In any case, the provision for a rollover of overages to subsequent years will create an impetus for more restrictive regulations to ensure that overages do not occur.

Rebuilding concerns

The proposed rule states that a rebuilding acceptable biological catch (ABC) must be set to match the target fishing mortality rates in the rebuilding plan [600.310(f)(3)(ii)]. Currently, our target fishing mortality rates for rebuilding species correspond to the optimum yield, not the ABC. The team recognizes that this rule may have been suggested based on the east coast management framework. We suggest the following change in the proposed rule: the target fishing mortality rates in the rebuilding plan must be set to match the ACL.