

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) met with the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) to discuss progress of this year's fishery and possible inseason adjustments. The GMT discussion was led by Ms. Jessi Doerpinghaus and Mr. Bob Leos. The GAP offers the following recommendations and comments on proposed inseason adjustments to ongoing groundfish fisheries.

Limited Entry Fixed Gear Sablefish Fishery North of 36° N. Latitude

Current trip limit (1,025 weekly/3,075 bimonthly)

Industry has requested an increase in trip limits for sablefish for the balance of the year (periods 4 through 6). The GAP supports the GMT recommended **Alternative 1, (1 landing per week of up to 1,125 lb., not to exceed 3,375 lb. per 2 months)**. The model suggests a sufficient buffer (est. between 85% to 95% take) depending on which price assumption is used.

Open Access Fixed Gear Sablefish Fishery North of 36° N. Latitude

Current trip limit (300 daily/900 weekly/1,800 bimonthly)

Open Access representatives on the GAP have requested exploring the possibility of an increase in trip limits for sablefish for the remainder of the year (periods 4 through 6). Open access fishermen are currently working with a very narrow profit margin due to high fuel prices combined with very low trip limits. The GAP supports the GMT recommended **Alternative 1, (350 lb. per day, or 1 landing per week of up to 1,600 lb., not to exceed 3,200 lb. per 2 months)**. The model suggests a sufficient buffer with projected attainment at around 83%.

Limited Entry/Open Access Fixed Gear Minor Nearshore Rockfish and Black Rockfish between 40° 10' N. Latitude and 42° N. Latitude

Current trip limit (8,500 lb. per 2 month period, of which no more than 1,200 lb. may be species other than Black Rockfish)

Analysis of the commercial black rockfish fishery in northern California indicates higher than normal catches are occurring. This is likely due to unusually good weather this winter as well as a liberalized RCA that went from a 20 fathom boundary to a 30 fathom boundary. Due to the accelerated catch of black rockfish there are concerns about impacts to overfished species. The GMT has recommended a trip limit reduction as follows: **6,000 lb. per 2 month period, of which no more than 1,200 lb. may be species other than Black Rockfish**. The GAP supports this reduction in trip limits for black rockfish.

Open Access Fixed Gear Minor Shelf Rockfish, Shortbelly, Widow Rockfish and Chilipepper between 40° 10' N. Latitude and 34° 27' N. Latitude

Current trip limit (Period 4/200 lb. per 2 months) (Period 5+6/300 lb. per 2 months)

Open access fixed gear fishermen north of Point Conception have requested a slight increase in shelf rockfish allowance to reduce regulatory discarding. The GAP supports the GMT recommended **Alternative 2: Increase the trip limit of Shelf Rockfish to 500 lb. per 2 month period for periods 4, 5 and 6.**

Limited Entry Fixed Gear Blackgill Rockfish south of 40° 10' N. Latitude

Current trip limit (40,000 lb. of Slope Rockfish per 2 month period, of which no more than 1,375 lb. may be Blackgill Rockfish)

Industry has reported increasing bycatch of blackgill rockfish while conducting targeted fisheries for shortspine thornyhead and slope rockfish to the point that it is hindering those fisheries. The GAP supports the GMT recommended **Alternative 2: 1,600 lb. Blackgill rockfish per 2 months for periods 4, 5 and 6**

Open Access Fixed Gear Blackgill Rockfish south of 40° 10' N. Latitude

Current trip limit (10,000 lb. of Slope Rockfish per 2 month period, of which no more than 475 lb. may be Blackgill Rockfish)

The open access sector has been requesting a trip limit increase since last year due to increased bycatch while targeting slope rockfish. A small trip limit increase can be supported by the GAP as it should not induce targeting of blackgill. The GAP supports GMT recommended **Alternative 1: 550 lb. Blackgill rockfish per 2 months for periods 4, 5 and 6.**

Limited Entry/Open Access Fixed Gear California Scorpionfish south of 40° 10' N. latitude

Current trip limit (1,200 lb. per 2 month period)

Industry has requested an increase in trip limits for California scorpionfish. The early closure of the fishery this past winter had a fairly significant financial impact on the commercial sector as the holiday season fetches the highest prices for scorpionfish. The GAP supports the GMT recommended alternative: **1,500 lb. California Scorpionfish per 2 month period for periods 4, 5 and 6**

Big skate

The GAP requests the Council ask the GMT to examine bi-monthly trip limits of 25,000, 30,000 and 35,000 pounds for periods 4, 5 and 6 (July –Dec.) at this meeting. The GAP notes that in April the GMT analyzed limits up to 37,500 pounds (**Agenda item E.8.a, GMT Supplemental Report 6, Table 1**)

Big skate is acting as a constraining species in the IFQ fishery, but new data, such as the 50 percent discard mortality rate, are available that indicate the trip limits approved by the Council in April are unnecessarily constraining.

The GMT report D.7.a, GMT Report to the SSC on skate discard mortality shows substantial documentation about skate discard mortality and that setting a 50 percent big skate discard mortality rate – instead of the 100 percent assumed currently – is justified.

Furthermore, two key pieces of information are missing in Council assumptions: 1) the trawl survey likely missed a large part of the big skate population because the survey did not go into the shallower waters, where big skate typically inhabit; and 2) a majority of the area off the Washington coast where big skate reside is closed to trawling, so no fishery-dependent data is available from this area to help inform Council decisions.

Fishing behavior this year is different as well: Many boats that had high bycatch of big skate or targeted big skate in the past are now participating in the pink shrimp fishery. This leaves more big skate available for the rest of the fleet to access via higher trip limits.

Big skate has been managed under a very precautionary ACL and it is unlikely we will exceed the ABC.

Canary rockfish for 2016

The GAP requests an adjustment of the annual catch limit (ACL) beginning in 2016 for canary rockfish, in light of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) acceptance of the canary stock assessment. The assessment shows canary is abundant and, in fact, has been above the overfished threshold since 2006.

The GAP requests an ACL increase from 125 mt to 250 mt. This would provide much-needed buffers to almost all sectors of the fishing industry, including the sport fishery. Trawlers in the catch share program would be able to relax a little and not avoid canary completely for fear of using all their quota pounds. This would increase trawlers' access to target species that are currently underutilized. Non-whiting midwater fishermen would likely benefit the most. More opportunity, even in the short term, would help make the trawl individual quota program workable.

For recreational fishermen anticipating a midwater sport fishery approval in November, for implementation in 2016, an increase in canary rockfish for incidental catch could result in some fishermen moving to the shelf, thereby taking some pressure off nearshore species and black rockfish resources – one of the main reasons for establishing a midwater fishery in the first place. In addition, it would provide some flexibility to the restrictive canary bycatch allowances in the recreational fishery.

Commercial nearshore fishermen have been exceeding the harvest guideline in recent years. A canary increase would help eliminate this as well.

Another issue is the research trawl survey currently taking place. The survey already has taken more than 3 tons of canary with a set-aside of 4.5 tons. Continuing this survey is critical to informing our stock assessments for future management. Extra canary would allow the survey to continue or even possibly expand in 2016.

It is important to note the GAP is not requesting any changes to management measures regarding canary rockfish for 2016. Further, the ABC for canary in 2016 is 697 mt; there is no chance the ABC would be exceeded. Simply increasing the ACL to 250 mt would alleviate concern of incidentally catching small amounts of canary rockfish that has plagued all sectors of the fleet for several years. This is a prime example of the rebuilding paradox; as the stock recovers – or in this case, is rebuilt – the chance of intercepting them increases as well, making it difficult to remain within the constraining limits established under a rebuilding plan.

The GAP understands this request may fall outside the parameters of an inseason action. However, given the results of the canary stock assessment and the current restrictions placed on the fishing industry, we strongly recommend the Council scope out possible avenues to accommodate our request in cases such as this, when a new stock assessment shows a stock has been rebuilt.

Summary of GAP Recommendations

1) Limited Entry Fixed Gear Sablefish Fishery North of 36° N. Latitude

GMT Alternative 1, (1 landing per week of up to 1,125 lb., not to exceed 3,375 lb. per 2 months) for periods 4, 5 and 6.

2) Open Access Fixed Gear Sablefish Fishery North of 36° N. Latitude

GMT Alternative 1, (350 lb. per day or 1 landing per week of up to 1,600 lb., not to exceed 3,200 lb. per 2 months) for periods 4, 5 and 6.

3) Limited Entry/Open Access Fixed Gear Minor Nearshore Rockfish and Black Rockfish north of 40° 10' N. latitude to 42° N. latitude

6,000 lb. per 2 month period, of which no more than 1,200 lb. may be species other than Black rockfish for periods 4, 5 and 6.

4) Open Access Minor Shelf Rockfish, Shortbelly, Widow Rockfish and Chilipepper south of 40° 10' N. latitude to 34° 27' N. latitude

GMT Alternative 2: Increase the trip limit of Shelf Rockfish to 500 lb. per 2 months for periods 4, 5 and 6.

5) Limited Entry Fixed Gear Blackgill Rockfish south of 40° 10' N. latitude

GMT Alternative 2: 1,600 lb. Blackgill Rockfish per 2 months for periods 4, 5 and 6.

6) Open Access Fixed Gear Blackgill Rockfish south of 40° 10' N. latitude

GMT Alternative 1: 550 lb. Blackgill Rockfish per 2 months for periods 4, 5 and 6.

7) Limited Entry/Open Access Fixed Gear California Scorpionfish south of 40° 10 N. latitude

GMT Alternative: 1,500 lb. California Scorpionfish per 2 month period for periods 4, 5 and 6.

8) Big Skate

Analyze bi-monthly trip limits of 25,000, 30,000 and 35,000 pounds for periods 4, 5 and 6.

9) Canary Rockfish

Increase Canary rockfish ACL to 250 mt for 2016.