

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON FUTURE COUNCIL MEETING
AGENDA AND WORKLOAD PLANNING

RESPONSE TO THE MIDWATER TRAWLERS COOPERATIVE OPEN COMMENT
LETTER REGARDING THE DISASTER TOW OF THE F/V SEEKER

A letter from the Midwater Trawlers Cooperative (MTC) was submitted to the briefing book under the Open Public Comment agenda item ([Agenda Item B.1.b. Open Public Comment 1](#)) regarding the F/V Seeker and its disaster tow of canary rockfish in 2015. The letter also included a request that the Council develop a process to help Shorebased Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) participants cover deficits resulting from disaster tows that exceed the vessel cap and prevents the vessel from fishing for multiple years until the deficit can be covered, even if there is quota available for purchase on the market. The captain of the F/V Seeker also gave public comment regarding his plans for 2016. At the end of 2015, he purchased all of the eligible quota he could until reaching his vessel limit, and has plans for doing the same in 2016 at the end of the year (when quota is cheaper); however, obtaining the entire vessel limit still would not allow the vessel out of deficit. The GMT therefore examines two issues, (1) The F/V Seeker's deficit situation with regards to the 2017 annual catch limit (ACL) alternatives and (2) general patterns exhibited by midwater trawl vessels (including the F/V Seeker) and the bycatch rate of canary rockfish, and provides a potential pathway for consideration by the Council in future situations.

F/V Seeker IFQ Deficit and Future Under 2017 ACL Alternatives

The GMT would like to extend their gratitude to Ms. Sarah Towne from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), who greatly contributed to this report. When an IFQ vessel catches more quota pounds (QPs) than they have available in their vessel account, their vessel account goes into deficit and they cannot leave on another IFQ trip until the deficit has been rectified. When an IFQ vessel catches more than the annual QP vessel limit, the vessel account will be in deficit for the rest of the year, because no vessel can bring an amount greater than the annual QP vessel limit into their account in a given year.

As stated in the MTC report, the F/V Seeker will not be able to fish in 2016 because their remaining deficit is in excess of the annual QP vessel limit for canary rockfish, which is 10 percent of the shorebased sector allocation, or 9,806 pounds in 2016¹. Even though they might be able to find enough available 2016 QPs on the market to cover their deficit, they are prohibited from purchasing more than their annual vessel limit of 9,806 pounds.

Although the F/V Seeker's vessel account will remain in deficit in 2016 and therefore will not be able to participate in the shorebased IFQ fishery in 2016, the vessel may participate in the at-sea mothership sector and other non-IFQ fisheries while their IFQ vessel account has a deficit. Depending on which ACL alternative and IFQ sector allocation alternative the Council selects for canary rockfish through the 2017-2018 harvest specifications and management measures

¹As shown on the 2016 vessel limits table at http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/publications/fishery_management/groundfish/vessel-limits.pdf.

process, the F/V Seeker may be able to cover the full amount of their disaster tow deficit in 2017 (depending on the vessel limit and amount of canary rockfish QPs they are able to obtain beyond QP allocation to the quota share account).

Since neither the 2017-2018 canary rockfish ACL, nor two-year allocations, have been decided, potential pathways for the F/V Seeker to cover their deficit were shown for status quo (i.e. September 2015 scorecard) allocations (Table 1). For all three ACL alternatives, the F/V Seeker has options for covering their deficit by purchasing additional QP beyond what their QS provides annually to cover the deficit. Table 1 also shows that the IFQ allocation of canary rockfish for 2017 would have to be less than 129 mt, which is approximately half the status quo allocation percentage for the lowest 2017 canary rockfish ACL alternative for the F/V Seeker to not be able to cover their deficit by the start of 2017. In short, unless the lowest ACL alternative is selected along with an even lower allocation of the ACL to IFQ, the F/V Seeker will be able to cover the deficit by 2017.

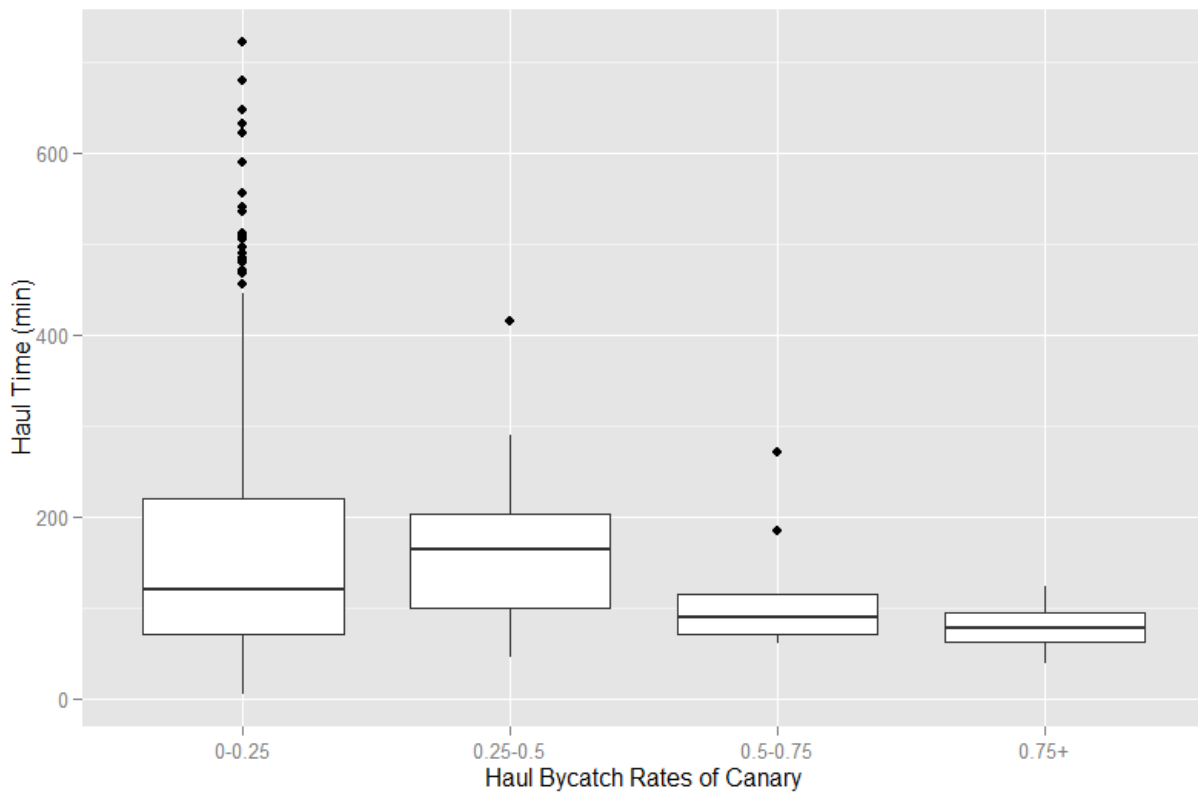
Table 1: Potential pathways for the F/V Seeker to cover their current QP deficit of canary rockfish under 2017 ACL alternatives with September 2015 scorecard percentages applied for sector allocations. The F/V Seeker will not be able to cover their deficit in 2016, even if they buy QP up to the annual vessel limit of 10 percent (red shading). But they will be able cover their deficit at the start of 2017 (black shading) for all three ACL alternatives assuming they buy their annual 10 percent QP vessel limit in 2016 and buy additional QP beyond their current QS (1.07 percent).

		Status quo IFQ allocation in 2017 (Same % as 2015 scorecard)		
		NA ACL	A1 ACL	A2 ACL
Canary ACL (mt)		1714	857	566
IFQ allocation of canary rockfish		689	336	216
Canary deficit at the end of 2015		-38,335	-38,335	-38,335
Current deficit (3/7/2016)		-37,169	-37,169	-37,169
Projected deficit for the end of 2016 (if they bring in pounds up to 10% 2016 vessel limit)		-28,529	-28,529	-28,529
2017 quota pound allocation to Seeker QS account (1.07%) = "yearly cut"		16,253	7,926	5,095
2017 annual QP vessel limit (10%) = max limit		151,899	74,075	47,620
Amount Seeker would need to buy beyond 2017 quota pound allocation to cover 2017		12,276	20,603	23,434
Note: To not cover their deficit by 2017 (assuming buy full 10% vessel limit QP in both 2016 and 2017), IFQ allocations would have to be less than 129 mt				

Analysis of Midwater Trawl Hauls and Bycatch of Canary Rockfish

The GMT examined the haul level data of the F/V Seeker disaster tow (which could not be presented due to data confidentiality), as well as the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (WCGOP) non-whiting midwater trawl haul level data from 2011-2013, and came to the same conclusion as MTC: the F/V Seeker disaster tow appeared to be a random, low probability event that could not be foreseen by the captain. The F/V Seeker exhibited no unique behavior in terms of fishing location, haul time, or depth compared to other non-whiting midwater hauls.

The GMT also examined whether or not there is any correlation between bycatch rate of canary rockfish (total lbs of canary rockfish/total lbs of haul; both retained and discarded) and haul time based on the theory that longer hauls may be subject to encountering larger amounts of canary rockfish. However, as seen in Figure 1, there is no observed relationship between bycatch rate (grouped to meet confidentiality) and haul times.



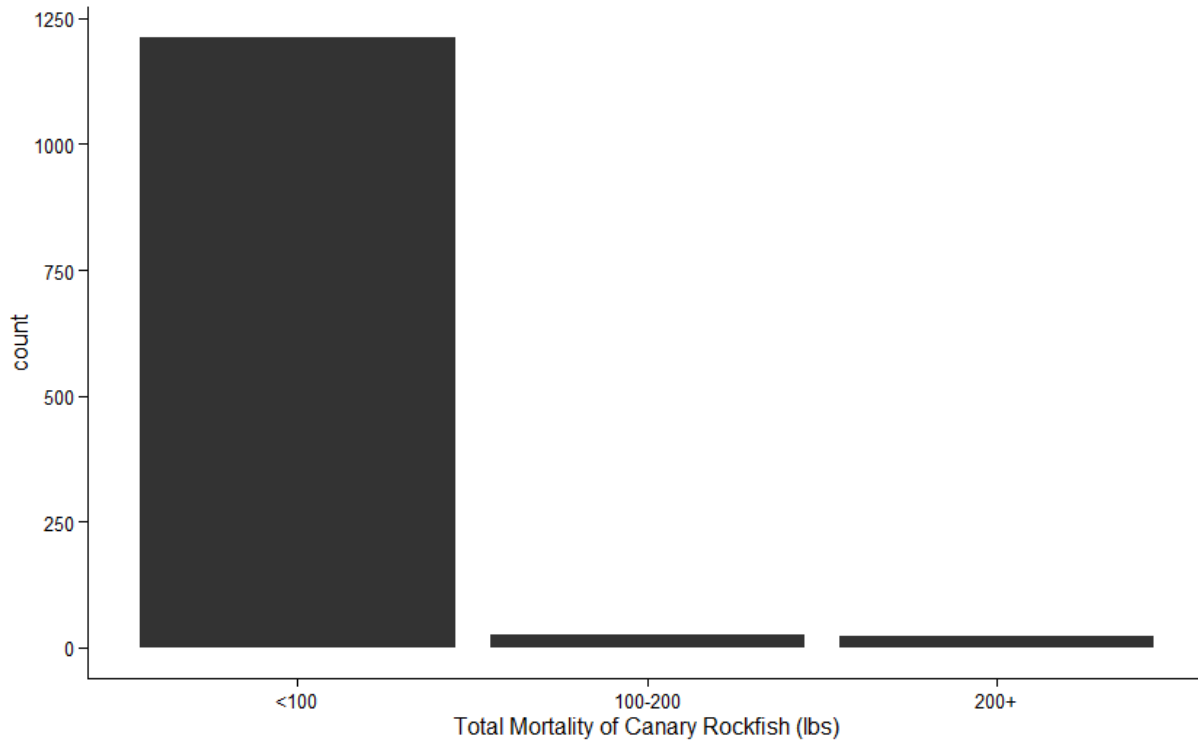


Figure 2: Total Mortality (in lbs) of canary rockfish on 2011-2013 non-whiting midwater trips

With the rebuilding of canary rockfish, there are expected to be increased encounters of canary rockfish on midwater trawls, especially with the higher ACLs of widow and yellowtail rockfish in 2016. However, based on the analysis above, there are no behavioral patterns that relate to increased bycatch of canary rockfish to targeting of other midwater species. Therefore, the GMT considers what potential options are available to the Council.

Potential Pathways for Solutions

While the rebuilding of canary rockfish will likely resolve the F/V Seeker overage in this instance in 2017 (assuming that the vessel is able to find and purchase the needed quota), this does not resolve the issue that low probability unintentional disaster tows for any IFQ species could occur in the future and be problematic. The Council is therefore tasked with a difficult question whether to take a precautionary or reactionary approach, and to what expense to other priorities.

Vessel limits were designed to prevent over consolidation of the fleet, but can cause significant negative impacts when vessels unintentionally exceed the limits. Accordingly, it could be beneficial for the Council to develop a regulatory mechanism via a two meeting process that would help address these situations. The Council could prioritize this topic now, if desired, or consider it along with the other groundfish workload priorities during the omnibus agenda item in June, or as part of the 5-year review of the trawl IFQ fishery.