

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON FINAL ACTION TO ADOPT FIXED GEAR ELECTRONIC MONITORING ALTERNATIVE AND DEEM WHITING AND FIXED GEAR ELECTRONIC MONITORING REGULATIONS

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) received a briefing on adopting fixed gear (FG) electronic monitoring (EM) alternatives and deeming Pacific whiting and FG EM regulations from Ms. Melissa Hooper, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) West Coast Region (WCR), and Mr. Brett Wiedoff, Council Staff. We offer the following comments and recommendations for the Council on adopting FG EM alternatives:

Video Review Percentage

The Council selected a final preferred alternative (FPA) to use logbooks to estimate discards, with a minimum 10 percent logbook audit level, and an escalation clause for non-compliance. Under the exempted fishing permits (EFPs) however, there has been 100 percent review of all video footage. It is the GMT's understanding that NMFS is recommending the continuance of 100 percent review under the fixed gear EM program, as the agency is still working with vessels and reviewers to improve the quality assurance and quality control (QA/QC) of discard procedures and estimates. There is additional need for further analysis with the potential use of optimized retention in 2016 and beyond. Once more analysis has been completed on the compliance and estimation of discards, NMFS will then examine using a level of review percentage lower than 100 percent. **The GMT supports NMFS' recommendation.**

Retention Requirements: Optimized Retention

In 2014, the Council selected optimized retention as the FPA for the FG fleet. However, under the EFPs, vessels have been operating under maximized retention in 2015. NMFS has stated that they will begin shifting vessels to optimized retention in 2016, but that results from the EFPs will not be available until after the proposed rule is published in June ([Agenda Item F.4.a, NMFS Report, Item 8, Pg. 4](#)). Since it would be confusing and ineffective to have the vessels switch back to maximized retention in 2017, NMFS is proposing to include optimized retention in the regulations and evaluate the results of the EFPs before publishing the final rule. **The GMT supports NMFS' proposal and can comment on the results of the analysis when available.**

Discard Species List and Adjustments

Under optimized retention, vessels will be able to discard all species (individual fishing quota (IFQ), non-IFQ, and protected species), with the exception of salmon. The GMT recognizes that there is very little volume and variety of discard species under the IFQ FG fleet participating in the EM program, as sablefish is the majority of catch. However, the GMT believes that an acceptable discard species list should be carefully considered and potentially developed (if the need arises and based on the results of the 2016 EFPs) to ensure that the species that are allowed to be discarded are identifiable and quantifiable, and not of any conservation or management concern.

NMFS is currently developing the EM proposed rule for June, which includes the discard reporting requirements, and suggested that they could bring back the allowable discard species list at the June Council meeting for GMT review. The GMT appreciates NMFS' offer and **recommends the Council incorporate this review under the NMFS report agenda item. On the selection of the FPA for the discard species list adjustment, the GMT supports Option B, routine management measures, and recommends a mandatory periodic review, perhaps under the omnibus item (in June of the even years) and the GMT can review and comment on any proposed changes at that time.**

Logbooks

The GMT considered how EM discard logbooks fit into existing logbook programs. Currently, all three states have state trawl logbooks. Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) developed a federal discard logbook for use within the EM program (to use as the official record of discards, and compare to video review). Under the EFPs and proposed regulations, only discards of IFQ species must be recorded. While the GMT recognizes that logbooks have limited space, and that there would need to be additional conversations between the states and PSMFC on the ownership of, and access to, the data, **the GMT sees merit in exploring the creation of a single logbook that includes both retained and discarded fish. Furthermore, the GMT recommends that discards of additional protected and non-IFQ species be recorded on the logbooks.** We recognize that these additions may increase the burden on vessel operators; however, the amount of discards are expected to be small and that the data, even self-reported, are very important in consultations on protected species (e.g. green sturgeon and short-tailed albatross) and potentially in the management of some non-IFQ species. The GMT is willing to work with industry and NMFS to develop a prioritized list of species to record on discard logbooks. Due to time limitations at this meeting, we were unable to draft a proposed list.

Pacific Halibut Discard Mortality Rates

In 2014, the Council selected two FPAs for applying Pacific halibut discard mortality rates on FG trips, as there is no on-board observer to assess the condition of released Pacific halibut with EM: Option A, using West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (WCGOP) mortality rates for specific gear type (16 percent for longline, 18 percent for pot), and Option F, using EM specific discard rates upon approval by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC). As Option F is currently still being evaluated in a scientific study, Option A would apply until the method is verified. The GMT sees promise in the Option F method, which would use gear, depth, tow time, and other factors, to determine a discard mortality rate by vessel. **Therefore, the GMT recommends option A and looks forward to the results of the IPHC study and can provide comments on its merits at the time of completion.**

PFMC
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