

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON BAROTRAUMA DEVICE MORTALITY RATES

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) was briefed by Mr. Ken Franke of the Sportfishing Association of California (SAC) on updated information from the cooperative research project involving the NFMS Southwest Region and local fishermen that is presently taking place off Southern California on the 43 Fathom Bank.

In one study last fall, this group deployed 5 acoustic data receivers to record data from sonotags on fish that have been returned to depth by means of descending devices. They descended 9 sonotagged cowcod last fall. Data has been recovered from these acoustic data devices.

This spring, the program installed 17 acoustic data receivers on the bank. The data from these 17 acoustic data receivers should be available in 3 months. During the duration of these two studies, the program has placed sonotags on 20 cowcod and 12 bocaccio. These sonotags send out signals indicating depth and activity (by accelerometer) of released fish. To date, no mortality has been observed for the cowcod released using these descending devices.

The SAC stated expects that this effort will continue to provide data to inform confidence levels regarding the utility of descending devices on cow cod.

The SAC referred to efforts taking place in California to inform the public regarding the existence of descending devices and to increase their popularity and use among the fishing public. This would also increase confidence in the level of use in the recreational fleet. The CPFV fleet in California is now in full utilization mode and will be required to report their use on their daily state trip reports.

Oregon has been using and recording the use of these descending devices for some time. Washington has also rolled out an aggressive program to utilize descending devices in their recreational fisheries.

Mr. John Budrick of the California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife then addressed the GAP. He presented data and recommendations from the GMT. This data was also supportive of the use of descending devices.

While this historical data did not show 100% survival with regard to mortality rates, it still illustrated the effectiveness of the use of these devices, when compared to surface release. The data also demonstrated that Cowcod, Canary and Yelloweye Rockfish have robust physical characteristics that may contribute to reduced mortality rates when recompressed. Even marginal savings are important in restricted fisheries.

The GMT expressed that their concern less about giving credits for use of descending devices, but more about reflecting the true state of the fishery where these devices are being used.

The Gap would like the Council to apply appropriate mortality credits to cases where, fisheries are using descending devices to provide reduction in mortality.

The GAP would like to point out that the use of devices and methods to facilitate recompression of live discards might also aid in the management of some commercial fisheries.

In addition, support for the mandatory possession of these devices on recreational vessels was expressed.

The GAP supports use of descending devices and, relative to mortality credits, agrees with the approach detailed by the GMT in their report.

This subject of the application of credits for successful release in determining management actions was discussed. The GMT has proposed a framework for giving these credits, and has passed on to the Council a range of confidence levels to consider.

The GAP feels that a moderate and progressive approach to confidence levels, reflecting existing favorable data would be productive. The consistent use of conservative buffers in the GMT analysis assures that the risk of underestimating mortality will remain low.

PFMC
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