

## GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON DESCENDING DEVICE MORTALITY IN RECREATIONAL FISHERIES

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) had the opportunity to further review and discuss the GMT report on proposed discard mortality rates for cowcod, canary, and yelloweye rockfish released with descending devices in the recreational fisheries (Agenda Item D.5.b, GMT Report). Additionally, the GMT had a lengthy discussion with the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC).

The GMT report describes how data from current published and ongoing research was used to estimate mortality for cowcod, canary, and yelloweye rockfish that reflect improved survivability of rockfish released with descending devices in recreational fisheries. The final estimates of discard mortality provided in this report benefited from input from the SSC on issues such as: how to handle the limited amount of species-specific estimates of mortality from the studies, the development of buffers to address unaccounted-for mortality, and differences in the study designs.

### **State Implementation Plans**

Council guidance in November was for the states to provide reports outlining implementation that could be reviewed by the GMT and SSC at this meeting, recognizing that the timing of implementation could be different for each state. The GMT had the opportunity to review the California, Washington, and Oregon reports, but had very little time for discussion. The GMT and the SSC discussion focused on issues surrounding the final estimates of mortality, but there was not time to discuss the specifics of the state implementation reports. The GMT recognizes that there may not have been sufficient opportunity to review these reports at this meeting, but that comments could be provided at a future meeting.

In an effort to put the proposed mortality rates into perspective, the GMT used a hypothetical rate of use (based on actual information from the Oregon recreational fishery for May and June of 2012) of descending devices and applied that to depth-specific yelloweye rockfish encounters in Washington and Oregon for 2011, as an example. Table 1 shows estimates of yelloweye rockfish mortality under the range of alternatives being considered by the Council, and the difference from the current surface mortality rates.

It is likely that the difference in mortality for cowcod, canary and yelloweye rockfish resulting from adopting mortality rates reflecting the use of descending devices and the current usage rates, compared to current mortality based on surface release mortalities, will not be sufficient to allow less restrictive management measures. However, it may prevent additional inseason restrictions, including closures, from being necessary. As angler awareness and use of devices increases, some liberalization to current regulations could be considered in the future.

Table 1. Total mortality of yelloweye rockfish under the range of alternatives, using 2011 as an example.

Method	Oregon		Washington	
	Discard Mortality (mt)	Difference from Surface Mortality (mt)	Discard Mortality (mt)	Difference from Surface Mortality (mt)
Surface	1.95	--	2.16	--
Mortality Rate w/ Descending Devices	1.37	0.58	1.51	0.65
Estimate w/ 60% CI	1.40	0.55	1.55	0.61
Estimate w/75% CI	1.42	0.53	1.57	0.59
Estimate w/ 90% CI	1.43	0.52	1.59	0.57
Estimate w/ 95% CI	1.45	0.50	1.60	0.56

**Public Comment**

The GMT received comments from Ken Franke and Michelle Gandola with the Sportfishing Association of California. We appreciate their time and presentation and look forward to the results of their study. The GMT encourages continuation of this study and similar studies to obtain more data on additional depths and species, to inform mortality rates when descending devices are used.

**Additional Considerations**

Currently, a variety of researchers are conducting work on recompression and descending devices, including at deeper depths and with additional species. These studies may also inform or update the current surface mortality rates. The GMT would like the Council to consider when and how new information from these studies will be incorporated into the mortality rates used. The GMT hopes to avoid a process where an update is expected any time new information becomes available or a new study is published. The GMT suggests that mortality estimates could be revisited in the even year of the biennial cycle (also called the off-year), so that any changes would be made in time to be incorporated into recreational projection models for the biennial harvest specifications and management analysis and documentation. However, if there is new information specific to species and/or depths with limited information, the Council would have the freedom to change the timeline.

**GMT Recommendations:**

- 1 **Choose mortality rates for the use of descending devices, using one of the upper confidence intervals to be precautionary.**
- 2 **Consider how and when to incorporate new information into mortality rates.**

PFMC  
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