GROUNDFISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON BIENNIAL MANAGEMENT PROCESS FOR 2013-2014 GROUNDFISH FISHERIES – PART 1

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a presentation from Mr. John DeVore on proposed groundfish harvest specifications for the 2013-14 management cycle. The GAP offers the following comments and recommendations on proposed 2013-14 harvest specifications.

Overfished Species Annual Catch Limits

The GAP reviewed Attachment 4 and recommends the following annual catch limits (ACLs) and annual catch targets (ACTs) for 2013 and 2014.

Bocaccio

The potential of a large 2010 bocaccio year class recruiting into the fishery could disrupt recreational and nearshore commercial fisheries in California. Therefore, the GAP recommends a relatively larger ACL to mitigate the potential of a fishery disruption. Also, given the management uncertainty managing bocaccio impacts in the recreational fishery, the GAP recommends an ACT be specified to accommodate this uncertainty. Specifically, the GAP recommends maintaining the spawning potential ratio (SPR) harvest rate of 77.7 percent in the current bocaccio rebuilding plan, which provides 2013 and 2014 ACLs of 320 mt and 337 mt, respectively (i.e., ACL alternative 4 in Attachment 4). The GAP also believes it is prudent to specify bocaccio ACTs that are lower than these ACLs with the specific purpose of allowing the ACT to be exceeded to avoid disruption of California recreational and nearshore commercial fisheries in the event there is a strong recruitment event.

Canary Rockfish

The GAP understands that the canary rebuilding plan will have to be amended based on the new assessment and rebuilding analysis. The GAP stresses the importance of having adequate canary yield since the available harvest of canary dictates how constrained all groundfish fisheries will be. Specifically, the GAP requests a canary ACL high enough to increase the allocation to all groundfish sectors to access target species in their fisheries.

Canary is a particularly constraining species for all sectors. For trawl, the amount of canary caught in 2011 in the trawl individual quota fishery is a poor indication of the needs of the fleet, since fishermen have been avoiding canary for fear of exceeding their quota. This results in a significant amount of shelf species going unharvested due to the risk of any canary interaction. An increase in canary will allow more flexibility for the fleet, thereby also increasing the success of the Trawl Individual Quota program.

Fixed-gear and nearshore fishermen also will benefit from an increase in canary as well, simply to maintain their current level of fishing due to the rebuilding paradox.

In the recreational sector, particularly in northern California and Oregon, charter, party and private boat operators have been subjected to time and area closures, resulting in shorter seasons and fewer fishing trips. This has a direct effect on charter and party boat businesses in the form of fewer customers, higher costs due to increased changes in fishing operations and other related business decisions.

The current SPR harvest rate of 88.7 percent in the canary rebuilding plan (see ACL alternative 4 in Attachment 4) gives a false indications of meeting the needs of fishing communities, primarily due to avoidance measures by the trawl fleet (see recent total mortality reports and NMFS' IFQ tracking reports), as discussed above. The GAP notes the higher ACLs under ACL alternative 5 in Attachment 4 (SPR = 85.9 percent, 2013 and 2014 ACLs of 147 mt and 151 mt, respectively) is predicted to rebuild the stock in the same year (2030) as ACL alternative 4, which maintains the status quo SPR harvest rate. This will allow greater flexibility for all fishing sectors.

Cowcod

The GAP has no recommendation to change the cowcod ACL. The GAP would reiterate their arguments under Amendment 16-5 for a 4 mt cowcod ACL, but declines to do so given the reluctance of NMFS to adopt this specification and rebuilding plan.

Darkblotched Rockfish

The GAP recommends maintaining the current darkblotched rebuilding plan as the new assessment and rebuilding analysis indicates rebuilding progress is on track and is, in fact, ahead of schedule. To that end, the GAP recommends darkblotched ACL alternative 2 in Attachment 4 (2013 and 2014 ACLs of 317 mt and 330 mt, respectively) since it will likely meet the needs of the trawl fleet and fishing communities. The GAP understands the 2009 and 2010 darkblotched optimum yields were exceeded by a slight margin, which compels an evaluation of accountability measures. The GAP notes that implementation of trawl rationalization with 100 percent observer coverage on all trawl efforts and the accountability afforded by IFQ management provides the strongest accountability possible and removes the uncertainty associated with projecting and managing trawl impacts under the old system prior to rationalization.

Pacific Ocean Perch

The GAP has serious concerns about the Pacific ocean perch (POP) rebuilding plan given that it is unlikely that any management action on the west coast will affect stock rebuilding. The POP stock is distributed well north of the west coast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) through the Gulf of Alaska, the Bering Sea and even off the coast of Japan. The higher harvests occurring in fisheries north of the west coast EEZ will likely drive stock rebuilding regardless of any west coast rebuilding strategy. Nevertheless, the GAP recommends maintaining the current level of harvest, which most closely corresponds to ACL alternative 15 in Attachment 4 (i.e., 2013 and 2014 ACLs of 182 mt and 186 mt, respectively). Further, the GAP recommends no ACT be specified for POP since the trawl rationalization program provides the best inseason accountability of catch possible.

Petrale sole

The GAP recommends maintaining the petrale sole rebuilding plan (i.e., ACL alternative 5 in Attachment 4). The GAP notes that the petrale stock is predicted to reach the rebuilding target in 2013, which is three years in advance of the target rebuilding year and the ACLs under alternative 5 meet the needs of fishing communities.

Yelloweye rockfish

The GAP recommends maintaining the target year in the current yelloweye rebuilding plan (2074), which is consistent with ACL alternative 7 in Attachment 4 (i.e., 21 mt in 2013 and 2014). Further, since there is greater management uncertainty in predicting and managing yelloweye impacts in recreational fisheries, an ACT should be established for this stock. Specifically, the GAP recommends an 18 mt ACT (see ACL alternative 6 in Attachment 4), which corresponds with the 76 percent SPR harvest rate in the current yelloweye rebuilding plan.

Summary of GAP-preferred alternatives for overfished species

Species	2012 ACL	GAP-preferred alternative (from Attachment 4)	SPR rate from preferred alternative	2013 ACL (mt)	2014 ACL (mt)	ACT?
Bocaccio	274	Alt. 4	77.7%	320	337	Yes, to be determined
Canary	107	Alt. 5	85.9%	147	151	No
Cowcod	3	(GAP-preferred alternative according to Amendment 16-5 under previous council discussion)		4	4	No
Darkblotched	296	Alt. 2	64.9%	317	330	No
POP	183	Alt. 15	83.9%	182	186	No
Petrale sole	1,160	Alt. 5	25-5 rule	2,592	2,652	No
Yelloweye	17	Alt. 7	72.7%	21	21	Yes: 18 mt; Alt. 6, which corresponds to current 76% SPR

Non-overfished Species Annual Catch Limits

The GAP recommends setting ACLs for non-overfished species equal to the preliminary preferred acceptable biological catch (ABC) specifications decided in September. The GAP notes that a very conservative ABC was decided for sablefish, which obviates the need for more precautionary ACLs. The GAP also understands the SSC is endorsing the new widow rockfish assessment, which indicates the stock has been successfully rebuilt. The SSC is also noting that there is greater scientific uncertainty in estimating the widow OFL relative to all other category 1 stocks. This has led to the SSC recommending a higher sigma of 0.41 for deciding the widow rockfish ABC, which addresses this higher uncertainty. Therefore, the GAP believes setting the ACL equal to the more precautionary ABC is adequately precautionary.

Regarding sablefish and spiny dogfish, the ABCs for which were proposed based on P* values of 0.33 and 0.3, respectively, the GAP would prefer to maintain the status quo ABC and

corresponding ACL calculations based on the P* values for those species on their respective categories (Category 1 and 2, respectively). These categories were based on the best available science.

The sablefish stock assessment-related scientific data is robust – therefore making it a Category 1 species. At the same time, sablefish is of huge importance to the West Coast fishing industry. To introduce a precautionary P* value contrary to existing policy for Category 1 species is premature and erodes the confidence of the industry in the Council's establishment of such a policy. Instead, the GAP suggests keeping the P* value of 0.45, as is used in other Category 1 stocks, in place and using another mechanism, such as an ACT or other management measures in the specifications process, to be precautionary in light of the recent stock assessment concerns.

Similarly, the spiny dogfish P* values should be treated the same. Spiny dogfish is a Category 2 species but the GAP suggests the Council use other management measure to determine appropriate precautionary levels for ACLs.

PFMC
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