

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON THE
MID-WATER SPORT FISHERY

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the Mr. John Holloway proposal (Agenda Item F.3.c) and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife letter (Agenda Item F.3.b). The GMT would like to thank Mr. Holloway for meeting with the team and answering our questions.

The GMT attempted to focus our comments in this report on the Council action listed in the situation summary: *Provide guidance on the development of a mid-water recreational fishery including whether regulations should be coastwide or Oregon only.* The GMT is not providing comments on the technical merits of the proposal itself, or the proposed fishery, in this report.

Is there enough information to proceed with the scoping of a mid-water recreational fishery?

Mr. Holloway's proposal relies on information collected during an exempted fishing permit (EFP) in 2009 and 2011. The primary purpose of the EFP was to test gear designed to avoid yelloweye rockfish. All trips occurred on observed charter vessels in Oregon, with full retention of all rockfish caught. Under the EFP, several trips occurred within the Stonewall Bank Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Area (YRCA), a known yelloweye rockfish hot spot, with minimal yelloweye rockfish encounters. In the two years combined, there was a total of 0.004 mt (or 4 kg) of yelloweye rockfish out of the 5.2 mt of total rockfish caught under the EFPs. In contrast, there was 1.0 mt of canary rockfish caught.

The GMT sees the potential benefit of implementing this proposal into regulation. Although it's difficult to estimate how many recreational anglers might participate in this fishery, adding new fishing opportunities in deeper water might take pressure off nearshore areas, and potentially vulnerable nearshore species, that are impacted under current regulations.

If there is enough information to proceed, should the mid-water recreational fishery be just in Oregon, or include other areas?

The EFP was conducted onboard observed charter vessels off of Oregon. Thirty two of the thirty four trips occurred out of Newport, Depoe Bay, and Garibaldi. Only two of the trips occurred out of ports south of Newport therefore, there is limited information from southern Oregon. There was an EFP using similar gear off of California that targeted chilipepper rockfish; however it was conducted in deeper water than what will likely be fished under this proposed fishery. The GMT is not aware of a similar EFP or any other research of this type off of Washington. Therefore there are no data to inform potential impacts to target and overfished species outside of Oregon.

The EFP was conducted on observed charter vessels; no private vessels participated in the EFP. Therefore, there is no direct information to predict impacts to target and overfished species for

private vessels. It is also difficult to predict the effort that might result from this fishery. Part of the EFP was a bag limit of 15 rockfish, versus the seven rockfish bag limit in state regulations at the time of the EFP. All rockfish were required to be retained during the EFP, including canary and yelloweye rockfish. If this proposal were to be implemented, all regulations, other than the allowable depth, would be the same as the regular recreational fishery. This may not provide the same incentives as the EFP.

When considering whether or not the fishery could be expanded to other areas, the GMT discussed the difficulty with examining this proposal as a stand-alone management measure outside of analysis of other management measure analysis that will occur under the 2015-2016 biennial harvest specification and management measure analysis. The GMT discussed the benefits of a stepwise approach that would allow the proposal to be implemented in Oregon where there may be stakeholder interest, with the opportunity to consider expansion into other areas at a later time after more information becomes available.

Additional consideration

The GMT also discussed ideas for implementing the proposal in a way that addresses concerns with monitoring and reporting under a management structure outside of the requirements of the EFP. One idea was to allow the fishery for charter vessels only where onboard observers could track discards. The GMT also discussed the possibility of short openers, perhaps two-weeks at a time, where catch information could be synthesized prior to the next two-week opening. Something like this could prevent the overfished species harvest guidelines, like canary and yelloweye rockfish, from being exceeded if bycatch in the new fishery is much higher than observed during the EFP. However, these concepts would add a layer of management, regulatory, and enforcement complexities that may outweigh the benefits of the fishery.

The GMT believes there is enough information to continue the scoping process, if the Council chooses.

PFMC
06/21/13