

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
SEABIRD AVOIDANCE REGULATIONS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a presentation on the preliminary Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for measures to minimize the take of short-tailed albatross in the Pacific Coast Groundfish fisheries from Ms. Gretchen Hanshew. The Draft EA provides two options, status quo and alternative 2.2, which is similar to seabird avoidance restrictions adopted by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. The proposed restrictions would affect longline vessels 55 feet and longer off California, Oregon and Washington. The GAP recommends adoption of alternative 2.2. The GAP had the following suggested changes.

1. On page 24 of the Council handout, which is titled, Appendix A-Draft Regulations, under, C. Seabird Avoidance requirements, part iv says, “Ensure that baited hooks sink as soon as possible as they are put in the water.” The GAP suggest that the wording be, “ensure that baited hooks are submerged by the time the gear gets to the end of the tori line.”

Explanation for the change in wording. The sablefish fishery off California, Oregon and Washington at times uses floats on the gear to avoid “slime eel” depredation. Therefore, baits leaving the stern of the vessel may not sink immediately, but should be at the appropriate depth by the time the gear passes the end of the tori line.

2. Due to the many designs of fishing vessels the GAP recommends that the regulations provide a process on a case by case basis by which a operator can request a variance in design and or deployment of the bird avoidance gear in order to address safety concerns or to meet the intent of the regulation. The GAP believes the strict 300 foot length of the tori lines may not work for all vessel designs.

Finally, the GAP was informed that the draft regulations in the EA are consistent with Alaska region regulations. However, it appears to the GAP that regulatory language in the draft EA does not appear in Alaska Regional regulations. For example, regulations requiring specific vessel operator action for the handling of hooked albatross (page 25 of the draft EA) do not appear consistent with Alaska regulations. The GAP request clarification about how regulations in the draft EA differ from the Alaska region and where different, explain what is the rationale for the difference.