

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
SEABIRD AVOIDANCE REGULATIONS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) recommends National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Alternative number 4 for adoption to minimize the take of short tailed albatross. This option incorporates Alternative 2 minus provisions to sink baited hooks quickly and control offal discharge. The exact threshold for a rough water exemption would be determined through the rulemaking process. The GAP recommends a rough water exemption when the weather reaches a 35 knot wind force which is considered a gale force wind. The exemption in Alaska is at 45 knots which is a storm force wind. Alternative 4, makes a distinction between snap-on gear and traditional longline gear, in that all vessels over 55 feet and using traditional longline gear would use two tory lines while a snap on vessel of 55 feet or longer would use a single tory line.

The safety concerns of the fleet when deploying tory lines occurs when there are strong winds which cause the tory lines to foul with the out-going ground line. The tory lines can break and snap back at the crew setting gear. The crew, when setting the tory lines, often deploys the lines from on top of the bait house and in rough seas this can become a safety concern. Another reason for a 35 knot exemption as opposed to the 45 knot exemption in Alaska is that the vessels that fish off Washington, Oregon and California tend to be of a smaller size class than those in Alaska.

The operators do not generally want to fish in weather with winds greater than 35 knots. However, a trip for sablefish can last up to seven days. The weather when leaving port may be fine but there can be days during the fishing trip when the weather exceeds 35 knots. Once a vessel has taken fuel and provisions it may fish through these blows and that is when an exemption may be needed.

PFMC
11/02/13