

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON
GROUND FISH OBSERVER PROGRAM

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) spent a considerable amount of time in debate on observer programs, their design, their coverage, their cost, how they are paid for, and what objectives they seek to achieve. A wide variety of opinions were expressed. Ultimately, the GAP agreed the draft observer program package should be adopted for public review.

The key to establishing a West Coast observer program is adequate funding to pay for it. Given the current state of affairs, the industry simply cannot afford to pay the entire cost of an observer program. The GAP was influenced in their decision on the observer program package by their understanding that this package constitutes the report to Congress on observers which was required by the Fiscal Year 2000 Commerce Appropriations Bill. Absence of that report has had a serious adverse impact on efforts to obtain funding for an observer program. Better communication between NMFS and the industry on this issue would have greatly facilitated work on getting the necessary funding to begin implementing an observer program.

Considering the costs of an observer program, the GAP strongly suggests that additional - or if necessary, alternative - means be used to provide better information on total fisheries mortality. In particular, the GAP recommends that displaced fishermen be trained and hired to serve as observers. The practical knowledge available to such men and women will be of great use in an observer program.

The GAP also again urges the Council and NMFS to move forward with a program involving landing of trip limit overages. The GAP has recommended this several times and the Council has already approved - but never implemented - a voluntary pilot project. Given the difficulty in obtaining funding for an observer program, a requirement to land overages may be the best interim means to get better information.

PFMC
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