

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON
ADOPTION OF ROCKFISH BYCATCH ESTIMATE AND
INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS IN RELEVANT FISHERIES

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) solicited anecdotal information on rockfish bycatch from its members and others in the audience. Discussions provided the following:

- Regulations adopted for 2000 are causing major changes in fishing strategies.
- The new regulations have compounded problems in estimating bycatch.
- Limited entry vessels are not bumping up against trip limits, indicating bycatch is minimal.
- Some limited entry vessels are encountering occasional overages, but these vary by area and depth fished and cannot be rationally spread across the entire fishery in a "one-size-fits-all" pattern.
- Processors report low landings of rockfish, indicating lack of targeting.
- Open access vessels have largely converted to the live fish market; since dead fish tend to be discarded, it is impossible to estimate the level of bycatch.
- Recreational vessels encounter occasional undersize fish, which are discarded, but the recreational fleet has also developed new strategies (including changes in fishing depth) to comply with more restrictive regulations.

In summary, the GAP believes the combination of new regulations (including closures and emphasis on deep water fishing during the first two months of the year) and the lack of hard data on landings makes it impossible to estimate bycatch levels at this time. The Council should reconsider this issue in June when more data are available.

PFMC
04/04/00