

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON INSEASON PROGRESS AND ADJUSTMENTS

Early reports from the 2000 fishery have identified several issues requiring minor adjustments to the management framework initiated this year. Regarding the assignment of *Sebastes* species to the minor rockfish sub-groups, industry has requested that redbanded rockfish be shifted from the shelf to the slope sub-group, in order to reduce discard associated with large footrope fishing for slope species. The GMT supports this adjustment. The GMT and GAP also discussed the appropriate sub-group assignment for flag rockfish. Reports of incidental catch of flag rockfish were reported in slope fisheries as far north as Oregon. Further investigation by the GMT has led us to believe that the primary range of flag rockfish is from Baja to Ft. Bragg, and between 15 and 100 fathoms. As a result, the GMT does not support re-assignment of flag rockfish from the shelf to slope sub-group at this time. Additionally, while POP was assigned to the minor slope rockfish subgroup in the area south of 40°10', the individual cumulative limit for POP was specified as a coastwide limit. The GMT recommends that this limit be restated to apply only to the area north of 40°10'.

The last issue involves incidental catch of English sole when fishing with large footropes for slope species. The GMT and GAP worked together last fall to try and identify and accommodate these kinds of cases, and recommended special provisions for petrale and Rex soles. English sole was not specifically addressed at that time, however, and there have been reports of small amounts of English that have had to be discarded when they have been caught with large footropes while fishing for slope species. At this time, the GMT feels that the safest way to reduce this discard, without creating an opportunity to target English sole with large footrope gear on the shelf, would be to provide an allowance when large footrope gear is onboard of 400 lb per trip of all flatfish species where retention is not specifically allowed with large footrope gear.

Inseason progress

Through February this year, the only fishery with landings approximate last year's rate is the DTS fishery. Landings through February were slightly higher than last year for all four species, and it appears as though landings through March will be very close to last years. Widow rockfish is the only other species with significant landings and those are running about 30-40% of 1999. However, the 3-month first period in the 1999 fishery stimulated much higher widow landings in 1999 than in previous years.

The QSM system reports very little tonnage of near-shore rockfish has been landed though March, in either limited entry or open access. And although these commercial non-trawl fisheries have always been subject to a high degree of seasonality, it appears unlikely that the current limits will encourage sufficient participation to fully utilize these commercial allocations. When the current limits were recommended in November, there was a clear need to reduce landings significantly. Those recommendations were based on the conservative assumption that the number of participants fishing for the new smaller limits would remain the same. Obviously, there is a relationship between the amount of limit that is offered and the number of participants that will be drawn to that opportunity. However, we are not in a position to quantify that relationship at this time. It does appear that current limits have shut down effort, to a significant degree. What is not clear is how quickly that effort would be drawn back into the fishery with higher limits.

The GMT recommends implementing cautious increases in near-shore limits beginning in May. The fishery response to the increases will be evaluated in June, and provided that participation remains below the level modeled last fall, further increases would be recommended beginning in July. Recommended nearshore-rockfish limits beginning in May are shown in the table below, acknowledging that black rockfish limits are the focus of agenda item B.8. Any of these increases runs some risk of accelerating the fisheries to the point where they would need to be closed before the end of the year. But this risk may be preferable to continuing limits which provide very little opportunity for profitable trips. Higher limits could be implemented in May, but with the understanding that the likelihood of early closure would increase.

The daily-trip-limit (DTL) fisheries for sablefish also appear to be running a bit behind. Higher rockfish limits may stimulate more trips on which sablefish would also be landed. However, it is probably

reasonable to consider increasing the monthly caps in both the LE and OA fisheries, as shown below, beginning in May, with evaluation in June.

GMT recommendations for May 1 cumulative limit changes.

Fishery	Area	Old limit	Proposed new limit, May 1
Limited entry Near-shore rockfish (fixed-gear)			
	North	2,400 lb / 2 months (max 1,200 non-black/blue)	3,000 lb / 2 months (max 1,400 non-black/blue)
	South	1,000 lb / 2 months	1,300 lb / 2 months
Open access Near-shore rockfish			
	North	1,000 lb / 2 months (max 500 non-black/blue)	1,500 lb / 2 months (max 700 non-black/blue)
	South	550 lb / 2 months	800 lb / 2 months
LE + OA Daily-Trip-Limit sablefish			
	N of 36	2,100 lb / 2 months	2,400 lb / 2 months

QSM also suggests that the current limited-entry limits for the shelf rockfish sub-group will result in landings that are well below the current allocation. However, the purpose of the shelf sub-group limits was to accommodate rockfish bycatch in the shelf flatfish fisheries without encouraging targeting that could undermine rebuilding efforts for bocaccio, canary, and lingcod. If the current landings pattern continues the GMT will explore available mechanisms for providing higher bycatch allowances of shelf rockfish when vessels are fishing for flatfish.