

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON
THE STATUS OF FISHERIES AND INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS

Inseason Progress

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed a summary of the soft data for landings by the limited-entry and open-access fleets through February and by all vessels combined through March 17. By the end of March, the limited-entry fleet is expected to have taken one-quarter to one-third of its allocations for four species: Dover sole, widow and yellowtail rockfish, and shortspine thornyheads. The first three species (except for Dover sole south of 40°10') have planned reductions of at least 50% in cumulative limits scheduled to occur beginning May 1. As a result, the GMT has no recommended changes in scheduled cumulative limits for the limited-entry fleet, based on limit attainment. Yellowtail and widow rockfish are currently scheduled for limit increases during portions of the September-December period. We will report at the June meeting on the advisability of implementing these increases. Although bocaccio landings during the first three months are running ahead of this time last year, they still represent less than 20% of the limited-entry allocation. We will continue to monitor this situation, and will recommend appropriate action in June.

The open-access fishery has two species of potential concern at this time: Near-shore rockfish south of 40°10' and canary rockfish. The open-access fleet has a canary allocation of just 5 mt, and landings through March are likely to be close to 2 mt. Although the GMT is not recommending any changes relative to canary at this time, we will attempt to ascertain the species with which canary are being caught, and report back to the Council in June. Landings in the southern near-shore *Sebastes* sub-group through March will comprise more than one-quarter of the allocation. Several factors suggest a reduction in this limit may be appropriate: other near-shore species such as cabezon and greenling are under more restrictive management by the State of California than in the past, and this may be increasing the effort directed towards the rockfish species; effort in this fishery usually increases during the summer months; the industry has conveyed the importance of opportunities for these species during winter months, in order to access more lucrative seasonal markets. We believe that **lowering the open-access Southern Near-shore rockfish cumulative limit from 1,800 lb per two-months to 1,200 lb per two-months, beginning May 1**, will afford a much higher likelihood of extending this fishery through the end of the year.

Other recommendations

Limited-entry northern flatfish

The GMT considered three other issues for possible recommendations during this meeting. The first concerns limits for flatfish species north of 40°10' following April. At previous Council meetings, the GMT conveyed its intention to review available logbook information relative to managing this fishery and potential canary bycatch. Staff from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife have provided generous assistance to the GMT in developing this analysis. Although the analysis is not complete at this time, examination of the general locations of trawl tows for arrowtooth flounder and other flatfish during the May-October period confirms that the fleet did relocate their activities in 2000 away from the areas of highest canary bycatch identified from the 1998-99 seasons, when canary limits were higher. Based on preliminary results from the analysis, the GMT recommends changing the current limits for flatfish other than Dover sole north of 40°10' during May-June. The current small-footrope limit would allow up to 30,000 lb per month during these months. Our recommendation is for a **small-footrope limit of 50,000 of flatfish other than Dover sole, no more than 15,000 lb of which can be petrale sole, and no more than 10,000 lb of which may be arrowtooth flounder**. We believe that this alternative is more conservative, with respect to canary bycatch than allowing all 30,000 lb of the current limit to be landed as either petrale or arrowtooth. We also hope that it provides a balance set of opportunities for the diverse group of fishers pursuing these species, however we acknowledge that it will not accommodate a directed arrowtooth fishery during these months. It is our

intent to refine the logbook analysis in the coming months, and evaluate the potential for a concentrated July-August arrowtooth fishery, as well as alternatives for the entire northern flatfish fishery following June.

In an effort to provide some additional arrowtooth opportunity and encourage pursuit of Dover sole on the slope rather than the shelf during May, we recommend that the reduction of the **large-footrope arrowtooth allowance**, from 20,000 lb per trip to 5,000 per trip, be phased in, allowing **15,000 lb per trip in May** and 5,000 lb per trip from June to October.

Northern Near-shore Rockfish

During the 2000 fishery, over 50% of the available commercial allocations of Near-shore rockfish went unharvested. As illustrated in Table 1, the limited-entry fleet took only 19% of its target poundage. One contributing factor to this situation is that limited-entry vessels using open-access line gear (those other than fixed longline) are constrained to the lower open-access limits. The current difference in limits is shown in Table 2. Raising the open-access limits to provide more opportunity for limited-entry fishers to utilize other gears would likely result in early closure of the open-access fishery.

	Landed mt	Target mt	% Utilized
Limited entry	32	172	19%
Open access	142	193	74%
Total	174	365	48%

The GMT considered alternatives for managing access to these species, that could benefit most, if not all current participants. Under unusual circumstances, the Council has previously chosen to manage the sablefish daily-trip-limit fishery, for a period, by pooling the limited-entry and open-access amounts, and applying similar limits in both fisheries. In a similar manner, the GMT is presenting the Council with an alternative management proposal for this fishery, that would rely upon managing to a single Near-shore target, across both fisheries, with initial limits as indicated at the bottom of Table 2. This change would be viewed as an experiment intended to allow full utilization of this allocation. Maintaining the current differential caps on species other than black or blue rockfish, was intended to serve as additional protection for the species most commonly associated with the live-fish fishery.

	Overall 2-month cum. limit	Cap on species other than black or blue rockfish
Current		
Limited entry fixed-gear	10,000 lb	4,000 lb
Open access	3,000 lb	900 lb
Proposed for joint management		
Limited entry fixed-gear	7,000 lb	4,000 lb
Open access	7,000 lb	900 lb

Salmon bycatch of yellowtail rockfish

The GMT received a request from representatives of the Washington salmon troll fishery to consider increasing the retention of yellowtail rockfish while fishing for salmon. The GMT is neither promoting nor opposing such a change. The following discussion is intended to provide the Council with guidance on limit changes the GMT could support, should the Council wish to take action on this issue.

The current open-access limit for yellowtail rockfish is 100 lb per month. Analysis of landings data from 1997-99 reveals an average of 50-75 lb of yellowtail for all troll salmon landings where yellowtail were present. Many of the individual trips contained more than 100 lb yellowtail rockfish. The vast majority of salmon troll landings during this period contained no yellowtail rockfish. The data reveal that at least 85% of the yellowtail rockfish bycatch in this fishery were landed on trips where they represented less than 50% of the salmon poundage in the landing. Assuming an average salmon weight that is four times that for yellowtail rockfish, **the GMT would support allowing up to two yellowtail rockfish per salmon in a troll landing, with a monthly cumulative limit of 300 lb.** This 300 lb limit would not be additive with the existing 100 lb open-access limit. The GMT examined correlations between yellowtail and canary rockfish in salmon troll landings. While there is co-occurrence, the correlation is not particularly strong. We believe that a 300 lb monthly cap on salmon troll landings will allow most existing yellowtail rockfish bycatch to be landed in this fishery, without providing significant additional incentive to target yellowtail, thereby placing canary at greater risk. The per-trip requirements would also prevent individuals who do not routinely catch much yellowtail with their salmon from making yellowtail-directed trips at the end of a month.

Review of experimental delivery options in the 2000 sablefish daily-trip-limit fishery

During the last months of the 2000 season, the Council implemented an alternative in this fishery that allowed one landing per week, up to a higher poundage than the usual 300-lb daily limit. The GMT indicated it would review the consequences of this option, and report back to the Council regarding re-institution of this option. Due to the fact that complete fishticket data for 2000 were not available until very recently, our analysis of these impacts is not available at this meeting. We intend to provide that review to the Council and the industry for consideration in June.