

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON  
FUTURE GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT PROCESS AND SCHEDULE

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) met with Council Executive Director Don McIsaac and NOAA General Counsel Eileen Cooney to discuss changes in the groundfish management process.

GAP members agreed the current process is unworkable, and changes could be made to promote efficiency and allow better decision-making.

After considerable discussion, the GAP endorsed the 3-meeting process which begins adoption of annual specifications at the June Council meeting. While some concern was expressed about the continued short time frame to allow discussion of regulatory measures between September and November, the GAP agreed this cost was less than the loss of current scientific data which would result from adoption of a 4-meeting process. Fisheries are already being managed on the basis of data which is from 4 to 6 years old; the GAP believes that adding another year will put us even more out of sync between stock assessments and current reality.

On the issue of 1 year versus 2 year management cycles, the GAP would support a 2-year cycle if several issues and questions are addressed, as follows:

1. Which cycle do Council staff and NMFS think will provide them with the greatest benefits in terms of workload and answering pressing scientific questions?
2. Will a 2-year cycle provide the opportunity for the Council to evaluate the effectiveness of existing regulations? As the GAP has noted on several previous occasions, there is concern that regulations keep changing without allowing adequate time to determine if existing regulations are doing the job. This evaluation is extremely important.
3. What will be the trigger for making changes in the 2-year cycle? Will that trigger take into account increased abundance as well as declines? Who pulls the trigger?
4. Will use of a 2-year cycle require additional "precautionary" reductions at the beginning of the 2-year period, or can we presume that regulations will follow their normal course?
5. Will the 2-year cycle gain us anything in terms of time, efficiency, workload, or knowledge, or will we still wind up dealing with frequent changes?

In regard to the groundfish season start date, the GAP sees no reason at this time to change from January to a later date. A late start can have adverse consequences for small boat fisheries that take place in the summer and for those fisheries that have been pushed into the winter months to reduce bycatch of sensitive species. The GAP recommends the fishery continue to begin on January 1st.