

DRAFT

Open Access Fishery Problem Statement

The great majority of groundfish stocks are now fully harvested by domestic fishermen in the Pacific coast groundfish fishery. Recent changes in the Magnuson Stevens Act coupled with new information indicating much lower productivity for many groundfish species has resulted in the determination that several stocks are overfished. Expectations of future productivity of most groundfish have been lowered along with estimated optimum yields. The Council has determined that the groundfish fishery is overcapitalized and a Groundfish Strategic Plan calls for more than a 50% reduction in fishing effort. Further, there is a general level of excess harvest capacity existing in most West Coast and North Pacific fishing fleets (e.g., shrimp, crab, halibut, salmon, etc).

At present, we need to clarify the purpose of any new limited entry program and identify a target fleet within the open access fisheries that would fall into a restricted access program. The open access fishery is composed of a diversity of non-limited entry fishers. Some fishers participate in more than one fishery while others are solely dependent on the groundfish fishery as an income source. Others occasionally land incidental catches of groundfish taken with other gears such as shrimp trawl and salmon troll. Recently, strong market incentives for groundfish (e.g., live and fresh fish markets) have encouraged participation by fixed gear/hook and line limited entry and open access fishers even though groundfish trip limits have been severely restrained. A large number of recent participants participate in nearshore fisheries for groundfish, but only land a small amount of fish on an annual basis. Additional restrictions are anticipated as more species are broken out of the nearshore rockfish and other groundfish groups with separate optimum yield (OY) targets and management measures. There is not much opportunity for the development of new fisheries given the constraints on the current fisheries to reduce bycatch of overfished stocks.

A plan for bringing open access fishers under a limited entry program is needed to reduce overall capacity directed towards groundfish. Without incorporating open access users into a limited entry and capacity reduction program, allocation issues will become more acute and additional, more restrictive, measures will be needed to prevent overharvest of critical stocks and to minimize discard.