

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON
AMENDMENT 17 (MULTI-YEAR) MANAGEMENT

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a presentation on the draft of Amendment 17 which would establish a multi-year management system. The GAP acknowledges the work done by Ms. Yvonne de Reynier of the Northwest Region on preparing the draft.

The GAP endorses the concept of multi-year management, as it will provide more time for Council consideration of important science and management matters that now often are put aside to accomplish the task of setting harvest levels and management measures every year. The reduction in Council family workload will benefit fisheries conservation and management by allowing more in-depth analysis of important issues.

In regard to the options presented, the GAP endorses Alternative 3, which provides for a 3-meeting groundfish management process, but continues the start date of the fishing season as January 1st. The GAP believes that a sub-option of the alternative should also be considered which would provide for an additional meeting date - perhaps in February - to prevent overlap between salmon and groundfish issues at the April meeting.

The primary reason for supporting Alternative 3 involves continuation of the January 1st start date. A May start date - as proposed in Alternative 4, would seriously disrupt fisheries that begin in April, such as the whiting fishery and the fixed gear tier sablefish fishery. A May date may also cause problems for tribal fisheries.

While March 1st might appear as a reasonable alternative and was supported by one member of the public testifying at the GAP, it was rejected for a variety of reasons. First, business planning is currently centered around the January 1st start date and has been for many years. There is enough instability in the fishery without creating further problems for business planning. Second, safety may be an important factor, especially as vessels attempt to finish up their available limits. January and February can be some of the worst weather months on the West Coast and having only these months available to finish fishing for the management cycle would pose a significant burden on vessels not capable of withstanding the weather.

Third, a March 1st start date could cause market disruptions for both processors and fishermen. Plants that process Dungeness crab see their heaviest activity in mid-December, January, and early February. Often, plants are forced to put groundfish vessels on limits simply in order to handle product flow. Again, if vessels are trying to finish out their management "year" in January and February, they may find themselves hampered by lack of markets.

Fourth, a March 1st start date could discriminate against vessels that have permits for both groundfish and crab. With a January start, such vessels can forgo groundfish in January to fish crab and make up their groundfish "loss" by fishing the rest of the year. With a March start, the time that losses are being made up coincides with the crab season when groundfish is usually foregone.

Finally, the GAP briefly examined the pros and cons of having an optimum yield that begins on January 1st of the first year and extends through December 31st of the second year, versus having identical optimum yields for each of the two years in the management cycle. The GAP was unable to reach consensus on this issue in the time available and recommends that both options be put forward for public review and analysis.

PFMC
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