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## GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM (GMT) REPORT ON INSEASON STATUS OF THE GROUND FISH FISHERY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT CHANGES

The GMT has reviewed the inseason status of fisheries landings and identified two areas of major concern: bocaccio and darkblotched rockfish. As of June 8, commercial landings of bocaccio reported to PacFIN total 21 mt. Although this is slightly ahead of a pace for year-end attainment of the commercial harvest guideline, the greater problem is presented by estimated recreational landings. Through the first two 2-month waves of 2002, RecFIN estimates that about 60 mt have been taken. This amount is higher than the harvest guideline set aside for recreational for the entire year. It also reflects only two months of opportunity for fishing outside of 20 fm in each of the areas north and south of Pt. Conception. The accuracy of the RecFIN estimates for the charter boat sector were evaluated by California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) staff, using state charter boat logbook submissions. The review concluded that, at this time, the RecFIN estimate could not be rejected. As a consequence, the GMT anticipates that by the end of June not only will the OY have been exceeded, but landings will have approached, if not exceeded, the ABC. Since removals in excess of the ABC constitute "overfishing", the GMT believes it is critical to address all sources of bocaccio fishing mortality as quickly as possible.

As a result, for the area south of 40°10', the GMT has several recommendations for actions beginning July 1, and we have attempted to identify other depth-based alternatives that we would support implementing as soon as practicable. From the advice we have received, implementing a depth-based approach would require a 2-meeting process, which would imply the earliest implementation date would be October 1. With the exception of the DTS and slope rockfish species, the GMT recommends that retention of groundfish species be prohibited for all trawl gear (including exempted trawl). Trawl survey depth distributions for sablefish Dover sole and bocaccio are provided in Figure 1. Discussions with the GAP also indicated that these fisheries occur in depths where bocaccio are not encountered. Additionally, we recommend re-instituting the 22" size limit for trawl sablefish that has been used in previous years, to provide further encouragement for the fishery to occur at depths beyond the bocaccio range. Limits for slope would be reduced beginning September 1 to 1,800 lb per 2-months between 40°10' and 36° rockfish for all gears, and to 15,000 lb per 2-months south of 36° for trawl and fixed gear, with equivalent limits for splitnose. Additionally, we support restricting the DTS and slope rockfish fisheries to areas outside of 150 fm as soon as possible. For all fixed-gears, we recommend closing all limits outside 20 fm except for primary sablefish, Daily/weekly-Trip-Limit sablefish, slope rockfish, and limited-entry shortspine north of 36°. Until a fathom curve can be implemented, we recommend implementing a 22" minimum size limit for the fixed-gear Daily/weekly-Trip-Limit sablefish fishery. Because California sport regulations revert to open inside 20 fm only when shelf rockfish is closed, the GMT supports taking this action July 1. We would also urge that the recreational groundfish fishery be closed outside of 10 fm as soon as possible. The GMT would also support Council consideration in September of re-opening the trawl flatfish fishery inside of some fathom line.

Our best estimate of darkblotched rockfish landings through June 8 is 78 mt, which represents about 55% of the landed catch OY. As the GMT informed the Council in April, significant landings of darkblotched occurred south of 40°10' during the first months of 2002. Further review of available data indicates that as of June 8, roughly 30 mt were landed south of 40°10', and review of 2001 logbooks suggests that these fish were caught south of that line. These south-of-40°10' fish represent catch not accounted for in last fall's modeling of expected darkblotched bycatch. In response to this situation, the Council lowered the southern slope rockfish limit from 50,000 lb to 5,000 lb per 2-months from May-August. This appears to have reduced darkblotched landings to less than 1 mt during May. However, the magnitude of earlier catches means that the projected bycatch from the north, plus a measure of landings and estimated discards from south of 40°10', for the remainder of the year would be 35-40 mt above the total catch OY.

The GMT has crafted two options for achieving the needed reduction in projected bycatch. Under the first

option, currently scheduled trawl limits would remain in place during July-August, but with a requirement that only small footrope be used. All limits for bottom groundfish fishing would be closed beginning September 1, with the intent of crafting a DTS limit outside of 250-300 fm and a flatfish limit inside 100 fm at the September meeting, for implementation October 1. Trawl survey distributions for sablefish, Dover sole, and darkblotched are provided in Figure 2. Under this option, the Council may wish to initiate a mechanism by which the GMT could recommend closure of the bottom trawl fishery to the NW Regional Administrator before September 1. The second option would involve closing bottom trawling beginning July 1, with the intention of re-opening the DTS fishery outside of 250-300 fm and a flatfish limit inside 150 fm beginning October 1.

Table 1. Proposed GMT recommendations for inseason adjustments to the 2002 groundfish fishery.

**Fishery Status**

- Bocaccio:** By the end of June, projected catch will exceed OY and approach or exceed ABC
- Darkblotched:** Model-projected northern bycatch plus southern (landings + assumed discard) with current limits will be 201 mt through year end (relative to a 163 mt target)
- Under Option 1 (North of 40°10'), this would be reduced to 157 mt  
Under Option 2 (North of 40°10'), this would be reduced to 153 mt

**Inseason Options (\* Indicates GMT-preferred)**

**North of 40°10'**

Possible 2-month midwater trawl opening for widow/yellowtail, after whiting \*

**Option 1**

- Leave trawl limits as specified for July and August (small footrope required)
  - Close all groundfish bottom trawling (small and large footrope) September 1
  - Consider re-opening the following fisheries at the September Council meeting:
    1. DTS fishery October 1 outside of 250-300 fm
    2. Flatfish fishery inside 100 fm
- NOTE: With Council approval, the Team could review the darkblotched status at the July GMT meeting, and implement a closure before September 1 if the OY is projected to be reached sooner

**Option 2**

- Close all groundfish bottom trawling (small and large footrope) July 1
- Consider re-opening the following fisheries at the September Council meeting:
  1. DTS fishery October 1 outside of 250-300 fm
  2. Flatfish fishery October 1 inside 150 fm

**South of 40°10'**

***Immediate Action***

1. No groundfish trawling except DTS and slope rockfish beginning July 1; minimum size limit of 22" for sablefish with a trip limit of 500 lbs/trip of sablefish less than 22"
2. No groundfish retention with exempted trawl gear beginning July 1
3. Close all fixed gear fisheries outside 20 fm July 1, except: primary sablefish; slope rockfish; DTL with 22" minimum size for sablefish
4. Allow limited entry fixed gear shortspine thornyhead fishery between 40°10' and 36°
5. Close recreational fishery outside 20 fm July 1
6. Beginning September 1, reduce slope rockfish trip limit to 1,800 lbs/2 months and splitnose to 1,800 lbs/2 months for all gears in the area between 40°10' and 36°
7. South of 36°, reduce trawl and limited entry fixed gear slope rockfish trip limit to 15,000 lbs/2 months and splitnose to 15,000 lbs/2 months September 1

***Further Action***

**Option 1 - Recreational \***

- Close recreational fishery outside 10 fm as soon as possible

**Option 1 - Commercial \***

- South of 40°10', close slope rockfish and DTS fishery for all gears inside of 150 fm; drop 22" minimum size limit

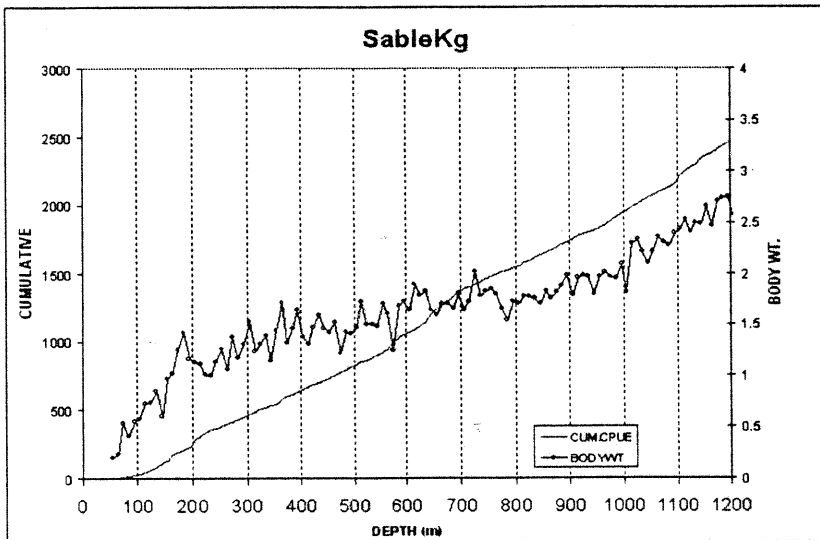
**Option 2 - Commercial \***

- Close fixed gear fishery outside 10 fm as soon as possible

**Option 3 - Commercial \***

- Consider reopening the following fishery at the September Council meeting:
  1. Trawl nearshore flatfish fishery inside 40-45 fm beginning October 1

Figure 1.--Overview of depth distribution of sablefish, Dover sole, and bocaccio in slope and shelf surveys, coastwide for all years.



Conversion	
Meters	Fathoms
100	56
180	100
200	111
270	150
300	167
400	222
450	250
500	278
540	300

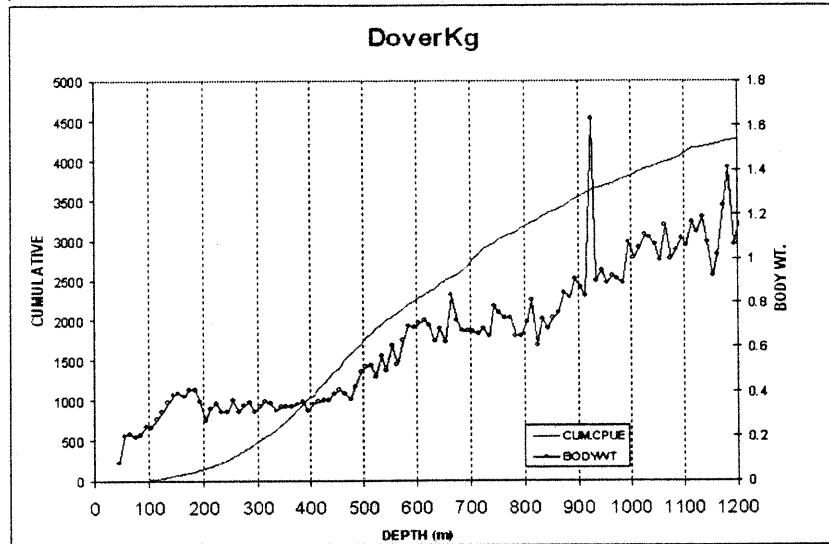
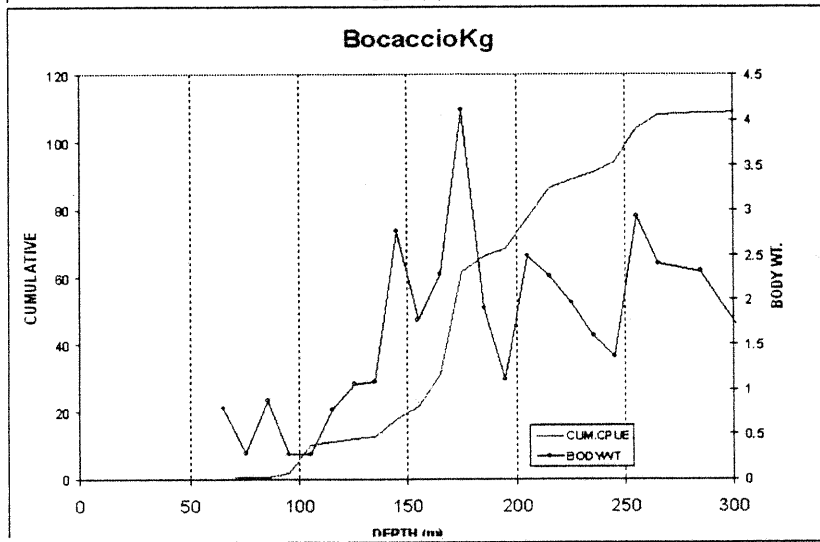
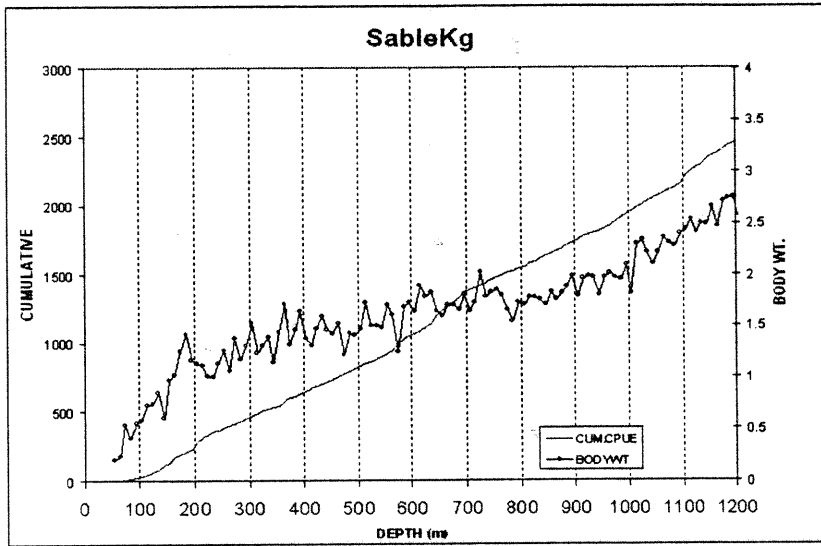


Figure 2.--Overview of depth distribution of sablefish, Dover sole, and darkblotched in slope and shelf surveys, coastwide for all years.



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