

ENFORCEMENT CONSULTANTS REPORT ON 2003 GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT MEASURES

Based on the new information received from the U.S. Coast Guard this week regarding the diversion of the primary first quarter, fiscal year 2003 medium endurance cutter from its fisheries enforcement mission to homeland security, the Enforcement Consultants (EC) remains concerned about its ability to enforce the depth-based management measures in the exclusive economic zone off the Pacific Northwest. The uncertainty of at-sea enforcement presence requires the EC, with Council support and understanding, to continue exploring alternative enforcement strategies which support depth-based management.

Additionally, the Council needs to be conservative in its evaluation and adoption of fishery options which complicate the basic depth-based fishing regimes to the extent that it compromises existing enforcement capability. The following are examples of options which, if implemented on vessels authorized to fish inside the restricted zone or seaward of the western boundary (where an on-the-water enforcement presence will may be unpredictable), may help reduce the risk of further overfishing to stressed groundfish species:

- A federal declaration system for consistence across all three states, or the continuation of the state systems being proposed for period 6 in 2002 for vessels allowed to fish in the restricted area. Expand this declaration system in 2003 for vessels allowed to fish in the restricted area and seaward of the western boundary of the restricted area.
- An experimental fishing permit (or regulation) that allows fishing in the restricted area or seaward of the western boundary of the restricted area only with a vessel monitoring system (VMS) unit or an observer.
- Expanded observer coverage (50% or more).
- Close the fishery.

In preparation for the November Council meeting, the EC recommend creating an Ad Hoc VMS Committee composed of:

- One (1) limited entry fixed gear representative from each state.
- One (1) limited entry trawl gear representative from each state.
- The Chairman of the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP), for a total of seven (7) GAP participants to work with the EC.

This ad hoc committee will meet once in person prior to the November meeting and as necessary by conference call to develop a draft regulatory package for final adoption at the November Council meeting.