

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON
STATUS OF FISHERIES AND INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS

Just prior to the November Council meeting, the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) became aware that the landings of canary rockfish reported in the quota species monitoring (QSM) system (40 mt) had exceeded the commercial landed catch optimum yield (OY) (35 mt) by 5 mt. This represented an increase of 6 mt from the landed amount estimated at the time of the mid-October GMT meeting, and was attributed to landings in the state of Washington. This increase does not reflect catch occurring in October, but rather corrections to the original soft data submissions from the summer, based on the incorporation of fishticket data from that period into Pacific Coast Fisheries Information Network (PacFIN).

The GMT believes the two major sources of this significant increase involve inadequate incorporation of tribal catch in the soft data submissions and QSM correction factors for canary rockfish in Washington that apparently reduced the estimates of catch for the summer's soft data submissions. The GMT will be pursuing means of reducing the likelihood of such surprises occurring late in the year during 2003. This circumstance emphasizes the importance of timely hard data submissions from the coastal states.

In an effort to evaluate the need for immediate inseason closures in commercial shelf fisheries, the GMT reviewed the status of recreational landings of canary in 2002. The GMT's best estimate of recreational canary landings through the end of the year is less than 20 mt. Given the July 1 closure of recreational fishing outside of 20 fm south of 40° 10' N latitude, the fact that Washington's estimates of recreational landings are complete through August, and the historical pattern of reduced winter recreational landings in the north, we feel confident this estimate is not likely to be greatly exceeded by the end of the year. Given that the 2002 recreational OY is 44 mt, and the additional canary mortality projected for remaining commercial opportunities is minimal, the GMT does not believe that closure of shelf trawl opportunities for the remainder of the year is necessary to ensure total mortality does not exceed the 2002 rebuilding OY for canary.

The GMT learned earlier this month of the inadvertent omission of an allowance for widow rockfish and nearshore rockfish retention north of 40° 10' N latitude with small footrope trawls. The GMT, therefore, recommends landing limits of 500 pounds of widow rockfish per month and 300 pounds of nearshore rockfish per month using small footropes for the remainder of the year. This recommendation will decrease discard of incidental bycatch of these species while pursuing nearshore flatfish species in the north.

An additional inseason issue was raised with the GMT at this meeting. It was brought to our attention that the prohibition on groundfish retention in all exempted trawl fisheries, approved in September for the remainder of 2002, has resulted in discards of small amounts of valuable flatfish species in the trawl fishery for California halibut. We believe that allowing minimal retention of flatfish bycatch in this fishery, which occurs largely inside of 40 fm, is unlikely to result in any additional bycatch of bocaccio. We recommend allowing retention of up to 100 pounds per day of flatfish species in the presence of at least one California halibut and between 100 pounds and 300 pounds of flatfish provided flatfish poundage does not exceed California halibut poundage. Because of the small size of this limit and the variability of California halibut catch rates, we favor suspension of the previous requirement that groundfish poundage not exceed non-groundfish poundage for landings in this fishery.

We also advocate altering 2003 regulations for bycatch in this fishery. The current regulation allows retention of 300 pounds of groundfish per day, provided that groundfish poundage does not exceed non-groundfish poundage. We propose adding to this an opportunity to land up to 100 pounds of groundfish without the ratio requirement, provided at least one California halibut is landed. Additionally, we recommend changing the adopted monthly cap of 3,000 pounds, no more than 300 of which may be species other than sanddabs, to a cap of 3,000 pounds per month, no more than 300 pounds of which may be species other than Pacific sanddabs, sand sole, starry flounder, rock sole, curlfin sole, or California scorpionfish. Groundfish retention allowances in other open access and exempted trawl fisheries would remain as previously specified. Vessels fishing for sea cucumbers that also encountered and retained California halibut would still have access to the higher 300 pound daily limit for groundfish, but only if their non-groundfish poundage was at least as great as their groundfish poundage.