

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON
FINAL ACTION ON GROUND FISH INSEASON MANAGEMENT

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) met jointly with the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) to discuss inseason adjustments to the groundfish specifications. The GAP makes the following recommendations:

AREA AND TRIP LIMIT ADJUSTMENTS

North of 40°10': As soon as possible, but not earlier than May 1, 2003, move the western boundary of the Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) to a line approximating 200 fathoms and the eastern boundary of the RCA to a line approximating 50 fathoms, as expressed by a series of straight lines connecting waypoints identified by latitude and longitude coordinates.

Beginning May 1, 2003, (May 15, 2003 for "B" Platoon vessels) until the line change is accomplished, the taking of Pacific groundfish by bottom trawls on limited entry vessels east of the 250 fathom line will be prohibited.

Beginning May 1, 2003 (May 15, 2003 for "B" Platoon vessels): the following trip limits will apply for large footrope limited entry trawl:

Dover sole - 31,000 lbs / 2 mos
Sablefish - 10,000 lbs / 2 mos
Longspine thornyheads - 14,000 lbs / 2 mos
Shortspine thornyheads - 2,800 lbs / 2 mos
Arrowtooth flounder - 200,000 lbs / 2 mos

Beginning at the time that the 50 fathom line is established, the following trip limits will apply for small footrope limited entry trawl:

Dover sole - 12,500 lbs / 2 mos
Sablefish - 3,000 lbs / 2 mos
Other flatfish - 20,000 lbs / 2 mos, no more than 10,000 lbs of which may be petrale sole
Arrowtooth flounder - 5,000 lbs / 2 mos

Beginning May 1, 2003, (May 15, 2003 for "B" platoon vessels) if small footrope gear is used at any time during the limit period, a vessel will be restricted to the small footrope limits during the entire cumulative period.

South of 40°10': As soon as possible, but not earlier than May 1, 2003, the western boundary of the RCA as it applies to fishing with bottom trawls will be a line approximating 200 fathoms, as expressed by a series of straight lines connecting way points identified by latitude and longitude coordinates.

During the periods of May 1 to June 30, 2003, and September 1 to October 31, 2003, (and the appropriate corresponding times for "B" Platoon vessels) the sublimit of petrale sole as a component of the other flatfish limit is increased to no more than 20,000 lbs / 2 mos

During the period July 1 to August 31, 2003, the taking of Pacific groundfish by bottom trawls on limited entry vessels east of this line will be prohibited.

During the period July 1 to August 31, (July 15 to August 15, 2003 for "B" Platoon vessels) the following limited entry trawl trip limits will apply:

Dover sole - 35,000 lbs / 2 mos
Sablefish - 12,000 lbs / 2 mos
Longspine thornyheads - 16,000 lbs / 2 mos
Shortspine thornyheads - 3,000 lbs / 2 mos

The GAP wants to make clear this recommendation is being made only because we have no choice. The

Council's decision to require use of the revised bycatch model leads to no flexibility. The results of adopting this proposal will be felt by fishermen and processors who have already made fishing plans for this season, who are already gearing up for May, and who will suddenly be shut down with two week's notice. To further complicate matters, the lack of harvest in May of this year will mean the bycatch model has less data to use next year, so this could, in effect, wind up as a permanent closure. We are now at the point where we are managing real people's lives with computer projections based on "virtual" fish. That is something that should not be allowed to happen.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

The GAP recommends the Council direct NMFS to defer their planned southern California bocaccio hook-and- line survey scheduled for this year.

The GAP believes the approximately 1 metric ton of bocaccio set aside for cooperative research in southern California would be better utilized to help maintain fishing opportunities for both recreational and commercial fisheries for the remainder of the 2003 season.

Getting better data on bocaccio biomass is of paramount importance. However, a southern survey which anticipates taking only 1 metric ton of fish is totally inadequate considering the species distribution from the shore out to 150 fathoms.

When more fish becomes available, the southern bocaccio survey work should be given the highest priority.

OTHER MEASURES

During its discussion of inseason adjustments, the GAP considered several other proposals presented by GAP members, other Council advisory bodies, and members of the public. The GAP's recommendations are as follows:

Retention of rockfish by salmon troll vessels - Beginning May 1, 2003, north of 40°10', salmon troll vessels may retain 1 lb of yellowtail rockfish for every 2 lbs of salmon landed, with a cumulative limit of 200 lbs / month, both within and outside of the RCA. Retention of other groundfish species will be governed by groundfish open access cumulative limits and season and area restrictions.

The special provision for salmon troll vessels to retain yellowtail rockfish was made several years ago, but was inadvertently dropped when the 2003 annual specifications were published. The GAP agreed it should be continued, with the monthly cumulative limit reduced to match the groundfish open access limit.

Representatives of the salmon troll fishery requested that similar exemptions be made for lingcod and other rockfish species. The GAP rejected the provision for lingcod since that species has been designated as overfished and is subject to rebuilding constraints. The GAP agreed that other rockfish could be incidentally taken, but retention be subject to the same rules governing other open access fisheries. This will prevent early attainment of open access harvest goals and prevent any re-allocation of other species from the open access fishery to the salmon troll fishery.

Minor corrections to RCA boundaries - several minor changes to RCA boundaries were discussed, including changes proposed by the Fishing Vessel Owners Association and a member of the GAP. Since some of these changes could result in bycatch impacts on species designated as overfished, the majority of the GAP agreed to support only those changes that were recommended by the GMT.

Recreational fishing for southern slope rockfish - the GAP considered a letter received from a recreational fishermen in California, requesting that recreational fishing for southern slope rockfish be allowed. The GAP opposed the request, because it would constitute a new fishery with unknown impacts on overfished species; would be extremely difficult to enforce; would go against the policy of providing greater nearshore opportunities for recreational fishermen in exchange for greater slope opportunities for commercial fishermen; could be detrimental to vessel safety; and could lead to additional incidental take of shelf rockfish.

Clarification of management line changes affecting “B” platoon vessels - The Enforcement Consultants and the GAP discussed how “B” platoon vessels should be treated when inseason adjustments are made to management line boundaries. The GAP notes that - for 2003 - vessels in the “B” platoon have already made fishing plans based on being able to operate under existing management lines during their entire cumulative period. Being forced to fish under new lines would be costly, and vessels cannot transfer to the “A” platoon once the fishing year begins. Since there are only 22 vessels registered under the “B” platoon and the Enforcement Consultants agreed they could - with some effort - enforce differential lines, the GAP recommended that for the 2003 season “B” platoon vessels be allowed to fish according to the management lines in existence at the start of their cumulative periods. For 2004, the GAP will consider whether the “B” platoon option should be allowed to continue.

The GAP notes that the uncertainty of when line changes may occur in May causes a further problem. The GAP suggests that - for the cumulative period beginning May 15, 2003 only - “B” Platoon vessels be allowed to fish at whatever line is in effect for the “A” Platoon vessels.

PFMC
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