

STATUS OF GROUND FISH FISHERIES AND INITIAL POLICY CONSIDERATION OF  
INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS

Situation: In the current groundfish management program, the Council sets annual harvest targets (optimum yield [OY] levels) and various management measures, with the understanding these management measures will likely need to be adjusted periodically through the year in order to attain, but not exceed, the OYs.

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) will present information on the status of ongoing fisheries, and any need for adjustments in typical management measures, such as trip limits and seasons. The Council will also need to consider policy guidance on two other issues that could manifest a need for inseason adjustments. A policy decision at this initial stage is necessary so as to provide Advisory Bodies with the guidance necessary to prepare recommendations for appropriate adjustments. These two issues are: (1) the use of any new information from the observer program, with particular relevance to bycatch rates and; (2) the use of new stock assessment information being presented for use in the 2004 fishing year.

At the April meeting, the Council received a report from the Northwest Fisheries Science Center on the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program including the issues and schedule for incorporating the observer data into fishery management decision making. Compared with logbook-based bycatch rates originally used to model 2003 groundfish trawl specifications, observer-based bycatch rates generally show substantially higher estimated bycatch of some overfished species. In response, the Council recommended that bycatch results from the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program be incorporated into fishery management as soon as feasible. Preliminary program results for trawl fisheries were incorporated as new observer-based bycatch rates by the GMT when analyzing inseason adjustments at the April meeting. The Council is scheduled to consider the status of observer data implementation under agenda item B.2, there may be the need for a policy determination about the use of additional preliminary information for purposes of further inseason adjustments.

The Council is scheduled to approve stock assessments and rebuilding analyses for 2004 groundfish management under agenda item B.3. The stock assessment schedule for 2004 management is ambitious and covers seven species including species designated as overfished such as bocaccio, darkblotched rockfish, widow rockfish, and Pacific ocean perch. It is anticipated the results from some of these assessments may be substantially different from what is currently known about the status of these stocks. The Council needs to make a policy determination about whether stock assessment results prepared for management of fisheries in 2004 represent the best available science for inseason adjustment of fisheries in 2003.

The Council is to consider advice from Advisory Bodies and the public on observer program data, stock assessment results and recommended inseason adjustments to the groundfish fishery and adopt tentative changes as necessary. Review of the tentative changes and final adoption of inseason adjustments to 2003 groundfish management measures is scheduled for Wednesday, June 18 under agenda item B.8.

**Council Action:**

- 1. Consider information on the status of ongoing fisheries.**
- 2. Discuss and provide guidance on any new information provided from the observer program.**
- 3. Discuss and provide guidance on whether stock assessments and rebuilding analyses for 2004 groundfish management represent the best available science for inseason adjustment of fisheries in 2003.**
- 4. Adopt tentative inseason adjustments, if necessary.**

**Reference Materials:**

1. Exhibit B.5.d, Public comments received by May 30, 2003.

Agenda Order:

- a. Agendum Overview
- b. Groundfish Management Team Report
- c. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
- d. Public Comment
- e. **Council Action:** Establish Guidelines for Consideration of Inseason Adjustments and Adopt Tentative Adjustments, If Necessary.

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