

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON OBSERVER DATA IMPLEMENTATION STATUS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) met with representatives of the Northwest Fisheries Science Center to discuss implementation of the groundfish observer program and use of observer data.

The GAP continues to express its frustration that what was supposed to be a real-time data program still relies on data that is over a year old and doesn't reflect significant changes in management and the fishery that have occurred since the data was collected. Projections from the observer model reflect neither the reality of the fishery nor the experience of fishermen. Model projections of a 50% discard rate of shortspine thornyheads make absolutely no sense. The model does not account for changes in markets or entry into alternative fisheries that has occurred during the period over which the model is projecting increased discards. Sampling methodology is highly questionable, in that observers are now counting a certain portion of bottom mud as catch. Discard mortality of shortspine thornyheads is assumed to be 100% in spite of anecdotal data that shows a far lower mortality rate.

If this is in fact the true level of discard, then it shows such a significant increase in stock abundance that OY levels should be adjusted accordingly.

While the GAP recognizes the personnel and funding shortfalls that exist within NMFS, the GAP notes that it is the participants in the fishery who are being punished for NMFS' inability to get its own fiscal house in order.

As a way to produce more relevant real-time data, the GAP urges the Council to direct the PacFIN data committee to get together with fishermen and processors and develop a means for the industry to provide regular landing reports which could be correlated with observer data. Such reports must be provided to state agencies and could readily be adapted to NMFS data needs without compromising confidentiality.

The GAP also notes, as it has on previous occasions, that the observer data which is being used is out of synch with the rest of the fishery management schedule. Out of synch stock assessments are not used for fisheries management; the same rule should apply to out of synch observer data.

Finally, in regard to the current discard projections for shortspine thornyheads, accepting the flawed model projections as an in-season adjustment will require the closure of the entire trawl fishery - *for all species* - north of 40°10' for the rest of the year and impose significant changes on trawl fisheries in the south and fixed gear fisheries coast-wide.

Because of the concerns with the inaccuracy of the projections from the model, the GAP does not believe that the projections for the DTS complex should be used for inseason adjustments, but should be applied to next year's fishery, if they are used at all.