

DRAFT REPORT

Ad Hoc Groundfish Information Policy Committee

Meeting Date: March 23, 2004

Meeting Venue: Sheraton Portland Airport Hotel, 8235 NE Airport Way, Portland, OR 97220.

Members Present: Mr. Don Hansen (Chair), Ms. Marija Vojkovich, Mr. Neal Coenen, Mr. Phil Anderson, Dr. Elizabeth Clarke, Mr. Bill Robinson, Ms. Eileen Cooney.

Others Present: Mr. Brian Culver, Ms. Michele Robinson, Mr. Rod Moore, Mr. Peter Huhtala, Mr. Dan Wolford, Dr. Guy Fleischer, Mr. Shannon Davis, Dr. Don McIsaac, Mr. Mike Burner, Mr. Dan Waldeck, Mr. Jim Seger, Dr. John Coon, Dr. Ed Waters, Mr. John DeVore.

Meeting Handouts: Materials provided to the committee members and public included: (1) Time line of Recent Management Information Issues, (2) NWFSC 11/03 Presentation on Observer Data Flow 2004-2006, (3) GMT 11/03 report on Observer Data Flow for 2004-2006, (4) GMT 11/03 Report on Off-year Science Activities, (5) Excerpts from GMT/SSC minutes regarding Mid-Course Corrections under Multi-Year Management, (6) Excerpt from Gulf of Mexico FMC Administrative Handbook regarding Policy on New Information, (7) NOAA Information Quality Guidelines.

Background: In January 2003 a workshop was held in Seattle, Washington to review the methodology used to estimate bycatch and to consider how new West Coast Groundfish Observer Program observer data will be incorporated to improve future estimates of fishing mortality and bycatch. The workshop report and a design for an updated trawl bycatch model were forwarded to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) for review and approval.

At its April 2003 meeting, the Council considered the new bycatch information from the observer program. In general, the preliminary observer-based bycatch rate information showed significantly higher estimated bycatch of certain overfished species than had been assumed previously. Application of the observer-based bycatch rates in April led the Council to adopt extensive inseason changes to commercial trawl fisheries, including modifying the configuration of Rockfish Conservation Areas, limiting nearshore open periods, and altering trip limits.

In June the preliminary observer-based trawl bycatch rates adopted in April were confirmed, but no new observer data was presented for inseason management. Responding to a more optimistic assessment of bocaccio, including a 10 to 26 fold increase in the bocaccio optimum yield (OY) for 2004, the Council recommended several inseason adjustments. As a result, bocaccio mortality for the 2003 fishing year was estimated to slightly exceed the 2003 OY. The Council requested, for discussion at the November Council Meeting, presentation of a long-term schedule showing when new observer data will be processed and presented to the Council for decision-making during the multi-year management cycle.

In September, observer-based discard rates for trawl target species were presented to the Council. While the Council elected not to use this new information for inseason management, these target species discard rates, as well as the bycatch rates for overfished species adopted in April, were incorporated for modeling the 2004 groundfish annual specifications. Further, in response to concerns about a proliferation of new information presented at Council meetings, the Council requested an ad hoc committee prepare a report for the March 2004 Council meeting on policy regarding the use of new information from the observer program (and other sources) for fisheries management.

In November, NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) presented a proposed schedule of when new observer data will be available for modeling and management decision making over the next several Council meetings. This schedule was generally supported by the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) and incorporated into planning for the 2005-2006 annual specifications process. Also in November, there was some controversy about whether to consider incorporating recreational catch estimates generated by a California recreational fishing organization, the Coastside Fishing Club.

Context: Current types and sources of information for groundfish management primarily include data products from ongoing data collection and monitoring programs and the outputs from fishery models that incorporate these data as inputs. Examples of current data collection efforts include: The West Coast Groundfish Observer Program, data collected from exempted fishing permits (EFPs), harvest monitoring programs (commercial, recreational and tribal), and periodic scientific surveys. These data and other parameters derived using expert judgement are combined in varying proportions to produce several types of fishery models, including: stock assessments, rebuilding analyses, and harvest impact projection models (e.g., bycatch models, quota species monitoring [QSM], and recreational fishery models). In addition, from time to time information from other sources may enter the management process either formally or informally. Examples include Enforcement Consultants (EC) reports on illegal catch, data or analyses brought forward by nongovernment organizations (NGOs), and anecdotal reports by fishers.

Emerging issues have necessitated that policy directives be formulated regarding the schedule and process by which information enters the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) groundfish management system. Recent developments pushing in this direction include: adoption of multi-year management for groundfish under fishery management plan (FMP) Amendment 17, the need to coordinate delivery of stock assessment information to be in phase with the multi-year specification setting process, development of models using observer data for estimating and monitoring bycatch of all directed groundfish fisheries, and the need to periodically monitor progress toward attainment of rebuilding goals for overfished species under FMP Amendment 16.

These issues have been highlighted as the Council develops multi-year management specifications for the 2005-2006 period, and beyond.

Policy Development: The Ad Hoc Groundfish Information Policy Committee (GIPC) expressed a desire to develop a written policy statement for submission to the Council in the future. Specific questions identified by the GIPC that should be addressed in a comprehensive information policy include:

1. **Observer data and bycatch modeling:** What is the best time frame for collecting observer data? When is the deadline to deliver bycatch models using observer data to the Council? When can bycatch models be used for inseason management, second season management (the second year of a multi-year management period), or updates to multi-year management plans?
2. **Stock assessments and rebuilding analyses:** When is the deadline to deliver stock assessments and rebuilding analyses to the Council? If stock assessments or rebuilding analyses for certain species arrive later than this, can adoption be postponed until the next management cycle? Can stock assessments or rebuilding analyses be submitted and adopted before the deadline? How many stock assessments can reasonably be completed and incorporated each cycle? (Current plan is for 23 stock assessments to be completed between May and November 2005). Which stocks don't need to be assessed each cycle? How is that decided? What is the process and schedule for monitoring progress for rebuilding species?
3. **Multi-year second season management:** What events can trigger a change in the second season OY adopted under multi-year management for a particular species? Can optimistic stock assessment events trigger an increase in an adopted OY?
4. **Other information:** What should be the cutoff date (e.g., briefing book deadline?) for submission of information eligible for consideration at a Council meeting? What is the process for receiving and reviewing data and analyses from NGOs? Can we design a process to solicit needed, supplementary information from NGOs? How does information not currently in the process get "approved?"

Intended Policy Direction:

The GIPC identified two tracks for information policy development:

Track 1, for immediate development, identifies the data collection time frame to be used by the groundfish observer program, specifies when new data should be incorporated into the bycatch models, and stipulates what types of management action the output from those models can be applied toward. The GIPC formulated a draft observer data-bycatch model schedule, shown in the table below.

Track 2, for longer term development, would use the lessons learned from formulating and implementing the 2004 annual and 2005-2006 multi-year management specifications to restructure and schedule the other main information components, including setting time lines for stock assessments, limiting the number of species to be assessed each management cycle, determining stock assessment thresholds for triggering second season OY changes, setting a process and schedule for monitoring rebuilding species, and determining a process for incorporating supplemental information from outside sources and NGOs.

The GIPC resolved to meet again between the April and June Council meetings to continue the dialogue and formalize portions of their recommended information policy statement.

DRAFT Proposed Observer Data and Bycatch Model Schedule for Multi-Year Management

Date	Fishing Year	Observer Data Period	Groundfish Bycatch Models	Actions
April 2004	2004	9/02 - 8/03	LE Trawl, LE Fixed Gear (new)	2004 inseason 2005-2006 spex
April 2005	2005	9/03 - 8/04	OA (new)	2005 inseason
Nov 2005	2006	1/04 - 12/04 ^{a/}	LE Trawl, LE Fixed Gear, OA	2005 inseason 2006 2 nd season ^{b/} 2007-2008 spex
Nov 2006	2007	1/05 - 12/05	LE Trawl, LE Fixed Gear, OA	2006 inseason 2007 update ^{c/}
Nov 2007	2008	1/06 - 12/06	LE Trawl, LE Fixed Gear, OA	2007 inseason 2008 2 nd season 2009-2010 spex
Nov 2008	2009	1/07 - 12/07	LE Trawl, LE Fixed Gear, OA	2008 inseason
Nov 2009	2010	1/08 - 12/08	LE Trawl, LE Fixed Gear, OA	2009 inseason 2010 2 nd season

a/ Note shift in observer data period.

b/ "2nd season" denotes the second year of a multi-year management cycle.

c/ "Update" denotes check and possible refinement of management measures after adoption of the multi-year spex, but prior to the first season of a multi-year management period.