

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON
STATUS OF 2004 GROUND FISH FISHERIES AND INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) met several times with the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) to discuss inseason adjustments to the groundfish fishery and followed the guidance on inseason adjustments provided by the Council.

In regard to limited entry trawl, the GAP recommends the option which is being presented by the GMT. This option will allow increases in harvest for Dover sole/thornyhead/sablefish trawl-caught sablefish complex (DTS) fisheries in both the north and south, with continuation of differential trip limits using large and small footrope trawls. An increase in the trip limits shallower than the Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) in the north is essential, as nearshore boats can only access Dover sole and flatfish species during the summer months. This option will also provide greater opportunities for access to slope rockfish and chilipepper in the south, which to date have been constrained over fears of bocaccio and darkblotched impacts. Additional analysis of landing and observer data demonstrates that this issue is not as great a concern as originally modeled, especially given changes in fleet structure in the south following the groundfish buyback.

In regard to limited entry fixed gear, the GAP supports the sablefish tier limits proposed by the GMT which were developed on the basis of the fixed gear observer data presented to the Council, which shows lower discard rates than previously assumed. The GAP also supports the increase in fixed gear slope rockfish and splitnose limits proposed by the GMT, which follows past policy of trying to align fixed gear limits with trawl limits.

In regard to California recreational fisheries, the GAP recognizes that existing landings data - as wildly inaccurate as it may be - provides the only basis for determining changes in recreational measures. The GAP hopes new data collection programs will come on line soon, perhaps in enough time to modify some of the severe closures the recreational fishery will have to face.

The California members of the GMT worked with a GAP subcommittee to develop changes in management options which are designed to constrain the fishery within available amounts of canary rockfish and lingcod. The option that meets the Council guidance on canary rockfish impacts will result in closures in the recreational fishery along most of the California coast for the months of May, June, July, November, and December, as well as an additional depth restriction on the southern California coast in October. The GAP supports this option as the best alternative available at this time.

Finally, the GAP would like to thank the GMT for their efforts to provide options to and conduct modeling runs for the GAP. We are all working under difficult constraints of time, fish, and data and have tried to do the best we can to provide reasonable recommendations for conservation and management.

PFMC

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