

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON
PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE HARVEST LEVELS FOR 2005-2006 FISHERIES

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) reviewed the proposed harvest levels for the 2005-2006 fisheries as shown on tables 1 and 2 of exhibit C.8.b. In general, the GAP agrees with the Council preferred options, with the following exceptions:

Lingcod - given the recent stock assessments that show lingcod rebuilt in the north and close to rebuilt in the south, the GAP recommends the high acceptable biological catch (ABC)/optimum yield (OY) level.

Pacific cod - this is a highly fecund species with a varying stock size that represents a fringe population within the Council's area of jurisdiction. Harvest occurs only when cod and markets are available. The "precautionary" OY reduction proposed is unnecessary and will prevent utilization of this species. The GAP recommends the high ABC/OY level.

Sablefish - a majority of the GAP recommends the medium ABC/OY level. A minority of the GAP recommends the high ABC/OY level.

Widow rockfish, bocaccio, cowcod, yelloweye rockfish - the GAP recommended ABC/OY levels consistent with GAP recommendations on rebuilding models under agenda item C.12; since it is the GAP's understanding the Council will defer action on ABC/OY level choices until rebuilding models are approved, the GAP will discuss its recommendations for these species under that agenda item.

Cabazon (California) - the GAP recommends the high ABC/OY level, as this corresponds to management under the Council's 40/10 control policy. Since this is a federally managed fish, federal - rather than state - rules should apply.

Other flatfish, other fish - in both cases, the GAP recommended the high ABC/OY. The species in these categories are generally non-target catch except in some specialized circumstances. Some of these species are being considered for stock assessment and appropriate ABC/OY levels can be set at that time. In the case of flatfish especially, there are no indications of stock problems and the species in question are generally fast growing. Artificially imposing a "precautionary" OY reduction of 50% will only serve to unnecessarily constrain fisheries that are already severely affected by reductions needed to meet established rebuilding targets. The GAP sees no reason to make drastic cuts in OY levels for these species groups.

Finally, as a general comment, the GAP has previously expressed concern that ABC/OY levels are being based on stock assessment projections that assume stock size reduction through fishing mortality, even when little or no fishing is occurring. The GAP recognizes that - for legal reasons - the Council can't change stock assessments once adopted. However, the GAP urges that as part of the Terms of Reference for stock assessments and STAR Panel reports, the uncertainty of future projections based on an assumed level of fishing mortality be clearly stipulated, as was recently done with the Pacific whiting STAR Panel report. We believe that the Council should have the ability - based on appropriate scientific input - to revise projected ABC/OY levels if fishing mortality assumptions are incorrect.