

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON
FINAL CONSIDERATION OF 2004 INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) met jointly with the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) to discuss various inseason adjustments. The GAP makes the following recommendations.

Sablefish Tier Limits

As was noted by the GMT, a calculation error resulted in sablefish tier limits being set too high, leading to the risk that the fixed gear sablefish portion of the optimum yield (OY) might be exceeded. The GAP explored a number of different options that would put the burden of solving the problem on the fishery that inadvertently received a benefit. Unfortunately, with the time and data available to us, we were unable to construct a plan that would both provide equity and prevent the fishery from exceeding total catch limits. The majority of the GAP therefore recommends that the Council reduce the daily trip limit fishery north of 36° to 300 lbs/day - 900 lbs./week with a 2 month cumulative limit of 3,200 lbs. We also request that the fixed gear sablefish fishery be closely monitored so that an in-season adjustment can be made at the October/November Council meeting to raise the daily trip limit fishery in period 6 if warranted.

A minority of the GAP put forward a separate option which would reduce only the limited entry portion of the daily-trip-limit fishery to the level recommended above. The minority believes that the level of participation in the open access segment of the daily trip limit fishery is low enough so that the necessary savings can be achieved without reducing that fishery.

Whiting Trawl Fishery

As a result of a single "disaster" tow, canary bycatch in the mothership sector of the whiting fishery exceeds by nearly four times the pre-season projected bycatch amount. The cause of the large tow remains unclear, but there is some correlation with the location being fished (near Heceta Bank) and the high tides that occurred at the time the tow was made.

The mothership fleet responded by leaving the area and in fact the mothership fishery is no longer operating at this point in the season. In the catcher-processor sector, only one vessel is operating and that vessel has received instructions to avoid the area and to temporarily stop fishing during the next high tide occurrence on July 4th. The main shore-based fishery based fishery began on June 15th. Shore-based processors who are members of the West Coast Seafood Processors Association have been told to advise their vessels to avoid Heceta Bank and to temporarily stop fishing during the July high tide period.

Given the facts that the bycatch overage was caused by a single unpredictable tow, that the industry has already taken voluntary steps to avoid a recurrence if at all possible, and that the total projected canary impacts in the whiting fishery have not yet been reached, plus considering the guidance provided by the Council earlier today, the GAP recommends that industry and state and federal agencies work together to ensure the highest possible level of voluntary avoidance of canary rockfish

throughout the whiting fishery. In addition, the GAP recommends that a regulatory process be started which would allow an early closure of the entire whiting fishery if a cumulative catch of 7.3 mt of canary is reached. Given the uncertainty of projections, the GAP emphasizes that the closure should occur when the 7.3 mt amount is reached, not based on a projection.

California Line Adjustment

The GAP is aware that a minor adjustment needs to be made to the coordinates of a line near Half Moon Bay. The GAP supports the adjustment.

Limited Entry Fixed Gear Fishery

The GAP recommends that the limited entry fixed gear cumulative limit for bocaccio rockfish between 40°10' and Point Conception be increased to 300 lbs./2 months. The increase in bocaccio population in this area has resulted in higher discards in the fixed gear fishery; the increase will allow those discards to be landed. We understand that the GMT has no objection to this recommendation.

Limited Entry Trawl Fishery

1. The GAP agrees with the GMT recommendations to make clerical changes which would specify that petrale is a sublimit of other flatfish north of 40°10'; that would remove the reference to a midwater yellowtail fishery in period 6; and that would provide for a midwater chilipepper fishery seaward of the Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) south of 40°10'.
2. The GAP agrees with the changes to trawl cumulative limits recommended by the GMT in order to avoid early attainment of the OY on several species.
3. The GAP recommends three minor changes in cumulative limits that would allow landing incidental harvest which currently must be discarded:
 - * provide an incidental limit of 500 lbs./ 2 months of lingcod coastwide by vessels using large footrope gear. The recovery of lingcod stocks has caused them to spread to deeper water seaward of the RCA, where they are more frequently being incidentally taken in the large footrope trawl fishery.
 - * provide an incidental limit of 300 lbs./2 months of bocaccio south of 40°10' by vessels using either large or small footrope gear. Similar to the situation with fixed gear, this minor retention allowance will convert discard mortality to landed catch.
 - * provide an incidental limit of 300 lbs./2 months of minor shelf rockfish north of 40°10' by vessels using large footrope gear. Their name notwithstanding, shelf rockfish are often found in deeper water seaward of the RCA. The small limit will not induce targeting and the OY for shelf rockfish will not have a chance of being attained.

The GAP understands that the GMT has no objection to these recommendations.