

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

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) has been meeting with the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) to examine potential inseason adjustments.

Based on current landings and projections of discards, there is no doubt that we will shortly be at or over the optimum yield (OY) on two species and that corrective action will need to be taken. The GMT has presented some possible alternatives for action which have been discussed with the GAP. Like the GMT, we are not making any specific recommendations, other than that - if the Council decides to take action - we try to keep as many people fishing as possible in order to minimize economic impacts on fishermen, processors, and coastal communities.

In looking at how we got here, it is obvious there was a breakdown in the system. Early in the year, we increased cumulative limits, and fishermen responded by doing what they do - they went fishing. Unfortunately, either due to monitoring of catches not occurring, or catch projections not being made, or both, we let the higher rate of fishing go on too long. In hindsight, if catch projections had been made and communicated - not only among managers, but also to the industry - we might have been able to slow the fishery down by a combination of voluntary action on the part of the industry and an appropriate inseason adjustment in June. None of this happened, and so we are faced with difficult decisions today.

The GAP is not trying to find fault, cast blame, or point fingers. All of us - fishermen, processors, and managers - have a mutual interest in having accurate, up-to-date data that can be used to manage our fisheries. We need to figure out how to solve the problem, so it does not recur.

We cannot determine how monitoring can best be accomplished or who should do it - state agencies, NMFS, Council staff, or some other entity. We do think that corrective action can more easily be taken, if information is communicated to the industry as it becomes available, and to the GAP at our meetings. For example, several GAP members have suggested that having catch projections, as modified by the bycatch/discard model available to the GAP at the start of our meetings, would help us better interact with the GMT and smooth out the inseason consideration agenda. Regardless of how it is done, we think that communication flow between management agencies and the industry will help us all to avoid future problems.

Finally, we recommend that the darkblotched rockfish discard rate applied to the 2004 non-whiting trawl fishery be examined. The rate currently being used is based on the 2003 fishery, when slope rockfish was not available as a major target. That situation did not exist in 2004.

Again, the GAP wants to help fix problems that have occurred. We stand ready to work with our colleagues in other advisory bodies to create solutions

PFMC
09/16/04