

## MANAGEMENT SPECIFICATIONS FOR SPINY DOGFISH AND PACIFIC COD FOR 2006

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) has recently raised concerns regarding the management of two West Coast groundfish species managed under the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan—spiny dogfish and Pacific cod. The GMT believes current harvest controls are inadequate to effectively manage these species and recommends Council consideration of harvest specifications and/or management measures for 2006 fisheries.

### Spiny Dogfish

Spiny dogfish is an important species to West Coast groundfish fisheries, primarily off the Washington coast, and fishermen and processors have worked aggressively to develop and maintain strong markets for this species. A number of trawl and longline fishermen and at least one major processor are heavily dependent upon spiny dogfish.

In recent years, fishermen targeting dogfish have been constrained by their assumed bycatch of yelloweye and canary rockfish, two overfished species managed under rebuilding plans. To provide protection for these overfished stocks, seasonally-variable and gear-specific closed areas, or rockfish conservation areas (RCAs), have been implemented. The RCAs off the Washington coast generally encompass the area between 100-200 fm for trawl gears and 0-100 fm for limited entry and open access fixed gears. The spiny dogfish fishery occurs around the 100-fm isobath, and dogfish are targeted by both trawl and non-trawl gears.

Since effort is not limited, especially in the open access fishery, there is a potential to overharvest dogfish and/or exceed the projected bycatch associated with the fishery, even with the RCAs in place. To address the potential of exceeding the estimated amounts of canary and yelloweye rockfish bycatch, which was anticipated for the open access fishery in 2005, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) adopted an emergency rule in early May to set bycatch limits for the directed groundfish open access fishery. These limits were originally set at 1.0 mt for canary rockfish and 0.6 mt for yelloweye rockfish, and subsequently raised inseason to 3.0 mt of each species, based on updated projections using NMFS West Coast Groundfish Observer Program data.

A formal stock assessment for West Coast dogfish has not yet been conducted, but one is recommended for the next assessment cycle (2007). Even in the absence of a formal assessment, life history information (slow growing, late maturing, and low fecundity) indicates spiny dogfish are easily overfished. Dogfish populations have been depressed as a result of fishing in areas of Puget Sound and have been declared overfished on the East Coast.

Spiny dogfish are currently included in the optimum yield (OY) for “Other Fish” in the management specifications for the West Coast groundfish fishery. Given the life history characteristics of dogfish and their status in other areas, the GMT recommended that the Council consider adopting a separate OY for dogfish along with harvest control regulations (i.e., trip

limits), beginning in 2006. If the Council agrees with this recommendation, then a draft environmental assessment (EA), tiered off the environmental impact statement used to analyze the 2005-2006 harvest specifications and management measures, will be prepared for final Council consideration in November. The Council task at this meeting is to consider adopting recommended 2006 spiny dogfish harvest specifications and management measures for public review.

### Pacific Cod

Pacific cod is a transboundary stock with most of the biomass distributed north of the U.S.-Canada border. They are harvested primarily in the limited entry trawl fishery north of 40° 10' N latitude. Pacific cod have never been formally assessed on the U.S. West Coast. The allowable biological catch (ABC) is based on catch history and the OY was set, beginning in 2005, at half the ABC based on the Council policy for specifying harvest limits for unassessed stocks. However, management measures such as trip limits have never been specified for this stock. This is a potential management problem given stock conservation concerns in Canada and recent high harvests in U.S. waters (the 2004 harvest approached the 2005 OY off the West Coast).

The GMT has recently requested tracking of Pacific cod total catches on the PacFIN Quota Species Monitoring (QSM) reporting system, which is expected to begin in January 2006. While this will aid the GMT, industry, and Council in tracking Pacific cod catches inseason next year, the Council may want to consider specifying a bimonthly trawl trip limit for Pacific cod to prevent early OY attainment. If the Council decides to specify a Pacific cod trip limit for the 2006 trawl fishery, then a tiered EA will be prepared in time for the final Council decision in November. The Council task at this meeting is to consider adopting recommended 2006 Pacific cod management measures for public review.

### **Council Action:**

- 1. Consider Adopting 2006 Spiny Dogfish Harvest Specifications and Management Measures for Public Review.**
- 2. Consider Adopting 2006 Pacific Cod Management Measures for Public Review.**

Reference Materials: None.

### Agenda Order:

- a. Agenda Item Overview
  - b. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
  - c. Public Comment
  - d. **Council Action:** Determine and Adopt 2006 Harvest Specifications (OY and ABC) and Management Measures for Public Review
- John DeVore

PFMC  
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