

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON MAGNUSON-STEVENSON ACT REAUTHORIZATION IMPLEMENTATION

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) had a thorough discussion regarding implementation of Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act issues with an emphasis on items significant to the Pacific Fishery Management Council. The GAP has specific comments on the following:

1. Role of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)
2. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process
3. Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures
4. Mandatory buffers
5. Multi-year optimum yields (OYs) and carry-over provisions
6. Stipends

Role of the SSC

The GAP recommends that the PFMC's SSC maintain the advisory role it has fulfilled in the past. The SSC should continue to provide the Council ongoing scientific advice for fishery management decisions, including (1) recommendations for acceptable biological catch (ABC), preventing overfishing, maximum sustainable yield, achieving rebuilding targets; and (2) reports on stock status and health, bycatch, habitat status, social and economic impacts of management measures, and sustainability of fishing practices. With respect to OYs, the GAP recommends that the SSC provide an appropriate range of OY alternatives to the Council and that the Council makes the ultimate policy decisions on catch levels. The GAP also believes that an emphasis on the economic and social impacts of regulations should be pursued more aggressively by the SSC.

NEPA Process

The GAP believes that the current protocol for public involvement in the decision-making process is sufficient and provides ample opportunity for stakeholder involvement.

Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures

The GAP believes that annual catch limits and accountability measures are accomplished with the current OY system and that over the years the Council has utilized some form of annual catch limits with accountability measures routinely in the fishery management process. For example, OYs are currently set to prevent overfishing. Accountability measures, such as the 40-10 rule, seasons, trip limits, bag limits, rockfish conservation areas (RCAs) and other tools are routinely used to ensure catch levels do not exceed the OY.

Mandatory Buffers

The GAP does not support a mandatory buffer system. The GAP believes that buffers should be considered on a species by species basis as appropriate. The GAP recognizes that "buffers" are already incorporated in our current management through catch monitoring and that data poor stocks are generally managed in a more precautionary way utilizing buffers. For example, OYs for stocks in the precautionary zone are set below ABC. When appropriate, buffers should continue to be established through the annual specifications process.

Multi-year OYs and Carry-over Provisions

The GAP believes this approach should be analyzed and included in the tool box for use as appropriate. The GAP recognizes that there may be some unknown biological issues associated with this type of approach, but believes that these impacts should be further explored in NEPA analyses when annual specifications are decided.

The GAP is cognizant of problems with being able to access up-to-date harvest data, including, but not limited to, recreational harvest data in some areas, and how the delay in data acquisition could effect both the establishment of OYs and inseason adjustments. The GAP believes that setting a multi-year OY would provide the most flexibility for managers and harvesters, and would help avoid the types of problems that are addressed in Agenda Item C.2.a, Attachment 2 such as:

- One sector's overharvest pre-empting fishing opportunities for another sector;
- The current management system that relies on uncertain catch monitoring is more prone to overfishing; and
- The current management system thwarts fishermen's efforts to explore strategies to fish more selectively to reduce bycatch. Multi-year OYs and carryover provisions would allow individual fishermen and fishery sectors to manage risk over a longer period and to explore more sustainable fishing practices.

Stipends

Stipends for advisory panels are now authorized in the MSA. The GAP recommends the Council seek funding for this.

PFMC

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