

**GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM COMMENTS ON THE RECFIN STATUS
 REPORT ON RECREATIONAL FISHERY INFORMATION NETWORK DATA AND
 SAMPLING REFINEMENTS**

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the status report prepared by the RecFIN Technical Committee for consideration by the Council and its advisory bodies. The GMT commends the RecFIN staff, RecFIN Technical Committee, and state sampling programs for continuing to improve the precision and reliability of recreational data, especially given the importance of these data in crafting management measures to stay within a number of constraining optimum yields for overfished species. The GMT continues to strongly support the goal of a single, common database of recreational catch data, available in a timely manner. Having state and federal managers, assessment scientists, and industry representatives operating from this common reference point would help resolve the controversy or confusion that often surrounds recreational catch estimates. The information and proposals described in Agenda Item B.3.b, RecFIN Status Report, represent significant steps in moving toward this important goal. The GMT provides the following comment on the action items in the report.

I. Discarded Fish Procedures

The GMT concurs with the proposed procedure that would tally all California fish thrown back into a single “discard” category, as is the case in Oregon and Washington. This would enable RecFIN to apply a consistent coastwide depth-based mortality. These mortality factors are still a GMT work in progress. The goal is to produce a matrix by species and depth with differential mortality rates, based upon available research or, where such data are lacking, the best professional judgment of fishery scientists. Table 1 displays the format envisioned by the GMT to capture coastwide discard mortality by species and depth. While assumed discard mortality for some species is currently partitioned only shallower and deeper than 20 fathoms, the GMT thinks a matrix more finely stratified by depth interval would be appropriate to capture information as future research warrants and/or as further depth-based management is adopted.

Table 1: Example of the estimated mortality proportion of released catch by species and depth where letters represent different mortality rates.

CATEGORY	SPECIES	DEPTH (fm)			
		0-10	11-20	21-30	>30
Rockfish*	Black Rockfish	B	D	I	I
	Blue Rockfish	B	D	I	I
	Bocaccio	B	E	I	I
	Canary Rockfish	B	E	I	I
	China Rockfish	B	E	I	I
	Copper Rockfish	B	E	I	I
	Gopher Rockfish	B	E	I	I
	Quillback Rockfish	B	E	I	I
	Tiger Rockfish	B	E	I	I
	Vermilion Rockfish	B	E	I	I
	Yelloweye Rockfish	B	E	I	I
	Yellowtail Rockfish	B	E	I	I

Other Fish	Cabazon	B	B	B	C
	California scorpionfish	A	A	A	C
	Kelp Greenling	B	B	B	C
	Lingcod	B	B	B	C
	Pacific Cod*	B	E	H	I
	Surfperch	B	B	B	C
General Cat.	Flatfish	B	B	B	C
	Other fish	B	B	B	C
	Sharks and Skates	B	B	B	C

*Species with swim bladders.

II. Average Weight Procedures

The GMT supports endorsement of the pooling rules used within RecFIN to obtain the best estimate of average weights to enable conversion of catch in numbers to metric tons. The GMT understands that pooling rules vary by state and that state personnel are working with RecFIN staff to adopt rules that make best use of available data.

III. Management by Number of Fish

The RecFIN Status Report contains a clear description provided by Dr. Richard Methot regarding the use of numbers of fish in model projections of available harvest levels. Inseason monitoring of commercial catch biological data is not implemented in a way that affects quota attainment if selectivity patterns change, whereas inseason changes in the average weight of recreational catches have the potential to substantially alter anticipated harvest levels. Modeling of recreational management measures, catch projections, and impact analyses typically involve predicting the catch response of a given level of angler effort to a given bag limit...in numbers of fish. Regulations are implemented in numbers of fish and traditional bag limit analyses project the expected catch (in numbers) as bag limits are changed or other measures (depth restriction) are imposed. For the most part, a constant average weight is assumed to convert catch in numbers to kilograms. Establishing recreational catch quotas in numbers of fish removes a source of uncertainty in model projections (changing average weight), addresses the “higher degree of in-season accountability than is warranted” by current assessment and monitoring precision, as well as adds more predictability and stability to recreational catch projections.

However, the GMT identified a number of implementation concerns in moving from management in metric tons to numbers. At what point in the assessment/management process would numbers be reconciled with metric tons to determine progress toward optimum yield (OY) or rebuilding targets? Would current allocations be affected by using numbers rather than weight? Depth-based management has resulted in some states assuming different average weights of recreational catch by depth. Inseason changes in depth-based regulations therefore alter total catch projections; how would this management approach be affected by managing to numbers?

The GMT has not yet fully explored the advantages and disadvantages of this proposal, or all the details required for its implementation, but the GMT does agree that the approach has sufficient merit to include it for analysis in the 2009-2010 Management Specifications process. The GMT is also interested in any views the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) might have on potential scientific or statistical implications of managing the recreational fishery in numbers of fish.

GMT Recommendations:

1. Endorsement of the proposed procedure that would tally all California fish thrown back into a single “discard” category, as is the case in Oregon and Washington.
2. Endorsement of the pooling rules used within RecFIN to obtain the best estimate of average weights to enable conversion of catch in numbers to metric tons.
3. The GMT will continue to discuss the tradeoffs of expressing allowable catch quotas and harvest against those quotas for recreational groundfish in numbers of fish (rather than mt). The GMT would appreciate hearing the SSC’s views on the potential scientific or statistical implications of managing the recreational fishery in numbers of fish.

PFMC
06/11/07