

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF
EXEMPTED FISHING PERMITS (EFPs) FOR 2008

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the technical merit of the four exempted fishing permit (EFP) applications. Three of the proposed EFPs evaluate the effectiveness of using different gear types in various areas to target a specific species while avoiding bycatch of overfished species. One of the EFPs proposes to investigate converting trawl effort into a regional fishery management association that utilizes hook and line and traps, to evaluate the stability of fishing and associated businesses as well as cost-effectiveness.

The GMT reviewed the applications relative to evaluation criteria in the Council's Operating Procedure (COP) on EFPs. EFPs are designed to promote increased utilization of underutilized species, realize the expansion potential of the domestic groundfish fishery, and increase the harvest efficiency of the fishery consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and the management goals of the Fishery Management Plan. EFPs are also commonly used to explore ways to reduce effort on depressed stocks, encourage innovation and efficiency in the fisheries, provide access to constrained target stocks while directly measuring the bycatch associated with those fishing strategies, and to evaluate current and proposed management measures. A primary requirement of EFPs is the evaluation of fishing gear or management measures that can be transferred into regulation and applied fleetwide. EFPs that rely upon fisher experience, skill or ability that cannot be harnessed through a regulation fail to meet this requirement.

The GMT only reviewed the technical merits of the EFPs and notes that the Council will likely need to make their decision based on the availability of overfished species in the November scorecard, which will contain the most up to date projection for the 2008 fisheries.

Churchman (Agenda Item E.5.a, Attachment 1)

This application proposes to target chilipepper, widow, and bocaccio rockfish using vertical non-bottom contact gear outside the non-trawl Rockfish Conservation Area in central California (40°10' to 36° N. lat). The EFP proposes to use one vessel and limit the number of hooks to 100 per set. This experiment will explore whether discard can be virtually eliminated by using a rod and reel method, thereby reducing bycatch.

The GMT questions the innovation of the proposal, as it relies on skipper expertise rather than a new fishing technique or methodology. We suggest that the applicant refine the EFP to include a new fishing technique or gear type (e.g., adding a float to keep the fixed gear off the bottom) that, if successful, could be replicated fleetwide and transferred into regulation. The proposal states that there are no catch allowances for canary, cowcod, or yelloweye rockfish. The GMT suggests adding minimal caps to allow for the incidental take of those species to prevent the EFP from prematurely being shut down if any of these species are encountered. The GMT also notes that with all EFPs, 100% at-sea observer coverage is necessary and the application would need to incorporate this.

The GMT does not support the proposal as written due to the concerns above. Although the GMT would support a revision to include a new gear description, we feel it would reflect a major change, resulting in a new EFP. The GMT does not feel that we would be able to adequately

review the new EFP within the Council timeline for the 2008 EFP season. The GMT does encourage the participant to develop a new fishing technique or gear type that, if successful, could be replicated fleetwide and transferred into regulation.

Berkeley proposal (Agenda Item E.5.a, Attachment 2)

This application proposes to target chilipepper rockfish using an epipelagic longline gear in central California (36° to 37°30' N. lat), with the long-term objective of evaluating the effectiveness of a species-specific longline technique for its potential of providing future economic opportunities. This EFP proposes to use up to three vessels and open access troll fly and vertical hook and line gear that is set and fished in a unique way such that the hooks sink near to, but not on, the bottom.

This proposal was well thought out, met most of the criteria required for EFPs, and may have technical merit. However, the GMT had difficulty envisioning the gear and requests more information on the “unique way” that the gear will be deployed to help determine whether the concept can be transferred fleetwide. A primary requirement of EFPs is the evaluation of fishing gear or management measures that can be transferred into regulation and applied fleetwide. Therefore, this EFP must meet this requirement in order to be approved.

Nature Conservancy and Environmental Defense (Agenda Item E.5.a, Attachment 3)

The GMT reviewed the EFP application from the Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Environmental Defense, which proposes the initiation of a slope groundfish fishery by vessels with trawl permits that use non-trawl gear in a regional fishing association on the central California coast. TNC designed this EFP to provide information on the economic efficacy of pooling catch limits into a harvesting cooperative, or a regional fishery association, that utilizes longline and traps. The EFP is intended to provide information on the socioeconomic effects of gear-switching and dedicated access in addition to informing the cost-effectiveness of managing a regional fishing association within the framework of the Council system.

The GMT is in support of this proposal because it can provide useful information on economic efficiency, gear switching, and transference to co-ops as well as help inform future management decisions on a coast wide basis. Although this proposal does not use a new gear type and whiting co-ops are currently in operation, it does satisfy the definition of an EFP as defined in the COPs. This EFP will provide information towards evaluating current and proposed management measures, specifically as it applies to the trawl rationalization program. This multi-species, multi-target fishery uses multiple gear types and is significantly different from the whiting fishery. Additionally, the proposed EFP co-op is a regional fishery association and not a sector co-op, like whiting. Even if the socioeconomic or cost/benefit results are not available prior to initial development of a rationalization program, they could still prove informative for groups seeking to develop co-ops after a rationalization program has been developed. Similarly the results may have value for both managers and fishery participants during the first scheduled review of the rationalization program. Therefore the GMT believes there is technical merit in this proposal.

The GMT notes that if the requested total allocation of sablefish (60-day cumulative trip limits based on the weekly fixed gear – 1,050 lbs/week) is achieved, it would result in over 130 metric tons of sablefish. The GMT recommends that the proposal authors resubmit a lower cap for sablefish.

One premise of this EFP is to evaluate the socioeconomic aspects and cost effectiveness of co-ops. Therefore, the GMT requests more information on the socioeconomic component as well as full accounting of the co-op budget and revenues to inform the feasibility of future rationalization programs.

Recreational Fishing Association (Agenda Item E.5.a, Attachment 4)

This EFP proposes to investigate recreational hook and line fishing of slope rockfish in north-central California (Pigeon Point to 40°10' N. lat) seaward of the RCA. The goal of this EFP is to investigate whether a recreational fishery can still occur on the slope without impacts to overfished species. If successful, this might open a new market for charter fleets during months when inshore rockfish seasons are closed.

This proposal, as written, is an area EFP which does not incorporate a new innovative gear. The GMT suggests that the technical merit of this EFP would improve with a selective gear component. The application also describes using Electronic Monitoring System (EMS), yet EMS has not been tested on Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessels (CPFV). As with the other EFPs, the GMT indicates that 100% at-sea observer coverage is necessary. Specifically, we recommend using a Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission recreational sampler, preferably with experience observing aboard CPFVs. EFPs can only be conducted for the duration of one year, so this proposal also needs to be modified. This proposal only suggests fishing during those months when the nearshore fishing is closed, yet if the goal of the proposal is to demonstrate the applicability to a year round fishing opportunity, then the GMT suggests that the EFP be conducted year-round to examine seasonality of species compositions. The GMT also suggests that the proposed hard caps be decreased.

The GMT does recognize the potential of this EFP, but recommends that the applicant further define any new novel gear and work with the California Department of Fish and Game to further refine the sample design.

GMT Recommendations:

1. The Churchman proposal be redesigned and resubmitted in June 2008 based on the reasons stated above.
2. The GMT acknowledges the technical merit of the remaining EFPs and recommends revisions based on items addressed above.

PFMC
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