

## PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE SCHEDULE FOR OBSERVER BYCATCH AND TOTAL MORTALITY REPORTING

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### **Observer Data Release**

Currently, the NWFSC's West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (WCGOP) releases data in two formats: fishery-specific observer data reports and an annual total mortality report. The first type of report is released in an annual, summarized format for each fishery after a number of data quality steps have been completed (as outlined in a report to the Council in June 2006). The bycatch and discard amounts and rates included in these reports reflect only data from observed trips. Following release of these reports, the data on which they are based are incorporated with other data, such as vessel logbooks and fish tickets, via bycatch models which are used to project catch and discard under alternative management scenarios.

The total mortality report is an annual summarized report that provides estimates of total fishing mortality for selected groundfish species or species groups during a calendar year. Observer data are expanded to unobserved vessels within each covered fleet, using data from fish tickets and, where available, logbooks. These estimates are combined with fish tickets and available discard assumptions or estimates for west coast fisheries not covered by the observer program, as well as research catches, in compiling total mortalities. The development of this report requires the availability of fish ticket and trawl logbook data, recreational catch estimates, and input from other sources, such as the Council's Groundfish Management Team and state agencies.

In August 2005, as per the recommendations of the Council's Groundfish Information Policy Committee and at the Council's request, the release of observer data (starting in 2006) has been scheduled to occur in the Fall of each year, to provide annual reporting in a manner that supports the needs of the two-year management cycle. The schedule that was provided to the Council outlined four observer reports being released in September 2006 and the total mortality report being released in January (Table 1). As stated above, after publicly posting the data, they are incorporated in bycatch models used to analyze management decisions.

Following the January 2007 release of the 2005 Total Mortality Report, which revealed a significant increase in the bycatch of canary rockfish in the trawl fishery, the Council requested that the observer program explore alternatives to decrease the time between data collection and release. Table 2 presents an alternative schedule for the release of observer data that could be initiated in January 2008. This schedule would divide each year into two data collection periods, January-June and July-December. Trawl and near-shore data reports and updating of bycatch models would be completed within 5-6 months of the end of each data period. The reports and updating the bycatch models for the sablefish-endorsed and limited entry Daily-Trip-Limit fleets would remain on an annual basis. Given current observer program resources and lags in the availability of fish ticket data, providing reports and model updates more frequently than twice per year is not feasible.

## **Pros and Cons of the Alternative Schedule**

### **Pros:**

- Complete observer data from the prior year's trawl and near-shore fisheries would be available to inform inseason management decisions at the June Council meeting.
  - The prior year's summer data are important for identifying trends during the season when the most shelf and near-shore effort occurs.
  - Greater opportunity to take action to avoid overfishing where significant increases in rates are observed in the previous year.
  - Potential for relaxing restrictions on landing healthy species, where downward trends in bycatch rates are observed.
  
- Earlier availability of the Total Mortality Report
  - 2006 report not expected until January 2008.
  - 2007 and later reports could be available in the Fall of the following year, which could benefit the biennial specification process in odd-numbered years and evaluation of inseason management for the following year in even-numbered years.

### **Cons:**

- Increased work load on NWFSC staff to create reports and update models.
  
- June adoption of biennial specifications would coincide with the release of new observer data, which may differ significantly from data used in conducting the impact analyses of biennial specification alternatives.
  
- At present, observer data from the first four months of the current year can be included in model updates prior to the November Council meeting, and used to inform inseason management decisions for the early months of the following year. Although the alternative schedule includes release of data reports covering the first half of the year by November 1, it is less likely that model updates and analysis would be completed in time for use in evaluating possible November actions.
  
- Increased focus on the prior summer's data, as part of June inseason decisions, may increase the chances of overreactions to natural or sampling variability in bycatch rates, misinterpreting such changes as trends.

Table 1. Data release schedule followed by the NWFSC in releasing observer data for management use since 2006.

| <b>Timeline of Observer Data Release in 2006/early 2007</b>  |                           |                           |                            |                 |                            |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Data set</b>  | <b>1-Aug-06</b>           | <b>1-Oct-06</b>           | <b>1-Nov-06</b>            | <b>1-Jan-07</b> | <b>1-Feb-07</b>            |
| Limited-entry trawl bycatch and discard rates                | QA/QC Data<br>5/04 -4/06  | Report posted<br>9/29/06  | Update<br>Bycatch<br>Model |                 |                            |
| Limited-entry Non-sable fixed gear bycatch and discard rates | QA/QC Data<br>9/04-4/06   | Report posted<br>10/16/06 | Update<br>Bycatch<br>Model |                 |                            |
| Nearshore rockfish bycatch and discard rates                 | QA/QC Data<br>9/04 -4/06  | Report posted<br>2/27/07  | Update<br>Bycatch<br>Model |                 |                            |
| Limited-entry Sablefish fixed gear bycatch and discard rates | QA/QC Data<br>9/04-4/06   | Report posted<br>9/29/06  | Update<br>Bycatch<br>Model |                 |                            |
| 2005 Total Mortality   | QA/QC Data<br>1/05- 12/05 |                           |                            | Report posted   | Update<br>Bycatch<br>Model |

Table 2. Alternative schedule for release of observer data and bycatch model updates for management use during 2008 and beyond.

| 2007   | Jan | Feb                  | Mar | Apr                       | May         | Complete by:         |      |                           |     |                           |                      |     |
|--|-----|----------------------|-----|---------------------------|-------------|----------------------|------|---------------------------|-----|---------------------------|----------------------|-----|
|  |     |                      |     |                           |             | June                 | July | 1-Aug                     | Sep | 1-Oct                     | 1-Nov                | Dec |
| Data release type:<br>LE Trawl bycatch and discard rates |     |                      |     |                           |             |                      |      | QA/QC Data<br>May06-Apr07 |     | Post report               | Update bycatch model |     |
| LE Sablefish fixed gear bycatch and discard rates        |     |                      |     |                           |             |                      |      | QA/QC Data<br>Apr06-Oct06 |     | Post report               | Update bycatch model |     |
| LE 0 Tier fixed gear bycatch and discard rates           |     |                      |     |                           |             |                      |      | QA/QC Data<br>May06-Apr07 |     | Post report               | Update bycatch model |     |
| Nearshore fishery bycatch and discard rates              |     |                      |     |                           |             |                      |      | QA/QC Data<br>May06-Apr07 |     | Post report               | Update bycatch model |     |
| 2008   | Jan | 1-Feb                | Mar | 1-Apr                     | 1-May       | Complete by:         |      |                           |     |                           |                      |     |
|  |     |                      |     |                           |             | 1-Jun                | July | Aug                       | Sep | 1-Oct                     | 1-Nov                | Dec |
| Data release type:<br>LE Trawl bycatch and discard rates |     |                      |     | QA/QC Data<br>May07-Dec07 | Post report | Update bycatch model |      |                           |     | QA/QC Data<br>Jan08-Jun08 | Post report          |     |
| LE Sablefish fixed gear bycatch and discard rates        |     |                      |     | QA/QC Data<br>Apr07-Oct07 | Post report | Update bycatch model |      |                           |     |                           |                      |     |
| LE 0 Tier fixed gear bycatch and discard rates           |     |                      |     | QA/QC Data<br>May07-Dec07 | Post report | Update bycatch model |      |                           |     |                           |                      |     |
| Nearshore fishery bycatch and discard rates              |     |                      |     | QA/QC Data<br>May07-Dec07 | Post report | Update bycatch model |      |                           |     | QA/QC Data<br>Jan08-Jun08 | Post report          |     |
| Total Mortality 2006                                     |     | Post report          |     |                           |             |                      |      |                           |     |                           |                      |     |
| Total Mortality 2007                                     |     |                      |     |                           |             |                      |      |                           |     |                           | Post report          |     |
| 2009   | Jan | 1-Feb                | Mar | 1-Apr                     | 1-May       | Complete by:         |      |                           |     |                           |                      |     |
|  |     |                      |     |                           |             | 1-Jun                | July | Aug                       | Sep | 1-Oct                     | 1-Nov                | Dec |
| Data release type:<br>LE Trawl bycatch and discard rates |     | Update bycatch model |     | QA/QC Data<br>Jul08-Dec08 | Post report | Update bycatch model |      |                           |     | QA/QC Data<br>Jan09-Jun09 | Post report          |     |
| LE Sablefish fixed gear bycatch and discard rates        |     |                      |     | QA/QC Data<br>Apr08-Oct08 | Post report | Update bycatch model |      |                           |     |                           |                      |     |
| LE 0 Tier fixed gear bycatch and discard rates           |     |                      |     | QA/QC Data<br>Jan08-Dec08 | Post report | Update bycatch model |      |                           |     |                           |                      |     |
| Nearshore fishery bycatch and discard rates              |     | Update bycatch model |     | QA/QC Data<br>Jul08-Dec08 | Post report | Update bycatch model |      |                           |     | QA/QC Data<br>Jan09-Jun09 | Post report          |     |
| Total Mortality 2008                                     |     |                      |     |                           |             |                      |      |                           |     |                           | Post report          |     |