

## GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS FOR 2009-2010 FISHERIES

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) considered options for 2009-2010 acceptable biological catches (ABCs) and associated optimum yields (OYs) for groundfish species. There are three parts to this statement: the first contains general comments; the second covers OY recommendations for species under rebuilding plans; and the third section includes recommendations for all other species. In addition for the record, the GAP includes as reference the 21-page Supplemental GAP Report from June, 2006 Agenda item F.2.c which detailed economic impacts to communities and fishing sectors based on low OY alternatives.

### GENERAL COMMENTS

#### *Needs of Fishing Communities*

Clearly status quo harvest levels are NOT meeting the needs of fishing communities. Species of concern OYs are set extremely low which greatly affects fisheries for healthier stocks which interact with the less abundant species. Nowhere is this more evident than in Neah Bay, Washington where the entire trawl fleet has literally gone out of business due to management measures implemented to stay within extremely low harvest guidelines for some species of concern. Taking into consideration the needs of fishing communities to avoid short-term disastrous consequences has different meanings to different stakeholders. However, one fact is undisputable: short and long-term consequences to fishing communities are intrinsically linked. In order for there to be commercial and recreational fishing industries over the long term, short term management measures must help preserve fishing businesses. More plainly said, if no fishing industry exists into the future because of overly extreme cuts in harvest then the Council clearly has not taken into account the economic needs of fishing communities.

#### *Rebuilding Paradox*

Much has been made about the need to justify even the smallest increase in impacts to depleted species as if recent and current levels of exploitation are somehow adequate – that people have been able to “make-it” on these low levels so an increase that results in a slightly longer rebuilding period is not justified. While we know that in fact people have not been able to “make it,” as in Neah Bay, we also know that all of our species currently under rebuilding plans are in fact rebuilding – some at a much greater rate than anticipated. The GAP believes our recommended increases to OYs for overfished species are justified based on the rebuilding paradox alone. Logically, as the stocks are rebuilding at accelerated rates the incidence of interaction with these stocks increases exponentially.

#### *Closed Areas*

When most if not all of a depleted species’ habitat is off limits to fishing through rockfish conservation areas (RCAs) it is unclear why further restrictions on catch outside of these sensitive habitat areas is warranted. For example, the cowcod conservation area is over 1.3 million hectares (over 5,000 square miles) and protects the majority of cowcod habitat - however we still need to beg and plead for even the status quo harvest OUTSIDE of this massive protected area.

### ***Catch Projections***

The catch projections currently utilized in the scorecard have become defacto allocations. As the OYs for overfished species have shrunk, so too have the catch projections resulting in a process where management measures are crafted to meet a defacto allocation presented as a catch projection in the scorecard. It is clearly difficult to accurately project impacts and managing to these extremely low levels is difficult based on uncertainty and extrapolated bycatch data from the observer program that always results in changed projections.

### ***General Economic Conditions***

#### *Commercial fishery*

Generally from 1981 through 1997 the ex-vessel value of the commercial non-whiting groundfish fishery ranged from \$80 to \$100 million. In 1998, the first year of the groundfish disaster, the value of the entire non-whiting groundfish fishery was \$61 million. The disaster was officially declared in 2000, and from 2002 through 2005 exvessel value of the fishery ranged from approximately \$40 to \$45 million. This is a difference of \$40 to \$55 million from the earlier period.

#### *Recreational fishery*

It is difficult to estimate the social and economic value of recreational fishing.

In California the groundfish draft environmental impact statement (EIS) from June 2006 notes that the values calculated were drawn from the dollars anglers spent pursuing the fishery. In 2005 for example, California Recreational Survey data in northern California records almost 57,000 angler trips for the months of September and October. A closure in October in north-central California could lead to a loss of almost \$3 million in recreational fishing expenditures. Another indicator of lost revenue to the state of California is the steady decline of sport fishing license sales. California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) reports that annual resident licenses sales are down from 2.2 million in 1976 to 1.2 million in 2005. During that time the population of California grew 166% from 21 to 35 million people, but there was still a loss of 1 million anglers with a drop in sales of licenses of 54%. It is estimated that this decline in license sales cost CDFG over \$32 million at a time when the department is already facing severe budget cuts.

The recreational charter fleet in Oregon has been reduced from 232 boats in 2001 to 76 in 2008. About 25% of the boats are not full-time operators – many are small 6-pack boats that are on trailers and may only operate on weekends. Management measures implemented since 2001 have greatly reduced and changed the make-up of the fleet. Many of the full-time operators have already gone out of business. The few full-time operators that are left are barely holding on. As management continues to tighten it takes fewer restrictions to break the remaining participants. Under low OY conditions, the Oregon recreational fleet stands to lose at least \$7.5 million. This equates to over 35,000 private trips and over 71,000 charter trips lost.

For the Washington recreational fleet, both private and charter operations are operating under restrictions that are difficult to live with currently and further reductions and restrictions will be devastating. Businesses in all sectors (hotel/motel, bait and tackle shops, charter offices, etc.) are showing a downturn in revenues from the same time the previous year. This is a cumulative effect of short halibut seasons, fathom restrictions, fuel prices, and a poor economy.

## GAP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OYS FOR SPECIES UNDER REBUILDING PLANS

In general the GAP would like to remind the Council that any liberalizing in OYs on overfished species does not present NEW fishing opportunities. We are looking to reinstate significant lost opportunities and provide flexibility for some existing fisheries. In the last two years some of the commercial and recreational participants have been permanently lost. In the last two years shoreside infrastructure and facilities have been permanently lost. In the last two years ice machines have had to be subsidized in some ports and buyers have stopped buying product because the amounts available are too low.

Increases in overfished species OYs also allow increased exempted fishing permit (EFP) opportunities. In recent years the GAP has consistently denied creative and forward thinking EFP applications because fish was not available to cover projected impacts. Increases in overfish species OYs allow the possibility that EFP proposals utilizing new and innovative gear could be pursued.

Increases in overfished species OYs presents opportunities for new and innovative cooperative research and also takes some pressure off traditional research opportunities. In recent years the possibility of a large research tow of canary rockfish could have shut down many fisheries. Research is a critical part of the process and a robust research program must be continued. Higher OYs on overfished species allow existing and new cooperative research programs to take place which ultimately inform the stock assessments necessary to make management decisions.

### ***Summary of GAP Recommendations:***

<b>Species</b>	<b>2009 OY</b>	<b>2010 OY</b>
Bocaccio	288 mt	302 mt
Canary rockfish	155 mt	155 mt
Cowcod	4 mt	4 mt
Darkblotched rockfish	300 mt	306 mt
Pacific Ocean Perch	189 mt	189 mt
Widow rockfish	522 mt	509 mt
Yelloweye rockfish	17 mt	15 mt

## **Bocaccio**

The GAP recommends an OY of 288 mt in 2009 and 302 mt in 2010.

### Justification for Recommendation

- The bocaccio biomass is increasing at an accelerated rate.
- The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) comments “There are four instances where calculated times to rebuild are very similar to the Ttarget in Amendment 16-4 (Pacific Ocean perch, bocaccio, widow rockfish, and yelloweye rockfish), with the greatest discrepancy being six years. For these stocks, progress towards rebuilding is considered adequate and the SSC recommends that no redefinition of Ttarget or adjustment to the rebuilding harvest rate is warranted” (from Agenda Item H.1.a. SSC Report).
- The 288 mt OY equates to the status quo harvest rate and results in rebuilding by 2023.
- The rebuilding analysis conducted in 2007 showed that given current spawning biomass per recruit (SPR) (77.7%) the median time to rebuild would be three years earlier (2023) than the originally estimated rebuilding schedule.
- As a precautionary measure the 288 mt OY is only 36% of the Council’s preferred ABC.

### Regained Opportunities:

- There is a significant benefit to charter boat operations when retention of three bocaccios is made available (current retention is one fish). It is well documented that passenger counts have decreased due to the severe restrictions currently in place.
- A 288 mt OY combined with increased OY for canary could allow open access fishermen to capture their deeper nearshore and shelf trip limits as well as their lingcod trip limits.

## **Canary Rockfish**

The GAP recommends an OY of 155 mt in 2009 and 155 mt in 2010.

### Justification for Recommendation

- The latest review of the canary stock status shows that the stock is rebuilding at a greater rate than anticipated – the SSC reports “canary rockfish is very much ahead of schedule (42 years)”
- The 155 my OY equates to the status quo harvest rate and results in rebuilding by 2021.
- The rebuilding analysis conducted in 2007 showed that given current SPR (88.7%) the median time to rebuild would be 42 years earlier (2021) than the originally estimate rebuilding schedule.
- As a precautionary measure the 155 mt OY is only 17% of the Council’s preferred ABC.

### Regained opportunities:

- A higher OY for canary rockfish could increase flexibility for the whiting fishery which has been constrained by canary bycatch in the past.
- A higher OY could possibly open up some yellowtail opportunity for the mid-water trawl fishery whose yellowtail fishery has been completely eliminated in recent years due to imposed restrictions.
- A higher OY would result in fewer regulatory discards and more fish available for biological data collection in both the recreational and commercial sectors.

- A higher OY could move the shoreward RCA boundary from 20 fathoms out to 30 fathoms. This presents reinstated opportunities for shelf rockfish as well as potentially longer seasons for the recreational, open access near shore and fixed gear sectors and the possibility to fish outside of marine reserves that currently limit nearshore water access.
- A higher OY would provide more opportunities seaward of the RCA boundaries.
- For the non-whiting trawl fleet canary reductions have resulted in forgone opportunities for lingcod, a fishery for sanddabbs, a shallow fishery for English sole, and the arrowtooth fishery. Large areas have been closed inshore of the RCA as from Port Orford to Coos Bay. While a higher canary OY does not bring all of these fisheries back it is a step in the direction towards reinstating some of this lost opportunity.

### **Cowcod**

The GAP recommends a 4 mt OY in 2009 and a 4 mt OY in 2010

#### Justification for Recommendation

- The SSC reports “the SSC therefore advises a revision to Ttarget is warranted but adherence to the current harvest rate (SPR=90.0%) provides continuity with past management practices and should rebuild the stock within Tmax(new).”
- The status quo harvest rate results in a harvest higher than 2 mt.
- As a precautionary measure the 4 mt OY is only 31% of the Council’s preferred ABC.
- The cowcod conservation area covers 1,372,447 hectares of essential cowcod habitat – the majority of habitat is protected by this area and harvesting up to 4 mt outside of this area should not be an issue.

A 4 mt is not opening up any new opportunity or regaining any old opportunity, but maintaining current limited opportunity.

### **Darkblotched**

The GAP recommends 300 mt for 2009 and 306 mt for 2010.

#### Justification for Recommendation

- As a precautionary measure the 300 mt OY is 68% of the Council’s preferred OY.
- A 300 mt darkblotch OY reflects the current projected take in 2008.
- A 300 mt OY is equal to the current SPR harvest rate (60.7%) and results in rebuilding by 2030.
- The SSC reports “rebuilding analysis suggests that the current SPR is within legal requirements of rebuilding by a newly defined Tmax(new) of 2040.”
- Anything less than 300 mt (which is a 10% reduction from 2008) could result in an RCA boundary change from 150 to 200 which would limit limited entry trawl opportunity and encourage more pressure shoreward of the RCA.
- A reduction less than 300 mt could result in more restrictive bycatch caps for the whiting fishery.

#### Regained Opportunities

- Currently darkblotch constrains slope rock, sablefish, whiting, short and longspines, dover and all of the other fisheries seaward of the RCA.

## **POP**

The GAP recommends a 189 mt OY for 2009 and 189 mt for 2010.

### Justification for Recommendation

- The SSC reports “the estimated time to rebuild the stock, if the current harvest rate is maintained at an SPR of 86.4% is 2011, which is six years ahead of schedule. Given these conditions, the SSC concludes that no change is necessary to POP harvest policies and that progress towards rebuilding is adequate.”
- A 189 mt OY equates to the current harvest rate in the rebuilding plan
- As a precautionary measure the 189 mt OY is 16% of the Council’s preferred ABC.

## **Widow rockfish**

The GAP recommends a 522 mt OY for 2009 and a 509 mt OY for 2010.

### Justification for recommendation

- The SSC comments “There are four instances where calculated times to rebuild are very similar to the Ttarget in Amendment 16-4 (POP, bocaccio, widow rockfish, and yelloweye rockfish), with the greatest discrepancy being six years. For these stocks, progress towards rebuilding is considered adequate and the SSC recommends that no redefinition of Ttarget or adjustment to the rebuilding harvest rate is warranted” (from Agenda Item H.1.a. SSC Report).
- A 522 mt OY equates to the current SPR of 95.0%.
- Using the status quo SPR the new median rebuilding time is 6 years (2015) earlier than previously calculated.
- The SSC reports “widow rockfish stock is on track for recovery by the next assessment cycle.”
- The GAP believes that the 522 mt OY presents no biological concerns for widow rockfish.

### Regained opportunities

- Higher OYs for widow would eventually allow a mid-water yellowtail fishery to be pursued which has been constrained by canary and widow
- A higher OY for widow allows the whiting fishery additional flexibility as widow rockfish has impacted fishing behavior and constrained the fishery in the past

## **Yelloweye**

The GAP recommends an OY of 17 mt in 2009 and 15 mt in 2010.

### Justification for Recommendation:

- The 17 mt OY is the result of the “ramp down” approach previously accepted by the Council
- A 17 mt OY for yelloweye is the only way to maintain current opportunities for recreational and commercial fisheries north of 40° 10’.
- If we reduce any lower than 17 mt in 2009 we will have to reduce even further our current fisheries which are already significantly restricted.

## **GAP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OYS FOR OTHER SPECIES**

The GAP discussed ABCs/OYs for all other species.

Summary of GAP Recommendations for non-overfished species:

Species	2009 OY	2010 OY
Lingcod N of 42	4,593 mt	4,173 mt
Lingcod S of 42	685 mt	656 mt
Pacific cod	1,600 mt	1,600 mt
Pacific whiting	GMT recommended range	
Sablefish coastwide	8,423 mt	7,729 mt
Sablefish N of 36	7,723 mt	7,100 mt
Sablefish S of 36	700 mt	629 mt
Shortbelly	6,950 mt	6,950 mt
Chillipepper rockfish	3,037 mt	2,576 mt
Splitnose	461 mt	461 mt
Yellowtail	4,562 mt	4,562 mt
Shortspine thornyhead N	1,608 mt	1,591 mt
Shortspine thornyhead S	414 mt	410 mt
Longspine thornyhead n	2,231 mt	2,175 mt
Longspine thornyhead S	395 mt	385 mt
Black rockfish (WA)	490 mt	464 mt
Black rockfish (OR & CA)	1,000 mt	1,000 mt
Blue rockfish (CA)	Leave under minor nearshore	Leave under minor nearshore
Minor rockfish north	2,283 mt	2,283 mt
Nearshore species	155 mt	155 mt
Blue rock	28 mt	28 mt
Shelf species	968 mt	968 mt
Slope species	1,160 mt	1,160 mt
Minor rockfish south	1,990 mt	1,990 mt
Nearshore species	650 mt	650 mt
Blue rock	202 mt	202 mt
Shelf species	714 mt	714 mt
Slope species	626 mt	626 mt
California scorpionfish	175 mt	155 mt
Cabazon (CA only)	74 mt	79 mt
Dover sole	16,500 mt	16,500 mt
English sole	14,326 mt	9,745 mt
Petrale sole	2,433 mt	2,393 mt
Arrowtooth flounder	11,267 mt	10,112 mt
Starry flounder	1,004 mt	1,077 mt
Other flatfish	4,884 mt	4,884 mt
Longnose skate	1,349 mt within skate category	1,349 mt within skate category

**Sablefish**

The GAP recommends adopting a coastwide OY for 2009 of 8,423 mt distributed 7,723 mt to the north and 700 mt south of 36°. This split more closely reflects the current fishery and status quo apportionment until there is more information to suggest otherwise. Further, as a precautionary measure an OY of 8,423 mt is only 85% of the ABC whereas if 2008 the OY was 98% of the ABC. Regardless of the split the GAP recommends a coastwide OY of 8,423 mt.

PFMC

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