

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON INSEASON ADJUSTMENT

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a presentation from California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) Enforcement about salmon bycatch in the early season California shoreside whiting fishery. Regulations provide 5 percent of the shoreside whiting allocation to the California fishery that opens April 1. This sub-sector allocation is based, in part, on migratory patterns of whiting, which are not generally available in this area in harvestable amounts later in the year. The allocation is intended to provide California an opportunity to participate in the whiting fishery.

The GAP understands and is sensitive to the severe restrictions imposed on 2008 California salmon fisheries. The GAP is fully aware of the concerns about salmon bycatch in all areas and sectors of the coastwide whiting fishery. The GAP appreciates the sensitivity surrounding the salmon issues. The GAP believes that current Federal regulations under the Biological Opinion address these concerns. In addition, the industry is committed to the use of voluntary measures that mitigate salmon bycatch. However, we find no biological reason or regulatory precedent in the whiting fishery that leads us to support or endorse the additional CDFG recommendations presented to the GAP.

(1) The GAP does not believe it is necessary for the California fishery to operate under a hardcap of 550 Chinook salmon. The GAP believes present regulations are sufficient to manage this fishery without the use of salmon hard caps for California. Current Federal regulations authorize curtailing the whiting fishery, including fishing in the California shoreside fishery, based on a specified salmon bycatch rate.

(2) The GAP and whiting industry recognize that there are a limited number of regulatory bycatch management measures available in 2008 that allow additional spatial closures or temporary harvest interruptions. Therefore, for the California shoreside fishery the whiting industry proposes to use (in concert with CDFG and National Marine Fisheries Service enforcement) additional voluntary measures, which have been used by other whiting sectors and/or in other regions, to mitigate bycatch. These include (but are not limited to) voluntary areas to be avoided of known salmon bycatch hotspots; and voluntary stand down for periods of time if salmon encounter rates spike. There will be an industry meeting Monday April 14th. Participants in the whiting industry will discuss the salmon bycatch issue at this meeting. It is hoped that other innovative ideas for salmon bycatch avoidance can be brought to the table at this time.

A question that has been posed by some in industry is if it would be prudent to re-examine the April 1 California shoreside fishery start date to see if salmon bycatch would be mitigated by starting later (e.g., April 15th or May 1st).