

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON PROPOSED PROCEDURES FOR ESTIMATING PACIFIC HALIBUT BYCATCH IN THE GROUND FISH SETLINE FISHERIES

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a briefing on this agenda item from Mr. John DeVore and Dr. Jim Hastie.

There was considerable GAP discussion regarding the results from the 2006 observer-based bycatch estimates of bycatch in groundfish setline fisheries. Dr. Hastie indicated that NMFS is conducting reviews of this analysis, which showed a high bycatch number. The number for 2007 seemed more in line with previous observations. The GAP was informed that International Pacific Halibut Commission had recommended a lower bycatch mortality associated with the limited entry (LE) setline tiered sablefish fishery. The rate will drop from 25 percent to 16 percent. This was recommended because the fishery is conducted in an Individual Fishing Quota format and not an open entry race for fish.

The GAP has several recommendations and observations from the discussion with Dr. Hastie that should assist in future bycatch estimations in the groundfish setline fisheries. The following reflects those thoughts:

1. The Council voted last fall to require the setline fisheries to fill out log books. This will presumably be implemented in the 2010 fishery. This should result in a new information base to help ground truth bycatch estimations for many species.
2. There needs to be recognition that bycatch rates of halibut drop the further south the directed daily-trip-limit (DTL) and LE tiered fisheries for sablefish are conducted. Dr. Hastie mentioned that NMFS was reviewing special and geographic differences in bycatch rates from the Olympic Peninsula area southward.
2. The 2009 sablefish season may provide an opportunity to see how the tiered limited entry fishery north of Pt. Chehalis operates their gear. With the allowed bycatch of only 2 halibut per trip bycatch rates may fall in the northern area as there is less economic importance in the bycatch. Additionally it was pointed out that it is important for the observer protocol for longline fisheries to observe efforts at different depths as the gear may be set from 200 fathoms out to 500 fathoms and there are significant differences in bycatch rates for different species by depth. Longline gear is generally set from shallow to deep. Dr. Hastie indicated that he believed that the observers were aware of this and that observations were being made throughout the range of depths fished by longline gear.
4. The GAP discussed the Port Orford proposal to allow for the bycatch of halibut in the daily trip limit and limited entry tiered sablefish fisheries south of Pt. Chehalis. The Pt. Orford fishermen are working with the State of Oregon currently and the Council can expect a formal proposal to amend the Area 2A halibut catch sharing plan on this issue later this year pending discussions between the fleet and ODFW.