

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON PROPOSED PROCEDURES FOR
ESTIMATING PACIFIC HALIBUT BYCATCH IN THE GROUND FISH FISHERIES

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the estimates of Pacific halibut bycatch in both the trawl and non-nearshore fixed-gear fisheries presented by the National Marine Fishery Service (NMFS) Northwest Fisheries Science Center (Agenda Items H.2.b, Supplemental NMFS Reports 1 and 2). The GMT supports using the most recent mortality estimates presented in H.2.b, Supplemental NMFS Report 2 for estimating halibut mortality in groundfish non-nearshore fixed-gear fisheries operating within International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) Area 2A. This report provides estimated total halibut discard mortality in non-nearshore fixed-gear fisheries from 2008. Alternative total mortality estimates for these fisheries were provided in a previous report (Estimated Discard and Total Catch of Selected Groundfish Species in the 2007 U.S. West Coast Fisheries) using essentially the same methodology. However, the use of more recent information is preferable as it would provide estimates from the same year for both trawl and fixed-gear fisheries.

The GMT also recommends that the Council pursue the exploration of two issues that would further refine the estimate of total mortality of legal-sized halibut in Area 2A in the future. The first issue is the procedure used to estimate halibut lengths by West Coast Groundfish Observers. Lengths of most discarded fish are visually estimated to the nearest 10 cm, which is problematic, because the regulatory discard size (< 81 cm) is encompassed by one of the 10-cm length bins that observers record (75 – 84 cm). The second issue is the assumed discard mortality rate (16 percent) that is applied to total discards. The GMT supports evaluating whether this assumed discard mortality rate is applicable for fixed-gear fisheries in Area 2A.