

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
FINAL EXEMPTED FISHING PERMIT APPROVAL

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed five exempted fishing permit (EFP) proposals (Agenda Items H.3.a, Attachments 1-5) for the drift gillnet (DGN) swordfish fishery in the West Coast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Proposals were solicited from the Council to test alternative fishing gears or methods, and/or to allow fishing practices that are not allowed under current regulations. Dr. Kit Dahl met with the SSC to discuss the current EFP review process, summarize the EFPs, and answer questions. Because of the shortened EFP review process, the SSC proposal reviews were not guided by specific science questions or concerns from the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT).

In general, 100% observer coverage is important given the clear desire to measure protected species interactions, which are typically rare events. All of the proposals include 100% observer coverage except the proposal in Attachment 2, which specifies a minimum of 20%. Observer coverage in the other proposals is contingent on funding. It is important that the EFPs report the economic results of their operations so that information is available about the potential economic viability of alternative fishing gears or methods. The economic information should include revenues, costs, and net-revenue. The catch monitoring and economic data should be made available in a format suitable for use in scientific evaluations and management.

With 100% observer coverage and sufficient economic information, all of the proposals can measure potential economic viability and begin collecting the data necessary to estimate levels of bycatch. The SSC points out that precisely estimating bycatch rates, or determining whether alternative gears or methods have lower bycatch rates than DGNs, is likely to require many years of data collection. This is not necessarily due to the EFPs themselves, but rather due to the rarity of protected species bycatch events and the relatively small number of vessels participating. However, if bycatch rates of new gear types or locations fished are substantially higher than the historical DGN fishery, this may be apparent more quickly.

The proposals contained in Attachments 1, 2, 3 and 5 seek to answer potentially useful scientific questions, but do not contain sufficient methodological information (e.g., sampling rates, sampling methods, or how the data will be analyzed) to evaluate how or whether the scientific questions may be answered. The SSC notes that the HMSMT's EFP evaluation criteria (see Agenda Item E.3.b, HMSMT Report, June 2014) comprise a useful listing of information proposals should contain so that their scientific and other merits may be evaluated.