

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON  
INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS INCLUDING CARRYOVER AND REGULATORY  
AMENDMENT TO MANAGE SET-ASIDES

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) met with the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) to discuss possible inseason adjustments. The GMT discussion was led by Mr. Dan Erickson and Ms. Jessi Doeringhaus. The GAP was also briefed by Mr. John DeVore on flexible management of set-asides. The GAP offers the following recommendations and comments on proposed inseason adjustments to ongoing and 2015-2016 groundfish fisheries.

Big Skate

It is unclear to the GAP what information – and what process – is being used to derive the acceptable biological catch (ABC). For example, we understand that numbers were pulled from the trawl survey and then a precautionary calculation was made to account for lack of data. However, the trawl survey doesn't cover the entirety of the coastwide skate biomass, which is generally located shoreward of 30 fathoms, thereby potentially under-estimating the skate biomass. While the GAP understands that management measures need to be put in place, we strongly urge the Council to obtain a more accurate estimate of skate biomass as soon as possible and take into consideration that Washington does not allow commercial fishing inside three miles. The best way to do this *may* be to make big skate an “in-the-fishery” species instead of an ecosystem component (EC) species. This way, we could request a big skate assessment in the future.

The GAP suggests instituting big skate sorting requirements in Washington and Oregon, as many processors already routinely sort skate species. In the meantime, it would be helpful to have Oregon's species composition data uploaded to PacFIN so we have the most up-to-date information about skate landings available. We also request the methodology for estimating big skate mortality, both current and historical, be analyzed in order to obtain a more accurate picture of big skate trends and to determine whether current big skate discard rates are applicable. Big skates are a very hardy species and discard mortality may be closer to 50 percent, like longnose skate, rather than 100 percent. The GAP requests the mortality rates be analyzed and perhaps utilized at the June Council meeting.

If the Council moves forward with a range of alternatives to consider for big skate trip limits, the GAP suggests analyzing the following from an early GMT analysis:

Alternative 6

5,000 lbs. in each of periods 1, 2, and 6; 12,500 lbs. in each of periods 3 and 4; and 10,000 lbs. in period 5.

Alternative 11

1,000 lbs. in each of periods 1, 2, and 6; 15,000 lbs. in each of periods 3 and 4; and 5,000 lbs. in period 5.

## Alternative 15

1,000 lbs. in each of periods 1, 2, and 6; 12,500 lbs. in each of periods 3 and 4; and 5,000 lbs. in period 6.

All of these options will allow some fishing in periods 1, 2, and 6, with higher trip limits in periods 3, 4, and 5. GAP members noted Alternative 6 may be the most equitable.

Trawlers noted this is a huge issue, much more of a problem than the rougheye issue, in some cases. As one trawler noted, he can move away from rougheye, but big skate is caught in shallow water, oftentimes in conjunction with petrale sole. Some trawlers also noted the best skate are way inside the 30-fathom line, outside the area covered by the trawl survey.

The consequences of potentially restrictive trip limits will have severe economic consequences. For example, trawlers may have to switch to fishing for a different species, such as shrimp. Others may decide that fishing for species other than skate may not be worth it and tie up in the summertime to work on their vessels or something.

On the processing side, this will affect several plants as well. It's not a simple change to switch out equipment for a filet line to process different species.

The skate market is primarily a Korean one – a quirky market in itself. Korean markets frequently pop up, then they disappear. Now there is a market for big skate and the seafood industry tries to take advantage of a market when it exists.

At the same time, the industry feels it's extremely unfair for a market to develop and then fishermen and processors will likely lose it. It could take two years to get a market back that fishery managers eliminated in one month.

## Flexible Management of Set-asides

The GAP believes that this is an activity that should be pursued for implementation in 2016. If there is no vehicle to facilitate 2016 implementation, then incorporation into the 2017-2018 specifications process should be pursued. The GAP believes there is benefit to moving forward with this item because it can provide management flexibility, possibly prevent fishery closures, and provide an avenue to harvest fish that might not be otherwise utilized. There would have to be careful constraints and criteria developed that would be specific on when and how National Marine Fisheries Service would have the authority to move unutilized set-aside fish. Another benefit of this action is that the set-aside fish could be available to any sector that might need it.

## Surplus Carryover

The GAP recommends that all non-whiting IFQ species where the ACL is less than the ABC, including sablefish north, be eligible for the issuance of surplus carryover from 2014 to 2015. The GAP also recommends the Council consider issuing eligible carryover pounds up to the point where the ACL plus surplus carryover equals the ABC.

## Yelloweye and Canary Rockfish

The GAP understands that there has been an increase in mortality of yelloweye and canary rockfish in the commercial nearshore fisheries between the 2012 and 2013 seasons. While the non-nearshore fishery was beneath their catch share for each species, the commercial fixed gear share was exceeded for both yelloweye and canary rockfish. Having viewed the GMT statement, the GAP recommends the following:

### **Option 1**

Allow the projection to be higher than the “share” in the scorecard. The non-trawl allocation is not projected to be exceeded (neither is the ACL).

### **Option 2**

Increase the “share” to nearshore.

The GAP does not recommend Option 3 which would move the Rockfish Conservation Area from 30 fathoms to 20 fathoms. Effort would shift to shallower water and would likely cause gear conflicts with the other commercial and recreational fishermen. It would also increase catch of nearshore rockfish. The yelloweye savings from this option are insignificant.

PFMC  
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