

GROUNDFISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON SEABIRD PROTECTION UPDATE

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a report on seabird avoidance measures by Council staff officer Dr. Kit Dahl and Mr. Ed Melvin of Washington Sea Grant.

The GAP notes the longline fleet currently deploys streamer lines for vessels greater than 55 feet as a seabird avoidance measure. The incidental take allowed for short-tailed albatross currently is one per year in the groundfish fishery (both fixed gear and trawl), and the take limit will be calculated based on an average of no more than two birds in any two-year period to accommodate inter-annual variation. More than that could trigger a Section 7 consultation under the Endangered Species Act.

Members of the GAP also noted concern about potential requirements for seabird avoidance for fixed gear vessels smaller than 55 feet. Larger fixed gear vessels and longliners that fish in Alaska frequently use fishing gear and seabird avoidance equipment that are more uniform in design. Small boats that fish the West Coast typically use gear and have deck designs that are very different, making it difficult – and potentially more costly – to conform to existing seabird avoidance techniques. The GAP requests fishery managers allow for some flexibility in seabird avoidance rules and time to allow development of designs that will work on smaller vessels. For example, using a single streamer line attached to the mast instead of two attached to the poles, or vice-versa.

Regarding night fishing, the GAP discussed the option of exempting the use of streamer lines at night, since data seem to show a decrease in albatross bycatch at night. This option should be considered to provide flexibility in seabird bycatch design for vessels on the West Coast.

The GAP also would like clarification on the next steps for seabird protection, if any.

One of the concerns of the GAP, as we've mentioned in the [Supplemental GAP report on habitat issues from April 2014 \(Agenda Item B.1.c\)](#), is potential placement of floating wind energy turbines on the Outer Continental Shelf. There are no bird take provisions for wind energy developers or owners of wind energy projects. Therefore, the GAP requests the Council make clear to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management that it require mitigation strategies for wind energy companies, such as ensuring the turbines can document any bird kills and, if a bird kill is detected, require the turbines turn more slowly, to a speed the birds can detect. The seafood industry should not be held hostage to an energy industry that could kill an endangered species unimpeded and potentially close an established fishery.