

GROUND FISH GEAR CHANGES – Draft Purpose and Need, Alternatives

Trawl Gear Configuration & Gear Use

Under the omnibus prioritization agenda item at the September 2014 Council meeting and under groundfish workload planning at the November 2014 Council meeting, the Council prioritized for near-term consideration several changes to groundfish gear regulations, including trawl gear configuration and gear use.

This document provides the following for discussion:

- Draft Purpose and Need statement on an action to increase flexibility, improve efficiency, and reduce regulatory complexity on gear regulations in relation to the trawl rationalization program.
- Draft range of alternatives.

Gear changes are tentatively scheduled for Council consideration as follows:

- *September 2015* – Adopt a purpose and need statement and range of alternatives
- *November 2015* – Analysis update
- *March 2016* - Select a final preferred alternative (FPA)
- *January 2017* - Target implementation

Background

The groundfish gear regulation topics to be considered build off past recommendations for changes developed from the Trawl Rationalization Regulatory Evaluation Committee ([TRREC](#)) in November 2011 and the [Gear Workshop Report](#) in November 2012, as well as the NMFS report on an initial review of pre- and post-trawl rationalization regulations ([Agenda Item G.9.b, NMFS Report 1, September 2013](#)).

At the September 2014 and November 2014 Council meetings, the Council prioritized changes to gear regulations. The excerpts below from the September Council meeting omnibus prioritization document ([Agenda Item J.1.a, Attachment 1, September 2014](#)) provide a starting point for the gear changes that could be considered in this action.

46. Trawl IFQ - Gear Use - Multiple Gears Onboard and Use

The [TRREC](#) Report from the November 2011 Council meeting and the [Gear Workshop Report](#) from the November 2012 Council meeting both contained recommendations for the carrying and use of multiple gear types on a single trip, including both trawl and fixed gears.

48. Trawl IFQ - Remove Certain Restrictions on Trawl Gear Configuration

The [TRREC](#) suggested that with the individual incentives provided by the trawl rationalization program it would be possible to “Eliminate codend, chafing gear, mesh size and selective flatfish trawl gear requirements and restrictions,” but that large and small footrope distinctions would have to remain due to EFH considerations—though they might be modified. For similar reasons, the [Gear Workshop Report](#) recommended reducing the minimum mesh size for bottom trawl by ½ inch, to 4 inches, and also recommended eliminating the selective flatfish trawl requirement. One particular obstacle presented by the selective flatfish requirement is that the nets are two seamed nets and it is not possible to put rockfish excluders in two seamed nets.

Draft Statement of the Purpose of and Need for Action

The purpose of this action is to provide more flexibility in the configuration and use of gear for participants in the trawl rationalization program, while at the same time ensuring that conservation objectives are met. Such flexibility is expected to foster innovation and allow for more optimal harvest operations. Benefits may include increased efficiency through reduced costs and increased revenues. The need for this action is to better use the individual accountability now in place for participants in the trawl rationalization program in order to more fully achieve the expected benefits of the program.

Pre-trawl rationalization regulations that managed the fleet as a whole may need to be updated or may no longer be appropriate for managing individuals operating under the incentives provided in the rationalized portion of the Pacific groundfish fishery. With the resource allocated to individuals or cooperatives, with 100 percent monitoring, and with individuals or cooperatives held accountable for the consequences of their decisions, participants would be allowed some additional flexibility in determining where to fish and with what gear, through relaxed restrictions on trawl gear configuration and gear use.

Background:

Before implementation of the trawl rationalization program in 2011, regulations governing the groundfish trawl fleet delivering shoreside were built around monthly, bi-monthly, and per vessel trip landing limits and included a variety of restrictions on fishing practices including gear usage, area of catch, etc. The at-sea fleets (mothership and catcher-processor sectors) were managed primarily using a framework built around staggered season openings and closure on attainment of sector allocations. The trawl rationalization program replaced the need for some, but not all, of the trip limit structure in the regulations and modified regulations for the at-sea fleets. Some of the remaining pre-trawl rationalization regulations may unnecessarily constrain harvest efficiency and effectiveness under a catch share framework.

The goal of Amendment 20 and the trawl rationalization program was to “create and implement a capacity rationalization plan that increases net economic benefits, creates individual economic stability, provides for full utilization of the trawl sector allocation, considers environmental impacts, and achieves individual accountability of catch and bycatch” (Amendment 20 EIS, 2010). The program was designed, in part, to reduce fleet capacity and to economically rationalize the groundfish trawl fishery. The trawl fleet is expected to consolidate so that fewer vessels would participate in the fishery. With fewer vessels in the fishery, fishery managers expect increased efficiency in the utilization of fishery resources and lower levels of incidental catch. Preliminary data indicate that the program has already shown substantial reductions in annual fleet discard levels. In addition, the trawl fleet may be able to gain additional efficiencies and operational flexibility by removing or revising some pre-trawl rationalization regulations.

The intent of this consideration and any resulting action is to further the goals of Amendment 20 and the trawl rationalization program consistent with the conservation and management requirements of the MSA and other applicable laws. The consideration and any resulting action should particularly consider MSA National Standards 5 and 7. National Standard 5 requires the consideration of efficiency in the utilization of fishery resources; except that no such measure shall have economic allocation as its sole purpose. National Standard 7 states that conservation and management measures shall, where practicable, minimize costs and avoid unnecessary duplication.

Draft Range of Alternatives for Discussion

The draft range of strawman alternatives below builds off of those alternatives recommended by the TRREC at the November 2011 meeting of the Pacific Council, and further refined in the Gear Workshop Report from the November 2012 Council meeting (see p. 1 [Gear Workshop Report](#)). The alternatives also include input from the Council’s Groundfish Management Team at the June 2015 meeting. The draft alternatives below are offered for Council consideration for this action.

Mesh size requirements would be reduced to provide fishermen with more flexibility and reduce the incidental violations that occur when net shrinkage reduces mesh size. It is expected that fishermen will choose larger mesh sizes due to the incentives of the catch program.

Selective flatfish trawl gear is defined as gear with two seams. This limitation on seams makes it difficult to include some types of bycatch excluders. Eliminating the selective flatfish trawl requirement, reducing the areas where selective flatfish trawl is required, or eliminating the two seam requirement would provide fishermen with more flexibility in designing their gear and increase the opportunity for using bycatch reduction devices of different types.

Chafing gear restrictions are primarily in place to ensure that trawl gear does not retain excessive amounts of small fish. The full catch accounting for IFQ provided by the catch share program

creates an incentive to reduce catch of unmarketable small fish and possibly the need for chafing gear restrictions. Chafing gear restrictions for midwater gear were recently reduced but would be reduced further under Alternative 3.

Allowing vessels to carry multiple gears on board at the same time may increase vessel operational efficiency. At sea monitoring allows determination of what gears are being used on a particular trip or in a particular location, reducing the need to limit the gear on board at any one time.

	Alternative 1 (No Action)	Alternative 2 (TRREC/Gear Workshop)	Alternative 3 (maximum flexibility)
Trawl Gear Configuration			
<i>Minimum mesh size for bottom trawl</i>	4.5"	4"	
<i>Selective flatfish trawl (SFFT) gear, a type of small footrope trawl</i>	SFFT is a 2-seamed net with no more than 2 riblines, excluding codend. Breastline no longer than 3 ft in length. No floats along center third of headrope or attached to top panel except on riblines. Footrope less than 105 ft in length. Headrope must be not less than 30% longer than footrope.	Eliminate the SFFT requirement shoreward of the RCA and replace with small footrope (like south of 40°10'). <u>Sub-option</u> , retain SFFT but change the SFFT definition to allow 2-seam or 4-seam net	Eliminate SFFT requirement, and allow small or large footrope shoreward of the RCA.
<i>Chafing Gear</i>	Last 50 meshes, 50% circumference, attachment method, consistent with minimum mesh size, attached outside straps	Consider bottom trawl chafing gear restrictions mirroring recent midwater changes (see 660.130(b)(4)(i) – bottom of page 3 in Agenda Item H.2, Attachment 2).	Eliminate chafing gear restrictions for bottom trawl and midwater
Gear Use			
<i>Multiple Gears Onboard</i>	One type of trawl gear onboard per trip. Multiple fixed gear allowed onboard per trip. Can't have trawl and fixed gear onboard on the same trip. Can only use one gear per trip.	Allow multiple trawl gear types onboard and midwater on the same trip. Can't have trawl and fixed gear onboard on the same trip. Can only use one gear per trip.	Allow any legal IFQ groundfish gear onboard on the same trip. Allow use of multiple gears per trip.* <u>Sub-option A</u> – must separate catch by gear type <u>Sub-option B</u> – catch by gear type can be co-mingled

* If allow multiple gear types to be used on a single trip, must consider how that affects data used for stock assessments, how it would work with the type of monitoring (EM vs. observer), and how it would be tracked on fish tickets (currently the system only allows one gear type per trip/ticket).