

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON EXEMPTED FISHING PERMITS AND ELECTRONIC MONITORING REGULATIONS FOR THE WHITING FISHERY

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a report from Dr. Steve Freese on the status of electronic monitoring (EM) exempted fishing permits (EFPs) and the status of the EM regulations related to the whiting fishery. The GAP offers the following comments and recommendations.

Exempted Fishing Permits

Overall, the GAP believes the EFPs have been working well, and have already highlighted a number of important factors to consider when moving to broader implementation of EM through regulation. A large part of the reason for that success has been excellent working relationships between the EFP applicants and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Office of Law Enforcement (OLE), Pacific States Marine Fishery Commission (PSMFC), and Archipelago staff. The GAP agrees with the NMFS report which notes that “Tracking compliance and communicating feedback to vessel owners and captains requires significant time and effort, but is critical to program success.” More than the technology itself, that dialog between the fishermen and regulatory bodies is what will ensure the long term viability and success of EM.

Despite the positive experience with EFPs to date, lack of availability of catch monitors is one issue which seriously threatens the ability to use EM for many operators. Before EM, human observers would typically serve the catch monitor function at the end of a trip. Now, in many ports, it is difficult to find a certified catch monitor as it is simply not profitable for providers to provide only catch monitors. This is particularly problematic in ports where observers were already hard to come by due to a relatively small number of trips or difficulty and expense travelling there. Because catch monitors are a requirement to offload, this is a significant problem needing immediate attention. The GAP recommends reconsideration of the requirements to fulfill the catch monitor function, and believes that in many ports locals could accurately and effectively fulfill that role dramatically reducing cost, but more importantly making catch monitors more available as needed.

Recommendations for EM Whiting Regulations

The GAP agrees with the NMFS report recommending modification of the Final Preferred Alternative (FPA) relative to unintentional discards in the mothership catcher vessel sector. The FPA recommended that unintentional minor discards by mothership catcher vessels be deducted in aggregate pre-season, because it was thought that the cost of reviewing video to estimate many small discard events might be excessive. In fact, it looks like video review on whiting trips is extremely fast, taking roughly 10 minutes to review an individual haul. Further, reviewing minor discard events in-season will provide the best information on overall discard.

The GAP does not agree with the NMFS recommendation that only industry be authorized to fund third party video review. While industry is supportive of paying for a large portion of the monitoring costs in the fishery, paying the full cost of monitoring, when information from the monitoring program supports stock assessments and therefore many other fisheries, seems disproportionate and unfair. Moreover, one of the reasons we pursued EFPs was to determine what the true total costs of the monitoring program would be. Initially, it was proposed that

fishermen in the EFPs would pay a third party provider directly and would have access to that cost information. Instead, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) has been serving that role, so industry still doesn't have a complete handle on costs.

Timing of EM Regulations

The GAP discussed the timing of EM regulations for the whiting fishery and raised several concerns with moving forward for 2016 implementation. Some members of the GAP feel that a two year EFP was authorized and we should take full advantage of that available opportunity to best vet needs and options for regulations. Others believe that it does make sense to implement EM regulations for the start of the 2016 whiting season if possible. The GAP reached a compromise and decided to wait until November when we will have a chance to see a more comprehensive EFP report, including a summary of the video data review from PSMFC before deciding whether to support final approval of whiting EM regulations. We strongly recommend that detailed regulations as well as the cost of video review be included in the advance briefing book for the November Council meeting so that we have the best opportunity to review and comment meaningfully.

PFMC
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