

## GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON SALMON ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT (ESA) REINITIATION OF CONSULTATION WORKSHOP REPORT

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a presentation from Ms. Susan Bishop about the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) efforts related to the reinitiated section 7 consultation for listed salmonids caught in Pacific Coast groundfish fisheries. Ms. Bishop reviewed information previously presented to the GAP, new information developed in response to Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) requests, and two proposed approaches developed subsequent to the Consultation Workshop. NMFS requested input about the preferred approach, re-initiation threshold Chinook incidental catch amounts, and management measures.

NMFS and the Council family are engaged in an Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation process. The goal of this process is to ensure that the incidental take of salmonids in the groundfish fishery does not cause jeopardy to any population listed under the ESA. The current Biological Opinion (BiOp) indicates that an overall threshold of 20,000 Chinook (for the whiting and non-whiting groundfish fisheries combined) achieves this goal. Information provided by NMFS indicates that the groundfish fishery, as a whole, has stayed below 20,000 Chinook in most years. Moreover, NMFS indicates that actual impacts to ESA-listed salmonids is low. As noted in the NMFS presentation “[b]ycatch of ESA listed Chinook in the whiting fishery is low – 0.002 listed Chinook per metric ton of whiting and 0.07 listed Chinook per total Chinook caught.”

It is clear that the current groundfish fishery is performing well relative to impacts to listed salmonids. NMFS asked for information about how the fishery might change over time and how that change might affect incidental catch of ESA-listed salmonids. The expectation of the GAP is that the groundfish fishery will be relatively stable for the foreseeable future. To be clear, the groundfish fishery is dynamic spatially and temporally, and participation levels can vary on an annual basis, but these patterns are typical and accounted for in the current BiOp regime. With the rebuilding of some rockfish and the prospect that others will be rebuilt in the near term, there will be new opportunities to harvest these and other species. However, any changes will be evolutionary rather than revolutionary (that is, change will occur slowly at a manageable pace).

Therefore, given that the current BiOp regime is effective and the groundfish fishery will remain relatively stable, the GAP recommends the Council request NMFS move forward with Proposal 1 as presented by NMFS. Proposal 1 maintains the current management regime, including the threshold Chinook amounts (that are informed by the complete historic incidental catch data series) and the current management measures. The GAP notes that, while the current regime protects listed salmonids, its annual threshold requirement has triggered re-consultation when it is likely that no jeopardy occurred and there was no need for re-consultation. Therefore, the GAP recommends use of an overall fishery threshold that is based on a multi-year running average of total Chinook because it would provide a less volatile re-consultation requirement. Moreover, maintaining a management regime that hews closely to the measures specified in the current BiOp approach would clearly facilitate completion of the new BiOp in a timely manner. Meeting deadlines and moving forward are important.

The GAP discussed Proposal 2 in this light. The GAP is concerned that this approach is unnecessarily complex (especially when the current system is doing well). Proposal 2 also has allocative implications. Allocations are controversial, even more so with constraining species. An approach that is complex and controversial has a low likelihood of staying on track.

Relative to the schedule, as the GAP noted in June 2015, there is a clear linkage between implementation of the 2017/2018 specifications and any new measures promulgated under the new BiOp. The GAP recommends aligning completion of the BiOp with implementation of the 2017/2018 specifications, which would mean a target date to complete consultation in June 2016 so that measures could be incorporated into the final specifications.

Finally, as a comment about the analysis, the GAP highlights the importance of accurately categorizing the fishery sectors. For example, trawl IFQ landings that come from fixed gear operations (that is, because of gear switching) should be categorized as non-trawl in the analysis.

PFMC  
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