

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
BIENNIAL MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR 2017-2018

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) met with members of the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) to discuss biennial management measures for 2017 and 2018 groundfish fisheries. The GAP offers the following comments and recommendations. In crafting our recommendations, we worked from the Council action list on page 2 of the Situation Summary for Biennial Management Measures for 2017-2018 Groundfish Fisheries (Agenda Item I.9, November 2015).

1. Adopt any remaining groundfish harvest specifications for 2017-2018.

The GAP has no comments on biennial specifications.

2. Adopt the final FMP designation and final alternative for managing big skate. Provide guidance on management measures necessary to control catch of big skate.

The GAP recommends removing big skate from the list of ecosystem component (EC) species and managing it with longnose skate in a skate complex. The GAP believes that managing within a complex will provide additional flexibility. It should be a high priority for the next stock assessment so that we have a better understanding of the true stock status.

The GAP further recommends a 95 percent/5 percent split between the trawl and non-trawl fisheries.

*3. The GAP notes that the Situation Summary skipped #3.

4. Adopt deductions from the ACLs and the trawl allocations, as appropriate.

The GAP offers no recommendations on this topic.

5. Adopt preliminary two-year allocations as necessary.

Canary, bocaccio, yelloweye, and cowcod remain highly constraining for all sectors. Adopting two-year allocations for those species that are substantially different from the status quo could create significant impacts, stranding fish and hampering overall fleet-wide revenue or recreational opportunity. However, for canary and bocaccio in particular, there are more fish available than in previous years and modifying the status quo allocations also has the potential to increase revenue and opportunity. For analysis purposes, the GAP recommends analyzing small shifts (5-10 percent) relative to status quo trawl/non-trawl allocations for yelloweye and cowcod, and slightly larger shifts for canary and bocaccio (5-15 percent).

6. Adopt a range of new management measures for more detailed analysis.

The GAP had a long discussion about new management measures, and made an effort to provide recommendations about priority items that should be included in the analysis. In making those recommendations we attempted to prioritize items that would result in clear benefit to commercial or recreational fishermen. We understand that the specifications package will go forward. At the same time, there are a number of important trailing actions pending final Council action and Council actions awaiting National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) implementation. A majority of the GAP believes new measures should not be added to the current specifications package that would delay or derail items already in the pipeline. If new items are going to be added, we have prioritized several new management measures. To the extent that these can be included without jeopardizing the implementation of the specifications on January 1, 2017, or the implementation of the trailing actions, we support moving them forward. The GAP understands that not all of our priorities can be included while keeping trailing amendments on track and implementing specifications by January 1. Therefore, the GAP recommends including its prioritized measures as workload permits.

1 - “Green-Light” Policy for Stocks Rebuilt Mid-Biennium

The GAP strongly supports using the best available science as soon as it is available instead of waiting for the next biennial cycle. Allowing increases in catch limits during a biennial management period if a new stock assessment shows a stock has been rebuilt would yield significant benefits for commercial and recreational fishermen without threatening the resource. In recent years, the lack of a green light policy has cost industry millions of dollars and greatly hampered recreational opportunity. Specifically, a green light policy could have been used for widow rockfish, petrale sole, and now canary rockfish. It appears likely that bocaccio and darkblotched rockfish may also soon be rebuilt mid-biennium. Nevertheless, because of the high workload associated with this item and concern about the ability to have regulations in place on January 1, 2017, the GAP recommends shifting this to the omnibus regulatory package. *The GAP recommends removing the green light policy from the management measure package.*

2 - Ecosystem component designation for big skate

As we described above, the GAP supports removing big skate from the list of EC species and managing it with trip limits as part of a skate complex with longnose skate. Big skate is an important target species for a small number of trawl fishermen, so it is inappropriate to continue to manage as an EC species. Based on historic catch between the trawl and non-trawl sector, the GAP recommends a 95 percent allocation to the trawl fishery and a 5 percent allocation to the non-trawl fishery.

High priority

3 - Descending device/recompression management measures

Updating existing mortality rates for overfished species and exploring whether developing mortality rates for other rockfish released with descending devices is an important issue for recreational and commercial fishermen. But, because of the high workload associated with this item, and because this item may not require a rule and could potentially occur mid-biennium, the GAP believes that we should take it off the list of new management measures and move it forward in the omnibus regulatory package.

The GAP recommends removing this item from the list of new management measures.

4 - Rockfish Conservation Area Changes in California

The GAP strongly supports making corrections to RCA lines where they are omitted or don't match depth contours. It appears that a possible error has been identified in southern California near Hueneme Canyon. The omission of RCA coordinates around 60 Mile Bank also needs to be examined. The GAP believes the workload associated with this item should be low (simply updating RCA coordinates to match depth contours).

High priority

5 - Automatic Inseason Action for Fisheries in California

The GAP does not believe that the potential benefit associated with automatic actions justifies the workload associated with this item.

The GAP recommends removing this item from the list of new management measures.

6 - At-sea Trawl-Buyback Movement

The GAP had a lengthy discussion about allowing the transfer of limited amounts of quota pounds (QP) for selected species from shorebased IFQ accounts to mothership (MS) co-ops. Only those vessels that are mothership-endorsed are able to transfer QP from shoreside accounts to the co-op. Transferring shore based QP to the mothership co-op would provide the mothership fishery with greater flexibility and opportunity to maximize catch of whiting while avoiding premature shut-downs due to constraining species.

A majority of the GAP supports including this item in the list of new management measures to be included in this package. Supporters point out that the shore-based QP they hope to transfer is in their accounts, not being fished now, and is largely stranded. Allowing the transfer does not harm anyone since the transfers would be voluntary and capped at specified amounts. Moreover, regulations currently provide for transfer of constraining rockfish species between the mothership and catcher-processor sectors (660.150 (c) (4)), which allowed the CP co-op to facilitate re-opening of the MS co-op in 2014, and which has previously facilitated transfers from the MS co-op to CP co-op. The GAP highlights that additional amounts brought into the MS co-op could be available to the CP co-op, thus providing potential benefits to both at-sea whiting sectors.

A minority of the GAP is concerned that including this in the management measure package means that it will take precedence over other critical items already prioritized. Because having regulations in place by January 1, 2017 is paramount, and because of the high workload associated with this item, a minority is concerned that this item could derail progress on bottom trawl gear regulations and RCA relief through the EFH/RCA package. In addition, the GAP was informed by proponents of this proposal that important elements of the proposal have not been settled within the MS co-op. Specifically, the GAP was informed that there was no agreement about how additional fish transferred into the MS co-op would be utilized within the MS sector. The GAP was told that if agreement could not be reached then the proposal would die. Lastly, while the minority understands that transfer of constraining species is provided for in regulations, the minority feels there is a low likelihood that this proposal will benefit the CP sector.

High priority

7 - Canary Rockfish Retention in the Commercial Fixed Gear Fisheries

The GAP believes that removing the prohibition on retention of canary rockfish in the open access and limited entry fixed gear fisheries is critical now that canary is rebuilt. We strongly support moving forward with this item.

High priority

8 - Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Area Considerations for California

The GAP believes that yelloweye rockfish conservation areas (YRCAs) are closely interrelated with the ability to allow consideration of recreational fishing in deeper depths under routine management measures. That is, without implementation of YRCAs it is unlikely the recreational fishery will be granted the ability to fish deeper than they are currently. Depth closures are a significant constraint and severely limit opportunity and revenue. With that in mind, the GAP believes this is a high priority. It is not clear to the GAP why this is a high workload item since these areas have been previously analyzed.

High priority

9 - Cowcod Conservation Areas and Hotspot Analysis

The GAP strongly supports the concept of developing more discrete closures that protect cowcod while allowing additional opportunity for the commercial fleets. However, because of the high workload associated with this item, the GAP recommends it move forward under future workload.

The GAP recommends removing this item from the list of new management measures.

10 - Retention of Flatfish Species Outside of the Seasonal Depth Restriction in the Oregon Recreational Fishery

Allowing retention of flatfish outside the seasonal depth restriction in the Oregon recreational fishery simply corrects an oversight and mirrors regulations that had been in place for many years before being accidentally struck. The workload associated with this item should be infinitesimal.

High priority

11 - In response to Council direction under Agenda Item I.4, the GAP met with Council staff to discuss modifying Amendment 21 allocations to the at-sea sectors for Pacific Ocean perch and darkblotched rockfish. The GAP appreciates the effort that went into developing this concept, and the support for helping relieve constraints in the at-sea whiting fisheries.

A majority of the GAP does not support including this option in the management measures package. The majority believes that the at-sea trawl buyback movement option described above is a better approach for a number of reasons. It allows MS co-op participants to transfer otherwise stranded quota from their own shoreside accounts rather than reallocating fish away from other sectors. It provides more overall fish than it appears would be provided under this option. Finally, the option described above offers a fix for four species rather than two under this concept.

A minority of the GAP supports moving this option forward in the management measures package. The minority believes that this is a more holistic option aimed at ensuring each sector has appropriate amounts of constraining species. This option is also more equitable because it would increase allocations of constraining species for all three sectors of the whiting fishery.

A majority of the GAP recommends removing this item from the list of new management measures.

In summary, the GAP believes that items 2, 7, and 10 (EC designation for big skate, canary rockfish retention, and retention of flatfish species in the Oregon recreational fishery) are the highest priority and are necessary for the fishery to occur. Item two is critical for management of big skate because there is directed targeting and managing as an EC species is no longer appropriate. Item seven is critical to allow retention of canary in non-trawl commercial fisheries now that canary is rebuilt. Item ten should be a simple housekeeping measure with almost no associated workload.

In addition, the GAP believes that items 4, 6, and 8 (RCA cleanup in California, At Sea Trawl Buyback Movement, and YRCA consideration in California) are high priorities to include in this package.

7. Provide guidance on routine adjustments to management measures.

The GAP supports all of the routine management measures described here except for hard allocations for scorpionfish and the non-trawl commercial RCA adjustments. The GAP believes that hard allocations for scorpionfish between the recreational and commercial sectors will impair flexibility and could hamper access and opportunity. The GAP believes that the non-trawl RCA adjustments are more appropriate for a different management action given potential EFH considerations.

The GAP was briefed by Mr. Steve Joner on the Supplemental Tribal Report regarding Makah Treaty Groundfish Fisheries in 2017-2018. The GAP supports the Tribal requests.

PFMC
11/18/15