

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM (GMT) REPORT ON ELECTRONIC MONITORING EXEMPTED FISHING PERMIT UPDATE AND REVISIONS

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) received a briefing from Ms. Melissa Hooper (National Marine Fisheries Service, NMFS) on the electronic monitoring (EM) exempted fishing permits (EFPs) and possible revisions and offers the following comments.

Whiting and Fixed Gear

In November 2015, the Council voted to combine whiting and fixed gear EM regulations into one rulemaking package with regulations to be deemed at the April 2016 Council meeting. Since then, members of the GMT attended a webinar that was held by the Groundfish Electronic Monitoring Policy Advisory Committee (GEMPAC) and Groundfish Electronic Monitoring Technical Advisory Committee (GEMTAC) to review and comment on the draft regulations for both fleets. It is the GMT's understanding that the second webinar (which was initially cancelled) is under consideration to be held prior to the April Council meeting when the GEMPAC/GEMTAC will meet in person to finalize any comments on the regulations. The GMT will provide comments on any concerns on the regulations or business rules in April. **Therefore, the GMT supports the timeline for implementing the whiting/fixed gear EM regulations by start of 2017.**

Bottom Trawl and Non-Whiting Midwater Trawl

Currently, the EFPs for bottom trawl and non-whiting midwater trawl are slated to expire on December 31, 2016. However, NMFS is recommending that the EFPs be extended in order to gather more information to inform the regulatory process. In 2015, fewer than three vessels participated in the non-whiting midwater EFP, while four vessels participated in bottom trawl EFP. Only one of those bottom trawl vessels participated using optimized retention, and NMFS is considering expanding this to more vessels in 2016. The GMT believes there is merit in expanding the use of optimized retention for bottom trawl fleets, as maximized retention is an operational burden to the fleet (e.g. limited storage for stowing, processors do not want to accept certain species or don't have fish meal processing capabilities, etc.). Optimized retention could also be beneficial for reducing individual takes for species that do not have 100 percent mortality rates after being discarded (e.g. Pacific halibut). However, the GMT is interested in the work that NMFS, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, and the EFP participants are planning on doing in 2016 regarding how to most efficiently and effectively operate under optimized retention. Specifically, there are some questions about the collection of non-IFQ species data, as currently video reviewers only review those discards for compliance. **The GMT recommends that the EFPs be extended for both bottom trawl and the non-whiting midwater trawl fleets through 2017 (or 2018, depending on rulemaking timeline) in order to capture more data on the effectiveness of the EM EFPs as well as test different methods of optimized retention.**