

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON TRAWL CATCH SHARE PROGRAM GEAR REGULATIONS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a report from Ms. Jamie Goen, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), about the proposed trawl gear changes. General comments related to the gear changes discussion and the trawl catch shares program, the proposed delay and details about each issue are below. For easy reference, we copied the Final Preferred Alternative (FPA) decision template ([Agenda Item G.8, Supplemental Attachment 4](#)) and highlighted our preferred options and summarized our rationale for choosing those options.

General comments

The GAP has consistently advocated for eliminating archaic regulations from the pre-catch shares management regime to achieve greater economic viability and efficiency. Unfortunately, this has not happened and the trawl sector has become more inefficient because new regulations were overlaid on out-of-date regulations.

The situation summary for this agenda item notes instances in which the industry has suggested gear changes but it has taken five years to finally move them forward. As we have mentioned in prior GAP statements, the trawl fleet is bearing all the burden of being fully rationalized without the majority of the benefits of a rationalized fishery. The industry is 100 percent monitored, 100 percent accountable.

It's also important to note that several of the alternatives are operationally impractical and that our suggestions here are not new. The GAP notes trawlers are not reinventing fishing gear; rather, the industry would like to return to the best, most efficient and conservative gear that has been used in the past and also have the opportunity to freely design and experiment with new gears that could be even more efficient and selective in their design. Some are concerned that liberalizing gear changes will result in illegal fishing, when in fact, the catch share program was intentionally designed to encourage innovative approaches. Participants in the program have displayed caution, creativity and forward-thinking within the constricts of a program intended to provide the greatest degree of flexibility. By supporting the development of the catch shares program, it's evident the industry has a vested interest in maintaining a healthy, sustainable resource. Why risk losing that reputation? It's time to let the trawl fleet operate unencumbered within the confines of a highly flexible program.

The GAP modified Alternative G (fishing in multiple individual fishing quota (IFQ) management areas) and provided justification for those suggested changes.

NMFS request to delay

The GAP has been steadfast in its push for rapid implementation of all pending ~~trawl~~ program changes.

However, with regard to the NMFS proposal to delay this package: If the Council agrees with our recommendations to not include a sorting requirement for alternatives F and G, then the GAP recommends the Council move forward with an FPA now. If the Council determines a sorting requirement is necessary for alternatives F and G, which the GAP does not support at this time, then the GAP recommends a delay of the entire package in order to further refine the options and have discussions with the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), Groundfish Management Team (GMT) and Enforcement Consultants (EC). In no way is this a suggestion to delay the package implementation past the January 1, 2017, start date. Therefore, the Council would have to select an FPA no later than June 2016. If this course is followed, then the GAP would like to discuss with the SSC, GMT, and EC the effects of non-sorting options on data quality.

Specific comments on the alternatives

Issue A: Minimum mesh size, Alternative A3 (no minimum mesh size)

The GAP support Alternative A3 and suggests removing Alternative A2 from consideration, setting a 4-inch mesh for bottom trawl, as it doesn't really address mesh size flexibility or provide additional options to test new net configurations.

Under the IFQ program, fishermen are fully accountable for their catch. Alternative A3 would allow fishermen to configure the gear in a way that is the most efficient to catch their target species and avoid (exclude) non-target species.

Most fishermen are unlikely to immediately change their gear and instead continue to use their existing gear. Certainly, fishermen will not begin using excessively small mesh gear because that would have negative consequences: greater inefficiency and less water flow, greater fuel consumption and harvest of a lot of small fish. They will not burn quota on unmarketable fish. It has to be sorted, which wastes crew time and observer time. It doesn't make business sense. The incentive to continue using bigger mesh is to increase water flow.

However, it is anticipated that eventually fishermen will begin to utilize smaller mesh strategically within the net to help eliminate the catch of non-target fish. For example, small web mesh would be used in panels to help direct unwanted catch out through excluder devices. Also, the use of square mesh knotless webbing could be used to allow the escapement of round fish while targeting on flatfish. Lastly, with the anticipation of a restored fishery on widow rockfish, smaller web would reduce the occurrence of "gillers" and thereby increase the quality of the delivered fish.

The GAP also understands there is no minimum mesh size in Alaska, except for pelagic trawls, which is 3 inches. GAP members intend to follow up on this.

Issue B: Measuring mesh size, Alternative B2 (measurements taken between knots or, in knotless mesh, between corners)

This is a technical change that is only relevant if the regulations continue to contain a minimum mesh size. If Alternative A3 is selected, then this issue is moot. However, if a minimum mesh size is to remain in regulations, then an alternative method of measuring the size of mesh opening is necessary if fishermen are to be allowed to utilize knotless

webbing. Clearly, measuring the opening between the knots does not work with knotless webbing.

Issue C: Codend, Alternative C2 (no codend restrictions)

This issue is similar to Issue A, which dealt with minimum mesh size. One goal of these changes is to clean-up old and unnecessary regulations that are meaningless under the IFQ program. Fishermen are now responsible to account for their catch. Regulations that once governed the gear that fishermen use are no longer necessary now that each fisherman is accountable for his catch.

Issue D: Selective Flatfish Trawl, Alternative D3 (SFFT definition modified to allow 2- or 4-seam net; eliminate requirement shoreward of RCA north of 40°-10' and replace it with small footrope)

The GAP supports Alternative D3 and suggests eliminating Alternative D2, as it would not accomplish anything.

Under the IFQ program, fishermen are fully accountable for their catch. Alternative D3 would allow fishermen to configure the gear in a way that is the most efficient to catch their target species and avoid those species they are not seeking. This option does not eliminate the use of the selective flatfish trawl but rather expands the options in the fisherman's tool box.

Issue E: Chafing Gear, Alternative E3 (eliminate chafing gear restrictions for bottom trawl and midwater trawl)

Under the IFQ program, fishermen are fully accountable for their catch. Alternative E3 would allow fishermen to configure the gear in a way that is the most efficient to catch their target species and avoid those species they are not seeking.

Issue F: Multiple Gears, Alternative F3 (Multiple gears on board), Gear suboption A (use any trawl gear), sorting suboption B (catch by gear type can be comingled), more than one gear fished on trip

The GAP supports Alternative F3 and suggests eliminating sub-option B, using any legal IFQ gear, as it's unlikely fishermen would use both trawl and fixed gear on the same trip.

This is another alternative that would be most helpful in providing flexibility to the trawl fleet. It would reduce operating costs such as fuel and observer costs and create more efficient fishing options.

With regard to the Scientific and Statistical Committee's concerns about comingling of catch creating greater uncertainty in stock assessment data, the GAP believes the few vessels that would take advantage of this alternative would not have a serious effect on assessments. Vessels have onboard observers who sample the fish or electronic monitoring, logbooks, fish tickets, catch monitoring at the processor and port samplers. Sufficient data should be able to be parsed or collated to sufficiently inform stock assessments.

It is a common practice in stock assessments to address changes in the fishery through the use of time blocking of periods before and after fishery changes. It would be relatively simple to create a time block for selectivity in a stock assessment. Again, the multitude of data sources should be able to inform the selectivity between gear types.

Furthermore, fishermen who are taking advantage of this option would likely use a bottom trawl and mid-water trawl: species compositions for each of those gears is very different and the random intermixing of species that may be caught in both is very small – or at least likely too small to require a level of concern that would necessitate more recordkeeping or prevention of flexibility in a program that was supposed to create efficiencies and better economic vitality for the fleet.

Eliminating the sorting option also makes this option easier to enforce.

Issue G: Fishing in Multiple IFQ Management Areas, *modified G2 wording*

The GAP suggests this wording for a modified G2 alternative:

Allowed to fish in multiple IFQ management areas per trip. The catch would be attributed to the IFQ management area of landing.

The original reason to include this option was so that vessels could tow across the 40-10 management line without having to fish up to the line, pick up their gear and empty the net, then start a new tow on the other side of the line.

This alternative, like many of the others, will provide increased opportunity for fishermen in the trawl catch shares program.

Fishing across the management line was done in the trip limit regime, so it is not a new management idea.

The 40-10 IFQ management line is the only one where fishermen would like to fish on both sides of it without having to deploy, retrieve, then re-deploy their gear.

Similar to Alternative F, it's unlike more than a handful of fishermen would take advantage of this alternative, but for those who do fish near 40-10, it could be key to creating more opportunity.

Issue H: Hauling Onboard Before Previous Catch is Stowed, Alternative H2 (allow a new haul to be brought onboard and dumped before all catch from previous haul had been stowed)

This alternative would allow greater efficiency. Sometimes it can take hours to sample a tow; at least having it onboard would eliminate wasting observer time – and therefore, more cost to the vessel.

In another example, if a net is ripped, you want to get it onboard quickly so it can be repaired, which may take hours. Allowing it to be dumped before all the fish from the prior haul is stowed would save hours of time for the crew and observer.

DECISION TEMPLATE FOR GAP DISCUSSION OF CHANGES TO
TRAWL CATCH SHARE PROGRAM GEAR REGULATIONS –

The following is a list of the trawl gear issues and alternatives for Council action at this meeting. The preferred GAP option for each issue is **highlighted**; recommendations for removal are in ~~strike through~~. A summary of GAP comments and rationale are in the boxes to the right.

Minimum mesh size (Issue A, DEIS Sections 2.1 and 4.1)		GAP NOTES
Alternative A1 (No-action)	4.5 inches for bottom trawl and 3 inches for midwater trawl.	
Alternative A2	4 inches for bottom trawl.	
Alternative A3	No minimum mesh size for bottom or midwater trawl.	-Fishermen are fully accountable for their catch and 100 percent monitored. -Smaller mesh will help eliminate unwanted catch through excluder panels -Increase the quality of rockfish by reducing the occurrence of gillers. -No minimum mesh size is an established gear in AK for bottom trawls (subject to verification).
Measuring mesh size (Issue B, DEIS Sections 2.2 and 4.2)		
Alternative B1 (No-action)	Trawl mesh size measurements taken between knots.	
Alternative B2	Trawl mesh size measurements taken between knots or, in knotless mesh, between corners.	Technical change only. Is moot if Alternative A3 is selected.
Codend (Issue C, DEIS Sections 2.3 and 4.3)		
Alternative C1 (No-action)	Only single-walled codends could be used in any trawl. Double-walled codends prohibited. Chafing gear could not be used to create a double-walled codend.	
Alternative C2	No codend restrictions.	Fleet is 100 monitored, 100 percent accountable Adds flexibility to design more efficient net based on fish behavior.

Selective Flatfish Trawl (Issue D, DEIS Sections 2.4 and 4.4)		
Alternative D1 (No-action)	SFFT would be a two-seamed net as further defined at §660.130(b)(3)(ii)(A). SFFT required shoreward of the RCA north of 40°10' N. latitude, and permitted, but not required, shoreward of the RCA south of 40°10' N. latitude. SFFT permitted seaward of the RCA coastwide.	
Alternative D2	The SFFT definition would be modified to allow a two-seam or a four-seam net.	
Alternative D3	The SFFT definition would be modified to allow two-seam or four-seam net AND would eliminate the SFFT requirement shoreward of the RCA north of 40°10' N. latitude and would replace it with small footrope (like south of 40°10').	Fishermen are 100 percent accountable under IFQ program. This expands the option for fishermen to use gear that is most efficient.
Chafing Gear (Issue E, DEIS Sections 2.5 and 4.5)		
Alternative E1 (No-action)	Bottom trawl chafing gear last 50 meshes, less than 50 percent circumference, etc. (see §660.130(b)(3)(iii)) Midwater trawl chafing gear may not cover top of codend, etc. (see §660.130(b)(4)(i))	
Alternative E2	Bottom trawl chafing gear revised to match midwater trawl chafing gear requirements.	
Alternative E3	Eliminate chafing gear restrictions for bottom trawl and midwater trawl. (assumes retain prohibition on double-walled codend, but related Alternative C2 would remove prohibition)	Would allow for more flexibility in net design to efficiently catch target species while avoiding unwanted species.

Multiple Gears (Issue F, DEIS Sections 2.6 and 4.6)		
Alternative F1 (No-action)	On vessel: bottom (small/large footrope) or midwater or fixed gear Fished on trip: only 1 gear	
Alternative F2	On vessel: bottom (small/large footrope) and midwater; or fixed gear Fished on trip: only 1 gear	
Alternative F3	<p>On vessel: Multiple gears onboard.</p> <p>Gear Type Sub-option A: Use any trawl gear.</p> <p>Gear Type Sub-option B: Use any legal IFQ groundfish gear.</p> <p>Sorting Sub-option A: Vessels must separate catch by gear type. Landings recorded on separate electronic fish tickets by gear type.</p> <p>Sorting Sub-option B: Catch by gear type could be commingled.</p> <p><i>NOTE: gear type sub-options independent of sorting sub-options.</i></p> <p>Fished on trip: more than 1 gear</p>	Provides flexibility to trawl fleet. Unlikely fishermen would carry trawl gear and fixed gear so that suboption can be eliminated. Easy to enforce.
Fishing in Multiple IFQ Management Areas (Issue G, DEIS Sections 2.7 and 4.7)		
Alternative G1 (No-action)	Allowed to fish in one IFQ management area per trip.	
Alternative G2	<p>Allowed to fish in multiple IFQ management areas per trip. The catch would have to be sorted by IFQ management area and recorded on separate electronic fish tickets. The catch would be attributed to the IFQ management are of landing.</p>	<p>This would help fishermen fishing near the 40° 10' line; no other IFQ management lines have this kind of problem.</p> <p>This, like other options, is key to increasing opportunity.</p> <p>Could fish across management lines in pre-IFQ system; catch attributed to port of delivery</p>

Hauling Onboard Before Previous Catch is Stowed (Shorebased IFQ Program only) (Issue H, DEIS Sections 2.8 and 4.8)		
Alternative H1 (No-action)	Prohibited to bring a haul on board before all catch from the previous haul had been stowed.	
Alternative H2	Allow a new haul to be brought onboard and dumped on deck before all catch from previous haul had been stowed. No mixing of hauls until the observer has collected samples.	Waiting for haul stowage is very impractical. Would improve efficiency.