

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON CHANGES TO TRAWL CATCH SHARE PROGRAM GEAR REGULATIONS – FINAL ACTION

Dr. Jim Hastie (NWFSC) briefed the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) on proposed changes to gear regulations in the trawl catch share fishery. The proposed changes include eight components (minimum mesh sizes, measuring mesh size, codend regulations, selective flatfish trawl, chafing gear, multiple gears on board, fishing in multiple management areas, and bringing catch aboard before previous catch is stowed).

Although it is impossible to fully anticipate all effects, it is unlikely that the proposed changes to gear construction regulations and enforcement (minimum mesh sizes, measuring mesh size, codend regulations, selective flatfish trawl, chafing gear) would present any insurmountable problems in maintaining high-quality data for assessment purposes. However, greater variability in the gear used by the fleet could generate greater uncertainty.

Some of the proposed alternatives that allow fishing with multiple gears (Issue F in the Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement [DEIS, Agenda Item G.8, Attachment 1]) and in multiple management areas (Issue G) on a single trip could affect the quality of data available for analyses that inform management. Estimates of total mortality depend upon information on catch by gear type and management area. Co-mingling of total catch could result in greater uncertainty in data used in stock assessments because gear-specific and area-specific catch and effort per trip would be unknown and species-specific selectivity varies among gear types. Also, fishing in multiple management areas could prevent accurate tabulation of catch by area.

Alternatives and sub-options that include sorting requirements could alleviate these analytical issues (Multiple Gears Alternative F3 Sorting Sub-option A; Multiple Areas Alternative G2). Separation of catch by gear type/area would need to be maintained at least through the point where catch accounting systems could identify catch by gear type and area in order to preserve the current levels of data resolution. These sorting requirements would likely impose costs on fishing operations that would need to develop methods and new configurations to prevent co-mingling. Sorting requirements may also require additional monitoring, including possibly expanding observations to areas below deck. These monitoring and enforcement considerations have not been well-analyzed to date and may require additional consultation with the Council's Enforcement Consultants.

How the proposed gear changes would interact with future management changes is not well-understood. For example, changing from human observers to electronic monitoring may require additional consideration of how to monitor compliance with sorting requirements.

The SSC notes the effects of alternative actions in the Preliminary DEIS are described in a way that is confusing and makes comparison between alternatives difficult. Specifically, some of the

No Action alternatives are described as having either positive or negative impacts. This makes it unclear against what baseline the effects of the alternatives are being measured. Also, the effects of the alternatives are described in strictly qualitative terms and the sources of the information used to make these determinations are not well described.

PFMC
03/12/16