

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT SEABIRD MITIGATION MEASURES SCOPING

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the documents in the briefing book and received an overview from Mr. Kit Dahl of Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) staff and Dr. Ed Melvin from Washington Sea Grant and offer the following comments.

Schedule

Based on the Preliminary Year at a Glance ([Agenda Item I.5., Attachment 1, November 2018](#)) and draft April agenda ([Agenda Item I.5., Attachment 3, November 2018](#)), the Council is scheduled to adopt a final preferred alternative (FPA) for this item in April 2019. To meet the deadline of implementation of these actions by January 1, 2020, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) believes that the latest the Council could take final action is June 2019 ([Agenda Item G.5., Attachment 1, November 2018](#)). Given that adopting the preliminary preferred alternative (PPA) is in the “candidate items” box on the draft March agenda ([Agenda Item I.5., Attachment 2, November 2018](#)), with no floor time available, **the GMT recommends the Council adopt the following alternative schedule:**

November 2018: Adopt Purpose and Need and Range of Alternatives
April 2019: Adopt PPA
June 2019: Adopt FPA

Purpose and Need

The GMT believes that the Purpose and Need statements from [Agenda Item G.5., Attachment 1, November 2018](#) are adequate and **recommend they be adopted as described below, as necessary for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis.**

The purpose and need for this proposed action is an extension of the 2013 action as described in the final Environmental Analysis (EA) prepared by the NMFS:

- The purpose of the proposed action is to further reduce interactions between ESA-listed seabirds and groundfish longline gear relative to current levels of take.
- The proposed action is needed to comply with the 2017 United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Biological Opinion (BiOp) by minimizing endangered short-tailed albatross take to levels judged not to jeopardize its continued existence.

Range of Alternatives

To help facilitate this schedule, the GMT has attempted to develop a Range of Alternatives (ROA) at this meeting. The GMT selected the alternatives to represent a broad suite of possible options that range from requiring all vessels between 26 and 55 feet in length overall (LOA) to use streamer lines to alternatives that consider area and seasonal exemptions, as well as requirements to fish during the night if streamers are not used. The GMT notes that these alternatives and sub-options are not mutually exclusive.

Below is the GMT's proposed ROA:

No Action

Alternative 1: Employ streamer lines in the commercial longline fishery consistent with Alaska streamer line regulations for federal waters, including use of single streamer lines on boats 26 to 55 feet in LOA.

Sub-Option A: Area exemption south of 36° N. lat., as the best available science suggests that short-tailed albatross distribution is primarily north of that line.

Sub-Option B: Depth exemption for vessels fishing shoreward of 250 fathoms, as at-sea surveys and telemetry suggest short-tailed albatross prefer continental shelf breaks.

Sub-Option B attempts to address potential differences in the necessity for streamer lines in the nearshore area. The GMT notes that using the state/federal water boundary to define the nearshore area can be problematic, as it intersects the outer depths of the nearshore fishery footprint in certain small pockets where streamers would be required, which would cause confusion and enforcement challenges. Therefore, the GMT recommends scoping a deeper depth contour (Sub-Option B) that fully encapsulates the footprint of the nearshore fishery and also provides exemptions for longline vessels fishing in shallower waters, where albatross abundance may be lower.

The GMT also encourages industry involvement and input to understand the implications of vessel size and configuration on effective streamer use.

Weather Safety Exemption. The current regulations exempt vessels greater than 55 feet from the streamer requirements when a National Weather Service Gale Warning is in effect. The GMT suggests that National Weather Service warning categories be explored (e.g., small craft advisory) to provide an appropriate weather exemption for smaller vessels.

Alternative 2: Set longline gear after civil sunset

Sub-Option A: Extend Alternative 2 to vessels 55 feet or larger

Sub-Option B: Require Alternative 2 when using floats, as doing so has shown to make streamers much less effective for seabird deterrence

Seasonal Exemption. [Agenda Item G.5., Attachment 1](#) highlights the uncertainty around seasonal distribution of short-tailed albatrosses along the United States west coast. Some research suggests that this species is present throughout the year, while other analysis suggests that the sub-adult population is only present in winter and spring. Exploration of the differing risk levels would inform potential seasonal exemptions that could be applied to either Alternative 1 or 2.

Vessels with High Black-Footed Albatross Mortality

Dr. Melvin's presentation showed that a small number of vessels are associated with the majority of observed black-footed albatross mortalities in the longline fleet. **The GMT recommends the Council encourage the NMFS to analyze the data to attempt to determine what factors could explain these high amounts of mortality.** Although these black-footed albatross interactions are not necessarily directly correlated with current or future short-tailed albatross mortalities, this action could inform potential actions more broadly and guide focused outreach to these vessels to encourage specific actions to reduce these and other seabird mortalities.

Recommendations

The GMT recommends the Council:

- **Adopt the updated schedule as shown above**
- **Adopt the purpose and need statements as shown in Attachment 1**
- **Adopt a range of alternatives**
- **Encourage NMFS to analyze the data to attempt to determine what factors could explain high amounts of black-footed albatross mortality from certain vessels**

PFMC

11/06/18