

## GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) met with the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) to discuss progress of this year's fishery and possible inseason adjustments. The GMT discussion was led by Ms. Jessi Doerpinghaus, Ms. Melissa Mandrup, and Mr. Patrick Mirick. The GAP offers the following recommendations and comments on proposed inseason adjustments to ongoing groundfish fisheries.

### **Sablefish Daily Trip Limit Fishery**

Due to poor market conditions and rough sea conditions early in the season, fixed gear sablefish landings have been tracking quite low to date; thus there is an opportunity to increase the daily trip limits for open access fixed gear both north and south. Working from the Supplemental GMT Report 1, **Table 8**, the GAP recommends the following:

#### **Open Access Fixed Gear Sablefish North of 36° N. Latitude**

Current 2019 trip limits: 300 lb. daily/1,200 lb. weekly/2,400 lb. bimonthly

The GAP supports GMT **Alternative 2**: 300 lb. daily/1400 lb. weekly/2,800 bimonthly.

#### **Open Access Fixed Gear Sablefish South of 36° N. Latitude**

Current 2019 trip limits: 300 lb. daily/1,600 lb. weekly/3,200 lb. bimonthly

The GAP supports GMT **Alternative 1**: 300 lb. daily/1,600 lb. weekly/4,800 lb. bimonthly.

### **Bocaccio Trip Limits**

Fixed gear fishermen targeting chilipepper rockfish have been encountering large numbers of bocaccio as bycatch. In order to reduce regulatory discards, the GAP recommends increasing the bocaccio trip limits to 1,500 pounds per 2-month period beginning as soon as is possible. Working from the GMT Supplemental Report 1, **Table 4**, the GAP recommends the following:

#### **Limited Entry Fixed Gear Bocaccio 40° 10' N. Latitude to 34° 27' N. Latitude**

Current 2018 trip limits: 1,000 lb./2 months

The GAP supports GMT **Alternative 1**: increasing the bocaccio trip limit to 1,500 lb./2 months.

## **Pacific Halibut**

The 2019 projected landings of Pacific halibut taken incidentally in the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis are currently tracking at 68.4% attainment of the 70,000 lb. allocation. Industry put in a request for the GMT to analyze some potential trip limit increases. Working from the Supplemental GMT Report 1, **Table 1**, the GAP recommends the following:

### **Incidental Pacific Halibut Retention in the Primary Sablefish Fishery North of Point Chehalis**

Current 2019 incidental limit: 200 lbs. dressed weight halibut per 1,000 lbs. dressed weight sablefish, plus 2 Pacific halibut

The GAP supports GMT **Alternative 2**: 250 lbs. dressed weight halibut per 1,000 dressed weight sablefish, plus 2 Pacific halibut.

## **Big Skate Trip Limits in IFQ Sector**

Landings of big skate in the trawl individual fishing quota (IFQ) fishery have decreased substantially in 2018 and 2019. GAP trawl representatives suggest some of that decline in catch can be attributed to the retirement of a few fishermen that had historically targeted big skate. Most of the trawl IFQ fishery does not target big skate. For those few fishermen that do target big skate, they have requested the GMT analyze an increase in trip limits for the remainder of 2019. Working from the Supplemental GMT Report 1, **Table 6**, the GAP recommends the following:

The GAP supports **GMT Alternative 2**: 70,000 lbs. for period 4; 20,000 lbs. for period 5; 20,000 lbs. for period 6.

## **Shortbelly Rockfish**

Approximately three weeks into the 2019 whiting season, industry participants noticed that the shortbelly rockfish catch was elevated. Shortbelly has not been a major component of bycatch in trawl fisheries in the past, but encounters have been increasing in recent years. Unlike other rockfish, there is no amount of shortbelly set aside for the at-sea whiting sectors, or for any other sector including tribal allocations, shoreside whiting, non-whiting groundfish, and shrimp. When industry representatives saw the rapid increase in bycatch, they quickly reached out to National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Council members, and other stakeholders to alert them to the situation. It is clear from the Sea State data that while there were a few large hits of shortbelly, there have been chronic small amounts of bycatch extending the length of the West Coast. The mothership Cooperative Board of Directors held an emergency meeting to voluntarily close areas where the highest bycatch of shortbelly had occurred, recognizing that shortbelly are a migratory species that likely don't lend themselves to successful area management. The catcher-processor sector also voluntarily avoided the hot-spot areas. Similar to the at-sea sector, the shoreside sector

has included shortbelly as a new species to track daily and shoreside fishermen have been made aware of the areas where shortbelly bycatch has been a problem for the at-sea sectors. The new Pacific Coast Fisheries Information Network scorecard report currently shows that 76% of the shortbelly annual catch limit (ACL) has been attained, with approximately 225,000 mt of non-tribal whiting left to harvest, worth almost \$50 million in ex-vessel revenue.

NMFS and the GMT project that the 2019 shortbelly ACL may be exceeded if current bycatch rates combined with average catch totals from recent years across all sectors are realized. Exploring remedies for the situation it was noted that the ACL was set more than 10 times lower than the shortbelly acceptable biological catch, so there appears to be some breathing room to support an operational fix. While there are policy implications to exceeding the shortbelly ACL, there is no negative conservation impact. In the short-term, NMFS is considering accountability measure responses that include acknowledging the voluntary actions taken by the Cooperatives to reduce interactions as well as a regulatory amendment to increase the 2020 ACL for shortbelly (which would involve a two-meeting Council process and subsequent NMFS rulemaking). Over the longer-term, the 2021-2022 specifications process will consider increasing the ACL or making shortbelly an ecosystem component species since it is not a fish where commercial markets will be pursued.

The GAP recognizes that the at-sea whiting sectors are already required to avoid chinook and coho salmon, Pacific ocean perch, canary rockfish, widow rockfish, darkblotched rockfish, sablefish, yellowtail rockfish, roughey rockfish, and now shortbelly rockfish, while trying to achieve National Standard 1 and Optimum Yield for whiting. Further, an ACL for shortbelly, which is set artificially low, will constrain not just whiting fisheries, but potentially any commercial or recreational fishery that interacts with the species, creating severe economic hardship for harvesters, processors, and communities if any of these fisheries close prematurely.

The GAP recommends:

- Acknowledging accountability measures implemented by whiting participants.
- Scoping out an increase to the 2020 ACL through a two-meeting process beginning in September and concluding in November 2019.
- Adopting a higher shortbelly ACL or moving shortbelly to a designated ecosystem component species through the 2021-2022 specifications process.

PFMC  
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