

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON THE ENDANGERED SPECIES WORKGROUP REPORT

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the Groundfish Endangered Species Workgroup (GESWG) Report ([Agenda Item F.5.a, GESW Report, April 2017](#)), received an overview from Mr. Kevin Duffy of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) West Coast Region (WCR), and offer the following for consideration.

Humpback Whales

The GMT was informed that there have been recent meetings with industry, management agencies, and others to discuss whale entanglement with crab pot gear and potential ways to limit interactions and mitigate against impacts. The GMT encourages these types of collaborative meetings continue and include groundfish fixed gear participants.

Eulachon ITS

The current incidental take statement (ITS) of 1,004 fish is based on historical bycatch from a time period when eulachon stocks were low and does not appear to pose a current conservation concern since impacts in other several other fisheries are in the millions of fish annually. While recent overages of the eulachon ITS (Table 1) have not resulted in negative impacts to the groundfish fishery (e.g., not treated as a hard cap), the low ITS has complicated proposed groundfish actions (such as the gear regulations package), resulted in a higher analytical burden, and could continue to do so in the future. The GMT believes that the current threshold level of 1,004 fish is too low; however, we are unsure of what a more appropriate level should be.

One option could be to set the ITS level at the recent historic high level (5,113 in 2013), which could be reviewed and updated regularly; or using the recent year high level plus some buffer to account for uncertainty. Another option could be setting the ITS for the groundfish fishery by taking into consideration the relative magnitude of the eulachon population and setting the threshold at some amount above the historical average catch (1,004 fish from 2002-2010; or 2,140 from 2011-2015) that would not cause a conservation concern, and would minimize the likelihood of catch in the groundfish fishery triggering a re-consultation.

The GMT recommends the eulachon threshold level be reevaluated and is willing to provide guidance on developing an updated threshold level for eulachon take for the ongoing biological opinion (BiOp).

Short-tailed Albatross

The 2012 BiOp for the short-tailed albatross ITS estimated take threshold is a yearly take of one individual, with the average not to exceed two birds over a two-year period. The observed take for 2011-2015 did not exceeded the two individuals per two-year average (1 take in 2011; [Appendix A, Agenda Item F.5.a, GESW Report](#)). However, the 2012-2013 two-year average estimate, using expanded annual estimates of black-footed albatross as a proxy, exceeded the 2 per

2-year period estimated by the ITS in the BiOp. For the new BiOp, the estimated impacts are now based on a Bayesian approach using expanded estimates of actual short-tailed albatross observations. The GMT believes this to be an improvement in the estimation methodology. **The GMT recommends the Council schedule time to receive the results of the short-tailed albatross consultation when it becomes available.**

If the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) BiOp recommends reasonable and prudent measures, the GMT recommends that this might be better to go through a separate process, rather than trying to include in the 2019-2020 biennial harvest specifications and management measures process. Based on past experience developing the seabird mitigation measures for vessels greater than 55 feet, implementing new management measures may be more complex than could easily be accomplished as part of the 2019-2020 biennial harvest specifications and management measures process.

Fixed Gear Logbooks

The GMT appreciates the GESWG's discussion of fixed-gear logbooks in their report, and **recommends the Council consider prioritizing the implementation of a fixed gear logbook for all fisheries**¹. As noted in the GESWG report, a fixed-gear logbook would reduce uncertainty in bycatch estimates, which are currently only observed less than 20 percent of the time overall. Furthermore, there are additional benefits to having fixed-gear logbooks such as: (1) increased ability to conduct spatial analyses; (2) usefulness as an index of abundance for stock assessments; (3) greater ability to apply gear-specific discard mortality rates.

Recommendations

- 1. The GMT recommends the eulachon threshold level be reevaluated.**
- 2. The GMT recommends the Council schedule time to receive the results of the short-tailed albatross consultation, when it becomes available.**
- 3. If the USFWS BiOp recommends RPMs, the GMT recommends that this might be better to go through a separate process, rather than trying to include in the 2019-2020 biennial harvest specifications and management measures process.**
- 4. The Council consider prioritizing the implementation of a fixed gear logbook for all fisheries.**

PFMC
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¹ The Council recommended a mandatory fixed gear logbook in the [2009-2010 biennial harvest specifications and management measures cycle](#). A draft fixed gear logbook was developed by the GMT in consultation with state representatives, West Coast Groundfish Observer Program, and Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission. However, due to competing priorities and funding, it has never been implemented.