

**GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON
FINAL ACTION ON INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS**

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the latest information on the status of the groundfish fisheries and offers the following comments and recommendations.

Action Items

Sablefish Daily Trip Limit Fisheries

Table 1 below shows the projected landings and attainment for the sablefish fixed gear daily trip limit (DTL) fisheries north and south of 36° N. lat. with electronic fish tickets submitted through March 31, 2017. Landings for April were assumed to be the same as March.

Table 1. 2017 projected landing and attainment estimates for DTL fisheries (Sectors: Limited Entry North of 36° N. lat= LEN; Open Access North of 36° N. lat= OAN; Limited Entry South of 36° N. lat= LES, Open Access South of 36° N. lat= OAS).

Sector	Landings (mt)	Landing Target (mt)	Attainment
LEN	200.5-226	258	77.7-87.6%
OAN	276.5-337.8	425	65.1-79.5%
LES	320.9-351.2	728	44.1-48.2%
OAS	49.7	312	15.9%

Based on requests from the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP), as OAN are tracking behind recent years in terms of vessel effort and landings (mostly due to poor weather), the GMT looked at the following proposed trip limit increases starting on June 1.

Table 2. Proposed Trip Limit Alternatives for OAN.

Alternative	Daily	Weekly	Bimonthly
Status Quo	300	900	1,800
Alternative 1	300	1,000	2,000
Alternative 2	300	1,100	2,200

Assuming that April landings are the same as March, and that the trip limit increase would go in place on June 1 (mid-Period 3), Table 3 shows the projected landings and attainments under the alternatives.

Table 3. Projected landings (mt) and attainment for OAN by Alternative.

Sector	Alternative	Landings (mt)	Landing Target (mt)	Attainment
OAN	Status Quo	276.5-337.8	425	65.1-79.5%
	Alternative 1	310.4-382		73-89.9%
	Alternative 2	346.4-428.8		81.5-100.9%

Salmon fishing conditions are expected to be poor in 2017, and therefore may drive effort up in the open access fishery for sablefish, as it did in 2015. Therefore, **the GMT recommends Alternative 1 be implemented, and be effective as soon as possible, as it will provide additional fishing opportunity to attain the landing target, while still being cautious on the uncertainty of salmon fishing opportunities and effort.**

Pacific Ocean Perch Transfer to the At-Sea Sectors

During discussions with GAP members, there were requests that the GMT explore potential pathways to address concerns that Pacific ocean perch (POP) bycatch in the at-sea sectors would restrict opportunity for attainment of the historic high Pacific whiting total allowable catch (TAC) in 2017.

POP Projection Updates

Update to the At-Sea Sectors Projections

Table 4 below shows the results of the at-sea bootstrap for both at-sea sectors, using the 2017 whiting allocations and constraining species allocations, based on data from 2000-2016. The quantile is shown across the top with the corresponding amount of POP projected in a simulated season beneath it; allocations are shown on the left. As shown, there is a 1-in-10 chance (0.9 quantile; shaded in grey) of either at-sea sector reaching, or exceeding, their POP allocation, based on historical fishing patterns.

Table 4. At-Sea Bootstrap Projections for POP based on 2000-2016 Haul Data.

Sector	Allocation (mt)	Quantile							
		0.1	0.25	0.5	0.75	0.9	0.95	0.99	0.9999
CP	12.7	0.2	1.5	5.5	10.8	12.9	13.4	15.3	16.9
MS	9.0	0.2	1.8	3.4	4.8	9	9.2	10.1	11.5

However, using more recent 2009-2016 data, which may better reflect the current patterns of the fishery, the risk of exceeding the allocation increases to 1-in-4 for the mothership (MS) sector and decreases to 1-in-20 for the catcher processor (CP) sector, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. At-Sea Bootstrap Projections for POP based on 2009-2016 Haul Data.

Sector	Allocation (mt)	Quantile							
		0.1	0.25	0.5	0.75	0.9	0.95	0.99	0.9999
CP	12.7	0.3	2.7	5.6	8.9	11.6	12.8	15.7	16.9
MS	9.0	2	3	4.5	9	9.3	9.7	10.7	11.5

It is important for the Council to consider that the bootstrap projections provide a distribution of projected bycatch, based on historical fishing effort and behavior. Between years, there can be variations in fishing locations, environmental conditions, and whiting school movement, among other factors. By restricting the input years from 2000-2016 to 2009-2016, there is a change in the risk of exceeding the POP allocation. In addition, if the whiting fleet changes behavior in the future, the projections may not be as applicable.

As the Council considers the analysis presented in this report, the GMT would like to highlight the relationship between salmon and POP for the whiting industry, as it pertains to this discussion. During this Council meeting, and noted by the Salmon Advisory Subpanel (SAS) in [Agenda Item F.6.a Supplemental SAS Report](#), there has been discussions of the groundfish fishery avoiding the Klamath Management Zone, to help minimize salmon bycatch. Therefore, if the at-sea whiting fleet voluntarily moves north to prevent bycatch of salmon, this could cause them to interact with more POP than they might otherwise.

Updated Projections to the IOA Off-The-Top Deduction

During the 2017-2018 harvest specifications and management measures cycle, the off-the-top deduction for IOA was set at a level equal to the highest mortality between 2007 and 2014 (10 mt in 2014). Based on the 0.3 mt IOA POP mortality in the [2015 Groundfish Mortality report](#), **the GMT recommends changing the IOA projected impacts for POP from 10 mt to 0.3 mt in the scorecard.**

Criteria and Options for Addressing the GAP Request

The GMT would like to remind the Council that as described in the groundfish regulations at 50 CFR 660.60(c)(3)(2) “Non-tribal deductions from the ACL”, there are specific criteria for reallocating unused deductions from the annual catch limit (ACL):

“Changes to the non-tribal amounts deducted from the TAC, ACLs, or ACT when specified, described at § 660.55(b)(2) through (4) and specified in the footnotes to Tables 1a through 1c, and 2a through 2c, to subpart C, have been designated as routine to make fish that would otherwise go unharvested available to other fisheries during the fishing year. Adjustments may be made to provide additional harvest opportunities in groundfish fisheries when catch in scientific research activities, non-groundfish fisheries, and EFPs are lower than the amounts that were initially deducted off the TAC, ACL, or ACT when specified, during the biennial specifications or to allocate yield from the deduction to account for unforeseen catch events to groundfish fisheries. When recommending adjustments to the non-tribal deductions, the Council shall consider the allocation framework criteria outlined in the PCGFMP and the objectives to maintain or extend

fishing and marketing opportunities taking into account the best available fishery information on sector needs.”

Based on these criteria, the GMT has developed two potential options for Council consideration.

1. Move POP from the IOA off-the-top deduction to one or both of the at-sea sectors.
2. Develop specific guidance for NMFS to release a portion of the 25 mt POP buffer if an unforeseen catch event were to occur between Council meetings.

The GMT notes that the Council may choose either option at this meeting, or wait until an inseason agenda item at a future Council meeting, when inseason catch data are available (i.e., after the Pacific whiting fishery starts).

GMT Options for Council Consideration

Option 1: Move POP from the IOA off-the-top deduction

In 2015, NMFS transferred 7 mt of unused darkblotched rockfish to the at-sea whiting sectors, with 3.5 mt to the CP sector and 3.5 mt to MS sector. This transfer accommodated higher than anticipated bycatch rates in 2015, and prevented closure of the MS sector prior to harvesting their full allocation of whiting ([NMFS-SEA-15-24 Public Notice, October 2015](#)). The Council and NMFS could consider a similar action for POP this year to alleviate expected bycatch concerns, due to the higher than expected 2017 whiting TAC, that were raised by the at-sea whiting sectors at the March and April Council meetings. In addition, as discussed in [Agenda Item F.6.a, Supplemental GAP Report, April 2017](#), industry has stated they plan to continue to try to reduce Chinook salmon impacts from the Klamath Management Zone, and may instead choose to fish more northward where POP are more common. However, movement of whiting schools is uncertain, which makes it difficult to predict precisely where fishing will occur.

In 2015, the GMT analyzed the likelihood of the 2014 incidental bycatch of darkblotched rockfish occurring in future years with recent gear innovations using light-emitting diode (LED) lights to reduce bycatch in the pink shrimp fishery (the primary IOA fishery with rockfish impacts; [Agenda Item H.9.a., Supplemental GMT Report 2, September 2015](#)). The darkblotched rockfish transfer was based on theorized 2015 low bycatch in the pink shrimp fishery with the use of the LED lights. The transfer of POP would be a similar action to the 2015 transfer. However, the transfer of darkblotched rockfish took place at the end of the fishing year, not prior to the start of the fishing year, so the bycatch projections were for a much shorter period of time and based on catch data from the fishery for that fishing year. Additionally, the need was immediate and known.

The GMT performed a similar analysis of historical bycatch of POP in the pink shrimp and other IOA fisheries. As shown in Table 6, total mortality of POP from the pink shrimp fishery in 2015 was 0.29 mt, which is 9.69 mt less than the 2017 set-aside of 10 mt. This is similar to the typical pink shrimp total mortality of 0.5 mt or less (Table 4). However, there have been periodic high bycatch years, 2004-2005 (2-3 mt) and 9.9 mt in 2014.

Table 6. Total mortality of POP from the pink shrimp fishery and from all incidental open access fisheries (including pink shrimp).

Year	Pink Shrimp	Total IOA
2002	0.03	15.43 ^a
2003	0.00	12.93 ^a
2004	2.10	7.45 ^b
2005	2.70	2.71
2006	0.00	0.00
2007	0.15	0.18
2008	0.15	0.16
2009	0.47	0.48
2010	0.08	0.22
2011	0.55	0.57
2012	0.20	0.20
2013	0.23	0.50
2014	9.97	9.97
2015	0.29	0.30

^a<0.01 mt was from non-pink shrimp incidental fisheries, remainder from EFPs

^b 5.3 mt from EFPs

Considerations

Similar to 2015 with darkblotched rockfish, the GMT provides the following considerations for the Council in their decision making.

1. The risk of total mortality exceeding the IOA off-the-top deduction: The GMT believes that lower 2015 bycatch will continue with Oregon and Washington looking to make the use of LED lights mandatory for the pink shrimp fishery in 2018. However, the Council should still consider if a larger buffer for the off-the-top deduction for IOA is warranted to account for uncertainty. Note that even though not currently required, it is our understanding that most of the pink shrimp fishery is now using LED lights: (1) 62 percent of shrimp landings (2012-16 average) were landed by Oregon vessels, which has approximately 86 percent light use (pers.comm. Matt Blume, ODFW); (2) 29 percent of shrimp landings are by Washington vessels, which is believed to have approximately 50 percent light use (pers. comm, Lorna Wargo, WDFW); (3) 9 percent of landings are from California although the status of lights used by California vessels is unknown at this time. Impacts to POP from California are expected to be low regardless of the use of LED lights as California is south of the main POP range. Based on West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (WCGOP) pink shrimp observed hauls off California, there has been less than 40 pounds of POP caught per year, with most years having no recorded bycatch.
2. Data Availability: The pink shrimp fishery opened on April 1, so there is little to no bycatch data for this year. Final information for 2016 will be available from WCGOP at the September Council meeting, however the Council may be able to request preliminary results sooner.
3. Fair and equitable distribution of the set-aside: As described under the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) considerations, the GMT believes, based off our projections, that there is a low likelihood that another sector may need access to the off-the-top deduction

this year. In addition, the 25 mt buffer would be available in the case of an unforeseen catch event. The Council should consider that once an off-the-top deduction has been reallocated (either the buffer or from IOA), it cannot be moved to another sector later in the year.

4. Risk to the ACL: If the pink shrimp bycatch were to exceed the IOA off the top deductions, the GMT notes that there is still a relatively low risk of exceeding the ACL given the low attainments in recent years (i.e. less than 50 percent; [2015 WCGOP Total Mortality Report](#)). For example, the non-trawl sector is currently projected to take 0.3 mt of their 11.6 mt allocation, which would provide an additional 11.3 mt buffer to protect against an ACL overage. Further, the individual fishing quota (IFQ) fishery is projected to take 51.9 of 220 mt allocation.
5. Other constraints to fully attaining the whiting TAC: External factors may continue to contribute to less than full attainment of sector-specific whiting allocations, such as the anomalous oceanographic conditions that may have contributed to low catch rates in 2015, the geopolitics that have resulted in increased uncertainty in the whiting export market since 2014, and the relative state of alternative fishing opportunities in which rationalized vessels have more flexibility to participate, particularly Alaska walleye pollock. ([Status of Pacific whiting stock in U.S. and Canadian waters in 2015](#)).

The GMT is not providing a recommendation on whether or not the Council should move any amount of POP from the IOA off the top deduction. **However, if the Council does choose to reallocate POP from IOA, the GMT recommends that the Council keep at least 3 mt in the off the top deduction for the IOA sector.** This would leave 7 mt available for the Council to move to one or both of the at-sea sectors. It is possible that IOA catches could be less than 3 mt (i.e., more similar to 2015); however, several factors lead the GMT to recommend retaining 3 mt for the off the top deduction value. First, in 2014 when landings were approximately 10 mt, a greater proportion of the Washington pink shrimp fishery was operating in northern Washington (See [WDFW Report](#), Figure 4), where POP interactions are more common. A similar situation could occur in 2017, depending on pink shrimp distributions. Additionally, there is limited information from the 2017 pink shrimp fishery to inform POP interactions, as the fishery has just begun. Finally, POP recruitment events are possible, which could lead to changes in interactions as the pink shrimp fishery tends to take juvenile POP. The GMT notes that if the Council moves part of the IOA off-the-top deduction, and IOA impacts exceed the remaining amount, there would still be a low likelihood of exceeding the overall POP ACL, due to the underutilization in the non-trawl and IFQ sectors (Attachment 1).

Option 2: Develop guidance for NMFS to release a portion of the buffer due to unforeseen catch events between Council meetings

When the Council adopted the 2017-2018 harvest specifications and management measures, it set up an off-the-top deduction, or a “buffer,” that would be available to any sector during routine inseason action if an *unforeseen catch event* were to occur. However, this routine action would be implemented based on a recommendation formed at a Council meeting (i.e., it is not designed as an automatic action). In addition, the GMT notes that the preamble of the proposed rule ([81FR75266](#)) for the 2017-2018 harvest specifications and management measures states that:

NMFS interprets the Council’s intent was not to apportion the buffer simply because allocations of bycatch species are lower or allocations of target species are higher than in

previous years; rather, any distribution would be based on demonstrated need. Consistent with the Council's recommendation that the buffer be used to account for unforeseen catch events this proposed rule provides that any buffer amounts could only be distributed due to an unforeseen catch event. Further, any distribution must go to a sector that has demonstrated a need for receiving such a distribution, not for the sole purpose of extending a fishery before a need is demonstrated.

Therefore, if the Council selects option two, the GMT could develop certain criteria (for consideration in June) that would allow NMFS to release a portion of the buffer (to be determined) to one or both of the at-sea sectors if an unforeseen catch event were to occur between Council meetings. As the fishery has yet to begin, and therefore an unforeseen catch event has not occurred to date, the GMT, after review of the current regulations, did not see a way to have the buffer (or portion of) released at this time.

An example proposal would be if A percent of the POP allocation is taken before B percent of the whiting allocation, then release C mt of the buffer to one or both sectors. The Council could also use the GMT's bootstrap methodology to set a risk tolerance level (i.e. when the risk of exceeding the POP allocation in either sector reaches a certain threshold). While the GMT understands that there is a perceived need starting May 15th (specifically to address the pool structure of the MS sector), the GMT is willing to bring this type of analysis back in June for Council consideration when there is information on the inseason progress of the fishery to consider. With release of the buffer, the GMT acknowledges that we would need to consider the potential needs of the other sectors before NMFS could release any of the buffer to the at-sea sectors. By waiting until June, there would be additional information available for the other sectors as well, further informing the Council action.

Finally, if the Council chooses option 2, the GMT asks that the Council provide guidance on how much of the buffer they would consider distributing to one or both of the at-sea sectors and how to apportion it.

Summary

The GMT recommends changing the IOA projected impacts from 10 mt to 0.3 mt. We ask the Council to consider the information provided above if they wish to reallocate POP from the IOA off-the-top deductions to either at-sea sector. As a reminder, once an off-the-top deduction is reallocated, it cannot be transferred to another sector during that year, unless the other whiting sector has attained their allocation or provides a cease fishing report.

In addition, the GMT asks that the Council provide guidance on whether they would like the GMT to bring back potential alternatives in June (or later) for creating criteria for distribution of the buffer, if an unforeseen catch event were to occur.

Informational Items

Scorecard 2017

Attachment 1 shows the most recent projections for overfished species in 2017. Updates include new projections for the at-sea whiting sectors for darkblotched rockfish and Pacific ocean perch based on updating the at-sea bootstrap methodology with the 2017 whiting allocations and 2016 data and updates to the off-the-top deductions for the IOA sector based on the 2015 Groundfish Mortality Report.

Recommendations

- 1. The GMT recommends the Council select Alternative 1, increasing the sablefish trip limits for the Open Access DTL fishery north of 36° N. lat from 300 lbs. per day, or 1 landing per week of up to 900 lbs., not to exceed 1,800 lbs. bi-monthly to 300 lbs. per day, or 1 landing per week of up to 1,000 lbs., not to exceed 2,000 lbs. bi-monthly.**
- 2. The GMT recommends changing the IOA projection for POP from 10 mt to 0.3 mt.**
- 3. If the Council chooses Option 1 to reallocate POP from the IOA off the top deduction, the GMT recommends that the Council keep at least 3 mt in the off the top deduction for the IOA sector.**
- 4. If the Council chooses Option 2, the GMT asks that the Council provide guidance on how much of the buffer they would consider distributing to one or both at-sea sectors, in case of an unforeseen catch event, and how to apportion it for consideration at the June Council meeting.**

Attachment 1. Allocations^a and projected mortality impacts (mt) of overfished groundfish species for 2017.

Fishery	Bocaccio b/		Cowcod b/		Dkbl		POP		Yelloweye	
	Allocation a/	Projected Impacts								
<i>Date: 10 April 2017</i>										
Off the Top Deductions	15.4	14.9	2.0	2.0	77.3	8.1	49.4	14.7	5.4	5.6
Additional Buffer					50.0		25.0			
EFPc/	10.0	10.0	0.015	0.015	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.030	0.020
Research d/	4.6	4.6	2.0	2.0	2.5	2.5	5.2	5.2	2.7	3.1
Incidental OA e/	0.8	0.3	0.0	0.0	24.5	5.3	10.0	0.3	0.4	0.2
Tribal f/					0.2	0.2	9.2	9.2	2.3	2.3
Bottom Trawl					0.2	0.2	3.7	3.7		0.0
Troll					0.0					0.0
Fixed gear mid-water					0.0				2.3	2.3
whiting						0.3	7.2	11.1		
Trawl Allocations	302.4	92.7	1.4	0.2	535.6	147.5	220.0	51.9	1.1	0.1
-SB Trawl	302.4	92.7	1.4	0.2	507.6	136.9	198.3	43.0	1.1	0.1
-At-Sea Trawl					16.1	10.6	21.7	8.9	0.0	0.0
a) At-sea whiting MS					11.6	4.5	9.0	3.4		
b) At-sea whiting CP					16.4	6.1	12.7	5.5		
Non-Trawl Allocation	472.2	202.1	2.6	0.0	28.2	5.8	11.6	0.3	13.1	11.8
Non-Nearshore	144.3	16.6		0.0		5.6		0.3	0.8	0.7
LE FG		6.2				5.2		0.3		0.6
OA FG		10.4				0.5		0.0		0.0
Directed OA: Nearshore	1.8	0.6		0.0		0.2			2.1	2.0
Recreational Groundfish										
WA						--		--	3.3	3.1
OR						--		--	3.0	2.8
CA	326.1	184.9		2.2		--		--	3.9	3.2
TOTAL	790.0	309.7	6.0	2.2	641.1	161.4	281.0	66.9	19.6	17.5
2017 Harvest Specification	790	790	6.0	6.0	641	641	281	281	20	20
Difference	0.0	480.3	0.0	3.8	-0.1	479.6	0.0	214.1	0.4	2.5
Percent of ACL	100.0%	39.2%	100.3%	36.9%	100.0%	25.2%	100.0%	23.8%	100.0%	87.4%
Key										

a/ Formal allocations are represented in the black shaded cells and are specified in regulation in Tables 1b and 1e. The other values in the allocation columns are 1) off the top deductions, 2) set asides from the trawl allocation (at-sea petrale only) 3) ad-hoc allocations recommended in the 2013-14 EIS process, 4) HG for the recreational fisheries for canary and YE.

b/ South of 40°10' N. lat.

c/ EFPs are amounts set aside to accommodate anticipated applications. Values in this table represent the estimates from the 13-14 biennial cycle, which are currently specified in regulation.

d/ Includes NMFS trawl shelf-slope surveys, the IPHC halibut survey, and expected impacts from SRPs and LOAs.

e/ The GMT's best estimate of impacts as analyzed in the 2017-2018 Environmental Impact Statement (Appendix B), which are currently specified in regulation.

f/ Tribal values in the allocation column represent the the values in regulation. Projected impacts are the tribes best estimate of catch.