

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE REPORT

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received an overview of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) report from Mr. Brett Wiedoff, Council staff, and discussed specific items with Ms. Karen Palmigiano, NMFS West Coast Region, and Dr. Kayleigh Somers, Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC). We also had the opportunity to meet Mr. Craig Russell, the new director of the Fisheries Resource Analysis and Monitoring (FRAM) division of the NWFSC.

[NMFS Rulemaking and activity plan](#)

With regard to the NMFS rulemaking and activity plan ([Agenda Item H.1.a, Supplemental NMFS Report 2, March 2020](#)), the GAP continues to find this report helpful. We note that at least two rules, the vessel movement and monitoring (VMM) rule, and the electronic monitoring rule for bottom trawl, appear to be missing from the list, and would appreciate an update on those under the NMFS report at the April 2020 Council meeting.

Additionally, for the salmon bycatch mitigation measures item, whiting industry members expressed during GAP discussion that they had been hoping for further dialogue with NMFS on the salmon mitigation plan contents following the Council's November 2019 action on salmon mitigation measures and prior to the proposed rule publishing. However, industry members will plan to review and comment on the proposed rule, which is slated to publish later this month. Moreover, the GAP encourages NMFS to develop proposed regulations that provide flexibility in the application of the salmon mitigation plans because industry response to bycatch events is generally more effective when there is the ability to adapt to events as they occur.

[At-sea hake observer salmon sampling protocols](#)

The GAP appreciates the information provided by the Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) on at-sea hake observer salmon sampling protocols ([Agenda Item H.1.b, NMFS NWFSC Report 1, March 2020](#)) and understands that the sampling methods provide a close estimate of fleet-wide bycatch over the course of a full year. However, while under- and over-estimates may balance out to an accurate estimate of salmon bycatch over the course of a year or across multiple years, the impact of an observer's salmon estimates at the individual tow level is consequential for fleet behavior. The need for accurate accounting is now even more pronounced under the Chinook hard caps (that can close groundfish sectors) included in the 2017 Endangered Species Act (ESA) salmon biological opinion and incidental take statement for groundfish fisheries, and the forthcoming salmon mitigation plans. For this reason, the GAP encourages the At-Sea Hake Observer Program (A-SHOP) to continue to communicate and collaborate with industry, and examine the feasibility of a salmon-census protocol for the at-sea hake fisheries, for example, by industry sharing with NMFS their experiences with the Alaska pollock salmon sampling program – that is, a long-standing census program that counts every salmon.

[Omnitracs VMS unit replacement](#)

The GAP is concerned that the McMurdo "Omintracs" Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) used in the groundfish fishery will no longer be supported by its satellite provider after March 31, 2020, and that new VMS units will have to be purchased before April 1 (see [NMFS Report 1](#)).

Sixty-four groundfish and highly migratory species drift gillnet (DGN) vessels on the West Coast use Omnitrac VMS units. Six of those units have already been replaced and three other units have not been used in several years. This leaves a total of 55 VMS units in need of replacement by April 1, 2020. Replacing a VMS unit is a costly expense to each individual vessel owner, often near \$4,000 per unit plus the installation costs.

NMFS Report 1 notes that fishermen cannot take advantage of a reimbursement program facilitated through the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission if they have already been reimbursed once before and if the change was not due to the government causing a unit to become non-compliant. Due to this rule, the GAP believes most, if not all, of these 55 VMS units will not be eligible for reimbursement. However, the GAP hopes this can be rectified with a waiver from the duplicative reimbursement clause. The necessity to replace the units was not due to either the fishing industry or the government. The GAP would appreciate the Council and NMFS consider pursuing options to provide reimbursement relief for the fleets.

PFMC
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