

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON FUTURE COUNCIL MEETING  
AGENDA AND WORKLOAD PLANNING

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) considered the documents under this agenda item and offers the following comments and suggestions.

The GAP requests the full schedule of agenda items continue for the June meeting whether it is held as an in-person meeting or webinar format. The April webinar meeting has gone well, and many of the issues that have come up, like those that are COVID-19 related, would have come up at an in-person meeting as well. Also, there is a time savings for a webinar meeting as travel time to and from the meeting is not required.

Regarding the June 2020 agenda specifically, the GAP appreciates starting the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) and GAP two days before the first groundfish items are on the floor. This will facilitate better advisory body discussion and more comprehensive statements.

Sablefish Management and Trawl Allocation Attainment Committee SaMTAAC/Committee) schedule: The SaMTAAC has done a lot of work and produced a comprehensive and detailed range of alternatives to bring forward to the Council. Therefore, the GAP requests this agenda item be retained, as scheduled, on the June 2020 agenda.

The Council has previously prioritized four items from the workload and new management measures list: non-trawl rockfish conservation area (RCA)- lines, mothership sector full utilization, moving the Emley-Platt exempted fishing permit (EFP) into regulation and Amendment 21 trawl/non-trawl allocations. At the November 2019 meeting, the Council tasked the GAP with scoping the first two issues – non-trawl RCAs and MS sector utilization – and prioritizing the four issues. The GAP is not going to prioritize the four issues because we represent all groundfish sectors that each have individual priorities, and it will be impossible for us to prioritize these items. However, we completed our scoping of the two issues with which we were tasked, non-trawl RCAs and MS utilization, and we plan to provide summaries of our scoping work to the June briefing book. We request all these issues be discussed by the Council under Agenda Item F.2, Workload and New Management Measures, at the June Council meeting.

The GAP understands the ambiguity surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and supports the following two issues discussed under various agenda items at this Council meeting:

Waiving observers and catch monitors during the COVID-19 pandemic: The GAP understands the Council and National Marine Fisheries Service may discuss this issue under the inseason agenda item. The Council has received substantial written comments and public testimony about this issue under Agenda Item B.1, Open Public Comment. The GAP agrees this is one of the most important issues to discuss and take action on at this time. Just during this Council meeting, additional waivers have been granted for observer coverage in fisheries in the Southeast and Gulf of Mexico regions. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans in Canada has suspended observer coverage due to the COVID-19 crisis. Now, some of the only fisheries in

the country where observer coverage has not been waived are on the West Coast and in the North Pacific – and they happen to be the only fisheries with 100 percent monitoring and accountability. The irony is not lost on the GAP. Complete catch monitoring and accountability is now being cited as the reason why observer coverage/shoreside monitoring cannot be suspended, even to protect the health and safety of the fishery participants and other observers. The nine years of data that has been collected through 100 percent catch monitoring should reassure NMFS that coverage can be temporarily suspended without compromising conservation instead of raising concerns about cheating/non-compliance. The risk to scientific data integrity and species conservation is almost zero; the risk to fishermen, processors and the greater communities is much, much higher. This is a public health issue, not just a groundfish issue. Furthermore, the GAP supports the public comment letters submitted from the Midwater Trawlers Cooperative/United Catcher Boats/Fishermen’s Marketing Association and the West Coast Seafood Processors Association regarding these issues and other pandemic-related relief proposals, such as suspending cost recovery and buyback payments for the remainder of 2020.

Mothership COVID-19 emergency rule: The GAP supports the request that [MTC and UCB submitted to NMFS](#) to develop an emergency rule to address an unexpected issue in the mothership whiting sector, and we ask that the Council support this request as well. The rule would temporarily allow an at-sea Pacific whiting processing platform to operate as both a mothership and a catcher processor in the same calendar year during the 2020 Pacific whiting season. This is needed because one of the six mothership platforms that had planned to process in 2020 will no longer be using their vessel as a mothership. The three catcher vessels that planned to deliver roughly 24 percent of the MS sector allocation to them, worth about \$5 million in ex-vessel revenue, no longer have a market. At this late date, the other mothership processors are not able to take on additional deliveries from these vessels, because they have already committed to other vessels. In addition, with the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, other catcher vessels may have limited market opportunity if other MS processors cannot operate. The only vessels likely to serve as replacement motherships or catcher processors are the existing motherships and catcher processors. In order to give potential processors the greatest flexibility and in order to provide opportunity for these three catcher vessels that have been displaced due to COVID-19 pandemic, the GAP supports the request to temporarily change the MS/CP transfer rules for 2020.

PFMC  
04/09/2020