

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE REPORT

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) reviewed the briefing book documents and received presentations from Ms. Keeley Kent, West Coast Area Groundfish Branch Chief, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) West Coast Region (WCR), and Mr. Craig Russell and Dr. Jim Hastie, Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC), under this agenda item and offers the following comments.

Ms. Kent reviewed rulemaking actions that occurred recently and updated the GAP about WCR staffing. She also reported on the Chinook bycatch reserve and noted the reserve was not used or needed in 2021. NMFS is not recommending any changes in this reserve. She also noted the limit for halibut caught incidentally in the sablefish fishery will remain in place this year until rulemaking is completed.

Regarding progress on the whiting offshore/at-sea utilization rule, Kent noted the new rule will be in place prior to the start of the 2023 whiting fishery. However, catcher vessels will be required to record their obligations to a mothership processor vessel one more time. Members of the whiting fishery on the GAP said they would remind the fleet of the necessity to commit to a mothership a final time; once the rule is published, no further mothership commitments will be required.

NMFS has contracted with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission to develop the electronic non-trawl logbook with a programming group. NMFS is hoping for material to share with fleets this summer for suggestions to improve utilization.

Regarding non-trawl area management, NMFS is waiting to hear from the Council at this meeting (Agenda Item F.6) for further direction. A tentative preliminary preferred alternative date was proposed for the September Council meeting. This would be followed by time for analysis and Council approval. Once the Council approves the package, rulemaking would take approximately nine months before final implementation. The GAP would like to emphasize the strong need for this action to move forward as expeditiously as possible due to the challenges that are now facing large sectors of the non-trawl fishery.

Ms. Maggie Sommer will be joining NMFS staff in May. The GAP welcomes her in her new role with the agency and looks forward to working with her on catch share subjects. In this senior policy lead position, she will report to Ms. Kent.

Groundfish surveys

Mr. Craig Russell described the 2021 survey activities. The GAP noted with satisfaction that the majority of these surveys proceeded on schedule and will inform future assessment and management. This year's surveys also seem to be on schedule.

Mr. Russell also discussed the Southern California Rockfish Hook-and-Line survey (H&L survey). GAP members have identified a pressing need for this type of survey to be conducted north of Point Conception to inform future stock assessments.

The GAP was disappointed to hear that future resources, funding included, need to be identified to continue these surveys. Absent funding, dropping stations from the present H&L survey may be required. This would also require a need to understand sampling objectives, expansion areas, existing related surveys, and optimal survey methods. A site selection process would also be required. A minimum of five years of data from this newly restructured survey would be required before the sites could contribute to survey indices. The GAP understands opportunities may exist to leverage others for additional resources (staff, gear, etc.), depending on what is determined to be required for survey expansion. As we noted in our [March 2022 statement](#), an expanded H&L survey could provide critically important information about species that inhabit nearshore and untrawlable areas.

Internal workshops led by Ms. Aja Szumylo will be held to re-envision the West Coast pelagic surveys. While this may chiefly inform hake/whiting and coastal pelagic species science, it would also be useful in identifying groundfish recruitment.

Groundfish surveys and proposed wind energy

Dr. Jim Hastie informed the GAP regarding analysis of potential impacts of proposed offshore wind energy areas on existing groundfish surveys. He presented analyses of impacts on different species of the survey operation. Mr. Hastie noted that some species' survey results will be affected more than others, depending on the final location of wind energy installations. He and others at NMFS will continue to investigate impacts to groundfish surveys. The GAP notes with trepidation that an impact of 11 to 18 percent on hake surveys may well be possible. Impacts to historical stock trends may be severe. The information on sablefish, darkblotched rockfish, and Pacific ocean perch may also be affected.

The GAP appreciates that discussions on this issue between NMFS and Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) are continuing, but would like to see greater deference given to NMFS regarding surveys that provide the backbone of stock assessments and fisheries management. Introducing greater uncertainty in stock assessments will also negatively affect the seafood industry in terms of lower harvest limits. Therefore, the GAP suggests that BOEM refrain from establishing potential offshore wind sites that could disrupt established surveys, particularly those that depend on historical time series.

PFMC
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