

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON DRIFT GILLNET FISHERY HARD CAPS

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) would like to thank the Highly Migratory Species Management Team for the exhaustive work that they have put into the bootstrap analysis of a large range of complicated alternatives regarding hard caps for the Drift Gill Net (DGN) fishery.

Previously, the HMSAS offered our support for measures, including hard caps, that are based on science – for example, the populations of species being protected. The hard caps proposed in the alternatives are based on performance and may not correspond to the scientific advice coming from the Take Reduction Team, National Marine Fisheries Service scientists, and other experts.

It is difficult to develop a recommendation without the benefit of having been able to review an analysis of Alternative 3. However, given that each Alternative will result in some sort of a closure, the HMSAS considered the No Action Alternative based on the following economic considerations facing the DGN fleet:

1. The California legislature's buyback program is taking place resulting in very few permits left.
2. The fleet itself has suffered from attrition over the last decade resulting in only a handful of active boats fishing, and these participants are dependent on this fishery for their livelihoods.
3. The California law, resulting from SB 1017, sunsets the fishery in January of 2024.
4. The Marine Mammal Commission has testified multiple times over the years stating there is no need for hard caps in this fishery due the rare nature of interactions with protected species.
5. The Take Reduction Team was formed in 1996 to mitigate bycatch problems in the DGN fishery.
6. Years of regulations in this fishery has been highly successful in bycatch reduction, so much so that the fishery was recently recategorized from a Category 1 to a Category 2 fishery under the Marine Mammal Protection Act in 2018.
7. The economic reliance of this fishery for the few remaining active vessels and dependent fishing community is paramount, making DGN a large portion of their income. In recent years, the fishery has benefitted from access to other marketable species, including Pacific bluefin tuna.

The HMSAS will provide further views on the alternatives after the completion of the analysis of Alternative 3.