

GROUND FISH ADVISORY PANEL REPORT ON GROUND FISH WORKLOAD AND NEW MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) reviewed the documents and received an update on this agenda item from Mr. Todd Phillips, Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) Staff. The GAP offers the following comments and recommendations.

Council Operating Procedure (COP) 19

The GAP strongly supports the intent of the COP 19 revisions. Creating a more formalized transition pathway from exempted fishing permits (EFPs) into the management measure process could reduce delay and create significant benefits for fishermen across the coast. Indeed, many EFPs have taken years to get into the management measure process even after they have proven their worth.

At the same time, the GAP notes that the proposed process will require more Groundfish Management Team (GMT) staff time, and the GMT is already overburdened. Moreover, it's not clear that the bottleneck in making the transition from EFP to management measure process has been the lack of a more formalized process. Other factors, such as Council and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) staff time and competing priorities, may be the primary culprits.

Despite those misgivings, due to the critical importance of advancing worthy EFPs more rapidly through the process, the GAP supports the COP 19 revisions with the following recommendations:

- 1) The GAP would like a formalized role in the process.

We therefore recommend the following additional language in section (C) (4) (1):

Additionally, for EFPs that are requesting renewal, the GMT, **in consultation with the GAP**, will consider the following...

While the COP does a nice job of spelling out what is necessary for EFPs, there is little information about what criteria need to be met to be eligible for moving an EFP into regulation.

- 2) The GAP recommends developing a list of qualifying criteria, which could be drawn from successful EFPs that have moved into regulation, so EFP applicants and participants have a better understanding of what they need to achieve.
- 3) The GAP also recommends development of a table listing the existing EFPs, their current status, start date, and primary objectives. Links within the table would contain the required yearly EFP reports. Currently, digging through briefing books is the only way to find information on EFPs.
- 4) Members of the GAP think that the COP should more clearly define the applicant expectations. As drafted, the revised COP 19 adds additional workload to the GMT but does not clearly specify the applicant's role in the process.

Finally, while in general the GAP would like to see worthy EFPs move into regulation much more quickly, there are times when EFPs serve as an alternate regulatory structure and moving more quickly may not be appropriate or desired. A good example is the Electronic Monitoring (EM) EFP for the individual fishing quota groundfish fishery. While new data continues to be collected, the general structure of the EM program and its viability has long been proven. Nevertheless, because of challenges in drafting regulations, shifting EM policies at NMFS headquarters, and disagreements between industry, the Council, and NMFS about what the ultimate regulations should like look, there has not been a viable regulatory vehicle outside of the EFP. Despite our recommendations above, we don't want to lose this other important function that EFPs can serve.

Workload Items

At-sea whiting sector representatives on the GAP noted that the issue of consideration of allowing at-sea processing south of 42 degrees N. latitude is not currently on the workload list. This issue was part of the Whiting Utilization action but was removed in an effort to streamline implementation of several other important regulatory changes, and because it was recognized that collection of fishery data south of 42 via an EFP would be a logical first step in moving this item forward. In March 2022, the Council apparently decided to remove it from the workload list because of the EFP aspect of this item. The GAP recommends adding this issue back to the workload list. While it is likely that an EFP will be initially used to collect data that would inform an eventual Council action, this workload item is more than an EFP project and should be placed on the workload list.

Limited entry fixed gear members of the GAP would like to encourage the GMT to add item B15 into their workload matrix and develop an analytical workload projection (e.g., high, medium) because it is a high priority for that sector.

Prioritization

In general, members of the GAP try to avoid prioritizing particular items in the list over others as it can pit one sector against another, and because of the gear type and geographic makeup of the GAP it tends to be unproductive. Instead, members of the GAP prefer to highlight which items should be on the list and provide an overall level of importance related to those items. Individual GAP members are encouraged to advocate for their own priorities.

PFMC
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