

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ADVISORY SUBPANEL  
REPORT ON EXEMPTED FISHING PERMITS – FINAL ACTION

The Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel (HMSAS) received an update on exempted fishing permits (EFPs) from Matt Craig.

We appreciate the efforts of the applicants who submitted revised applications. As we have stated, and evidenced by the recent activity reports, there are significant concerns about the economic viability of the deep-set buoy gear fishery. To date, there have been less than 20 fish harvested in 2022 using deep-set buoy gear and/or linked buoy gear. This has resulted in swordfish buyers becoming more dependent on imports that are utilizing gear types not allowed off the west coast. This dependence has caused the price for domestically harvested swordfish to drop, despite the lack of domestically harvested supply. This boutique fishery provides a small contribution to Optimum Yield and has yet to be shown to be financially viable. We are supportive of testing types and/or configurations which could increase the harvest of swordfish and other marketable species off the U.S. west coast. To that end, we are recommending the Council approve the Harold and PIER EFPs.

Concern was expressed that approving EFPs to fish with fifteen pieces of gear creates a fairness and equity issue for current EFP holders who are limited to ten pieces of gear. We understand the benefit of determining whether allowing additional gear will improve the viability of the fishery, however we are concerned about the competitive advantage this provides those applicants. Below, we provide two options we believe will address the fairness and equity issue. Each of these would allow current EFP holders, with a history of participation in the fishery, to submit applications to fish up to 15 pieces of gear in advance of the March 2023 Council meeting. Determining history of participation could focus on number of sets (100) or number of fish landed (50). We believe allowing additional pieces of gear will help answer questions regarding the financial viability of the fishery and address the ability to actively tend the gear and whether there is an increased likelihood of lost gear.

The HMSAS was undecided on the best approach to recommend to the Council at this time. The following best represents the two most favored options:

Option 1 - Approve the four applications seeking to use fifteen pieces of gear, and then allow all current EFP holders with a history of participation in the fishery to submit an application during your March 2023 PFMC meeting to utilize up to 15 pieces of gear if they want to.

Option 2 - Defer final action on the remaining EFPs until the March 2023 PFMC meeting, and invite current EFP holders with a history of participation in the fishery to submit an application before that meeting to utilize up to 15 pieces of gear if they want to.