

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE  
2023 PACIFIC WHITING FISHERY UNDER THE U.S./CANADA AGREEMENT

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received an overview of the 2023 total allowable catch (TAC) determination by the U.S./Canada Whiting Agreement Joint Management Committee (JMC) from Colin Sayer (National Marine Fisheries Service [NMFS]-West Coast Region [WCR], Whiting Treaty Coordinator) and participants in the treaty process. The GAP is pleased that the JMC provided a consensus recommendation to the Parties for a coastwide 2023 TAC. With the stock projected to be at 104 percent of its unfished biomass, a coastwide TAC of 625,000 mt was recommended for 2023. Whiting fishery participants highlighted for the GAP that the bilateral scientific research and analysis process that is the foundation of managing the whiting fishery is strong and working well. The whiting fishery is a critically important piece of the groundfish fishery portfolio, and the GAP very much appreciates the collaborative approach among scientists, managers, and fishery participants.

The GAP also received information about NMFS proposed plan to make major changes to the Pacific Hake Acoustic Trawl Survey by integrating it with the Coastal Pelagic Species survey in an effort to accomplish multiple objectives while seeking to optimize the efficient use of NMFS resources. The GAP discussed with fishery participants that the hake acoustic survey (its survey biomass index, age-1 index, and biological and oceanographic data) is the scientific foundation of managing the fishery and the US/Canada Treaty process. Based on what NMFS has presented during Treaty meetings, fishery participants are deeply concerned that this effort to integrate NMFS surveys will only serve to improve efficiency to the benefit of NMFS and has the potential to weaken the survey, negatively impacting the fishery-independent data time series and the hake stock assessment, with the likelihood that increased scientific uncertainty will further complicate management of this important Treaty-managed trans-boundary stock. The GAP agrees with whiting fishery participants and JMC that more direct engagement with fishery participants, scientists, and interested parties is urgently needed to understand and clarify risks, opportunities, and benefits of any change to the hake survey prior to further development. The GAP recommends the Council consider providing guidance to NMFS about how to proceed; specifically, the Council could recommend that NMFS collaboratively engage with affected stakeholders and Hake Treaty participants to ensure efforts to make the use of ship time more efficient results in improvements to the current survey rather than making modifications that risk weakening the survey.

In addition, Colin highlighted the imminent expiration of the terms of several whiting treaty Advisory Panel (AP) members and two JMC members (that is, the JMC whiting fishery and tribal representatives) are expiring in September 2023. NMFS will soon announce a request for nominations to the U.S. sections of the AP and JMC.

It is the understanding of the GAP that the Council took action under Inseason in November 2022 to establish a 750 metric ton set-aside amount for 2023 research and incidental catch, as recommended by the GMT ([Agenda Item H.6.a, Supplemental REVISED GMT Report 1, November 2022](#)) and we continue to support implementation of this set-aside amount in determining 2023 whiting sector allocations.