

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON FIXED GEAR MARKING AND ENTANGLEMENT RISK REDUCTION; LIMITED ENTRY FOLLOW-ON ACTIONS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) provides the following comments on the Fixed Gear Marking and Entanglement Risk Reduction and the Limited Entry Fixed Gear (LEFG) Follow-On Actions packages.

Fixed Gear Marking and Entanglement Risk Reduction

Purpose and Need Statement

While we understand the necessity of including the last sentence, the structure could be modified for clarity. The GAP suggests: Action is also needed to improve the effectiveness of the biodegradable escape mechanisms currently required in pot gear.

Range of Alternatives

Item 1: Buoy marking

The GAP supports the inclusion of Alternative 1 but recommends removing Alternative 2 from the range of alternatives (ROA). Marking buoys according to gear type, in addition to the already required vessel information, will align the fixed gear fishery with other fisheries working to reduce/attribute whale entanglements. The GAP understands that a gear-sector identification alternative is not needed to attribute entanglements given the already required vessel information.

The GAP recommends including both suboptions in Alternative 1 for the ROA.

Item 2: Line marking

This portion of the GAP discussion was diverse and included many references to the ongoing line marking discussions in the state-managed Dungeness crab fishery. In those fisheries marking up to the top 20 fathoms of line has been recommended. It would be helpful to have more direction from National Marine Fisheries Service about the distance of marking and mark spacing that would be adequate. The GAP is interested in the use of a custom color line and believes that acquiring funding is a good way to ensure continuity and take advantage of economies of scale. The GAP supported the various alternatives under this item with the exception of the following:

Portion of line marked: The GAP recommends dropping Alternative 1 because the burden of marking all of the line used in the fishery is excessive.

Distance of marking: The GAP recommends the removal of Alternative 3 because the burden of marking more than 50 fathoms of buoy line is excessive.

Item 3: Entanglement risk reduction

The GAP is in full support of including Alternative 1 in the ROA; allowing the use of one buoy line per set. The GAP is hopeful that further discussions with Enforcement Consultants (EC) can bear out that the benefits of this action outweigh the risks.

Through public comment and GAP discussion we searched for more ideas to put under this item. Some of those discussed include:

1) Pop up gear: The GAP was not in favor of suggesting pop-up gear at this time due to the technologies' undemonstrated effectiveness, potential for gear conflicts, lost gear, and EC concerns. These concerns far outweigh the potential benefits.

2) Time and area closures: There was no support for this in the GAP, for many reasons, including that whale entanglements have not followed a specific pattern and EC concerns about enforcement.

3) Surface gear limitations: This has been used in the Dungeness crab fishery and may have application in the fixed gear fishery. The simplest form would be preferable; i.e. total allowable length of gear on the surface. The GAP recommends the Council consider adding this to the ROA with two options of 5 fm and 10 fm as the maximum length of gear allowed. Future discussions on the item should consider whether this should be in regulation or in a best practices guide (see below).

Item 4: Escape panel

The GAP is in support of including Alternative 1 in the ROA.

Item 5: Best practices guide

The GAP supports developing a best practices guide, to include buoy marking, line marking, minimizing buoy line length, using a sinking top shot, identify high whale traffic times/areas, etc. The GAP understands that gear marking could help minimize the risk of entanglements, and it is best to disseminate these ideas in a best practices guide before implementing them into regulation, as further testing of these ideas is needed.

LEFG Follow On

Purpose and Need

The GAP recommends the Council adopt the purpose and need in Attachment 2.

Range of Alternatives

Item 1: LEFG permit endorsement

The GAP sees value in all of the alternatives, but favors Alternative 3 in that it is the most effective of the alternatives at simplifying the administrative burden and provides the fleet the most flexibility to harvest the resource.

Item 2: Fourth permit stacking

The GAP was initially optimistic about this item, but after further analysis and discussion, recommends not moving forward with this item. The benefits to the resource and the public are hard to identify. Additionally, the complexity surrounding permit control issues could be time-consuming for enforcement.

Item 3: Base Permit designation

The GAP supports including the removal of the base permit designation in the ROA.

Item 4: Permit price reporting

The GAP supports Alternative 2 and does not see the need to limit the collection of permit price reporting to only sablefish endorsed permits. Therefore, Alternative 1 should not be included in the ROA. Data collected will be useful in future Council deliberations.

Item 5: Season start time

The GAP supports including the removal of season start times in the ROA.

Item 6: Cost recovery

The GAP supports Alternative 1 sub-option 2. Placing the responsibility of the cost recovery on the permit owner and permit renewal will streamline cost recovery collection. The GAP recommends removing sub-option 1 from the ROA.

Summary of Recommendations:**Fixed Gear Marking**

- Adopt purpose and need with proposed change to replace the last sentence with “Action is also needed to improve the effectiveness of the currently required biodegradable escape mechanisms in pot gear.”
- Adopt the ROA presented in Attachment 2 with the following changes:
 1. Remove Alternative 2 from Item 1: Buoy marking
 2. Remove Alternative 1 from “Position of line marked” and Alternative 3 for “Distance of Marking” in Item 2: Line marking
 3. Add surface gear limitations to the ROA in Item 3: Entanglement Risk Reduction Measures with two options of maximum length: 5 fm and 10 fm.
 4. Include a best practices guide as a part of the package.

LEFG Follow On

- Adopt purpose and need presented in Attachment 2
- Adopt the ROA presented in Attachment 2 with the following changes:
 1. Remove Item 2 from the ROA.
 2. Remove Alternative 1 (sablefish endorsed permits only) from Item 4: Permit price reporting
 3. Remove Sub-option 1 (vessel owner pays) from Alternative 1 on Item 6: cost recovery

PFMC
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