

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE GEOGRAPHIC STRATEGIC PLAN AND REGIONAL EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) would like to thank Mr. Jeff Bash and Ms. Maggie Sommer for their reports and ideas on these agenda items.

The GAP had a robust discussion about the strategic plan and suggests the following be included:

1. Nearshore surveys: Fund the expanded Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFS) hook and line survey and expand trawl surveys to cover shallower depths, where current surveys are not accessing, to more fully account for juvenile and adult abundance of stocks that are not being counted. The existing hook and line survey in the south should be expanded into northern California and would target nearshore rockfish; the trawl surveys would target petrale and skates.
2. Sablefish: Robust sablefish recruitment events began and continued for the West Coast in approximately 2014. The younger fish appeared to avoid the larger adults (perhaps due to cannibalistic predatory behavior). These young fish appeared to stay nearer to shore than larger adults at times and other times mix with schools of whiting. This resulted in industry exceeding set-asides in the at-sea fishery and hoarding of sablefish quota in the shoreside individual fishing quota (IFQ) fishery.

Recently though, things changed. Successful sablefish recruitment materialized into a large amount of young adults that are now mixing with the older adults and are now being captured in the survey. This resulted in an instantaneous expansion of roughly 300 percent.

At first glance, this seems like a windfall and may well be in some respects. But when these expansions of biomass are not recognized, it can and does create major difficulties for bycatch and markets. When actual biomass exceeds survey-projected stock assessment biomass estimates, the fishermen will encounter more bycatch than what would normally be predicted. This can lead to expensive avoidance maneuvers and shut down of fisheries. Therefore, markets need time and promotional work and investment to sell the increase in volume. The GAP suggests finding creative ways to survey juvenile sablefish, whether recording the amounts and nature when they are taken as bycatch or utilizing emerging technologies to survey juvenile fish.

3. Offshore wind and aquaculture: The GAP appreciates the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) creation of an internal offshore wind team that focuses on offshore wind impacts to West Coast Region resources. The chair of that team is also part of the Pacific Fishery Management Council's Marine Planning Committee and we count on that NMFS knowledge and expertise when informing that Committee. However, it is clear, through historical activities and recent offshore wind area identification and leasing developments, that NMFS is relegated to more of a support role to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) offshore wind process, but NMFS, as part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, is the clear leader with respect to managing ocean

resources that could be affected by offshore wind. The GAP suggests NMFS take a greater role in working with BOEM for any renewable energy development in the ocean space.

Additionally, potential offshore aquaculture should be included in any marine spatial planning projects for which NMFS is consulted. Again, NMFS understands the ocean space more thoroughly than any other agency as well as the communities that depend on ocean resources.

Regarding regional equity and environmental justice implementation, the GAP understands this is a developing process and appreciates the efforts and work completed to this point. Additionally, the GAP suggests:

1. Consideration of communities prior to implementation of the trawl IFQ program: As a result of the trawl IFQ program, some coastal communities, including a tribal fishery in Neah Bay, lost more than 90 percent of their trawl effort. At the time, no one realized the extent of the potential trawl fleet losses to those communities and resultant changes in operating costs for those vessels to switch to other fisheries. A historical consideration of these changes could inform the plan and potential future management action.
2. Effects of regulations on seafood supply chains/markets: As a result of increasingly restrictive fishing regulations, more fisheries are becoming marginalized and the seafood industry is losing longstanding supply chains that, for example, depend on consistent volume to provide markets with seafood. As the regional plan is developed, it would behoove NMFS to work with processors and other sister agencies (for example, U.S. Department of Agriculture) to facilitate meetings or programs to consider underutilized fisheries resources and how to access them sustainably. This would help meet the basic needs of underserved communities on several levels, for example providing jobs, new access points to fisheries, and provide more sustainable US-sourced protein resources to programs like the school lunch program.
3. Recognize the importance of commercial passenger fishing vessel (CPFV) and private sport fishing in underserved communities: The GAP notes the importance of CPFV and private sport entities to the public as a source of healthy protein to fulfill the basic need of feeding a family. In some cases, it is more efficient and less costly to directly access federal fisheries vs. purchasing the same or comparable seafood in seafood markets or grocery stores. There are clear disparities of availability to some stocks in the fishery and the availability of those stocks in the market. Identifying ways to get those proteins to underserved communities would be mutually beneficial.
4. Fishery regulations: Recognize and consider the effect of accessing and understanding fishery regulations by people in underserved communities who are interested in providing protein to their families. That is, recreational fishing may be considered a subsistence fishery for some. Multiple layers of fishery regulations may hinder the efforts of community members to go fishing or they may not have the resources to understand the regulations.