

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON NATIONAL MARINE
FISHERIES SERVICE REPORT – INCLUDING SABLEFISH MANAGEMENT STRATEGY
EVALUATION UPDATE

Sablefish Management Strategy Evaluation

The sablefish management strategy evaluation presentation notes a major finding of stock vulnerability south of 36° N. lat. due to movement and reproductive isolation, and that there was an absence of tagging and age data south of 36° N. lat., making movement rates uncertain. **The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) recommends exploring a logistical and funding pathway to implement a tagging program on the West Coast.** Some participants have experience with tagging and would be willing to participate in a future program.

Discard Mortality Rates

Regarding research discards, from our Agenda Item F.6, [June 2024 Supplemental GAP Report 1](#) relating to harvest specifications and management measures:

“As a note for future cycles, it came to our attention during GAP discussion that, currently, all hook-and-line research and non-nearshore commercial catch for the majority of rockfish species are assumed to have 100 percent mortality by the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (WCGOP) within the Groundfish Multi-year Mortality Report, regardless of whether they were descended or released at the surface. In some cases where rockfish are caught in shallow depths and descended, this may overestimate true mortality. Currently, the only species with discard mortality rates applied to hook-and-line research catch are cowcod, canary rockfish, and yelloweye rockfish, which was based on previous Council action. For WCGOP to apply either surface or descended mortality rates to all rockfish there needs to be additional Council action.

“For California quillback and other species with low or declining ACLs, given increasing sigma values, this difference could be a meaningful amount. The GAP requests that the Council recommend that the Observer Program use the same depth-based discard mortality rates for research and non-nearshore discards, when appropriate, that are applied to the /commercial nearshore fishery discards when estimating overall species mortality from fishing.”

Additionally, the GAP has concerns that there are currently no discard mortality rates (DMRs) for species that have a high survival rate when discarded - such as shortspine thornyhead. which have no swim bladders. Given the constraining nature of shortspine and other groundfish species, any savings that can be found to more accurately reflect total mortality are significantly important to the seafood industry.

Therefore, the GAP recommends the Council task Council staff and the GMT to do a summary of:

- Existing surveys that use groundfish, and how DMRs are applied for those;

- Identify species for which consideration of applying DMRs to research catch may make sense (because there are research discards of that species, it's a highly constraining species across groundfish sectors, etc.)
- Conduct a literature review to identify existing research on DMRs for species without currently approved discard mortality rates (e.g., shortspine thornyhead); and
- Scope how these DMRs (existing or new) might be applied in the next harvest specifications cycle.

PFMC
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