

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON LIMITED ENTRY FIXED GEAR ACTIONS

The Habitat Committee (HC) received an update from Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) staff on the proposed Limited Entry Fixed Gear Actions. The HC focused our discussion on the actions related to gear endorsements and the effects of these gear types on habitat, including proposed new gear types (e.g., slinky pots). Because traditional pot gear is more damaging to benthic habitat and has a larger individual footprint than bottom longline gear, Scenarios 2 and 3 may increase the overall spatial footprint of impacts to structure-forming invertebrates and rocky habitat. The size and amount of netlike material associated with slinky pots may also be more susceptible to entanglement of structure-forming invertebrates and complex rocky habitat compared to other gear types and therefore may result in more lost gear and damages to habitat. The HC also discussed potential advantages of slinky pots compared to traditional pots, such as reduced bycatch and increased efficiency, therefore potentially reduced soak time. Additionally, the reduced weight of slinky pot gear compared to traditional pot gear may reduce damage to benthic habitats. However, given their lighter weight, slinky pots may be more susceptible to being lost (and may be more likely to be used under rough sea conditions, which could increase risk of losing gear).

The HC recommends habitat impacts from the proposed gear endorsement alternatives be analyzed in the Council's process of selecting a Preliminary Preferred Alternative/Final Preferred Alternative. This is especially important in the context of proposing a new gear type (slinky pots), as habitat impacts from this gear type have not been evaluated. The analysis should consider impacts from the longlines associated with the pots (slinky and traditional) in addition to the pot itself, spatial benthic footprint of different gear types, potential for smothering/entanglement of benthic habitats, and potential shifts/changes in fishing effort based on the different gear endorsement alternatives.

PFMC
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