

GROUNDFISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE REPORT

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) would like to express our support for the work the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) conducts to facilitate the operation and implementation of our fisheries, such as surveys, stock assessments, and those regulatory actions that allow our fisheries to open on time, operate, and have increased opportunities or flexibility.

The GAP is very concerned about the significant loss of staff members at both science centers and within the West Coast Region and the implications that the loss of key staff members will have on the integrity of the fishery conservation and management regime in Federal waters off the West Coast.

The GAP requested Jeremy Rusin, Interim Director of the NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center (Center), provide information about personnel changes at the Center. The Center has lost roughly 25 percent of its staff due to probationary layoffs and retirements, noting the percentage is about the same or slightly more at the West Coast Region and Southwest Fisheries Science Center, but varies across departments. The hiring freeze has also not been lifted. Reduction in work force mandates are still looming, creating additional uncertainty and NMFS could lose additional employees across fisheries offices. Additionally, some contracts had to be canceled, leading to backlogs of work that were previously outsourced.

While the GAP understands NMFS staff will continue to do their utmost to fulfill their management objectives, it is clear they will be constrained to doing less with less. The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) process is important to the future of the groundfish fishery and has worked really well for a long time. NMFS is a critical partner in the Council process, and the GAP is concerned the staffing losses and loss of institutional knowledge will impact the responsiveness of the Council and NMFS to critical fisheries issues.

PFMC
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