GROUNDFISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON MARINE MAMMAL TAKE REDUCTION TEAM UPDATE

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a concise update on the West Coast Take Reduction Team (TRT) from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

This TRT is unique in that the initial requirement of the TRT to bring the incidental mortality and serious injury (M/SI) down to the potential biological removal (PBR) of the affected stocks has already been achieved.

The first TRT meeting was proposed for four days, in person, beginning November 6. Due to the government shutdown, this meeting has been moved to a virtual three-hour meeting on November 20. The GAP is concerned about this meeting starting the six month "clock" on the development of a Take Reduction Plan and how the condensed timing of the process will make it difficult for industry representatives on the TRT to participate. Specifically, it has been indicated that the second TRT meeting will likely be virtual and scheduled for the second week in December. Many of the representatives also participate in the Dungeness crab fishery, which will likely start for a portion of the coast on November 28.

Furthermore, the GAP continues to have concerns about the lack of commitment from the NMFS to make all of the TRT meetings available to the public for virtual attendance and to provide virtual opportunities to make public comments. Only allowing for in-person attendance and public comment risks making the process less transparent and trusted, not just by fishermen and industry, but by all persons interested in the TRT process.

The GAP appreciates the potential for future virtual or hybrid access to the TRT meetings, as that would allow for more transparency in the discussions, which would also engender trust across all TRT members and those affected outside of the TRT process. Additionally, it would facilitate better participation by fishery participants who may not always be able to travel due to maintaining their fishing businesses during open seasons.

As the GAP stated in our April 2024 F.1.d, Supplemental GAP Report 1:

> "Technological advances for facilitating virtual and hybrid meetings have evolved in the past few years and should be fully explored before committing solely to in-person meetings. Alternatively, exploring or negotiating a more appropriate six-month window would be helpful. The GAP suggests recording the TRT meetings. This would enhance recordkeeping, allow alternates to get up to speed on discussions prior to attending a meeting and also allow more transparency on the TRT process for members of the public."

PFMC
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