

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON CONSIDERATION OF INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) met with the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) to discuss progress of this year's fisheries and possible inseason adjustments. The GMT discussion was led by Ms. Jessi Doerpinghaus. The GAP offers the following recommendations and comments on proposed inseason adjustments to ongoing groundfish fisheries.

Industry Voluntary Avoidance of Sablefish Bycatch in the At-Sea Whiting Fishery

The GMT briefed the GAP about the higher than anticipated sablefish bycatch in the at-sea whiting sectors, including discussion about the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) public notice to the at-sea sectors. Mothership (MS) and Catcher-Processor (CP) representatives outlined for the GAP the measures taken in response to the [NMFS notice](#). Within hours of the NMFS notice, the at-sea sectors identified the general area where higher sablefish bycatch occurred, including specific haul locations of the highest events, and vessels moved well south of the problem area. In addition, sablefish catch was added to the daily reports produced by the MS and CP vessels, which are shared widely among the whiting fleet, and a base bycatch rate was established to facilitate self-monitoring of sablefish catch against the set-aside amount.

At-Sea Pacific Ocean Perch (POP) and Darkblotched Rockfish Bycatch

For 2018 the at-sea sectors have sector-specific set-asides and access to shared buffers for POP and darkblotched, but the automatic closure authority provision under Amendment 21-3 still remains. The at-sea whiting sectors have had higher than projected POP and darkblotched bycatch this spring, as they move to avoid salmon and sablefish. For this reason, the GAP wanted to flag that the Council might consider moving some POP and/or darkblotched from the incidental open access to the shared groundfish buffers at a future meeting. This would not limit use by open access participants since the buffer is for all groundfish sectors but could provide additional insurance for the at-sea whiting sectors' fall fishing between meetings.

Electronic Monitoring (EM) Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) Discards

The GAP supports the need for flexibility and efficiency in the whiting EM program and understands the Midwater Trawlers Cooperative (MTC) proposal submitted under public comment was responding to a NMFS request of industry to submit a specific discard proposal through the Council process. We understand that whiting fishermen want to retain as much fish as possible and remain accountable for all discards but may encounter circumstances from time to time that require discards. The GAP is fully supportive of further discussions and analysis on whiting discards, and we encourage the industry participants and fishery managers to work together on a proposal that will work for all parties.

Electronic Monitoring Final Rule

The [EM proposed rule for midwater whiting and fixed gear](#) published in September 2016, and NMFS signaled through the NMFS report at this meeting ([Agenda Item E.1.a, Supplemental NMFS Report 2](#)) that the final rule will publish sometime this month, in June 2018. There have been developments in technology and experience gained under the EM EFP during the time that has passed between the proposed and final rule. Based on the text of the proposed rule, the GAP has concerns with what will be included in the final rule and the process for industry to provide input. For example, the proposed rule text says that it would be unlawful to not submit a hard drive, but newly available technology would allow for data to be sent electronically. Industry would also like clarity on the data review rate – what’s the process for review, what are the criteria for each species, what counts as a violation? There are rigid requirements in the proposed rule that may be better suited through the vessel monitoring plan (which could be updated more often than through a rulemaking process). And as the GAP referenced in [our statement under C.2](#), we would like more clarity on how cost recovery and the national EM Cost Allocation Policy Directive will be applied to the EM program and how it will interact with the EM final rule. The GAP prefers the final rule be written in such a way that these issues can be developed through a process outside of regulations (e.g., through the VMP) with further input from the Ad Hoc Groundfish Electronic Monitoring Policy Advisory Committee / Ad Hoc Groundfish Electronic Monitoring Technical Advisory Committee and industry. But if the final rule is inflexible and prescriptive, the GAP supports delaying the final rule until these discussions can take place.

PFMC
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