

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT MITIGATION MEASURES FOR SEABIRDS – SCOPING

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a report on West Coast seabird bycatch by Dr. Ed Melvin from the University of Washington and discussion from Ms. Keeley Kent of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) relative to the scoping process for development of seabird mitigation measures for vessels less than 55 feet in length overall deploying longline gear.

The GAP recommends the following scoping ideas for development of seabird bycatch mitigation measures for vessels less than 55 feet long:

1. Exempt seabird tory lines for longline operations south of 36° N. Latitude. The reason for this exemption is the documented lack of albatross migration in this southern area.
2. Exempt the nearshore longline fleet from seabird tory lines as the albatross do not seem to migrate into the near shore areas. The albatross seem to be on the shelf break or seaward of the shelf break.
3. Examine the ability to exempt vessels less than 55 feet in length if sets are made as night sets. The GAP was not sure how this would be enforced; however it was pointed out that tide books do have times for sunset and sunrise. There should be some outreach with small boat operators and enforcement to determine how this exemption might be used.
4. Include as an option the requirement to use tory lines for vessel less than 55 feet in length overall.
5. For smaller vessels of less than 36 feet in length, examine whether a vessel can have a customized tory line that works specifically for their vessel. For those who need a customized design, perhaps enforcement could work with the smaller vessel operators to develop this option further. The GAP recommends a process like the one used for individual vessel monitoring plans under the electronic monitoring exempted fishing permits (EFPs).

GAP members were informed there are generally three vessels that have accounted for over 50 percent of the black-footed albatross bycatch over a long period of time. Due to confidentiality restrictions with the observer program, it is difficult for the fleet to identify and communicate to these individual vessel operators that there may be a unique problem with the setting of their gear and resulting bird bycatch. The GAP requests the observer program, when conducting observer debriefings, identify these operators and inform them that they have abnormally high bycatch rates.