

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON USING DESCENDING DEVICES TO MITIGATE BAROTRAUMA IN RECREATIONAL FISHERIES

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) had the opportunity to meet with the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) at this meeting to discuss the GMT's Progress Report on Using Descending Devices to Mitigate Barotrauma in Recreational Fisheries ([Agenda Item I.3.b, GMT Report](#)). In addition, the GMT provided the Council and the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) an overview of the Progress Report.

The progress report and discussion with the SSC were the first steps in the process of considering how mortality rates for fish discarded with descending devices could be incorporated into recreational groundfish management. The Council prioritized this task for the GMT and the SSC in June with the objective of potentially developing discard mortality rates for yelloweye and cowcod rockfish as soon as 2013, and possibly including other species during the 2015-2016 harvest specification and management measure cycle. The GMT's intent for this progress report was to provide a broad overview of the current research, some preliminary ideas on how the research might be used to produce depth-specific estimates of mortality for yelloweye and cowcod rockfish when descending devices are used, discuss limitations relative to the amount of data currently available, and offer preliminary ideas for implementation. We acknowledge the difficulty with reviewing and processing the large amount of information included in the Barotrauma Report and we appreciate the time set aside for a discussion with the SSC.

The GMT would like to continue working on this project over the winter with the goal of producing a more refined report consisting of alternatives for consideration at the March 2013 Council meeting. We offer some ideas on the path forward and what we envision should be included in the updated Barotrauma Report:

- The GMT is scheduled to meet in January 2013 with a portion of the meeting reserved to further refine the Barotrauma Report in time for the March Council meeting. The focus would be to develop a smaller range of alternatives and identify a GMT-recommended alternative. **The GMT recommends that a subgroup of the SSC participate in that discussion.** To maximize the efficiency of the discussion with SSC members at the January meeting and help focus that discussion, the GMT proposes some dialogue with these members prior to the January meeting.
- While canary rockfish impacts may not constrain season lengths or depth restrictions for the recreational fishery at present, they are overfished and retention is prohibited. Accounting for the use of descending devices in their release would provide a greater incentive to use descending devices and may result in higher survival for released canary rockfish. Data analogous to that available for developing mortality rates for yelloweye rockfish are available for canary rockfish. **The GMT recommends that mortality rates for canary rockfish and methods for applying the mortality rates be developed for review by the SSC at the March Council meeting.**

- Additional guidance is requested in the development of methods to apply them. Each state has its own data limitations and considerations regarding data required to inform the proportion of anglers using these devices. **The GMT recommends a process in which the methods to estimate the proportion of anglers using descending devices are developed by each state and submitted for review by the GMT and SSC in time for comments to be included in the March Briefing Book.**
- The current timeline for development and review of mortality rates reflecting the use of descending devices and methods to apply them is scheduled to culminate in Council action in March 2013. Most fishing activity takes place over the summer months, and estimates can be augmented to reflect their use retrospectively as long as the appropriate data is being collected in the field. If additional work is required for refinement, final action could be delayed to April to provide additional time, while still allowing implementation in 2013. The GMT envisions a small initial step forward with the opportunity to build as you go, as more research data becomes available.
- The GMT will provide more specific information on implementation in the case that the Council adopts mortality rates for rockfish released with descending devices. The timing of implementation may be different for each state. Some states may be prepared to implement mortality rate estimates sooner than others. Accounting for the use of descending devices should be implemented using mortality rates and methods for application presented by each state that have been reviewed and approved by the Council. **After rates and methods are approved, the GMT recommends implementing them when each state is prepared to do so rather than waiting for all three states to be prepared before moving forward.**

Recommendations:

1. Have the GMT and an SSC sub-group meet to discuss refinement of the mortality rate estimates at the January GMT meeting.
2. Task the GMT with development of mortality rates for canary rockfish for review at the March Council meeting.
3. Have the states provide a description of their proposed methods for accounting for the proportion of anglers using descending devices for review by the GMT and SSC in time for comments to be included in the March Briefing Book.
4. If mortality rates and methods for applying them are approved, state by state implementation would begin when each state is prepared to do so rather than waiting for all three to be prepared before moving forward.

PFMC
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