# CHAPTER 6 DESCRIPTION OF THE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT REGIME

This chapter summarizes information provided in the 2007-08 groundfish harvest specifications and the groundfish SAFE document. The information is incorporated by reference and briefly summarized here.

## 6.1 Current Biennial Management

Starting in 2005 and 2006, harvest specifications (ABCs and OYs) and management measures are established for two years. This new cycle extends Council decision-making over three meetings. At its November meeting, 14 months before the start of the biennium, the Council identifies preliminary ABCs and OYs. At the following April and/or March meeting, the Council finalizes these harvest specifications and identifies a preliminary range of management measures. The Council makes its final decisions on these management measures at the June meeting preceding the next biennium. This schedule allows enough time for NMFS to publish a proposed rule in the *Federal Register* and take public comment before its final decision on whether to approve the Council recommendations. More time is also available to meet the procedural and documentary requirements of NEPA. Finally, this cycle accommodates an "off-year" during which the Council and NMFS would be less occupied with ongoing management of the groundfish fishery and could spend more time on long-term initiatives such as developing better assessment models and surveys.

## 6.2 Catch Monitoring and Accounting

Various state, Federal, and tribal catch monitoring systems are used in West Coast groundfish management. These are coordinated through the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC). PacFIN is the commercial catch monitoring database, and RecFIN is the database for recreational fishery catch monitoring. There are two components to total catch: (1) catch landed in port, and (2) catch discarded at sea. Discards occur for regulatory reasons (i.e., catch in excess of trip and/or landing limits) and market reasons (i.e., catch of unmarketable species or size).

Management measures are normally imposed, adjusted, or removed at the beginning of the biennial fishing period, but may, if the Council determines it necessary, be imposed, adjusted, or removed at any time during the period. As described in Section 6.2 of the Groundfish FMP, four different categories of

management actions are authorized, ranging from automatic actions initiated by NMFS to full rulemaking actions requiring a minimum of two Council meetings. Inseason adjustments typically fall under the category of notice actions that are routine (as defined by the FMP) in nature and usually require one Council meeting and one *Federal Register* notice. Federal and/or state responses to management goals varies according to the specification of the harvest targets and are largely governed by the definitions in the FMP and Federal Regulations.

## 6.3 Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodologies

Establishing a standardized bycatch reporting methodology and limiting bycatch to the extent practicable are MSA mandates. Effective bycatch accounting and control mechanisms are also critical for staying within target total catch OYs. The first element in limiting bycatch is accurately measuring bycatch rates by time, area, depth, gear type, and fishing strategy. Current programs, described in detail in the 2007-08 harvest specifcations EIS and the groundfish SAFE are:

- West Coast Groundfish Observer Program
- At-Sea Pacific Whiting Observer Program
- Shore-based Pacific Whiting Observation Program
- Central California Marine Sport Fish Project
- Oregon Marine Recreational Observation Program
- WDFW Groundfish At-Sea Data Collection Program
- WDFW Ocean Sampling Program
- Tribal Observer Program

## 6.4 Exempted Fishing Permits

An EFP is a NMFS-issued Federal permit that authorizes a vessel to engage in an activity that is otherwise prohibited by the MSA or other fishery regulations for the purpose of collecting limited experimental data. EFPs can be issued to Federal or state agencies, marine fish commissions, or other entities, including individuals.

The specific objectives of a proposed exempted fishery may vary. The groundfish FMP provides for EFPs to promote increased utilization of underutilized species, realize the expansion potential of the domestic groundfish fishery, and increase the harvest efficiency of the fishery consistent with the MSA and the management goals of the FMP. However, EFPs are commonly used to explore ways to reduce effort on depressed stocks, encourage innovation and efficiency in the fisheries, provide access to constrained stocks while directly measuring the bycatch associated with those fishing strategies, and to evaluate current and proposed management measures.

Proposed EFPs are considered by the Council at the June meeting of the management year to allow the Council the opportunity to set-aside OY for EFPs it has tentatively approved. Final approval of EFPs for any given year occurs at the November Council meeting. For additional information on EFP protocols, visit the Council web site and review Council Operating Procedure 19 (www.pcouncil.org/operations/cops.html).

## 6.5 Research Fisheries

The reduction in directed fisheries and overall landings has resulted in less information available to fishery managers compromising efforts to assess stock abundance and recovery. There is an increasing

reliance on fishery-independent sources of information such as research fisheries and surveys. This is particularly true for depleted species such as widow rockfish, yelloweye rockfish, cowcod, bocaccio, and canary rockfish since fisheries are designed to avoid areas inhabited by these species. There is a relatively sparse amount of data available for widow rockfish because widow rockfish directed fisheries have been eliminated and the Pacific whiting sectors have modified their behavior to avoid encounters with widow rockfish. Assessment scientists will continue to rely on research fisheries as landings, age composition, and logbook catch rate data from many fishery sources decreases. A summary of long-term research fisheries and resource surveys can be found in Appendix A, Section 1.1.1.3. of the 2005–06 groundfish harvest specifications FEIS (PFMC 2004d).

### *6.5.1 Stock Assessment Process and Rebuilding Analyses*

The Council process for setting groundfish harvest levels and other specifications depends on periodic assessments of the status of groundfish stocks, rebuilding analyses of those stocks that are depleted and managed under rebuilding constraints, and a report from an established assessment review body or a STAR Panel. As appropriate, the SSC recommends the best available science for groundfish management decision-making in the Council process. The SSC reviews new assessments, rebuilding analyses, and STAR Panel reports and recommends the data and analyses that should be used to set groundfish harvest levels and other specifications for the following biennial management period.

In the case of depleted species, stock assessment results form the basis of a rebuilding analysis, which in turn is used to develop rebuilding policies and choose the rebuilding target identified in each rebuilding plan. The elements of rebuilding analyses are described in the SSC Terms of Reference for Rebuilding Analyses (SSC 2005). The MSA mandates these rebuilding periods need to be the shortest time possible while taking into account the status and biology of the depleted stock, the needs of fishing communities, and the interaction of the depleted stock within the marine ecosystem.

## 6.6 Vessel Monitoring System

In response to increasingly complex fishery regulations, and particularly the use of closed areas like the RCAs, NMFS implemented a vessel monitoring system (VMS) monitoring program, which includes satellite tracking of vessel positions and a declaration system for those vessels legally fishing within an RCA. VMS was initially implemented on January 1, 2004, for all vessels participating in the groundfish fishery with a limited entry permit. In 2007 the VMS requirement was expanded to all commercial vessels that take and retain, possess or land federally-managed groundfish species taken in Federal waters or in state waters prior to transiting Federal waters, which includes all directed and incidental groundfish open access fisheries. VMS is also required on California halibut, sea cucumber, and ridgeback prawn trawl vessels fishing in Federal waters or transiting through state waters to fish in Federal waters, even if not landing groundfish. The broader requirements help to enforce groundfish essential fish habitat closed area. The EA prepared by NMFS for this action contains detailed description and analysis of the VMS monitoring program (NMFS 2003).