



Introduction to West Coast Fishery: Past and Present

Focus Questions:

- What is the history of the U.S. fishery and why do Observer programs exist?
- Why are Observers needed in the Washington, Oregon, and California groundfish fisheries?
- How is the West Coast fishery managed?
- How does management use West Coast Groundfish Observer data?

Chapter Outline:

- I. Commonly Used Abbreviations
- II. History of the U. S. Fishery
- III. Fisheries and Observer Programs
- IV. Washington, Oregon and California Fisheries and the Advent of the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program
- V. Management Structure of Washington, Oregon and California Fisheries
- VI. Observer Data and Management

I. Commonly Used Abbreviations

ABC- Acceptable Biological Catch
BBL- The Bird Banding Laboratory of the U. S. Geological Survey
CFR- Code of Federal Regulations Oregon, California
CMA - Conservation and Management Act
CPR- Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation
CPUE- Catch Per Unit Effort
EPIRB- Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon
FCC- Federal Communications Commission
FMP- Fishery Management Plan
FUS- Fully Utilized Species
GPS- Global Positioning System
IPHC- International Pacific Halibut
IRCS- International Radio Call Sign
LOA - Length overall
MARPOL- Marine Pollution
M-SFCMA- Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act
MSY- Maximum Sustainable Yield
NMFS- National Marine Fisheries Service
NMML- National Marine Mammal Laboratory
OTC- Observer Total Catch
OY- Optimum Yield
PFD- Personal Floation Device
PFMC- Pacific Fisheries Management Council
PLT- Pacific Local Time
PRR- Product Recovery Rate
PSC- Prohibited Species Cap
PSMFC- Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission
SSB- Single Side Band radio
TAC- Total Allowable Catch
USCG- United States Coast Guard WCGOP- West Coast Groundfish Observer Program
WOC – Oceans off Washington, Oregon, and California

II. History of the U. S. Fishery

Fisheries in the U.S. began in earnest in the 1950's when World War II wartime vessels were converted to fishing vessels. Like the beginning of most resource dependent industries, the U. S. government and industry personnel believed that fish were inexhaustible. As a result, a fisheries management structure was not put in place. The fisheries continued unabated through the 1960's and 1970's. By the early 1970's, large foreign factory trawlers fishing off the coast of the U. S. were out competing smaller U. S. owned vessels. Then, in 1976, the Magnuson Fishery and Conservation Act (Magnuson Act) was passed by the U.S. Congress. With this Act, the U.S. declared management authority over fish resources within 200 nautical miles from their shores, an area known as the **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)**. The goals of the Magnuson Act were to Americanize the fishery and to implement fishery management plans (FMPs) to maintain **optimum yield (OY)** of the resource while rebuilding depleted stocks. Additionally, the Magnuson Act established regional councils to manage the nation's fisheries. The Pacific Fisheries Management Council (PFMC) has jurisdiction over the EEZ off the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California. The act was re-authorized in 1996 as the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA).

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) – the term used for the 200 mile jurisdiction zone, in which a nation has exclusive fishing rights.

Optimum Yield (OY) – the harvest level for a species that achieves overall benefits including economic, social, and biological considerations.

When the Magnuson Act was passed, American fishers had little knowledge of how to harvest or process many of the groundfish species. To encourage investment in this resource, the U.S. Congress passed the American Fisheries Promotion Act. It required that fish quotas be given preferentially to nations that contributed heavily to the development of the U.S. fishing industry. Joint-venture fisheries were created, with American catcher vessels delivering their catch to large foreign floating processors. This allowed foreign countries to continue receiving a quota while developing the U.S. domestic

fleet. By 1991 all foreign commercial fishing within the 200 mile EEZ off the Alaska Coast and the West Coast was terminated, leaving an entirely domestic U.S. fishery.

III. Fisheries and Observer Programs

Foreign Fisheries

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries (NOAA Fisheries) began placing Observers on foreign fishing vessels operating off the northwest and Alaskan coasts of the United States in 1973. Initially, federally employed and funded Observers were placed on vessels only upon invitation of the host countries. In the early years of the program, the primary purpose of Observers was to determine incidental catch rates of Pacific Halibut in groundfish catches and to verify catch statistics in the Japanese crab fishery.

The Magnuson Act mandated that foreign vessels accept Observers, prompting an expansion of Observer coverage. The scope of the program in the North Pacific increased and in 1977-1978 Observer programs were implemented in the Northeast and Hawaii. The costs of funding these programs were recovered from the foreign nations participating in the fishery.

Most foreign vessels were phased out of fisheries within the U. S. EEZ by the late 1980's. However, limited quotas are still being taken by foreign vessels in the Northeast and 100% Observer coverage is mandatory in all of these fisheries.



Domestic Fisheries

Initial authority for NOAA Fisheries to place Observers on domestic fishing vessels came from the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), enacted in 1972. Starting in 1976, NOAA Fisheries Observers were placed on board domestic tuna purse seine vessels fishing in the Eastern Tropical Pacific

to investigate the extent of their interaction with marine mammals.

Since that time numerous domestic Observer programs have been implemented in a wide variety of fisheries. The authority to place Observers onboard domestic vessels is now provided not only by the MMPA but also by the Magnuson Act and the Endangered Species Act. In 2002, NOAA Fisheries deployed Observers in over twenty different fisheries nationwide.

Observer program activities vary widely from fishery to fishery because of differences in fishing location, types of vessels, gear types, interactions with protected or prohibited species (marine mammals, seabirds, endangered species, and species of concern), and overall program objectives. The scope and complexity of these activities often change annually, as data on other species are needed or as new regulations are introduced.



IV. Washington, Oregon and California Fisheries and the Advent of the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program

Fisheries on the West Coast followed the trend of the rest of the nation. They began in the 1950's and became foreign vessel heavy through the 1960's and 1970's. With the passage of the Magnuson Act, effort by U. S. owned vessels increased in the 1980's and West Coast groundfish landings peaked. By 1989 it became clear that harvest levels could not be maintained. A 1998 NOAA Fisheries report to the U.S. Congress on the status of fish stocks on the west coast stated that five of fifty-four rockfish species were "approaching overfished condition", four were "not approaching overfished condition", and the status of the remaining forty-five species (83%) was unknown. In 2000, Commerce Secretary Daley

declared the West Coast Groundfish fishery a failure. By 2001, the PFMC had listed seven overfished species; Lingcod, Widow rockfish, Dark-blotched rockfish, Pacific Ocean Perch, Canary rockfish, Bocaccio rockfish, and Cowcod. In 2002, Yelloweye rockfish and Pacific hake became the eighth and ninth species listed as overfished.

When the fishery was declared a failure in 2000, NOAA Fisheries director Penny Dalton said "A major underlying cause for the current situation is the lack of basic scientific data about these fish. If money is made available, we would like to work with fishermen to gather more data and improve our understanding of this valuable fishery." Fishery managers decided two courses of action were required to return the fishery to an economically and biologically sustainable level. The first occurred in 2001 when the Pacific Fisheries Management Council implemented the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (WCGOP). The goal of the program is to gather the data needed to better manage the groundfish fishery off the coasts of Washington, Oregon and California. The second course of action was a capacity reduction in the fishing fleet. In November 2003, 92 trawl permits were bought out of the fishery by the U. S government and the remaining fishers.



V. Management Structure of Washington, Oregon and California Fishery

The Pacific Fisheries Management Council is responsible for instituting the Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) for the federal fisheries on the West Coast of the United States. Currently there are 4 FMPs: the Pacific Coast Groundfish FMP, the Pacific Salmon FMP, the Coastal Pelagic Species FMP, and the Highly Migratory Species FMP. The council is made up of 19 members, 14 of whom are eligible to vote on

matters brought before the council. The 19 members include representatives of the industry, states (California, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho), NOAA Fisheries, tribes, the United States Coast Guard, and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan specifies how the Council develops recommendations for management of the groundfish fishery. In some cases, it contains specific fishery management recommendations.

Each year the PFMC designates an OY yield for all commercially valuable species or species groups. The OY is split between three sectors; the limited-entry fleet, the open access fleet, and the recreational fleet. The limited-entry fleet includes trawlers and fixed-gear vessels that carry federal fishing permits. The open-access and recreational fleets do not have federal permits and are regulated by the states.

Trip Limits – A trip limit is a specified weight of fish that can be landed during a:

- a. Two-month period
- b. Day

Groundfish trawlers are regulated mainly by two-month trip limits while limited entry fixed gear and open access vessels have daily, weekly, and monthly limits.

One of the primary goals of the Pacific Coast Groundfish FMP is to keep the fishery open throughout the year. To achieve this goal, OYs are constrained by several measures including; annual harvest guidelines, two-month cumulative **trip limits**, individual trip limits, size limits, species-to-species ratio restrictions, and other measures.

VI. Observer Data and Management

Long before the fishery was declared a failure in 2000, managers understood that there was a lack of data on a huge component of the fishery, the discards. Therefore, in the late 1990's, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife sponsored a study of discard rates. This study was limited in scope (only Oregon vessels participated) and in target species (focus was on Dover sole, Sablefish-also known as Blackcod, and Thornyhead complex). However, it produced the only discard rates available for fisheries managers. After the fishery was declared a failure, a focused effort was put towards obtaining more accurate discard rates. To ensure that the

discard rates were more applicable to the wide range of West Coast fisheries, the scope needed to be broadened to include vessels in Washington, Oregon, and California and all target fisheries. As a result, the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (WCGOP) was created. The WCGOP is responsible for providing the data required to calculate discard rates for West Coast groundfish species.



The WCGOP releases its data on an annual basis. In January 2003, the first year of Limited Entry trawl data was summarized and released. The summarized data was then used in a bycatch model to set quotas for the 2004 Limited Entry Trawl fishery. The bycatch model predicts the total amount of fish caught based on the combination of what was actually landed and discard rates.

In January 2004, the second year of Limited Entry trawl data was released along with the summary of 2001 – 2003 Limited Entry Sablefish-endorsed fishery data.

Currently WCGOP Observer data is primarily used to estimate discard rates and the marine mammal and seabird data collected by Observers is used by NOAA Fisheries scientists. Looking forward, stock assessments to be completed in 2005 are likely to include Observer data. The role of WCGOP data to promote ecosystem management has endless possibilities.