



Achieving a Common Understanding: Current and Future State of the West Coast Swordfish Fishery

Group Discussion

The afternoon of the second day involved small group discussions using the questions below to explore perspectives on the information presented. Highlights were shared with the full group. Everyone then discussed overall impressions, outcomes, and ideas on moving forward.

Discussion Questions

- **Is the current state of the swordfish fishery both socio-economically and environmentally sustainable?**
- **What gear and operational changes could increase the viability of the swordfish fishery and coastal communities while minimizing impacts to protected marine species and the marine environment?**
- **What can be done to increase the demand for local and sustainable swordfish products and decrease U.S. reliance on foreign imports?**



Discussion Summary

The cross-cutting themes are summarized below. See Appendix D for more detail.

- All groups agreed that the U.S. west coast swordfish fishery is not economically sustainable. The PLCA time and area DGN closure was cited as being particularly damaging because it reduces access to some of the most productive swordfish fishing grounds during times when swordfish are most abundant off the California coast. Other reasons include: increased fuel costs; safety at sea issues associated with fishing farther offshore; compounding regulatory burdens; and no succession plan for the next generation of fishermen.
- Those involved in the fishery agreed that the U.S. west coast swordfish fishery is environmentally sustainable as it relates to the target swordfish stock with minimal impact to non-target species, such as sea turtles and marine mammals. However, some workshop participants voiced ongoing concerns over discard mortality rates for blue sharks and ocean sunfish (*Mola mola*).
- Participants identified a range of possible gear and operational changes to improve the viability of the fishery. All groups put forward variations on the following three recommendations:
 1. Re-examine dimensions of the PLCA based on current information.
 2. Pursue exempted fishing permits in the PLCA to test DGN, longline, and buoy gear using updated conservation measures successfully applied in other U.S. fisheries.
 3. Conduct more research to better understand the temporal-spatial overlap between sea turtles and swordfish and the possible implications for new practices and management approaches (e.g., dynamic area management).

Other suggestions included revamping the fisheries permit system and exploring other incentives to facilitate the recruitment of new fishermen. At least one group noted that nearly all the concepts identified have the potential for downsides, from increased cost and political battles to possible target and non-target catch per unit effort changes.

- All groups suggested strategies for increasing demand for locally caught swordfish and decreasing U.S. reliance on imports. Two common strategies centered on forming partnerships between industry, NMFS, NGOs, restaurateurs:
 1. Better educate consumers about the benefits of buying U.S. west coast-caught swordfish (versus other less sustainably harvested swordfish) and about the story of the swordfish fishery.
 2. Press to implement federal MMPA provisions to identify and restrict the import of non-sustainably harvested seafood.

Other ideas included: involving fishermen in marketing campaigns; partnering with the California Sustainable Seafood Initiative; developing a turtle-safe brand or label for west coast-caught swordfish; imposing a industry self-tax to fund restoration of sea turtle nesting beaches; supporting NOAA FishWatch as a reliable data source for sustainability information; and revitalizing the California Seafood Council.