

Decision Summary Document
Pacific Fishery Management Council Meeting
September 11-16, 2015

Council Meeting Decision Summary Documents are highlights of significant decisions made at Council meetings. For a more detailed account of Council meeting discussions, see the [Council meeting record and voting logs](#) or the [Council newsletter](#).

Ecosystem Management

Fishery Ecosystem Plan Initiative Scoping

The Council 1) will proceed with development of the Fishery Ecosystem Plan Initiative on Coordinated Ecosystem Indicator Review and endorsed the steps described in the [Ad Hoc Ecosystem Workgroup Report](#); 2) endorsed the Climate Shift Initiative, but work on this initiative would be integrated into later stages of the Indicator initiative. Indicators for monitoring the effects of climate change could be developed in the meantime; and 3) recommended a project to test a practical application of ecosystem information in fishery management. Specifically, the Council asked the NOAA Integrated Ecosystem Assessment Team work with sablefish assessment scientists and members of the Scientific and Statistical Committee to initiate a comprehensive review of the sablefish stock throughout its range and to explore potential relationships between stock status and ecosystem changes that could help inform the next assessment.

Unmanaged Forage Fish Regulation

The Council deemed regulations implementing protective measures for a suite of unmanaged forage fish that prohibit the development of new directed commercial fisheries on these species in the Exclusive Economic Zone. The regulations define directed commercial fishing, establish incidental landing limits of 10 mt per trip and 30 mt per year, and place restrictions on at-sea processing. Additionally, the Council approved Council Operating Procedure 24, a Protocol for Consideration of Exempted Fishing Permits for Shared Ecosystem Component Species, including the suggested edits of the Ecosystem Workgroup.

Salmon Management

Salmon Methodology Review

Of the preliminary methodology review topics identified in April, the Council approved the follow four topics for the final 2015 review process:

- Update of the Chinook Fishery Regulation Assessment Model (FRAM) base period and associated base period algorithms.
- Update documentation for Chinook FRAM.
- Evaluate Sacramento River winter Chinook (SRWC) contribution to ocean fisheries north and south of Point Sur.
- Evaluate a management line at Point Reyes for the Klamath Ocean Harvest Model (KOHM), Sacramento Harvest Model (SHM), and Winter Run Harvest Model.

Regarding the fifth preliminary topic, the evaluation of a potential management line splitting the California Klamath Management Zone, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) reported that there is insufficient data to address the issue, and that the agencies are planning to work with the California salmon fishing industry to develop a test fishery for 2016 to start collecting the required information.

Additionally, the Council approved a CDFW request for a review of the use of SRWC stock projections from jack returns as a management tool, as indicated in Agenda Item D.1.e, Supplemental CDFW Report at the April 2015 Council meeting. It is not anticipated that this review will result in policy recommendations or a full scientific review, rather it is anticipated to be a general review of the merits of this mechanism as a tool for management and a discussion of what is necessary to pursue the matter further.

The 2015 methodology review meeting has been scheduled for October 20-22 in Portland, Oregon. Review materials are due to the Council office no later than October 5. The Council will consider final methodology changes at the November Council meeting in Garden Grove, California.

Sacramento River Winter Chinook (SRWC) Update

The Council heard reports from CDFW and NMFS regarding the current status of SRWC and the in-river spawning and rearing habitat they rely on. The Council has continuing concerns for SRWC largely due to the ongoing drought, but was encouraged by reports of cooler and more consistent flows in the Sacramento River than were observed in 2014. Preliminary results suggest that the 2015 spawning escapement of SRWC will be in the range of 2,000-3,000 spawners. The Council also discussed the existing harvest policy for SRWC under the Endangered Species Act, the potential for a precautionary approach to 2016 fisheries, and a process to explore a revised harvest policy for 2017 and beyond. To develop alternative harvest controls for future management, the Council decided to establish a schedule and an ad hoc workgroup that are modeled after the successful processes used for Columbia River tule fall Chinook and natural coho. It is anticipated that the Council will appoint representatives to this workgroup at its November meeting in Garden Grove, California.

Habitat

Current Habitat Issues

The Council directed staff to send a letter to the Oregon Department of Forestry relating to recommendations for riparian reserves and other forest practices in accordance with the Habitat Committee's recommendations, and directed staff to send a brief letter to Coast Seafoods requesting an extension of the comment deadline for the Humboldt Bay aquaculture project, and attaching the letter previously sent to Coast Seafoods by the Council.

Highly Migratory Species Management

Update on International Issues

The Council will submit comments on the proposed rule (80 FR 48172) to revise NMFS regulations to implement the import provisions of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

The Council heard about the management strategy evaluation (MSE) for North Pacific albacore being performed by the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species (ISC). Member countries of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Northern Committee have been requested to submit candidate operational objectives, biological reference points, and harvest control rules to the ISC Chair and ISC Albacore Working Group Chair by November 19. The Council tasked the Highly Migratory Species Management Team and Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel with review and completion of a template of necessary MSE inputs and any other relevant recommendations on objectives and management strategies for the MSE. During the workload planning agenda item, the Council decided to not schedule a Council floor session on this matter at the November Council Meeting, but instead to forward the HMS Advisory Body recommendations directly to the Council representatives to the WCPFC meeting in December. An October webinar will be considered to develop the HMS Advisory Body recommendations.”

Swordfish Management and Monitoring Plan and Hardcaps

The Council briefly discussed the content of the draft West Coast Swordfish Fishery Management and Monitoring Plan. The Council plans to discuss the structure, concordance, and general questions about current policies for swordfish fisheries at its November 2015 meeting

The Council took final action in adopting final preferred alternatives for management of the California large mesh drift gillnet fishery including hard caps for high priority protected species, performance objectives for non-ESA listed marine mammals and finfish, and fishery monitoring objectives. See the [HMS blog on the Council's website](#) and the forthcoming Council fall newsletter for more detail on the final preferred alternatives.

Scoping of Amendment 4 to the FMP: Authorizing a Shallow-Set Longline Fishery Outside of the EEZ

The Council decided to suspend this agenda item and take it up at a future Council meeting, as a result of extreme length of the September Council meeting at its mid-meeting point. During future meeting planning, the Council scheduled this matter for its March 2016 meeting.

Groundfish Management

Mid-Water Recreational Fishing Regulations

The Council adopted a draft purpose and need statement and directed that it be updated for further consideration at the March 2016 Council meeting. The Council also adopted a range of alternatives for developing mid-water recreational fishing regulations for Oregon only. The mid-water gear would be allowed for both charter and private vessels seaward of the 40 fathom seasonal depth closure and monitored with the existing programs. The season dates forwarded for analysis include: a) April-September, b) July-September, and c) August. The gear configuration would be as described in the [Groundfish Advisory Subpanel Report](#), including no more than three hooks, at least a 30-foot leader, and a non-compressible float required above the hooks. Further, lingcod retention would be prohibited. The Council is scheduled to take final action at the March 2016 meeting in Sacramento, California.

Consideration of Gear Regulations for the Trawl Catch Shares Sector

The Council adopted the purpose and need found in [Attachment 1](#) for considering gear regulation changes for the trawl catch shares sector. The Council also adopted the range of alternatives contained in Attachment 1 and the recommendations forwarded by the [Groundfish Advisory Subpanel](#), except that large footrope gear would not be considered shoreward of the rockfish conservation area. The Council is scheduled to take final action on this issue at its March 2016 meeting.

Final Stock Assessments

The Council adopted new full assessments for bocaccio, China rockfish, Oregon kelp greenling, and widow rockfish, which were endorsed as the best available science by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). A new black rockfish assessment for the portion of the stock off Oregon will be reviewed at the end of September at a “mop-up” stock assessment review panel. Pending the outcome of that review and subsequent SSC review at the November meeting, new assessments for black rockfish off Washington, Oregon, and California are anticipated for Council adoption in November 2015.

Electronic Monitoring Regulations and Exempted Fishing Permit Update

The Council heard an update from NMFS regarding implementation of the electronic monitoring (EM) exempted fishing permits and the development of EM program regulations for the midwater trawl whiting fishery. The Council provided guidance to NMFS and Council staff for the development of the whiting fishery EM program regulations that are scheduled for deeming at the Council’s November meeting in Garden Grove, California. The Council will also review the preferred alternatives they selected for the whiting fishery EM program during the September 2014 meeting in Spokane, Washington. They will consider any new information and

may revise their preferred alternatives at the November meeting. It's expected that the draft EM program regulations will reflect the Council's current set of preferred alternatives. If the Council changes their preferred alternatives in November, refinement of the regulations would be necessary.

Specifications Process for 2017-2018 Management

The Council adopted the range of overfishing limits (OFLs), acceptable biological catches, and annual catch limits (ACLs) for stocks that were not highlighted in [Agenda Item H.5, Supplemental REVISED Attachment 1](#). They also added ACL alternatives to default ACLs for China rockfish, canary rockfish, darkblotched rockfish, and widow rockfish for further analysis. Most of the new management measures recommended in the Groundfish Management Team (GMT), Groundfish Advisory Subpanel, and state reports under this agenda item were also adopted for public review. In November, the Council is scheduled to narrow the range of new management measures for more detail. Establishing a manageable range of alternatives for analysis will increase the likelihood that harvest specifications are implemented January 1, consistent with the Fishery Management Plan.

Salmon Endangered Species Act (ESA) Reinitiation of Consultation Workshop Report

The Council adopted a motion and provided guidance to NMFS for analysis of a range of alternatives to determine the salmon bycatch threshold for the ongoing ESA Section 7 consultation on the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The Council also discussed a schedule for completing the Council recommendation for this consultation that allows for appropriate analysis and refinement of the best threshold numbers, but also optimizes the other workload commitments of key NMFS staff and the Council's GMT. During the workload planning agenda item, the Council scheduled a description of the alternatives to be analyzed and an update on any other possible progress at the Council's March 2016 meeting, with a final Council recommendation scheduled for the September 2016 Council meeting.

Blackgill-Slope Rockfish Intersector Allocation and Accumulation Limit Adjustments

The Council reviewed the preliminary draft environmental assessment for this proposed action provided under [Agenda Item H.7, Attachment 1](#) and decided to reject alternatives 1 and 4 as "considered but rejected from further detailed analysis" since they were not consistent with the groundfish FMP's allocation framework. They also requested further analysis on accumulation limit adjustments for blackgill rockfish and the remaining slope rockfish species in the event blackgill is removed from the southern Slope Rockfish complex. The Council was not prepared to select a preliminary preferred alternative at this meeting. A final preferred alternative for this item is scheduled for Council consideration in November.

Amendment to Modify Groundfish Essential Fish Habitat and to Adjust Rockfish Conservation Areas

The Council adopted a Purpose and Need statement, as modified by input from Council Advisory Bodies and Management Entities. The Council also tasked the Project Team to include the following in developing a suite of alternatives for consideration at future Council meetings:

- Opening current Essential Fish Habitat Conservation Areas (EFHCAs) closed to bottom trawling that are included as part of the six public proposals or the collaborative group proposal.

- The proposed new or expanded EFHCAs that are included in the six public proposals or the collaborative group proposal.
- The six public proposals and the collaborative group proposal as stand-alone alternatives.
- New EFHCAs within existing trawl Rockfish Conservation Areas (RCAs), based on priority habitats.
- Closing waters deeper than 3500 m to bottom contact gear, and develop an exempted fishing permit process for anyone wishing to use bottom contact gear in these waters.
- Removing the trawl RCA completely.
- Removing the trawl RCAs except establishing discrete area closures designed to reduce catch of selected groundfish species
- Removing the trawl RCAs except establish discrete area closures designed to reduce catch of overfished species.
- FMP text and appendices that describe species life history, habitats, and major prey items; fishing and non-fishing activities that may adversely affect EFH; research and information needs; an EFH review and revision process; and minor clarifications and corrections.

The Council also asked the Project Team to develop alternatives that would exclude any changes to EFH or RCA regulations within Tribal Usual and Accustomed areas.

The Project Team will provide an update on the alternatives at the April Council meeting. The full suite of alternatives is tentatively scheduled for Council consideration and selection of preliminary preferred alternatives at the September 2016 meeting.

Inseason Adjustments

The Council considered the progress to date of the fisheries, as presented in the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reports, as well as reports from Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) and the public. The Council recommended that the limited entry and open access daily trip limit fisheries for sablefish north of 36° N. latitude should close on November 1. The fishery closure is necessary to mitigate the anticipated quota overages for both sectors. The Council also recommended that NMFS monitor the progress of the at-sea whiting sectors, and, taking into account other relevant factors, make 8 metric tons of darkblotched rockfish available to the at-sea whiting sectors, not to exceed 5 metric tons to either mothership or catcher-processor sector, at a time that will not interrupt the fisheries. Additionally, the Council recommended NMFS prohibit Pacific halibut retention in the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis as soon as possible, to make the groundfish regulations conform with the earlier closure announced under the halibut regulations and Washington state regulations.

Groundfish Management Science Improvements and Methodology

Review Topics

The Council discussed proposed science activities for next year to improve stock assessments and other scientific analyses that inform management decision-making. The Council voiced support for the three items prioritized by the SSC under [Agenda Item H.10.a, Supplemental SSC Report](#) (these items were also prioritized by the GMT and GAP in their supplemental reports under this agenda item). There was also some support to address recreational catch per unit effort index standardization, an important element of many nearshore stock assessments. The

Council will be informed of the priorities and resources available from the NMFS Northwest and Southwest Science Centers in November under the groundfish NMFS Report; additional work planning may occur at that Council Meeting.

Pacific Halibut Management

2016 Catch Sharing Plan and Annual Regulation Changes

The Council forwarded, for public review, proposed changes and processes for establishing the 2016 Catch Sharing Plan and annual fishing regulations as described in [NMFS Report 2](#), [Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife](#), [Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife](#), and both reports provided by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife ([Report 1](#) and [Report 2](#)).

Administrative Matters

Legislative Matters

The Council directed staff to send the letter on drought legislation to Representatives Huffman and Thompson as included in the [Supplemental LC Report](#).

Membership Appointments and Council Operating Procedures

The Council made the following appointments:

- Mr. Rich Lincoln to the Legislative Committee
- Mr. Phil Anderson to the Budget Committee
- Mr. Phil Anderson as the Council representative to the International Pacific Halibut Commission, and Ms. Michele Culver as his alternate
- Mr. Alan Sarich to the Tribal seat on the Highly Migratory Species Management Team
- Mr. Joe Petersen to the Tribal seat on the Groundfish Management Team

The Council created an ad hoc Sacramento River Winter Chinook Workgroup to review harvest policies for ESA-listed Sacramento River winter Chinook and to develop a suite of options and supporting analyses for Council review. The proposed schedule advises the culmination of this effort in November 2016 when the Council would adopt final harvest policy recommendations to NMFS for implementation in 2017 and beyond.

The Council terminated the following ad hoc committees:

- Groundfish Amendment 24 Workgroup
- Groundfish Process Improvement Committee
- Lower Columbia River Natural Coho Workgroup
- South of Humbug Pacific Halibut Policy Committee
- South of Humbug Pacific Halibut Workgroup
- Trawl Rationalization Regulatory Evaluation Committee
- Mitchell Act Committee

The Council also directed staff to solicit nominations for the three-year terms of all advisory subpanel members, the seven at-large members of the Scientific and Statistical Committee, and

the four non-agency members and the tribal members of the Habitat Committee, all of which expire on December 31, 2015. Interested parties should monitor the Council website for details on the application procedures.

Future Council Meeting Agenda and Workload Planning

The next meeting of the Pacific Fishery Management Council is scheduled for November 13-19, 2015 in Garden Grove, California. A single-page draft proposed agenda summary is available on the Council website and a draft detailed proposed agenda will be available in late October.

PFMC

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