

DRAFT PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

1.1 Proposed Actions, Purpose and Need

This document evaluates two actions related to periodic changes in the management of fisheries under the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (PCGFMP).

1.1.1 The Proposed Actions

1.1.1.1 Harvest Specifications and Management Measures

The proposed action is to implement harvest specifications and management measures for the 2017-2018 biennial period and revising Federal regulations at 50 CFR 660, Subparts C through G accordingly. Using the “best available scientific information,” the Council considers harvest specifications every 2 years, including the OFLs, ABCs, and ACLs for groundfish stocks (and related management units¹), consistent with the policies and procedures the Council has established in the Pacific Coast Groundfish FMP (PCGFMP) for these actions and in compliance with other applicable law.

The specification of catch limits must be consistent with requirements of the MSA, and particularly the 10 National Standards enumerated in §301(a) of the MSA and related advisory guidelines established pursuant to §301(b). The proposed action needs to be consistent with the OY harvest management framework described in Chapter 4 of the PCGFMP, which complies with National Standard 1 guidelines (50 CFR 600.310). ACLs are amounts of fish catch that should not be exceeded in a year and must be set at a level that prevents overfishing, according to the best available science. For stocks whose biomass is below the MSY level, ACLs will be set appropriately to return stock biomass to that level. Adopted rebuilding plans need to be evaluated and adjusted, if appropriate, based on the most recent stock assessments for these stocks. ACLs must be set consistent with these rebuilding plans and MSA §304(e).

In the case of groundfish species designated as overfished or rebuilding,² harvest specifications are determined so that the stock will rebuild to the target biomass (B_{MSY} or proxy) by the target year (T_{TARGET}) specified in its rebuilding plan, if possible. As part of this biennial process the Council may revise rebuilding plans to meet the objective described in §304(e) of the MSA. This objective is to rebuild the stock in as short a time as possible, taking into account the status and biology of any overfished stocks of fish, the needs of fishing communities, recommendations by international organization in which the United States participates, and the interaction of the stock of fish within the marine ecosystem. T_{TARGET} and the underlying harvest control rule are defined in both the rebuilding plan and regulation.³

¹ Management units are stocks occurring throughout the west coast EEZ (“coastwide”), geographic subdivisions of stocks in the EEZ, and geographically subdivided stock complexes composed of more than one managed species.

² According to the [2015 Second Quarter Update Summary of Stock Status for FSSI Stocks \(Table A\)](#) produced by NMFS Office of Sustainable Fisheries, three Pacific Coast groundfish stocks—canary rockfish, Pacific ocean perch, and yelloweye rockfish—are currently designated “overfished.” An additional three stocks—bocaccio, cowcod, and darkblotched rockfish—are designated as not overfished but “rebuilding.” All six stocks are currently managed under rebuilding plans.

³ “Harvest control rule” means the methods adopted to determine harvest specifications, based on criteria in the MSA and Groundfish FMP. Harvest specifications are the numerical values determined by applying the harvest control rule (or harvest policy) to the best available scientific information about the status and characteristics of a stock or management unit.

1.1.1.2 Categorize Big Skate as a Fishery Management Unit Species

This proposed action is to categorize big skate (*Raja binoculata*) as a management unit species “in the fishery” (see 50 CFR 600.310(d)). Currently big skate is described in the PCGFMP as an ecosystem component (EC) species. The PCGFMP must be amended to accomplish this change.

1.1.2 Purpose of and Need for the Proposed Actions

1.1.2.1 Harvest Specifications and Management Measures

The purpose of this proposed action is to prevent overfishing, to rebuild overfished stocks, to ensure conservation, to facilitate long-term protection of EFH, and to realize the full potential of the Nation’s fishery resources (MSA §2(a)(6)).

This action is needed to regulate Pacific Coast groundfish fisheries in 2017-2018 so that annual catch limits are not exceeded and in a way that best achieves the purposes outlined above.

1.1.2.1 Categorize Big Skate as a Fishery Management Unit Species

The purpose of this proposed action is to respond to new information demonstrating that big skate is “in the fishery” according to criteria established at 50 CFR 600.310(d).

This action is needed to allow effective management of fisheries targeting big skate as demonstrated by their commercial sale.

1.2 The Fishery Management Area

Federally-managed Pacific groundfish fisheries occurring within the EEZ off the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California (WOC) establish the geographic context for the proposed action. West coast communities engaged in these fisheries are also part of the context (see Figure 1-1). Although this is the Federal fishery management area, the states manage the fisheries in the territorial sea to meet the goals and objectives of the Pacific Groundfish FMP.