The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed Supplemental Revised Attachment 2, Supplemental Revised Attachment 4, and Supplemental Attachment 8 under this agenda item. The team agrees that the approach represented in these documents is consistent with the Council’s June guidance on keeping the 2013-14 harvest specifications as similar as possible to what was done for 2011-12 (e.g., applying the same P* values, the 40-10 adjustment where appropriate, etc.). We have no further comment on overfishing limits (OFLs) and acceptable biological catches at this time, yet we may provide additional comment for November.

The GMT also reviewed the schedule in Attachment 1. We do not have additional comments on this schedule from what we provided in June, except for those given below in the context of the potential evaluation of the species and stock complexes in the fishery management plan (FMP). We understand the submission deadline for the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is still under discussion between National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and Council staff. We look forward to the finalization of that deadline so as to plan our individual workloads for GMT contributions to the DEIS.

Classification of Stocks in the FMP and Evaluation of Stock Complexes

The GMT discussed progress in complying with the National Standard One (NS1) guidelines in terms of designating stocks in the fishery (i.e., new additions to the FMP), Ecosystem Component (EC) species, and reconfiguring complexes to more closely align with the NS1 guidelines. In Attachment 5, a subgroup of GMT and Council Staff provided some analysis of vulnerability and the configuration of stock complexes. The full GMT discussed this analysis and the questions it raised with particular focus on the timing and logistics of aligning the stock complexes with the NS1 guidelines.

The GMT recommends that the Council consider which of the candidate stocks presented in the subgroup analysis to include in the FMP, if any. The Productivity and Susceptibility Analysis (PSA) provided by the subgroup scored 8 non-FMP species, of which 5 were of low concern and 3 were of medium concern; however, all 8 had relatively poor data quality scores. The GMT recognizes that the species currently contained within the FMP have a broad range of vulnerabilities (Cope et al. 2011), but those species were included primarily due to their presence in the fishery, likely from presence in landings data. Species that are not landed, but are still vulnerable to the fishery were not included. The Council may want to consider prioritizing new species to add to the FMP based on new information on vulnerability and current targeting by fishermen.

Similarly, the GMT does not have a specific recommendation on any species that might be designated EC species under the FMP; however, the Council could consider designating some species as EC species following criteria described in Cope et al. (2011) and Attachment 5, consistent with NS1 guidelines. Potential benefits of EC species designation is the removal of a
requirement to specify an annual catch limit (ACL), while allowing for continued monitoring of changes to status or vulnerability as well as allowing measures to protect that species’ role in the ecosystem to be implemented under the FMP if needed or desired. For example, some of the eight species evaluated by the subgroup might be monitored as EC species until it can be determined whether they are vulnerable to overfishing in the fishery. Also, all rockfishes are currently included in the FMP, yet not all of those species are vulnerable to the fishery. If the Council sees benefits of designating any species, whether currently in the FMP or that should be brought in and designated as EC species (see specific examples of this in Cope et al. 2011), then the GMT will provide further analysis of such designation for the November Council meeting.

The subgroup analysis in Attachment 5 presents two alternatives for the timing of considering complexes. Upon full team deliberation we suggest a single path forward with a few ways to address specific questions along the way. Based on the process and schedule adopted by the Council in June (presented in Attachment 1 under this agenda item), the Council is scheduled to adopt final harvest specifications and a final preferred alternative (FPA) for stock complex configuration in November. A chart presenting steps and possible alternative timing needed for consideration of stocks in the fishery and stock complex configuration is reproduced from our April 2011 statement (Agenda Item I.2.c, Supplemental GMT Report) as Figure 1. We also recommend that the Council solicit input from the project team for the November Council meeting on the timing and logistics of the process suggestions that we provide here.

If the Council chooses to implement changes for this cycle based on NMFS guidance to make some progress on reconfiguring complexes to align with the NS1 guidelines, we suggest preliminary preferred alternatives (PPAs) for ACLs being specified for the current list and configuration of complexes and subcomplexes at the November Council meeting with a few exceptions. The decision whether to accept the dogfish assessment and then whether to manage it separate from the Other fish will affect how much the Council chooses to alter that complex and what harvest level to specify for it. The analysis in Cope et al. (2011) presents some possible configurations for the Other fish complex. The PPA adopted in November would then be the alternative used in the “integrated alternatives” to compare tradeoffs among overfished species alternatives.

The Council may also want to make progress on changes to the other complexes as well. The GMT has also provided some analysis on how they might better be reconfigured to align with NS1 guidelines (Cope et al. 2011). Based on the harvest specifications work that we will do during our October meeting, the GMT can provide alternative OFL/ACL scenarios for various configurations of stock complexes at the November Council meeting. In addition to the Status Quo alternative and the reconfiguration of Other fish, the GMT could also come back with an alternative that more fully explores how complexes may be reconfigured to align with the guidelines (e.g., similar to the analyses in Cope et al. 2011). The GMT could then analyze the management measures needed to achieve the harvest levels specified in that more comprehensive reconfiguration along with other analyses planned over the winter and/or the coming months (i.e. it does not need to compete with the priority analyses for the DEIS from November - January). While the analysis may not inform adoption of an extensive reconfiguration for 2013-14, it should help lay the groundwork for continued progress in conforming to the NS1 guidelines in future cycles.
Alternatively, the Council may want to consider stock complex reconfiguration outside the harvest specifications and management measures cycles in the future, given the compressed timelines and front-loaded schedules planned for the coming biennia. Council staff have indicated that Amendment 17-1 which would update the Council’s biennial process or Amendment 23-1 which would further align groundfish management with the NS1 guidelines may both present opportunities to consider stock complex configuration and the management measures necessary to achieve their harvest levels separate from the multitude of other decisions in the biennial management process.

If the Council wanted to retain the status quo configuration of a particular complex or all complexes, yet also follow NMFS guidance to make progress in meeting the NS1 guidelines, the GMT notes that there are ways to do that through changes in management measures for stocks within complexes. The Council is scheduled to make its preliminary decision on management measures next April and its final decision in June. For example, if the Council wished to address the issue of the high splitnose OFL contribution to the minor slope rockfish north subcomplex and its potential impact on vulnerable species such as rougheye rockfish, the Council could consider adopting a sorting requirement and subcomplex trip limits for rougheye that prevents it being a large portion of the minor slope north limits. This is similar to the approach taken for blue rockfish within the minor nearshore south subcomplex last cycle.

GMT Recommendations:
1. Consider whether to include new species in the FMP and prioritize based on vulnerability and targeting.
2. Consider whether to designate EC species in the groundfish FMP.
3. Adopt a PPA for configuration of complexes in November for use in the integrated alternative analysis between November and January.
4. Consider tasking the GMT with analyzing a more extensive restructuring of complexes in 2012 to provide information for better aligning complexes with the NS1 guidelines in future cycles.
5. Consider alternatives to considering how to structure complexes and their associated management measures outside the biennial specifications and management measures process.
6. Consider differential management measures for component species within stock complexes as a tool to better meet the NS1 guidelines this cycle.

PFMC
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Figure 1. Draft diagram of steps likely required to align the stocks within the FMP and the configuration of the complexes with National Standard 1 and develop management measures for the coming biennial cycle.

*PSA evaluation would require reviewing current PSA analysis so that it aligns with management area breaks and is accurate. New PSA would have to be done for any species being brought into the fishery.

**This is a break from the PIC recommended timeline. It adds a step (consideration of complex configuration alternatives in September) and pushes the OFL and ABC (and maybe ACL) PPA decision a meeting later in November, but this would still allow for completion of the rest of the schedule.