

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON THE INITIAL BLACKGILL ROCKFISH REALLOCATION CONSIDERATION

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) received a report from Mr. John DeVore on the Pacific Fishery Management Council's consideration of a process to restructure the Slope Rockfish complex south of 40°10' N. latitude (hereafter referred to as the southern Slope Rockfish complex) by removing blackgill rockfish from the complex and reallocating the harvestable surplus of both blackgill rockfish and the remaining stocks within this complex. Several issues are identified with comments provided by the GMT.

When blackgill rockfish was last assessed in 2011, the stock was determined to be at a 30 percent depletion level, placing it in a precautionary status. Because of this, the Council chose to manage the stock utilizing a harvest guideline strategy beginning in 2013. Management of this stock was addressed by implementing reduced trip limits for both the limited entry and open access non-trawl fixed-gear fisheries south of 40°10' N. latitude. As a result of this management strategy, landings in 2013 for both sectors decreased by approximately 77 percent and 93 percent, respectively, compared to the previous two years that the individual fishing quota (IFQ) program has been in existence (Figure 1). While this decrease is closely linked to the more restrictive trip limits placed on these sectors, landings for the trawl fishery did not follow this pattern. They were 15.9 mt in 2011, increased to 78.8 mt in 2012, and then decreased to 54.7 mt in 2013 ([Agenda Item J.3.a Attachment 1, November 2014](#)) (Figure 1).

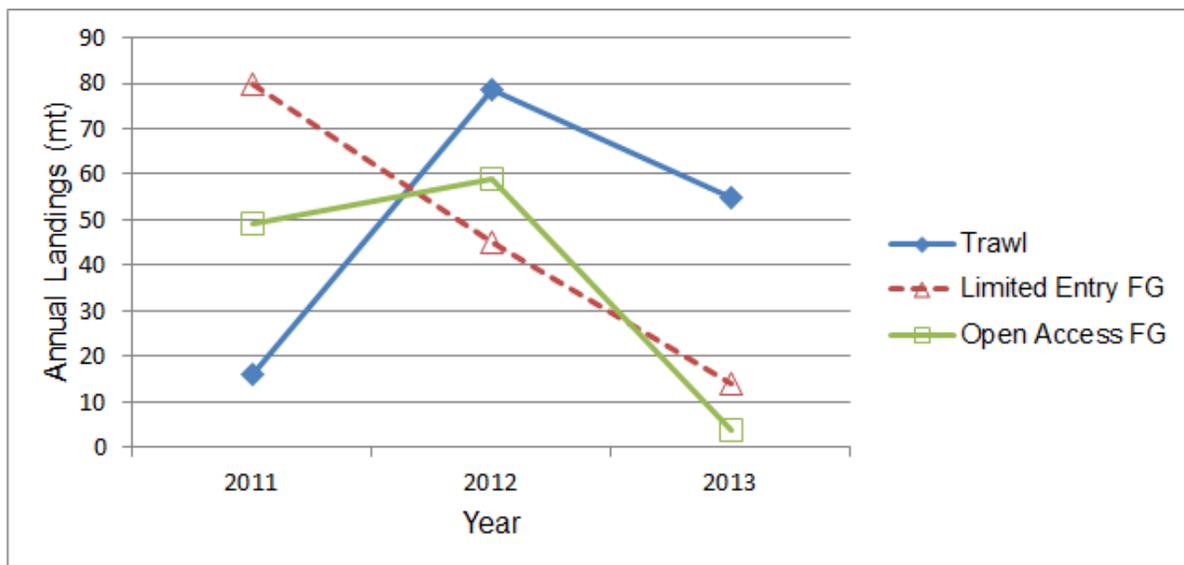


Figure 1. Commercial blackgill rockfish landings (metric tons) for the IFQ trawl and the limited entry and open access fixed-gear non-IFQ sectors south of 40°10' N. latitude since 2011. Data source: PacFIN (vdrfd table).

The landing pattern for the trawl sector differs from the non-IFQ fixed gear sector because blackgill rockfish are included in the southern Slope Rockfish complex and trawl quotas are managed at the complex level with much higher trip limits in place. The GMT notes that

included in these trawl landing totals, are non-trawl gear landings that reflect vessels' use of the gear switching option available to them.

The GMT analyzed and the Council considered whether to manage blackgill rockfish separately by removing it from the southern Slope Rockfish complex. If this restructuring were pursued, the team acknowledged that an adjustment to the trawl/non-trawl allocation amounts would be advisable. The team feels that a key reason for managing blackgill rockfish separately from the southern Slope Rockfish complex and supporting an adjustment to the trawl /non-trawl allocation would be to benefit the stock, as such an action would likely even out fishing pressure exerted on the stock by a single sector. If blackgill rockfish remains in the southern Slope Rockfish complex, the pressure exerted by the IFQ sector could lead to a continuing negative impact beyond the most recent stock assessment result of a 30 percent depletion level. Central to this concern is the ability of IFQ trawlers to utilize the gear switching option. Because of this, the GMT supports managing the stock separate from the southern Slope Rockfish complex and then further supporting a full detailed analysis that would calculate the most appropriate trawl/non-trawl allocation percentage that would provide for a viable fishery for all fishery sectors. This analysis would also address the issue of allocation amounts for the remaining stocks in the southern Slope Rockfish complex.

When Amendment 21 was implemented, the trawl/non-trawl allocation was set at 63 percent and 37 percent, respectively. The GMT notes that since the IFQ program was implemented, blackgill rockfish mortality amounts by fishery sector have essentially reversed, with 37.2 percent taken by the IFQ trawl fleet and 62.8 percent by the non-trawl fleet in the Post IFQ years (2011-2013). Along with this allocation alternative, two other strawman alternatives presented in Attachment 1 indicate a larger percentage of blackgill landings for the non-trawl sector compared to the trawl sector when examining allocations based on Amendment 21 (2003-2005) and a combination of Amendment 21 and Post IFQ years (2003-2005, 2011-2013). ([Agenda Item J.3.a Attachment 1, November 2014](#), Table 7) However, when looking at slope rockfish landings (excluding blackgill) under the three strawmen alternatives, the trawl fleet took over 80 percent in all scenarios while non-trawl landed 17 to 18 percent. The GMT recognizes that the years that the Council chooses for analysis may impact the trawl/non-trawl allocation as the trip limits that were put into place in 2013 for the non-trawl sector may cause the landings of blackgill for the trawl sector to be weighted higher in alternatives that include 2013 data.

A broader analysis will be necessary to determine the most appropriate allocation split. That analysis would include the potential effects on the IFQ trawl permit structure. In September, the Council adopted a number of priority items to be implemented by the 2017-2018 cycle under the omnibus package, including blackgill allocation. The GMT notes that completing such an analysis before the beginning of the work needed to set up the 2017-2018 biennial management cycle would help to alleviate Council and state staff workload issues. Having the results of this analysis in place before the beginning of the 2017-2018 biennial harvest specifications and management measures cycle process would not only result in a more efficient use of staff time and resources, but would contribute to streamlining the work involved in the specification cycle. The GMT recommends that the analysis be completed by either the April or the June 2015 Council meetings. While this is an aggressive time schedule, it would streamline the work involved in formulating the 2017-2018 biennial management cycle.