GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON THE REVIEW PROCESS AND SCHEDULE, AND INITIAL ACTIONS FOR SETTING 2017-2018 SPECIFICATIONS

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the items in the briefing book under this agenda item and received an overview of the harvest specifications from Mr. John DeVore. The GMT provides the following comments.

I. Harvest Specifications

Default Harvest Control Rules

In 2015, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) established default harvest control under Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Amendment 24. Those default harvest policies will be used for the first time with the development of the 2017-2018 harvest specifications. Default harvest policies will be applied to the best available scientific information to generate the 2017-2018 harvest specifications, including overfishing limit (OFLs), acceptable biological catches (ABCs) and annual catch limits (ACLs). The harvest specifications generated by applying the default harvest control rules will describe the No Action alternative as we move forward, and will be implemented in regulation in absence of further Council action to make changes to the default harvest control rules for any species.

The GMT understands that if the Council would like to consider departing from the default harvest control rules, particularly for overfished species, such indication should be made at this meeting. This timing is necessary to coordinate with the stock assessors and prepare information for the November Council meeting, when the Council is scheduled to adopt preliminary preferred ACL alternatives. This information will also be discussed at the October GMT meeting.

Harvest Specifications for 2017-2018 Groundfish Fisheries

Schedules

The GMT reviewed the tables in Attachment 1 under this agenda item. We note that many species rows in the tables have been highlighted, and additional information is forthcoming that will inform the harvest specification decisions. **The GMT reiterates the importance of completing all harvest specifications decisions by the end of the November 2015 meeting to facilitate the winter analysis and final Council action on the ACLs in April 2016, per the schedule adopted by the Council** (Agenda Item D.5, Attachment 1, June 2015). Recall in the 2015-2016 cycle, harvest specifications for several key nearshore species and cowcod were delayed until March 2015, which subsequently delayed the management measure analysis and the agency reviews. The delayed harvest specifications and other challenges with the analysis ultimately resulted in regulations implemented after January 1. If harvest specifications cannot be adopted by November 2015, the GMT believes there are several options that could be considered. The Council could modify the schedule to anticipate implementation past January 1, 2017. Under this option, the 2016 values in regulation would remain until replaced sometime in 2017. The Council should indicate

the desired implementation date so schedule milestones can be adjusted accordingly. The Council could also consider two-part implementation, starting with the ACLs based on the default harvest control rules, relying upon the existing Tier analysis. That is, if the impacts of implementing the default harvest control rules have been previously disclosed then no additional analysis would be necessary and could be implemented on a faster track, meeting January 1. The second step would focus only on those species where the Council has departed from the default harvest control rule, which may require additional analysis **The GMT recommends that the Council begins discussing the preferred approach should the harvest specifications be delayed, so implications of various contingency plans can be scoped and adjustments can be made accordingly.**

Overfishing Limits

Since recommending the OFLs is the purview of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), the GMT does not have comments on the specific values in Table 1. The GMT notes that as OFLs for component stocks managed in a complex are recommended by the SSC, the complex OFL totals will need to be adjusted. The GMT also notes that if the Council makes changes to default harvest control rules and those changes, in turn, change the ACLs for 2017, then the OFLs for 2018 will likely also need to be adjusted at the November meeting.

Change in Steepness

During the 2015 cycle of stock assessments, the updated meta-analysis determined that productivity of rockfish (steepness) was 0.773 (mean of a prior distribution).[1] The meta-analysis has undergone a number of iterations, and has ranged from 0.52 to 0.78 depending on the stock assessment and recalculation of the prior (e.g., Dorn 2002, Agenda Item G.4.a, September 2007).

Currently, spawning potential ratio (SPR) harvest rates for non-overfished rockfish species (50 percent) were established to achieve $B_{40\%}$ at a less productive steepness value of closer to 0.6. Given this change, the Council may want to consider adjusting from a default SPR harvest rate of 50 percent to a lower rate, more compatible with the new steepness values and the Council's current harvest policies. Specifically, this issue came up during the black rockfish assessment this year, but was also discussed in 2009 regarding petrale sole. If the Council wants to consider a change during the 2017-2018 cycle, they may wish for the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to review the meta-analysis on steepness for the November Council meeting, and provide recommendations on whether the SPR harvest rate should be changed and still achieve $B_{40\%}$. Historically, changes to SPR harvest rates are done in off year science, although for petrale sole it was done during the harvest specifications process. The GMT believes this issue is better suited to be considered under Agenda Item H.10, Groundfish Management Science Improvements and Methodology at this meeting.

*Acceptable Biological Catch (ABCs), Sigma and P**

The default harvest policy for ABCs is to apply the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)-recommended sigma value and the Council-recommended P* value to reduce the ABC from the OFL as a buffer against scientific uncertainty. The SSC will recommend appropriate sigma values, based on the best available scientific information. Through Amendment 24 to the FMP, the

[1] The steepness in the 2015 widow assessment was set at .798, which resulted from removing widow data from the meta-analysis.

Council established default P* values that will be applied to calculate ABCs, in the absence of further Council action. The default P* values are the same P* values that were recommended and implemented for 2015-2016.

Annual Catch Limits (ACLs), and Annual Catch Targets (ACTs)

Overfished Species Default Harvest Control Rule and Rebuilding Analyses
The overfished species stock assessments conducted in 2015 (bocaccio, canary and darkblotched) indicate the T_{TARGET} in the current rebuilding plans will be achieved. In fact, canary was declared rebuilt and the remaining species were ahead of schedule. **As such, the Council can continue with the default harvest control rules outlined in the rebuilding plans for the remaining overfished species, if desired. If the Council is interested in departing from the default harvest control rules, it would be most efficient to have the request brought forward at this meeting. This is particularly true if the Council desires revised rebuilding analysis, which would need to be reviewed at the September SSC Groundfish Subcommittee meeting (September 28-October 2, 2015 in Seattle).**

In the case of yelloweye rockfish, the rebuilding analysis, which assumes the full ACL is harvested, has not been updated since the 2011 assessment. Council staff has already requested that the rebuilding analyses be updated based on recent year catches, since ACL attainment has been low. Council staff and the GMT did not identify a need to update the bocaccio and darkblotched rockfish rebuilding analyses as the assessment revealed that the ABC for each species could be harvested without changing the estimated time to rebuild, which is 2016. That is, even if the Council chooses to depart from the default harvest control rules for these species, the information necessary to inform those decisions can be found in the stock assessments. Lastly, the GMT did not identify the need to revise the 2013 cowcod rebuilding analysis because few years have elapsed since the last assessment and this species has not been a constraint since mortality has remained below the 4 mt annual catch target, which is set far below the 10 mt ACL to facilitate rebuilding. Similarly, the 2011 Pacific ocean perch rebuilding analysis was not identified as needing to be revised because catches have been below the ACL, and this species does not appear to be currently constraining any fisheries.

II. Preliminary Range of New Management Measures

Council action is to adopt a preliminary range of new management measures under this agenda item. The GMT appreciates this timing as it will allow us to discuss these items at our October GMT meeting, allowing for more detailed feedback in November. The GMT notes, however, that it in some cases it is difficult to predict the new measures needed without knowing whether the Council intends to depart from the default harvest control rule. As such, the GMT discussed that there may generally be a need to restructure trip limits for the limited entry and open access fixed gear fisheries based on the preliminary preferred ACLs (for example establishing sub-trip limits for species managed in complexes).

As in the past two cycles, the GMT continues to have concerns with the number of new management measures that may be included for analysis. If the Council desires a long list with multiple complex items, then the schedule and implementation dates may need to be modified. As

we heard in June, the January 1, 2017 schedule may be in jeopardy even before a list of new management measures has been developed (see contingency plan below). Therefore, the GMT recommends careful consideration of any new management measures that are added to the list, and if any could be included in another rule making process. Specifically, new management measures that could be better served through the omnibus process, which prioritizes analysis of management measures both new and old.

New Management Measures Identified by the Council for Inclusion in Range

Ecosystem Component Species

The GMT reviewed the Council Staff paper on this agenda item that addresses reconsideration of the Ecosystem Component (EC) species designation for big skate and possibly a broader consideration for all skates. As an initial step, the GMT examined available data, as summarized in Appendix 1 of Agenda Item H.5, Attachment 2, to explore what might be the logical path forward in light of new information that indicated big skate were being targeted. While other skate species are caught in the fishery (Table 2 in Appendix 1), the only new information available since the decision to designate all skate species other than longnose as EC species is the higher amounts of big skate landed. Therefore, the only action alternatives offered are those that contemplate removing the EC designation for big skate and actively managing the species beginning in 2017. **Based on the information presented in Appendix 1, the GMT recommends that only big skate (and none of the other EC species) should be reconsidered as an EC species.** Therefore, the range of alternatives is appropriate to move forward. When there are many alternatives forwarded for analysis and public review, it is very helpful to the analysis and public to identify a preliminary preferred alternative (PPA). However, if there is a low number of alternatives, identifying a PPA seems less imperative. We do offer a recommendation on the management measures under the alternatives.

Under Alternative 1, management measure option 3 would be to establish shorebased individual fishing quota (IFQ) for big skate in lieu of cumulative landing limits as well as a coastwide sorting requirement for all sectors. Because the GMT believes that establishing IFQ for big skate would be difficult to do, it should be considered outside of the harvest specifications cycle. There are several complications with regard to creating a representative catch history, including difficulties in determining historical landings as skates were landed under one general category until 2009[2] (when longnose was required to be sorted individually). As seen in Appendix 1, there was a possible lag in sorting out longnose from the other skates until 2010. However, the GMT does note that using species composition information from the longnose skate assessment along with more recent catch information, a catch history could be created and IFQ distributed. Alternatively, the Council could use an approach similar to that currently being analyzed under the blackgill rockfish-southern slope complex reallocation proposal - in that quota could be allocated as the percentage of total unidentified skate catch landed (i.e. if landed 10 percent of unidentified skate, would receive 10 percent of big skate quota).

[2] Prior to 2009, California did not have a market category for longnose skate, but it did for other species of skates which were used. However, many landings of these other skates were probably recorded using the unspecified skate market category as well. The other two states used only a general skate category.

"Green Light" Policy

Current rules allow mid-cycle alterations of harvest specifications if stock status for all species changes from healthy to overfished ("red light"); however, the same does not apply if a stock rebuilds mid-cycle (i.e., no "green light").

The GMT notes that additional guidance may be needed from NMFS regarding how analysis of a "green light" policy getting added to the FMP fits within existing analyses that were completed with the 2015-2016 Tier 1 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis and document. This was brought up with regard to ensuring that for the stocks that are still managed under rebuilding plans, we must ensure the mandates are met to rebuild as quickly as possible taking into account the relevant factors.

To assess the impacts of a new "green light" approach, the Council could request the stock assessment teams (STATs) provide forecasted 2017 & 2018 ACLs for overfished species under a rebuilt scenario. This would give a starting point for analysis, with the intent that no additional analysis would be required to implement a new ACL during the biennium that reflects a stock's new rebuilt status. If the former, do we just analyze the rebuilt ACL even if it's not anticipated to occur in the upcoming biennium (for example, cowcod is scheduled to be rebuilt in 2020)? Specific to this cycle would include the forecasted rebuilding of bocaccio and darkblotched rockfish.

"New" Management Measures the GMT has Identified for Inclusion

In addition to the two above, the GMT has identified six items in our discussions as potential for inclusion. The GMT has not had thorough discussions on any of the below items, including the workload that might be associated. The GMT anticipates additional items added by the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP), public, and states. Some items on the list may be routine, and thus able to be removed from this list. The GMT anticipates that the remaining list will be further refined either at this meeting, or once some additional information on the analysis that may be required is provided by the team in November.

1. Allow retention of canary rockfish in the limited entry and open access fixed gear fisheries, including a range of trip limits
2. Develop mortality rates for the use of descending devices for yelloweye rockfish, canary rockfish, and cowcod in the commercial nearshore fishery
3. Develop mortality rates for venting of discarded rockfish from the commercial nearshore fishery
4. Develop mortality rates for the use of descending devices for additional species for recreational and commercial fisheries
5. Implement a management line in the commercial nearshore bycatch model at either 34°27' or Pt. Año Nuevo
6. Update the depth strata and mortality rates (based on existing analysis) for the commercial nearshore bycatch model

With regard to item number 5, a proposal is being considered that would modify the nearshore bycatch model by stratifying it further by adding another management line into the model structure.

The rationale for this proposal is that an additional stratification will better inform the model to improve its estimates of overfished species (OFS), especially for canary and yelloweye rockfishes. Currently, the model is stratified into three areas: north of 42° N. latitude (Oregon only), between 42° and 40° 10' N. latitudes, and south of 40° 10' N. latitude. This proposal would insert an additional line at either Pt. Año Nuevo, California or at 34° 27' N. latitude; both management lines are already established in Federal regulations. One goal of better OFS estimates would be to allow the nearshore participants improved access to the nearshore stocks by possibly having increased bi-monthly trip limits. The GMT notes that, under Council Operating Procedure 25, model modifications would be addressed during even years under that process. Lastly, this proposed change to the model will need to be reviewed by the SSC and West Coast Groundfish Observer Program staff. Additionally, new trip limits may need to be designed for the additional management strata to reduce catch.

III. Contingency Plan

To meet the January 1, 2017 implementation of the 2017-2018 biennial harvest specifications and management measures regulations, all benchmarks and deadlines adopted at the June 2015 meeting (Agenda Item D.5. Attachment 1, June 2015) have to be met. To facilitate that, all parties involved in the biennial process need to remain committed to that schedule. Any delays in harvest specifications, or attempting to take on too many new management measures could jeopardize that schedule.

In Agenda Item H.5.a. NMFS Report, NMFS lays out contingency plans, in case January 1, 2017 cannot be met. As experienced in some previous cycles, the harvest specifications and management measures in regulation from the previous year would remain in place, unless there is a conservation concern. If there are conservation concerns, considerations for management measure adjustments may be necessary to keep impacts within ACLs, which would require notice and comment rulemaking, possible additional NEPA analysis, as well as additional workload. In regards to issuance of IFQ quota pounds (QPs), they would be issued in two parts, the first of which would be based on the lower range of possible harvest specifications. Therefore, the Council would need to know by the September 2016 meeting at the latest that January 1 will not be met, so that these processes can be initiated. The sooner the Council, and its advisory bodies are informed of the delay, the sooner the processes can begin. Depending on how long the delay is (March 1, July 1) could add some additional complications that may need to be addressed.

GMT Recommendations:

1. **If the Council considers departing from the default harvest control rules, particularly for overfished species, such indication be made at this meeting.**
2. **Reiterates the importance of completing all harvest specifications decisions by the end of the November 2015 meeting to facilitate the winter analysis and final Council action on the annual catch limits in April 2016, per the schedule adopted by the Council.**
3. **The Council begin discussing the preferred approach should the harvest specifications be delayed, so implications of various contingency plans can be scoped and adjustments can be made accordingly.**
4. **If the Council is interested in departing from the default harvest control rules, it would be most efficient to have the request brought forward at this meeting. This is particularly true if the Council desires revised rebuilding analysis, which would need to be reviewed at the September SSC Groundfish Subcommittee meeting.**

5. **Based on the information presented in Appendix 1 that only big skate (and none of the other EC species) should be reconsidered as an EC species.**

IV. Reference

Dorn, M. W. 2002. Advice on West Coast Rockfish Harvest Rates from Bayesian Meta-Analysis of Stock−Recruit Relationships. North American Journal of Fisheries Management 22:280-300.

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