

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL STATEMENT ON  
FINAL ACTION TO ADOPT BIENNIAL HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS  
FOR 2017-2018 FISHERIES

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received reports and information about the proposed 2017-18 biennial harvest specifications from Mr. John DeVore and Ms. Kelly Ames, PFMC staff; Ms. Joanna Grebel, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) staff; and Ms. Jessie Doerpinghaus, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) staff, and we offer the following comments.

**General comments**

The GAP discussed the range of alternatives as described in [Agenda item F.3, supplemental REVISED attachment 2](#), considered the [Supplemental WDFW report](#) and related reports and comments from other agencies and the public. We also took considerable time reviewing past GAP, Groundfish Management Team (GMT) and Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reports.

This marks one of the few times, especially with respect to canary, the Council and advisory bodies are not in crisis mode or reacting to low levels of a species that constrains one or more sectors. Instead, discussions in the GAP centered on ideas and ways to increase fishing opportunities that in turn benefit coastal communities. We should be celebrating successful management of our stocks.

**Final 2017-18 ACLs for canary, widow and darkblotched rockfish; California black rockfish; and California scorpionfish**

In general, the GAP supports alternatives for four of the species – canary, widow, darkblotched rockfish, and California black rockfish -- that consist of ACL=ABC ( $P^* = 0.45$ ), whether these are default harvest control rules or alternatives that revise the default rule.

Canary rockfish

→ **No Action:** The GAP recommends setting the ACL=ABC ( $P^* 0.45$ ), resulting in 1,714 mt ACL in 2017 and 1,526 mt ACL in 2018 for canary rockfish (no action alternative). This is considered a risk-neutral strategy.

The GAP believes, for the following reasons, there is minimal risk and significant benefit in adopting ACL=ABC ( $P^* 0.45$ ) for canary rockfish. This will provide the greatest opportunity to the fleet to use this rebuilt canary resource as a vehicle to access a greater volume of various target species.

The GAP discussed canary rockfish management policy and the contrast between relying on “best available science,” and “accounting for management uncertainty.” To inform our

discussion on this topic, the GAP referred to The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Section 302(g)(1)(B) that states:

(g) COMMITTEES AND ADVISORY PANELS.-

(1)(A) Each Council shall establish, maintain, and appoint the members of a scientific and statistical committee to assist it in the development, collection, evaluation, and peer review of such statistical, biological, economic, social, and other scientific information as is relevant to such Council's development and amendment of any fishery management plan.

(B) Each scientific and statistical committee shall provide its Council ongoing scientific advice for fishery management decisions, including recommendations for acceptable biological catch, preventing overfishing, maximum sustainable yield, and achieving rebuilding targets, and reports on stock status and health, bycatch, habitat status, social and economic impacts of management measures, and sustainability of fishing practices.

Consistent with this charge, the Council's [SSC accepted the 2015 canary rockfish report in June 2015](#): "The SSC endorses the use of the 2015 canary rockfish assessment as the best scientific information available for status determination and management as a category 1 assessment. The canary rockfish spawning stock biomass is estimated to be above the  $B_{MSY}$  proxy of  $B_{40\%}$  and has therefore achieved the rebuilding target."

Furthermore, the [Council adopted the assessment as noted in the Council's decision document for June 2015](#).

And lastly, the National Marine Fisheries Service has declared the canary rockfish status as rebuilt in its [2015 Quarter 3 Status Update](#).

In summary, given that three entities have supported the findings in the latest canary rockfish assessment, we wonder why it is necessary to address management uncertainty in this case.

The GAP also discussed the following points that support this position:

1. The assessment passed a rigorous review process, between the SSC, the STAR panel, the GMT and the GAP;
2. This is one of the few times that what is reported in the assessment mirrors what fishermen are seeing on the ocean. Canary rockfish are hard to avoid, given observed large numbers of these fish;
3. The base case in the stock assessment fully accounts for natural mortality and a different steepness value already. There is no need for additional precaution over concern about a different steepness value. Furthermore, canary is one of the more productive species in the rockfish complex, which should alleviate some of the concerns about natural mortality;
4. Generally, the Council has good in-season monitoring and management it can

use to track canary rockfish landings and mortality. Mechanisms are in place to limit effort, if needed. The trawl fleet has real-time reporting and other fisheries have, at most, a two- or three-month lag time in catch reporting.

5. The 2015 stock assessment shows depletion is at 55 percent, 15 points over the target; and
6. The reduction from the OFL of 1,793 to an ABC of 1,714 in 2017 includes a buffer of 79 mt. This amount was higher than the whole canary OY as recently as 10 years ago and the seafood industry managed to stay within those limits. Some of those same monitoring and avoidance strategies are still in place.

Regarding socioeconomic concerns, the GAP reviewed past statements and suggest the amount of flexibility and opportunity allowed as a result of greater canary access would cut across all sectors.

For example:

- Tribal fishery: Tribal fishermen will have more access to groundfish and provide flexibility in salmon fisheries.
- Non-whiting trawl fishery: This would allow greater security in knowing there was enough canary to allow for the opportunity to fully execute target fisheries and in more areas, such as the shelf. For example, trawlers could harvest more lingcod, a higher value species. It also would allow more access to midwater fisheries.
- Whiting fisheries: The biggest change would allow for greater efficiency. Vessels would save on fuel costs necessary to travel further offshore to avoid canary. Instead, vessels could access whiting closer to shore. It would allow for the opportunity to fully execute target whiting fisheries.
- Limited entry fixed gear fisheries and open access fisheries: Fishermen who have been restricted by canary and yelloweye rockfish could possibly get increased catch limits on target species and/or rockfish conservation area (RCA) line adjustments to access areas that have been closed. It also could spread out the fleet, resulting in less targeting on other, possibly more vulnerable, species.
- Recreational fisheries: A higher ACL could allow California sport fishermen to retain canary rockfish. In Oregon, the higher ACL would allow more retention and a greater number of angler trips. It also would benefit charter fisheries by potentially increasing the bag limits and attracting more customers. Washington fisheries could similarly benefit. This would help fulfill the opportunity for increased bag limits in midwater fisheries. Use this rebuilt canary resource to access.

### Widow rockfish

→ **Alt. 1:** The GAP recommends setting the ACL=ABC (P\* 0.45), resulting in 13,508 mt ACL in 2017 and 12,655 mt ACL in 2018 for widow rockfish (Alt. 1).

Higher widow ACLs would provide better opportunity for all sectors. The conservation risk of setting a higher widow ACL is lessened due to a new understanding of stock status, as identified in the recent stock assessment. A directed widow fishery – an option now due to its rebuilt status – has fewer canary rockfish bycatch concerns because canary rockfish also is rebuilt.

### Darkblotched rockfish

→ **Alt. 1:** The GAP recommends setting the ACL=ABC (P\* 0.45), resulting in 641 mt ACL in 2017 and 653 mt ACL in 2018 for darkblotched rockfish (Alt. 1).

Information from the most recent stock assessment indicated the stock is projected to be rebuilt in 2016 and that setting the ACL at the ABC will not jeopardize the current rebuilding target of 2025 (because this stock is already likely to be rebuilt). Additionally, the current projected rebuilding schedule is based upon the assumption that the total ACL would be harvested each year since the assessment was prepared in 2015, when in fact only a fraction of the ACL has actually been harvested. This means the stock has been rebuilding even faster than the projection indicates.

Further, besides not jeopardizing the stock, setting of the ACL at a higher level will provide the trawl fleet with a greater sense of security. This will allow individuals to fish in areas that are closer to where darkblotched rockfish live so that they can harvest other species of groundfish, knowing they have sufficient quota to cover any catch of darkblotched. However, the GAP does not expect this will result in full attainment of the ACL.

### California black rockfish

→ **No action alt.:** The GAP supports the recommendation of an ACL of 334 mt in 2017 and 332 in 2018 for California black rockfish.

### California scorpionfish

→ **Alt. 1:** The GAP recommends an ACL of 150 mt in both 2017 and 2018. This is a constant catch scenario (Alt. 1) in the harvest specifications process.

An ACL of 150 mt in both 2017 and 2018 from Alternative 1 in [Table 2 of the Supplemental REVISED Attachment 2](#) and is supported by the GAP. The GAP also concurs with the CDFW recommendation for 111 metric ton ACT for California scorpionfish and this will be reiterated under F.6, management measures for 2017-18.

## Summary

Stock	2017			2018		
	OFL	ABC	ACL	OFL	ABC	ACL
Canary rockfish ( <i>no action alt.</i> )	1,793	1,714	<b>1,714</b>	1,596	1,526	<b>1,526</b>
Widow rockfish ( <i>alt. 1</i> )	14,130	13,508	<b>13,508</b>	13,237	12,655	<b>12,655</b>
Darkblotched rockfish ( <i>alt. 1</i> )	671	641	<b>641</b>	683	653	<b>653</b>
California black rockfish ( <i>no action alt.</i> )	349	334	<b>334</b>	347	332	<b>332</b>
California scorpionfish ( <i>alt. 1</i> )	289	264	<b>150</b>	278	254	<b>150</b>

PFMC  
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