

## GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT TEAM INFORMATIONAL REPORT ON INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) discussed the current status of groundfish fisheries and the need for any inseason adjustments during the March 2020 meeting. The GMT did not receive any requests for inseason changes at this meeting. Instead, below is summary information on the Pacific coast groundfish fishery performance in 2019 and performance to date for 2020.

### 2019 Groundfish Fisheries

#### Overall ACL Attainments

Preliminary Pacific Fisheries Information Network (PacFIN) estimates indicate that no annual catch limits (ACLs) were exceeded in 2019 except for shortbelly rockfish (catch = 654 mt; ACL = 500 mt), but final estimates will not be available until September 2020. The Council selected a final preferred alternative in November 2019 ([Agenda Item H.4](#)) to increase the ACL for shortbelly in 2020. However, since that ACL increase has not yet been implemented, the GMT encourages the whiting sectors to continue to voluntarily avoid this important forage stock. Industry reports that shortbelly rockfish must be hand-sorted to prevent fouling whiting processing lines, which has incentivized continued development of avoidance measures.

#### Chinook Salmon Scorecard

The 2017 Salmon Incidental Take Statement specified thresholds for the non-whiting and whiting sectors. These thresholds are enforced through sector closure mechanisms in regulations. For 2019, neither the whiting nor the non-whiting sectors exceeded their thresholds (Table 1). Overall catch of Chinook salmon in all groundfish fisheries was 6,698 fish, or 33 percent of the 20,000 threshold.

**Table 1. Chinook salmon catches for 2019 Groundfish fisheries and sector thresholds. (Source: PacFIN Endangered Species Act [ESA] Salmon Scorecard)**

Sector	Sub-Sector	Catch To Date	Threshold	% of Threshold
Whiting	CP	2,648	11,000	51%
	MS	791		
	Shoreside	2,147		
	Tribal	13		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>5,599</i>		
Non-Whiting	Bottom Trawl	412	5,500	19%
	Midwater Trawl	145		
	Fixed Gear	500 a/		
	WA Rec			
	OR Rec + longleader			
	CA Rec			
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,057</i>			
All groundfish fisheries		6,698	20,000	33%

## Trawl Fishery Performance

Last year was a particularly strong year for the shoreside mid-water trawl fisheries, both whiting and non-whiting. Shoreside whiting had high attainment (85 percent, or 143,747 mt out of a 169,126 mt share) and atypically high prices of 10-11 cents per pound, ~30 percent higher than in the past 3 to 4 years. The non-whiting mid-water trawl rockfish fishery continues to have high attainments and almost exclusively targets widow and yellowtail rockfishes.

The at-sea whiting sector's attainment of Pacific whiting was relatively low in 2019 (catcher-processor = 85 percent; mothership = 54 percent), but industry reports that was largely due to exceptional walleye pollock fishing opportunities in Alaskan waters. The GMT cautions that 2020 could be another year of high sablefish bycatch in the at-sea whiting fisheries, and that voluntary measures should be encouraged early in the season. As we discussed in November 2019, record high bycatch of sablefish in all whiting fisheries occurred in 2019, which could be indicative of another strong year class moving through the population that may be vulnerable to mid-water fishing once again in 2020 as semi-pelagic juveniles ([Agenda Item H.10.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, November 2019](#)).

The 2019 bottom trawl fishery performance was similar to previous years. Attainments continue to be high for sablefish north of 36° N. lat., widow rockfish, and petrale sole, but low for all other stocks and stock complexes. Catches of Dover sole continue to decrease (~5,700 mt in 2019 vs 7,700 mt average 2011-2013), which some claim is due to higher rockfish landings displacing processor demand for flatfishes.

Depressed sablefish prices continue to be a concern, which processors attribute to a lack of demand from their main Japanese buyers due to large inventories of frozen product in Japan. Industry

states that low sablefish prices are negatively impacting both the trawl and non-trawl fisheries throughout the entire Pacific Ocean. The GMT expects that future sablefish prices could decrease even more because sablefish allocations are set to increase by large amounts throughout the West Coast and Alaska in the next two years (Table 2) and could further saturate markets.

**Table 2. Upcoming West Coast and Alaskan sablefish allocations.**

<b>Region</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
<a href="#">West Coast</a> ABC	7,750	7,896	8,791 a/
<a href="#">Alaska</a> (ABC/TAC)	15,068	18,763	23,453
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,818</b>	<b>26,659</b>	<b>32,244</b>

a/ Derived from the PPA to use the ACL = ABC P\*0.45 for 2021-22

## Non-Trawl Fishery Performance

Non-trawl fishery performance in 2019 was similar to past years in that attainments were once again high for some of their most important stocks, which include sablefish north of 36° N. lat., nearshore groundfishes, black rockfish, and vermilion rockfish. Attainments for sablefish south of 36° N. lat. were also low again, which has been attributed to a lack of processing infrastructure and the Western Cowcod Conservation Area.

One of the most successful, but often overlooked, management stories is the re-emergence of non-trawl lingcod fisheries north of 40° 10' N. lat. Lingcod is an increasingly economically important stock for small commercial boats and is reducing their dependence on sablefish and nearshore stocks. Lingcod is also regarded as one of the best stepping stones for new open access (OA) fishermen, since they can be easily accessed without expensive state or federal limited entry permits. Lingcod have always been one of the most desirable recreational stocks, and they are gaining additional access via the easing of seasonal depth restrictions. The extra lingcod opportunity has been made possible by numerous improvements to the science informing discard mortality rates, faster than expected rebuilding of yelloweye rockfish, and the Council’s gradual increase of trip limits each year. Lingcod allocations have however been constraining to non-trawl fisheries south of 40° 10' N. lat. but efforts are being considered via the 2021-22 harvest specifications to increase opportunity.

## 2020 Groundfish Fisheries

### Surplus Carryover

In order to prevent duplicative workload, the GMT is not conducting a preliminary analysis of surplus carryover at this time. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) conducts a final analysis each year when observer and electronic monitoring (EM) data are final, and when vessel accounts have been settled, which this year includes post-season quota trading (Amendment 21-4), and outstanding appeals for some vessel accounts which were not renewed by the deadline.

The difference between the sum of the area-specific sablefish ACLs and the coastwide acceptable biological catch (ABC) in 2020 (141 mt) is smaller than it was in 2019 (154 mt), so it is likely that a similar situation could occur, where sablefish surplus carryover may need to be reduced from the

initially eligible amount, to one which will not exceed the ABC, in order to comply with the court ruling.

The court ruling [\*Conservation Law Foundation v. Pritzker\*](#), No. 13-00821 (D.D.C. Apr. 4, 2014), stated that under the plain language of 302(h)(6) of the MSA, 16 U.S.C. § 1852(h)(6), neither the Council nor NMFS may establish a total potential catch level that exceeds the ABCs recommended by the SSC. This total potential catch level includes surplus carryover.

For sablefish in 2019, the difference between the sum of the ACLs and the acceptable biological catch (ABC) was smaller than the amount of otherwise eligible surplus carryover for sablefish; this restricted the amount of surplus sablefish carryover which could be legally issued in 2019.

In the absence of any relevant conservation concerns (none have been identified at this time), the GMT recommends that surplus carryover be issued for each individual fishing quota species in 2020, up to the maximum amount which is allowable under the law (either the full eligible amount, or up to the level of the ABC, whichever is smallest).

## Corrections to 2020 trip limits

NMFS issued a final rule ([85 FR 8200](#)) effective February 13, 2020 that corrected the limited entry daily trip limit (DTL) trip limits from 36°-40°10' N. lat. to be 1,300 lbs. weekly not to exceed 3,900 lbs. bi-monthly, and resolved formatting issues where the species label had been missing for individual fishing quota big skate and for limited entry fixed gear (LEFG) Pacific cod south of 40° 10' N. lat.

## Sablefish Daily Trip Limits

The projected sablefish DTL landings in relation to their respective 2020 landing targets are shown in Table 3 for the north of 36° N. lat. limited entry (LEN) and open access (OAN) fisheries to the north, and for the limited entry (LES) and open access (OAS) fisheries to the south.

The GMT expects there will be potential to consider increases to the LEN and OAN trip limits later in the year for the same reasons as in 2019. Comparing catch in 2019 and 2020, landing targets of sablefish are similar (~1 percent higher in 2020), year-round preseason trip limits were the same (i.e., OAN = 300 lbs. daily, 1,200 lbs. weekly, and 2,400 lbs. bi-monthly; LEN = 1,300 lbs. weekly, 3,900 lbs. bimonthly), and both GMT projections for March predicted attainments close to the landing targets. However, the model consistently overestimated 2019 projected landings by 25-40 percent per month, which led to two 2019 inseason increases for OAN and one for LEN. In summary, there may be a higher potential for inseason DTL increases in 2020 because the model is likely overestimating 2020 landings.

**Table 3. Sablefish DTL projected landings, landing targets, and percent attainment for 2020.**

Sector	Projected Landings (round weight mt)	Landing Target (mt)	Attainment (%)
LEN	208 - 315	278	75% - 113%
OAN	397 - 497	459	87% - 108%
LES	336 - 411	805	42% - 51%
OAS	26 - 39	345	8% - 11%

### Chinook Salmon Scorecard

Table 4 shows Chinook salmon catches as of March 6, 2020 in relation to the sector thresholds. Although the Council’s final preferred alternative from November 2019 was to add new automatic authorities that would close all trawl fisheries at 19,500 fish and all non-whiting trawl fisheries at 8,500 fish in order to preserve 500 fish for fixed gear and recreational, these have not yet been adopted into rule and thus are not yet shown in the table.

**Table 4. Chinook salmon catches as of March 6, 2020 in relation to the sector thresholds (Source =PacFIN).**

Sector	Sub-Sector	Catch To Date	Threshold	% of Threshold
Whiting	CP	0	11,000	0
	MS	0		
	Shoreside	0		
	Tribal	0		
	<i>Total</i>	0		
Non-Whiting	Bottom Trawl	149	5,500	12
	Midwater Trawl	4		
	Tribal	0		
	Fixed Gear	500 a/		
	WA Rec			
	OR Rec + longleader			
	CA Rec			
	<i>Total</i>	653		
All groundfish fisheries		653	20,000	3

a/ GMT proposed assumption of mortality, which assumed maximum historical mortality (154) plus a 250 fish buffer from the 2017 BiOp and an additional 96 fish to account for some uncertainty in recreational salmon seasons; recreational estimates only apply to groundfish fisheries occurring outside of salmon seasons.

### Rebuilding Species Scorecard

Attachment 1 shows the updated rebuilding species scorecard for yelloweye rockfish and cowcod. There are no updates since November 2019, and all fisheries are projected to be within their allocations, harvest guidelines (HGs), annual catch targets (ACTs), and shares.

**Attachment 1. Allocations<sup>a</sup> and projected mortality impacts (mt) of rebuilding groundfish species for 2019.**

Fishery	Cowcod b/		Yelloweye		
	Date: November 18, 2019	Allocations a/	Projected Impacts	HG Allocations a/	ACT Allocations a/
<b>Off the Top Deductions</b>	2.0	2.0	6.1	6.1	5.9
EFP b/	0.00	0.00	0.24	0.24	0.02
Research c/	2.0	2.0	2.9	2.9	<b>2.3</b>
Incidental OA d/	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.6	1.3
Tribal e/			2.3	2.3	2.3
Bottom Trawl					0.0
Troll					0.0
Fixed gear			2.3	2.3	2.3
mid-water whiting					0.0
<b>Trawl Allocations</b>	2.2	0.4	3.4		0.1
<b>-SB Trawl</b>	2.2	<b>0.4</b>	3.4		0.1
<b>-At-Sea Trawl</b>			0.0		0.0
a) At-sea whiting MS					
b) At-sea whiting CP					
<b>Non-Trawl Allocation</b>	3.8	3.5	38.6	30.3	17.3
Non-Nearshore		1.0	2.0	1.6	0.8
LE FG					0.7
OA FG		<b>1.0</b>			0.1
Directed OA: Nearshore		0.0	6.0	4.7	2.2
Recreational Groundfish					
WA			10.0	7.8	<b>3.7</b>
OR			8.9	7.0	<b>4.5</b>
CA		2.5	11.6	9.1	<b>6.1</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	6.0	3.9	48.1	36.4	23.4
<b>Harvest Specification</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Difference</b>	0.0	2.1	-0.1	2.6	15.6
<b>Percent of ACL</b>	100.0%	65.2%	100.2%	93.3%	59.9%
Key			= not applicable		
		--	= trace, less than 0.1 mt		
			= Fixed Values		
			= off the top deductions		

a/ Formal allocations are represented in the black shaded cells and are specified in regulation in Tables 1b and 1e. The other values in the allocation columns are 1) off the top deductions, 2) set asides from the trawl allocation 3) ad-hoc allocations recommended in the 2019-2020 EIS process, 4) HG for the recreational fisheries for yelloweye rockfish.

b/ EFPs are amounts set aside to accommodate anticipated applications. Values in this table represent the estimates provided by the applicants and approved by the Council, which are currently specified in regulation.

c/ Includes NMFS trawl shelf-slope surveys, the IPHC halibut survey, and expected impacts from SRPs and LOAs.

d/ The GMT's best estimate of impacts as analyzed in the 2019-2020 Environmental Impact Statement (Appendix B), which are currently specified in regulation.

e/ Tribal values in the allocation column represent the the values in regulation. Projected impacts are the tribes best estimate of catch.