

JOINT COUNCIL/NMFS STAFF MOTHERSHIP UTILIZATION SCOPING PAPER – THINGS TO CONSIDER

At the November 2019 Council meeting, the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) was tasked with development of two groundfish management measures, including mothership utilization. The GAP submitted a report to the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) at the June 2020 meeting ([Informational Report 4, June 2020](#)). The report contains a draft purpose and need statement and several proposals that may increase utilization of the Pacific whiting allocations in the mothership sector of the groundfish fishery. The Council is scheduled to further scope this management measure at the September 2020 Council meeting.

Council and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) staff developed this document to assist the public, the Council, and its advisory bodies when scoping the measure for potential development. We pose a variety of questions and concepts to foster further discussion when considering this topic. Recent discussions and advisory body statements regarding this topic are compiled into a reference section.

Does the draft purpose and need statement in Informational Report 4 clearly identify the problem and objective for this action? The draft purpose and need statement should articulate the need for action. The industry has indicated over the past several years that utilization of the mothership whiting allocation is not optimal and multiple factors hinder full attainment of their allocation (See reference section). If the draft purpose and need statement sufficiently describes the problem and the objectives for this action, it could be adopted for public review. The Council could also continue to scope the issues at future Council meetings to further examine the need for action or refine the purpose and need statement.

Could the draft proposal(s) trigger reinitiation of the NMFS 2017 Salmon Biological Opinion? As the GAP noted in its Informational Report, proposals 1 and 5 in particular, may have Endangered Species Act listed salmon impacts that would need to be evaluated as part of an action development process. If the Council moves these proposals forward for development, NMFS in consultation with the Council, will determine the types and level of analyses needed to support the decision-making process and action, including whether the proposals would trigger reinitiation of ESA consultation (i.e., the 2017 Biological Opinion evaluating the impact of the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery on listed salmonids).

Do these actions have crossover considerations with the groundfish specifications process?

The next groundfish biennial harvest specifications and management measures process for the 2023-2024 cycle begins in June of 2021. The extent of what impact the proposals may or may not have on the development of the biennial management measures would be highly speculative at this point. The Groundfish Management Team may be able to provide some general thoughts on the proposals and their potential impact when developing new biennial specifications.

Would prioritizing a few of the draft proposals expedite development yet still provide desired benefits to the industry? Some of the proposals may have similar, potential benefits while requiring less workload. Some may be more administrative in nature or have a narrower analytical

burden. Prioritizing the proposals may help reduce complexity of the action, move the action into regulation more quickly, or eliminate the need to reinstate consultation of the 2017 Biological Opinion.

The Council could consider development of Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs) to examine the proposed actions prior to making a decision for a regulatory change. The industry could consider submitting EFP proposals to the Council and NMFS to test some or all of the proposals. This may provide immediate relief to the industry on a temporary basis and allow the Council to examine the efficacy of the changes. In addition, information about protected species interactions could be used to help guide further action or refinement. We note that Council Operating Procedure 19 states EFPs should be synchronized with the decision-making process for considering new biennial groundfish harvest specifications and management measures. Since the deadlines have already expired to consider EFPs within the next management cycle (2021-2022), any applications received would be considered “out-of-cycle” and increase the workload for the Council and staff. We note that workload is still considerable when developing analytical documents and permitting to support EFPs.

In June 2020, the Council recommended, and NMFS implemented an [emergency rule](#) to allow at-sea Pacific whiting processing vessels to operate as both a mothership and a catcher-processor in the same calendar year during the 2020 Pacific whiting fishery. This emergency rule is in effect until December 16, 2020. The rule notes possible extension through the end of 2020. The Council may want to discuss the outcomes (or realized effects) of the 2020 emergency rule.

Would taking action on this item affect Council staff, advisory bodies, and/or NMFS ability to work on other items? The Council may want to discuss the potential trade-offs of taking this action relative to other unscheduled, prioritized items (e.g. Non-trawl RCA changes, Amendment 21 allocation considerations, etc.) as well as existing obligations.

If the Council initiated work on this action, how many meetings would be required and what timeline would be needed given workload considerations?

Based on the FMP, it is likely this action would be a three-meeting process. Additionally, NMFS and Council would need to provide input as to their workload and staffing ability for development of the action.

Reference Section

In September 2018, members of the Mothership (MS) sector provided public comment on several issues hindering the utilization of the MS whiting allocation ([public comment](#) - Arctic Storm). A majority of the MS sector participants met in November and brought forward a summary of the meeting, issues, and potential solutions at the November Council meeting ([Agenda Item G.4.b, Supplemental Public Comment 2, November 2018](#)).

[Supplemental WDFW Report 1](#) (November 2018)

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) offered background as the Council considered whether and when to potentially take actions to address these issues.

From [GMT Report 1](#) (March 2019)

Depending on the scope of the alternatives within this item, the GMT would need to assess a variety of factors. For example, the GMT would analyze the appropriate level for a processing limit in the current fishery and explore the implications of allowing MS vessels to operate as catcher processors or allowing CVs to deliver MS quota shoreside. The MS sector has had an average of 78 percent attainment of whiting over the last 8 years, with a low of 39 percent in 2015 and high of 97 percent in 2012. The allocation in 2012 was almost 2.5 times less than in 2018, post-tribal reapportionment. Therefore, finding ways to increase attainment of the sector's allocation could provide significant benefits to processors, catcher vessels, and their communities.

From [GMT Report 4](#) (March 2019)

The mothership sector attained 69 percent of their 2017-2018 allocations; relative to 92 percent in the CP sector and 81 percent shoreside. The continued low attainment of this sector relative to the other whiting sectors indicates a potential to improve progress towards the National Standard (NS) 1 goal of optimum yield. Given the importance of whiting catch by mothership catcher vessels to coastal communities and west coast fishery economies overall, this item warrants additional consideration under NS 5 and NS 8 (efficiency in utilization and sustained participation of communities, respectively).

From [GAP Report 1](#) (March 2019)

The GAP supports the GMT recommendation (GMT Report 4 above) to prioritize the mothership whiting sector utilization item on the Council's Year-At-A-Glance. As identified by the GMT, improved attainment in the mothership sector would support the National Standard goals of optimum yield, efficiency in utilization, and sustained participation of communities. The GAP has previously supported mothership utilization proposals being included and analyzed through the Council process¹ and understands that the mothership sector submitted a document under omnibus [public comment](#) to provide more detail for the Council on the proposals coming forward from the sector.

¹ Agenda Item G.4.b, Supplemental GAP Report 1, November 2018; Agenda Item G.4.a, Supplemental GAP/GMT Report 1, November 2018; Agenda Item I.7.a, Supplemental GAP Report 1, September 2018

[Mothership Utilization Proposal](#) (March 2019)

Public comment to urge the Council and NMFS to prioritize the Mothership Sector Utilization omnibus item (#15) at the March 2019 meeting, and take action to move two sector-wide consensus solutions forward for analysis: 1) change the processor obligation deadline, and 2) increase the mothership processing cap (currently 45%). The document is intended to provide more background and detail to facilitate that process.

From [GAP Informational Report](#) (June 2020)

In November 2019, the Council directed the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) to develop the scope of action and draft purpose and need statements for non-trawl area management/salmon troll incidental landing limits and mothership sector utilization items during the GAP's March and April 2020 meetings. At its April 2020 meeting, the Council requested the GAP submit an informational report on these items for June. This report includes the GAP's proposed actions with draft purpose and need statements.

PFMC
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