

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON EXECUTIVE ORDER 13921:
PROMOTING AMERICAN SEAFOOD COMPETITIVENESS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH-
-FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) received a briefing from Dr. Jim Seger on Executive Order (EO) 13921 and reviewed the public comments submitted by industry.

Potential Items for Prioritization

Due to the tasking, importance, and Pacific Fishery Management Council) (Council) prioritization of our time on the emergency rule at this meeting, the GMT did not have time to discuss ranking of issues on this list relative to one another. The GMT identifies the following items that could reduce burdens on domestic fishing and increase production within sustainable fisheries. As we have stated repeatedly, the GMT is concerned about workload given team turnover, staff limitations, and other Council prioritized actions. However, we believe the Council could initiate the three agenda items identified below under the section “Items Requiring Council Action” before the May 2021 deadline if they were prioritized relative to other currently scheduled and emergent issues.

Items Outside Council Process

These are those proposals in which the action would be outside the scope of the Council process and the Magnuson-Stevens Act. These would not require any Council meeting time.

Surveys: Even prior to the cancellation of the Northwest Fishery Science Center (NWFSC) West Coast Groundfish Bottom Trawl and Hook and Line surveys in 2020, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) budget to fund surveys had not kept pace with rising costs ([Agenda Item I.1.b Supplemental NMFS NWFSC Presentation 1 \(Hastie\) June 2019](#)). There is broad agreement of the importance of ongoing groundfish surveys to inform management and provide stability to domestic groundfish fisheries, a point emphasized in [Agenda Item C.1.a, Supplemental GAP Report 1](#). Survey-collected data, not only provides important length and age observations that inform the population length- and age-structure, but also provides critical information on incoming year-class strength (often a year or more prior to being caught by commercial fisheries). Additionally, data collected coastwide using a standardized sampling approach allows for the creation of indices of abundance that are an essential component in stock assessments to derive current trends in stock abundance. The Council should reiterate to NMFS that funding for surveys should be a top agency priority.

Program costs: The Council should request that the NMFS Interagency Seafood Trade Task Force provide a report to Congress indicating the degree to which legally required industry costs (i.e., buyback fees, cost recovery for limited access privilege programs, and monitoring coverage) compare to industry costs in competing fisheries in other countries. These costs support biological and environmental sustainability, but may limit competitiveness in international and domestic markets with lower conservation standards. For example, the Economic Data Collection Program

reports that these costs amounted to over \$8 million in 2018 for businesses in the West Coast Groundfish Catch Share Program. Congress may wish to explore further subsidizing these costs to provide parity with international substitute products, and ensure that environmental responsibility and stewardship in American fisheries management results in seafood products that are affordable on a global market.

Items Requiring Council Action

Actions in this category would still have to undergo the Council process, including potential two or three meeting processes (depending on the amendment needs and past analysis completed to date). Per the EO, this process would need to be initiated by the April 2021 Council meeting to comply with the May 7, 2021 deadline.

Non-trawl area management: The unharvested non-trawl allocation¹ is valued at \$55 million across all species (assuming 2019 non-trawl average prices). Harvesting the entire non-trawl allocation for each groundfish species may never be fully achievable, but there is an opportunity to expand access to healthy, underutilized stocks for industry, and to a valuable product for domestic and international consumers. Stakeholders have submitted ample public comment emphasizing the importance and urgency in accessing these underutilized stocks via this management measure.

Midwater trawl gear targeting non-whiting stocks: The Year-Round Coastwide Midwater Rockfish Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) has been ongoing since 2018 and allowed midwater gear landings prior to May 15, resulting in an annual average of \$2.2 million per year. Moving this EFP into regulation may help processors in developing year-round markets for midwater rockfish species, improving the ability to compete with foreign seafood products. The EFP will have been in place for the required three years at the end of 2020, so the Council could move forward with scoping in March or April of 2021. The GMT notes that this change could require reinitiation of the 2017 salmon Biological Opinion based on the scope of the proposed action.

Mothership (MS) sector utilization: As discussed in detail under [Agenda Item D.2, Supplemental GMT Report 3, September 2020](#), the MS sector of the Pacific whiting fishery has averaged 71.2 percent of their initial allocation and 64 percent of their post-tribal reapportionment allocation between 2017 and 2019. This equates to an average of 34,778 mt of unharvested Pacific whiting allocation. Using the average 2017-2018 price of \$0.08 cents per pound, this equates to over \$6.1 million a year in lost potential revenue. Under Agenda Item D.2. at this meeting, the Council adopted a proposed purpose and need statement and limited the scope of any actions to north of 42° N. lat.

PFMC
09/17/20

¹ The non-trawl allocation is shared by recreational and commercial sectors and therefore the price here assumes all unutilized quota, estimated as the difference between 2019 non-trawl groundfish mortality and the 2019 non-trawl allocations, could be commercially landed. The GMT notes that recreational caught fish generate income and jobs through charter trips and tourism; increasing the non-trawl utilization across both recreational and commercial fisheries would benefit coastal communities.