

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON FUTURE MEETING AGENDA AND WORKLOAD PLANNING

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the draft proposed Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting agenda for November ([C.7, Attachment 2](#)) and the preliminary Year-at-a-Glance ([YAG; C.7, Attachment 1](#)) from the advanced briefing book.

Adding Groundfish Agenda Items During a Council Meeting

During both the April and September 2020 Council meetings, the Council added a groundfish emergency rule agenda item during the meeting. In April, the new item was added to the Council agenda at 6 p.m., with GMT being asked to reconvene and address the issue after 9 p.m. that day, well after the GMT had adjourned for the meeting (5 p.m. that day), so only a portion of the team was available to have the discussion, conduct analysis, and write the report. In September, the email tasking the GMT to work on the emergency rule agenda item was sent at 7 p.m., with a request to submit the report by mid-afternoon the following day.

The GMT understands that unexpected issues arise and need to be addressed, especially given the ongoing global pandemic. However, adding groundfish agenda items part way through a Council meeting, and then giving the GMT very limited time (less than 24 hours) to have discussion, do analysis, and write reports requires very late nights and/or early mornings for team members and does not provide time for us to do our best work. Working those hours is more likely to lead to errors in analysis and reports, and limits our ability to identify creative solutions. The earlier in the meeting that the Council can identify any additional analysis needed by the GMT, the more likely we will be able to provide a comprehensive and accurate document. This also provides additional time for the GMT to coordinate with other advisory bodies as needed, which is critically important for issues such as emergency rules, or other actions that significantly impact fishery participants. This could be facilitated by scheduling the Workload Prioritization Agenda Item on the first day of the meeting, as it is the agenda item under which groundfish issues are most likely to arise. The GMT also urges the Council to stress the importance of presenting requests for actions that are not already on the agenda under open public comment, specifically under Comments on Non-Agenda Items, prior to the start of the Council Meeting to allow for such planning.

Scheduling Daily Agendas During Council Meetings

The GMT appreciates the breadth and complexity of management issues requiring Council attention across fishery management plans. The GMT notes that, in discussions on several of these issues at this and the two previous webinar meetings, public comment, advisory reports, and Council discussion exceeded the length of time estimated for the agenda items by several hours. The Council's current plan to take up a similar number of items over six days in November seems likely to continue the pattern of unrealistic expectations. The Council should either delete several agenda items or add additional days (but not agenda items) to their schedule. Similar to the GMT's suggestions above, this will ensure that advisory bodies and the Council can do their best work.

November Agenda

The GMT would like to bring to the Council's attention that the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) has scheduled their interim meeting for November 18th and 19th, which conflicts with the November Council meeting. The same Council members from Washington, Oregon, California, and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), as well as technical staff on the GMT, routinely attend the IPHC interim meeting as part of their regular responsibilities. The interim Pacific halibut meeting is the first opportunity for policy and technical staff to review stock assessment results, previous year's science, and harvest policy recommendations. Many staff essential to the Council process will not be available to engage in or attend the Council meeting on November 18th and 19th. The GMT recommends that the Council adjust the schedule of the November meeting so that no agenda items pertaining to groundfish or coastal pelagics are scheduled for November 18th and 19th.

No new methodologies were proposed, so the September 2020 Agenda Item D.3 Impact Analysis Methodology Review was cancelled. Finalization of that item (Agenda Item I.2) can be removed from the draft November agenda.

Under Agenda Item D.2 at this meeting, the Council identified that the periodic review of the Limited Entry Fixed Gear (LEFG) fishery needs to be initiated in November 2020. Based on further guidance from NMFS, the GMT recommends the review be added to the November agenda.

The GMT notes that the November inseason action item will include changes the Council would like to make to the fishery for the start of the fishing year on January 1, 2021. The GMT views this as our priority action in November, so that any changes could be implemented with the new 2021 harvest specifications. The Council may want to plan for the item to take longer than the usual two hours to account for any emerging issues.

In the limited time available before many members of the team turn their attention to the IPHC interim meeting, the GMT anticipates being able to provide reports on a maximum of two agenda items only, in addition to our inseason report. This would allow for the possibility of emergency rule(s) to arise and be considered in a reasonable timeline. The GMT would appreciate direction from the Council about where to direct our efforts given staff time constraints.

Year-at-a-Glance

On the draft YAG in the advanced briefing book, none of the new groundfish items the Council prioritized previously appear on the calendar. Under Agenda Item C.2, the GMT suggested that before the May 2021 deadline, the Council could work on three of the EO 13921 items (i.e. non-trawl area management, mothership sector utilization, scoping the "Year-Round Coastwide Midwater Rockfish Exempted Fishing Permit" (EFP) for regulations). However, the GMT recommends the items should only be added to the YAG once staff (Council staff, GMT, etc.) are identified and tasked to lead analyses.

Follow up on the LEFG review also needs to be added to the YAG at two additional meetings in 2021, with the potential need for further meetings to develop follow-on action.

The GMT encourages the chairs and Council staff of other advisory bodies and management teams to reach out early and often regarding potential overlap with groundfish management issues.

Winter Work Session

The GMT typically convenes a winter session to initiate work on items scheduled for the new year and other tasks the Council charges the team to investigate. In most years, this meeting has occurred at the Council office in Portland, Oregon. However, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the GMT recommends an online, webinar-style meeting, consistent with the current practice of all Council meetings. The meeting has not been scheduled, but typically occurs in mid-January to early February to avoid conflicting with the IPHC annual meeting (January 25-29, 2021). Ongoing workload constraints associated with furloughs, staffing challenges, and the pandemic make completing our typical winter workload unfeasible, so the GMT requests the Council prioritize our time among the following:

- Stock Assessment and Review panel planning (GMT Priority)
- 2021-2022 harvest specifications and management measure debriefing (GMT Priority)
- Planning for the 2023-2024 biennial process, which the GMT understands will include a new National Environmental Policy Act document that is not tiered off the 2015-16 biennial Environmental Impact Statement. (GMT Priority)
- Developing items the Council prioritized, such as
 - mothership utilization
 - gear switching
 - non-trawl area management changes
 - Sablefish Primary Fishery Limited Access Privilege Program Review
 - Additional items identified in November by the Council

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