

GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON GEAR SWITCHING AND SABLEFISH AREA MANAGEMENT SCOPING

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) was briefed by Dr. Jim Seger and Ms. Jessi Doerpinghaus (Pacific Fishery Management Council [Council] staff), and reviewed the extensive and comprehensive analytical background documents, as well as public comment, in the briefing book.

Neither the analysis nor public comment to date definitively elucidate a management mechanism underlying the low utilization of trawl allocations for all species except sablefish north of 36° N. lat. and petrale sole (utilization of Pacific whiting discussed under Agenda Item D.2 Supplemental GMT Report 3). Discussions in the Community Advisory Body, Groundfish Advisory Subpanel, and Sablefish Management and Trawl Allocation Attainment Committee (SaMTAAC) focused on sablefish north of 36° N. lat. in the trawl sector have not produced a consensus resolution to either the larger utilization issue or the specific allocation concern. The GMT recognizes that different facets of the fishing industry have voiced equally strong interest in moving alternatives forward for analysis and in ending the discussion at this meeting.

The analysis under this agenda item indicates some overlap between fixed gear entrants in the trawl sector and the primary tier limits fishery (see section 6.4). The issues of allocation and cross participation between sectors, while outside the original charge of the SaMTAAC, have been raised by trawl participants under [public comment](#). The GMT notes that National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) guidance requires the Council to commence a review of both groundfish fisheries management plan catch share programs, scheduled for the next two years, as well as conduct regular allocation reviews (see [Agenda Item D.2, Attachment 2](#)). As noted in [March](#), [April](#), and [June](#), the Council could use the upcoming mandatory reviews to consider both the underlying allocation structure, and the interactions between the two groundfish catch share programs, to assess management performance for sablefish as a whole (including the southern apportionment).

While extending this analysis will frustrate some stakeholders, the Council should consider the urgency of the need to address the gear-allocation conflict within the trawl sector in the next biennium rather than pursuing a comprehensive review. Individual fishing quota utilization of sablefish north was 35 percent as of September 8, 2020 (Individual Fishing Quota [\[IFQ\] Database](#)). Sablefish quota pound prices from 2019 to date are less than half of the average price in 2017 when catch of Dover sole and shortspine and longspine thornyheads was at its 5-year high (Attachment 1 [Figure 39](#)). Looking ahead to 2021, the proposed harvest specifications will increase sablefish north of 36° N. lat. quota by 21 percent relative to 2020. In Alaska, the total allowable catch for sablefish increased by 25 percent in 2020 and will increase an additional 55 percent in 2021 ([FR 85 FR 13802](#)). Increased supply coupled with depressed demand is likely to compound a three year slide in ex-vessel prices for sablefish (Attachment 1 [Figure 37](#)). This does not support the need for immediate action, and so the GMT supports a holistic program and allocation review for sablefish over the 2021-22 catch share review cycle that would support improved long-term management.

If the Council chooses to forward the purpose and need and alternatives for analysis, the GMT will then analyze and comment on the relevant management issues and implications. The GMT reminds

the Council that state agencies and NMFS West Coast Region (WCR) are facing reduced workload capacity due to both the effects of the ongoing pandemic and employee turnover. This action will be a heavy lift for the team analysts, NMFS WCR, and Council staff, and moving forward with the current scoping and alternatives, alongside the mandatory reviews discussed above, will prevent progress on other currently prioritized and emergent action items.

PFMC
09/11/20