

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON WORKLOAD PRIORITIZATION

In this report, the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) provides additional information on workload prioritization and new management measures. At the March 2019 meeting, the GMT provided an overview of ongoing and potential upcoming groundfish issues ([Agenda Item G.4.a, GMT Report 1, March 2019](#)). Four items were prioritized by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) in March 2019: Mothership Sector Utilization, Amendment 21 (A-21) Allocations, Non-Trawl Area Management, and Emley-Platt Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) into Regulation. This statement provides comments on the latter three topics as well as the Limited Entry Fixed Gear (LEFG) review. We discuss the Mothership Sector Utilization Scoping in Agenda Item D.2.a, Supplemental GMT Report 3.

A-21 Trawl/Non-Trawl Allocations

This item was first identified for action after the intersector allocation concluded in 2017 and was added to the new workload prioritization list in 2019. The Council recommended that the A-21 allocations for lingcod south of 40° 10' N. lat., widow rockfish, petrale sole, and slope rockfish south of 40° 10' N. lat. be converted to two year allocations in the 2021-2022 harvest specifications, which National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is in the process of publishing in a proposed rule. If needed, re-considering A-21 allocations for some stocks, such as shelf rockfish north of 40° 10' N. lat. and shortspine thornyhead south of 34° 27' N. lat., could occur in the 2023-2024 biennial harvest specifications and management measures process or in the next catch shares review follow-on actions package. **Given the progress made on this issue for the stocks described above and the clear path for ongoing consideration for the remaining stocks in future biennia, the GMT recommends that this item be removed from the workload prioritization list.**

Non-Trawl Area Management

This item contains proposed changes to the non-trawl rockfish conservation area (RCA), the Cowcod Conservation Areas (CCAs), and salmon troll incidental groundfish retention limits. As a reminder, in the 2021-2022 harvest specifications and management measures package, the Council recommended opening portions of the non-trawl RCA off of Oregon and California to allow access to underutilized shelf stocks. Furthermore, in that same package, the Council recommended removing the landing ratio and managing only to an increased monthly landing limit for yellowtail rockfish retention by the salmon troll fleet north of 40° 10' N. lat. as well as allowing retention of yellowtail rockfish on salmon troll trips south of 40° 10' N. lat.

If the Council wishes to move this item forward, the GMT recommends the Council take action this fall to identify an action lead and establish a Council sub-group of advisory body members with the necessary expertise, including representatives from the GMT, Groundfish Advisory Subpanel, Ecosystem and Salmon Advisory Groups, and Habitat Committee. This group should start compiling existing analytic resources and identifying potential issues (e.g., low or no observer coverage, lack of logbooks, missing habitat information) that would need to be addressed overwinter. The project team should inform the public of the process and timeline through an action plan, which should also be included in the Council's year at a glance.

Overall, this action could provide additional access to healthy, underutilized stocks, and result in significant economic benefits to coastal communities. The Council could increase these benefits by contextualizing non-trawl RCA and CCA alterations within the bigger picture of non-trawl management by simultaneously considering changes to salmon troll incidental limits and/or gear restrictions. For example, if the extent of the non-trawl RCA is reduced by shifting the shoreward boundary deeper, the Emley-Platt EFP gear could be used in these areas without additional regulation changes. **Therefore, the GMT recommends moving this prioritized item forward including consideration of salmon troll limits and the Emley-Platt EFP.**

Emley-Platt EFP

As discussed in the previous section, if the Council chooses to proceed as recommended by the GMT, this item could be incorporated into the “Non-Trawl Area Management” analysis. This would likely mean that neither item would move quickly through the Council process. Public comment indicates a desire to move this into regulation as soon as possible. Therefore, the Council must weigh the benefits that would come from moving this gear rule forward with those that would come from the non-trawl area management package as a whole, as the same staff are likely to work on both items. Incorporating the Emley-Platt EFP into the non-trawl management package may take longer than implementing only the Emley-Platt EFP piece, but the overall benefits of the non-trawl area management package would likely be greater.

Limited Entry Fixed Gear Review

As required by the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the LEFG permit stacking program, a catch shares program, is due for review. The first review of the program occurred in November 2013 and was completed in June 2014. Given the seven year subsequent review requirement, the next review should commence in November 2020. The GMT understands that much of this work can occur outside of the Council process, including the development of the scoping/review documents, and that GMT workload would be low until the Council is asked to consider program changes. **Therefore, the GMT recommends the Council direct Council staff to begin scoping the review.** Additionally, the Council could consider directing Council staff to initiate a call for public comments on the program and/or the development of a review team and calendar.

2020 Sablefish Primary Tier Season

If the Council suggests an emergency action to extend the sablefish primary fishery season, the GMT would be required to prioritize this action. As provided in NMFS guidance ([62 FR 44421, August 21, 1997](#)), emergency rules take precedence and may delay the review of non-emergency items. The GMT would need to devote resources over the next few weeks to support NMFS’ implementation and delay progress on other actions and items. If this is something that industry is interested in pursuing as an overall change to the fishery (beyond 2020), the GMT recommends it be brought forward in the LEFG Review call for proposals. Additional information will be provided in Report 4 under this agenda item.

PFMC
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