GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the progress of the groundfish fisheries to date, and requests from industry, and offers the following updates and recommendations.

Action Items

Sablefish north of 36° N. lat.

Sablefish-targeted fishery landings in 2020 to-date remain lower than the prior 5-years (5-year median in red below, 2020 landings in blue in Figure 1 below). Even before the impacts of the pandemic resulted in decreased demand around March, prices have continued the decreases observed since 2018, and remain much lower than observed in the past decade, for a variety of reasons including potentially a decrease in the average size of landed fish, a saturated Japanese market, and large increases in Alaska sablefish Total Allowable Catch.

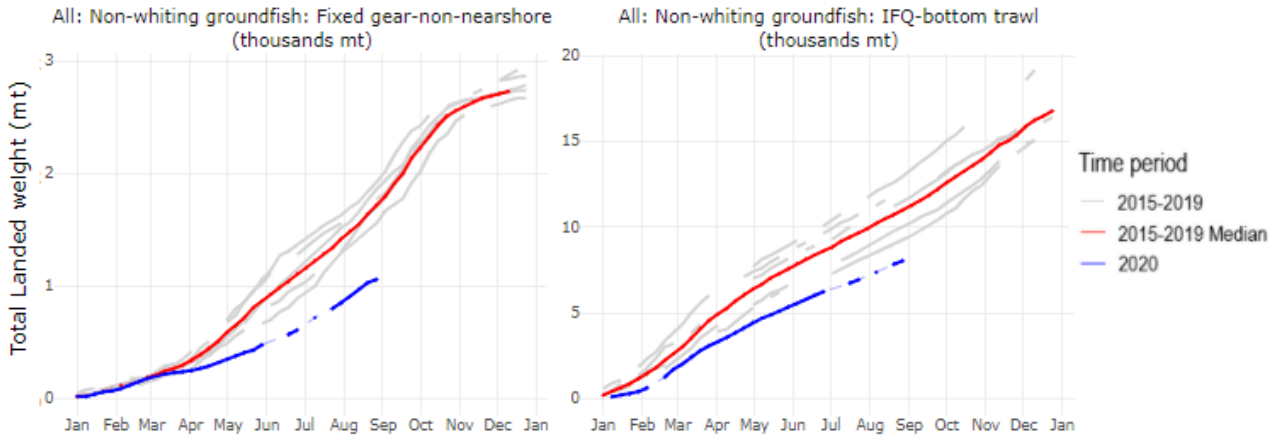

Figure 1. Cumulative weekly landings (mt) in the fixed gear non-nearshore and IFQ-bottom trawl fishery, 2015-2020 (source, EDC Landings Tracker).

There is no clear indication at this point that sablefish prices or rate of landings will increase in the final months of 2020. Low catch throughout the year-to-date have left attainments well below allocations in every sector (Table 1). With utilization low in every sector to date, year-end increased effort in any sector represents very little risk to the annual catch limit (ACL). Raising trip limits would allow for increased effort if opportunities improve in the remainder of the year.

Table 1. Sector-level sablefish north of 36° N. lat. allocations in 2020 and catch through September 9, 2020.

	LE All	Limited entry trawl			Limited entry fixed gear			*Open Access HG*
		All trawl	At-sea whiting	Shorebased IFQ	All FG	Primary	DTL	*OA*
Allocation a/ (mt)	4,632	2,687	50	2,637	1,946	1,654 b/	292 b/	*481 b/*
Catch (mt) through 9/14/2020	1,789	877	13	864	912	576	104	*232*
Attainment through 9/14/2020	39%	33%	26%	33%	47%	35%	36%	*48%*

a/Table 2c to Part 660, Subpart C—Sablefish north of 36° N. lat. Allocations, 2020 and Beyond

b/ Shares do not include anticipated discard mortality

Limited Entry Fixed (LEFG) Gear Trip Limits

Through August 2020, actual landings by the LEFG fishery has been about 60 percent of projections, possibly due to the overall decreases in demand, prices, and effort in the fishery associated with the global pandemic. Thus the percentages in the attainment column shown in Table 2 are likely overestimates, if current trends continue through the end of the fishing year. For example, projected landings for Option 2 (Table 2) are expected to be 187 mt, or 67.3 percent attainment, when adjusted for the current year overestimate ratio.

Status quo and proposed LE trip limits are provided in Table 2 with associated projections and percent attainment of the landed catch share. Projections from proposed trip limits are based on the increases being implemented by October 1. Given the overestimates and low attainments, the **GMT recommends Option 1 (2,500 lbs./week not to exceed 7,500 lbs./2 months) for the LEFG fishery be implemented as soon as possible.** However, depending on Council action under Agenda Item D.2, if Council chooses to not pursue an emergency rule to extend the tier fishery season to December 31, the GMT offers Option 2 for Council consideration to provide an additional opportunity to those vessels. As stated in our Supplemental Report 4, while this would not provide the same level of opportunity as extending the season would allow, it would provide opportunity beyond what would be currently available.

Table 2. Options for trip limit increases in the Limited Entry Fixed Gear Daily Trip Limit sector, assuming October 1 implementation.

Option	Trip Limit	Projected Landings* (rd. wt. mt)	Landed Catch Share (mt) a/	Attainment (percent)
SQ	1,500 lbs./week not to exceed 4,500 lbs./2 months	172-192	278	62-69
1	**2,500 lbs./week not to exceed 7,500 lbs./2 months**	**236-262**		**85-94**
2	3,000 lbs./week not to exceed 9,000 lbs./2 months	271-303		99-109

*Note, the model has over-estimated every period during 2020, and based on current modeling to date, even the low-end estimate has exceeded the actual landings thus far.

Open Access Trip Limits

A request was submitted for the open access fishery north of 36° N. lat. to increase the daily limit from 300 lbs. to 600 lbs. and the bimonthly limit from 3,000 lbs. to 4,000 lbs. Status quo and proposed Open Access (OA) North trip limits with associated projections are in Table 3. Vessels are not fishing close to the daily or bimonthly limits, so this change did not greatly influence model projections.

If landings continue at the current level, this change is not expected to increase attainment of the allocation. However, if demand increases in October-December, this increase could provide an opportunity to make up for low landings in the earlier part of the year, as well as allow vessels to potentially spend fewer days at sea given COVID-19 guidelines. Note, the model has over-estimated every period during 2020, and based on current modeling to date, even the low-end estimate is higher than the actual landings thus far. **Therefore, the GMT recommends Option 1 (600 lbs./day or one landing per week up to 2,000 lbs., not to exceed 4,000 lbs./2 months) be implemented as soon as possible.**

Table 3. Projected landings and percent attainment for the Open Access North of 36° N. lat. sector trip limit alternatives assuming October 1 implementation.

Option	Trip Limit	Projected Landings* (rd. wt. mt)	Landed Catch Share (mt) a/	Attainment (percent)
SQ	300 lbs./day or one landing per week up to 1,500 lbs., not to exceed 3,000 lbs./2 months	237-318	459	52-69
1	**600 lbs./day or one landing per week up to 2,000 lbs., not to exceed 4,000 lbs./2 months**	**259-262**		**56-77**

a/ The open access total catch share is reduced by the anticipated discard mortality of sablefish, based on West Coast Groundfish Observer Program data from 2002-2016. In 2019-2020, 23 percent of the sablefish caught are anticipated to be discarded and 20 percent of those discards are expected to result in mortality.
*Note, the model has over-estimated every period during 2020, and based on current modeling to date, even the low-end estimate has exceeded the actual landings thus far.

Incidental Pacific Halibut Retention in the Primary Sablefish Fishery North of Point Chehalis

The GMT received a request to increase the landing ratio for incidental Pacific halibut retention in the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis from 200 to 250 lbs. of Pacific halibut per 1,000 lbs. of sablefish, and maintain the limit of up to two additional Pacific halibut in excess of the ratio. Through September 9, 2020, incidental catch was 29,420 lbs. (net weight) of the 70,000 lbs. (net weight) allocation (42 percent). The fishery reached a similar level of catch (45 percent) through September 11, 2018 when the landing ratio was raised from 160 lbs. to 200 lbs. (Agenda Item I.10.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, September 2018). Additionally, the GMT recommended, and the Council adopted, a landing ratio increase from 200 lbs. to 250 lbs. in June 2019 (Agenda Item I.7.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, June 2019).

The proposed change to the ratio would give participants in the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis the opportunity to land more Pacific halibut in a year of low sablefish prices and ongoing challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) tracks the fishery daily and will update the Council, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) if the landings begin to approach the allocation. If needed, fishery closure can be announced via the NMFS West Coast Region Pacific halibut hotline.

Table 4 below shows the status quo landing ratio and the proposed alternative alongside projected landings based on 2019 and 2020 data through September 11, 2020, and the current allocation. Attainment under Option 1 (250 lbs. landing ratio) is projected to reach 99 percent of the current allocation. However, the model uses 2019 as a reference year, and landings were highest in October compared to previous months in both 2018 and 2019. Industry expects that participation in October will be lower than in recent years, so the model likely overestimates 2020 attainment. Table 4 projections assume implementation on October 1 due to industry-stated urgency to maximize

remaining time left in the primary sablefish fishery, which is scheduled to end on October 31 or until the quota is caught, whichever is sooner.

Table 4. Projected incidental Pacific halibut landings in the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis under the status quo landing ratio and the proposed alternative, assuming implementation on October 1.

Option	Landing Ratio	Projected Landings (net wt. lbs.) through October 31	Allocation (net wt. lbs.)	Attainment (percent)
SQ	200 lbs. halibut per 1,000 lbs. sablefish landed and up to 2 halibut in excess of limit	64,783	70,000 lbs.	92.5
1	**250 lbs. halibut per 1,000 lbs. sablefish landed and up to 2 halibut in excess of limit**	**69,315**		**99**

Assuming October 1 implementation, the increased Pacific halibut allowance would likely be in place for up to one month, as the primary fishery closes on October 31. Therefore, GMT sees very little risk of exceeding the allocation during this limited time frame, especially given the low attainment thus far, industry-expected low October participation this year, and the impacts of similar past landing limit increases. If the primary tier sablefish fishery season is extended through December 31, as requested below, the GMT notes that IPHC regulations[1] require all commercial (directed and incidental) Pacific halibut fisheries close at noon local time on November 15. A primary season extension, if implemented, would provide only 14.5 additional days to land incidental Pacific halibut compared to the current season end date of October 31, and so does not greatly increase the risk of exceeding the allocation.

Therefore, the GMT recommends the Council increase the landing ratio of incidental halibut allowed in the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis to 250 lbs. of Pacific halibut per 1,000 lbs. sablefish (plus 2) by October 1. Given the limited amount of time left in the season, the GMT emphasizes the urgency of putting this adjustment into regulation as soon as possible, ideally by October 1, to maximize the economic benefits to fishery participants.

2021-2022 Sablefish Allocation Corrections

The GMT recommends the Council adopt the corrected ACL values and subsequent allocations for sablefish North of 36° N. lat. and South of 36° N. lat. as noted in Agenda Item D.5, REVISED Attachment 1.

Additional Requests Considered but not Recommended

The GMT also received requests to increase open access (OA) trip limits for canary rockfish and vermilion rockfish between 40° 10′ N. lat. and 34° 27′ N. lat. Inseason action in April 2020 adjusted

[1] https://iphc.int/uploads/pdf/regs/iphc-2020-regs.pdf ; Section 9, paragraphs (3) and (5)

these limits, which were implemented on June 1, 2020. The GMT spent significant time analyzing how to maximize the canary rockfish trip limits within the nearshore and non-nearshore shares for the remainder of 2020, and therefore there is no room to increase limits further under the current within non-trawl harvest guidelines[2]. Additionally, in April, the Council approved a sublimit on vermilion rockfish to ensure catch remains below harvest limits. The GMT suggests that a new stock assessment for vermillion rockfish be conducted before further adjusting trip limits.

The GMT also received a request to increase the daily limit for shortspine thornyhead south of 34° 27′ N. lat. to help reduce regulatory discards while targeting sablefish. After discussions with the requestor, it was decided that California staff would work with industry to develop a 2021 trip limit to discuss as an action item in November 2020.

There was an additional request to correct 40 fathom waypoints of the Non-Trawl Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) off Albion/Point Arena, CA. According to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP), corrections to the Non-Trawl RCA need to be addressed through a two-meeting process. Therefore, the GMT suggested to the requestor that it be brought forward under D.2, Groundfish Workload and New Management Measures Priorities.

Informational Items

At-Sea Update

With 50 percent attainment of the at-sea sectors' Pacific whiting allocation as of September 11, 2020, the sectors are at 93 percent of their darkblotched rockfish set-aside, 55 percent of yellowtail rockfish, and 26 percent of sablefish, with all other set-asides tracking at less than 14 percent. The GMT does not anticipate a risk of exceeding the ACLs of these stocks, even darkblotched rockfish. Only 25 percent of the ACL has been caught to date and is unlikely to be exceeded even if the at-sea sector catches more than the set-aside.

PacFIN APEX Reports

In June of this year, the Council requested a shortbelly rockfish scorecard be added to the GMT Inseason statements; the GMT reminds the Council, and public, that near real-time total mortality estimates compared to ACLs and at-sea set-aside amounts are provided online through the PacFIN APEX Reporting System. Reports IFQ001 - Targeted Pacific Whiting Report and GMT007 Scorecard of Groundfish Stock Species and Complex are the two most useful for determining current shortbelly rockfish attainment. As of September 14, 2020, mortality of shortbelly rockfish totals 517 mt, or 17 percent of the 3,000 mt ACL.

[2] The Council combined the nearshore and non-nearshore harvest guidelines in the 2021-22 harvest specifications to provide additional opportunities to LE and OA vessels as they operate under the same trip limits across the "nearshore" and "non-nearshore".

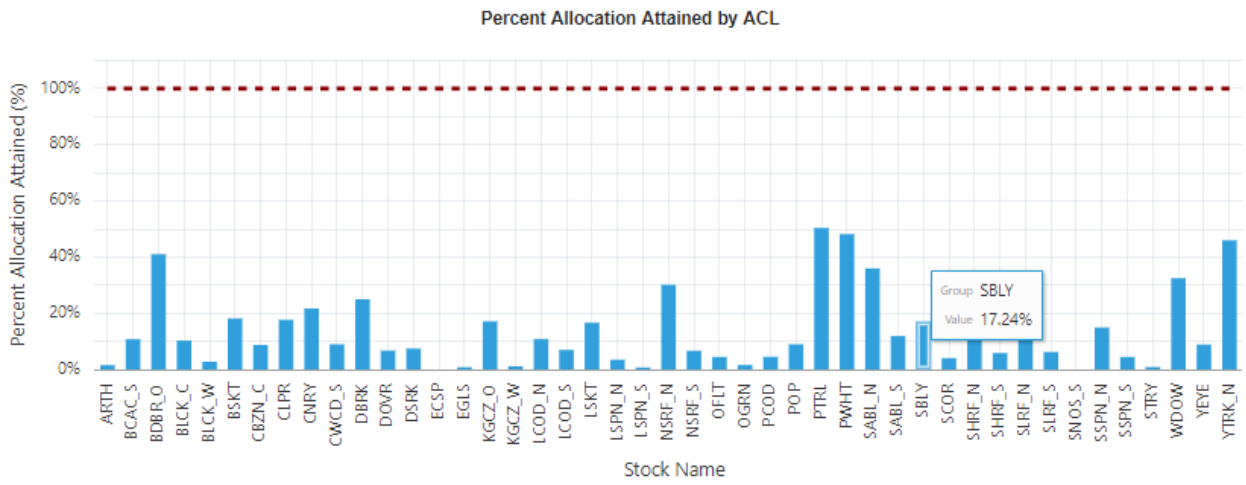

Figure 2. PacFIN Groundfish Scorecard Report 2020 Summary by Stock Species and Complex (9/14/2020)

Rebuilding Species Scorecard

The long anticipated, significantly streamlined Estimated Discard and Catch of Groundfish Species in the 2019 U.S. West Coast Fisheries reports (Agenda Items C.1.a, NWFSC Report 3 and C.1.a, NWFSC Report 4) informed adjustments to the yelloweye rockfish incidental open access projections (as discussed in Agenda Item C.1.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1) and cowcod commercial projections in the 2020 Species Scorecard (Attachment 1). Additionally, cowcod allocations were updated to reflect the Rule (85 FR 36803, June 18, 2020), removing the 6 mt annual catch targets (ACTs). Impacts from all fisheries are projected to remain within their 2020 allocations, harvest guidelines, ACTs, and shares.

Chinook Salmon Scorecard

The 2017 Salmon Incidental Take Statement specified thresholds for the non-whiting and whiting sectors. These thresholds are enforced through sector closure mechanisms in regulations. Both the whiting and non-whiting sectors have remained below their thresholds in 2020 (Table 5). Estimated overall catch of Chinook salmon as of September 14, 2020 in all groundfish fisheries was 3,089 fish, or 15 percent, of the 20,000 threshold. The GMT projects that the whiting and non-whiting thresholds are unlikely to be reached or exceeded, based on the relatively low bycatch rates and amounts to date.

Table 5. Chinook salmon thresholds for and catch by groundfish fisheries in 2020 through September 14, 2020. All units are individual fish. Source: PacFIN Endangered Species Act [ESA] Salmon Scorecard.

Sector	Sub-Sector	Catch To Date	Threshold	% of Threshold
Whiting	Catcher-Processor	336	11,000	21
	Mothership	65		
	Shoreside a/	1,356		
	Tribal b/	560		
	Total	*2,318*		
Non-Whiting	Bottom Trawl a/	232	5,500	9
	Midwater Trawl a/	14		
	Fixed Gear c/	500		
	WA Rec c/			
	OR Rec + longleader c/			
	CA Rec c/			
	Tribal b/	25		
	Total	*771*		
All groundfish fisheries		*3,089*	20,000	15

a/ In-season estimates for catch shares fleets do not include trips during the two-week observer coverage waiver period. Current analysis suggests that Chinook salmon catch was minimal.
b/ The maximum of the observed annual catch from 2016 to 2019 is used to estimate tribal catch inseason.
c/ GMT proposed assumption of mortality, which assumed maximum historical mortality (154 fish) plus a 250 fish buffer from the 2017 BiOp and an additional 96 fish to account for some uncertainty in recreational salmon seasons; recreational estimates only apply to groundfish fisheries occurring outside of salmon seasons.

Summary of Recommendations

The GMT recommends the Council:

1. **Adopt Option 1 (2,500 lbs./week not to exceed 7,500 lbs./2 months) for the LEFG fishery, be implemented as soon as possible**
2. **Adopt Option 1 (600 lbs./day or one landing per week up to 2,000 lbs., not to exceed 4,000 lbs./2 months) be implemented as soon as possible, be implemented as soon as possible**
3. **Adopt an increase in the landing ratio of incidental Pacific halibut allowed in the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis to 250 lbs. of Pacific halibut per 1,000 lbs. sablefish (plus 2), be implemented by October 1**
4. **Approve the corrected annual catch limit values for sablefish North of 36° N. lat. and South of 36° N. lat. as noted in Agenda Item D.5. REVISED Attachment 1**

Attachment 1. Rebuilding Species Scorecard

Fishery	Cowcod b/		Yelloweye		
***Date*: 14 September 2020**	**Allocations a/**	**Projected Impacts**	**HG Allocations a/**	**ACT Allocations a/**	**Projected Impacts**
Off the Top Deductions	2.0	2.0	6.1	6.1	**12.0**
EFP b/	0.00	0.00	0.24	0.24	0.02
Research c/	2.0	2.0	2.9	2.9	1.6
Incidental OA d/	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.6	**8.0**
Tribal e/			2.3	2.3	2.3
Bottom Trawl					0.0
Troll					0.0
Fixed gear			2.3	2.3	2.3
mid-water					0.0
whiting					
Trawl Allocations	2.2	**0.8**	3.4		0.1
-SB Trawl	2.2	**0.8**	3.4		0.1
-At-Sea Trawl			0.0		0.0
a) At-sea whiting MS					
b) At-sea whiting CP					
Non-Trawl Allocation	3.8	**3.2**	39.5	30.3	16.4
Non-Nearshore		**1.6**	2.1	1.7	0.8
LE FG		**1.6**			0.7
OA FG					0.1
Directed OA: Nearshore		0.0	6.0	4.7	2.2
Recreational Groundfish					
WA			10.2	8.1	5.2
OR			9.1	7.2	4.9
CA		1.6	11.9	9.4	3.3
TOTAL	6.0	**6.0**	49.0	36.4	**28.5**
Harvest Specification	**6.0**	**6.0**	**49**	**43**	39
Difference	0.0	**0.0**	0.0	6.6	**10.5**
Percent of ACL	100.0%	99.3%	100.0%	84.6%	73.0%
Key			= not applicable		
	--		= trace, less than 0.1 mt		
			= Fixed Values		
			= off the top deductions		

a/ Formal allocations are represented in the black shaded cells and are specified in regulation in Tables 1b and 1e. The other values in the allocation columns are 1) off the top deductions, 2) set asides from the trawl allocation 3) ad-hoc allocations recommended in the 2019-2020 EIS process, 4) HG for the recreational fisheries for yelloweye rockfish.

b/ EFPs are amounts set aside to accommodate anticipated applications. Values in this table represent the estimates provided by the applicants and approved by the Council, which are currently specified in regulation.

c/ Includes NMFS trawl shelf-slope surveys, the IPHC halibut survey, and expected impacts from SRPs and LOAs.

d/ The GMT's best estimate of impacts as analyzed in the 2019-2020 Environmental Impact Statement (Appendix B), which are currently specified in regulation.

e/ Tribal values in the allocation column represent the the values in regulation. Projected impacts are the tribes best estimate of catch.

PFMC
09/15/20