

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON FUTURE COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA AND WORKLOAD PLANNING

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) reviewed the briefing book documents under this agenda item and offers the following comments.

General Comments

The GAP appreciates the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) groundfish reports provided at every meeting and sees value in representatives from the West Coast Region (WCR) and Northwest and Southwest Fisheries Science Centers providing briefings to the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council). Moreover, WCR and Science Center staff have made themselves available at recent GAP meetings to discuss issues pertinent to groundfish fisheries, such as surveys and rulemakings. The GAP is grateful for the information provided during these exchanges. We encourage Council staff to coordinate these GAP briefings at each Council meeting.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been problematic for the seafood industry, fishery managers and researchers during the past year. The GAP truly appreciates Council staff's flexibility and management of online meetings for the Council and advisory bodies. These technological advances have allowed some sense of camaraderie while allowing business to be conducted and move forward. However, given the growing number of vaccinations available, it may be possible for the Council to indeed hold an in-person meeting in September, currently scheduled in Spokane, Washington. The GAP supports this and would like to urge the Council to do whatever it can to allow an in-person meeting in September.

The groundfish workload and new management measures agenda item is scheduled for each of the remaining Council meetings this year. The GAP suggests that we have a solid set of groundfish items prioritized and that, if the Council would like to save time on one or more meeting agendas, this groundfish agenda item could be removed from one or two meetings for the remainder of 2021.

June 2021 Council agenda

Referencing the [proposed June Council agenda](#), the GAP recommends the following:

1. Add an offshore development agenda item. The GAP is understandably very concerned about offshore development, whether it's for renewable offshore wind (OSW) energy or regarding aquaculture opportunity areas (AOAs). GAP members have been engaged in OSW siting issues for several years and strongly recommend the Council and NMFS stay directly engaged on this front. For example, the four [states' supplemental report 1](#) under this agenda item addresses the need for Council and stakeholder involvement in a meaningful and helpful way. The GAP thinks this report provides important information for the Council to consider as well as prudent alternatives for Council engagement.

Therefore, as requested by the states, the GAP recommends scheduling this issue on the Council and advisory body agendas at the June 2021 Council meeting.

[Informational Report 9](#), a Department of Interior (DOI) Officer of Solicitor Opinion, demonstrates why engagement by the industry and, more importantly, state and Federal fishery managers, is crucial. The DOI opinion essentially reverses a [December 2020 DOI opinion](#) that gave existing fisheries priority when determining placement of offshore wind energy sites. The April Opinion ([Informational Report 9](#)) concluded the Secretary of the Interior has “discretion to determine the appropriate balance between two or more goals that conflict or are otherwise in tension,” which suggests that existing fisheries and future OSW development have the same level of priority. As part of the larger examination of the appropriate pathway for optimal Council engagement, preventing the disruption of council-managed fisheries should be a Council priority. OSW energy development should not come at the cost of displacing existing fisheries and cause disruptions to the communities they support, as noted by the [GAP \(in March 2021\)](#) and other advisory bodies in the past.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management at this time seems eager to work with the Council, as noted in an [email exchange between BOEM and the PFMC](#). The GAP appreciates Council and state staff encouraging BOEM to work with the Council and NMFS for greater stakeholder engagement and to provide context to data sets shared between the Council/NMFS and BOEM.

2. [Unshade the electronic monitoring \(EM\) for June](#). EM users would like to see the update on this issue and keep it moving forward.
3. [Unshade sablefish gear-switching for June](#). The GAP reconvened to finalize this statement prior to the end of Council discussion on Agenda Item F.4, sablefish gear switching, at this meeting. However, the GAP expected several members would request this be unshaded for June.

Preliminary Year-at-a-Glance

Referencing the [preliminary year-at-a-glance \(YAG\) calendar](#) under this agenda item, the GAP recommends the following:

1. [Add the non-trawl RCA/area management issue to the September 2021 agenda](#). The GAP and Council staff have worked hard to scope this issue and substantial public commenters have indicated this is an important issue for the non-trawl fleet. The GAP requests the Council add this issue to the September Council meeting agenda.
2. [The GAP requests the at-sea whiting utilization final preferred alternative \(FPA\) item be retained on the November 2021 agenda](#). The GAP would like to keep the momentum of this issue moving forward. However, if, for analytical reasons, there is a need to schedule the FPA for a later meeting, the GAP requests this occur no later than March 2022.