

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON BIENNIAL HARVEST
SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES PROCESS FOR 2023-2024
FISHERIES

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) received a briefing from Todd Phillips of Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) staff, as well as Gretchen Hanshew, Brian Hooper, and Galeeb Kachra of National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) West Coast Region (WCR) staff, reviewed the proposed schedule in [Agenda Item G.6, Supplemental REVISED Attachment 1, June 2021](#), and offers the following comments.

Schedule

Upon review of Attachment 1, **the GMT supports and recommends the Council adopt the schedule as drafted.** The GMT notes that successful implementation of regulations by January 1 depends on frontloading the schedule, as described in [Council Operating Procedure \(COP\) 9](#) and Attachment 1, and on ALL participants in the process adhering to this schedule. The GMT notes that adopting a preliminary preferred alternative (PPA) for annual catch limits (ACLs) by November 2021 is essential to the development of the GMT's over-winter analysis, which is necessary for final Council action on the ACLs in April 2022 and management measures in June 2022.

As described below, if the Council concentrates the regulatory package on harvest specification numbers and the management measures (e.g., commercial and recreational harvest limits) needed to implement those harvest specifications, the schedule goals are more likely to be met. This focus on the harvest specifications could allow the Council to focus on reviewing, editing, and finalizing management measures in June of even-numbered years, as opposed to reviewing new analyses. This more manageable June workload should minimize errors and increase the quality of the harvest specifications package.

Additionally, the GMT emphasizes the importance of exempted fishing permit (EFP) actions, particularly those that request deductions from the ACLs, taking place in accordance with the schedules described in [COP-19](#), so that anticipated impacts (i.e., set-asides) and analysis align with the biennial process. EFP applications should include all the information necessary for evaluation in November of odd-numbered years (e.g., 2021) in order to be considered for final action in June of even-numbered years. Minor changes to sample design, based on input from the GMT, Scientific and Statistical Committee, and the Council can occur between November and June without impacting other analyses.

Harvest Specifications

By November 2021, the Council is scheduled to adopt PPA overfishing limits and a range of PPA P* values, acceptable biological catches (ABCs), and ACLs for all stocks/stock complexes. In order to stay on the schedule in [Supplemental REVISED Attachment 1](#), all stock assessments will need to be adopted for use in management before or at the November 2021 Council meeting, regardless of the timing of stock assessment review. Additionally, final preferred alternative (FPA) Overfishing Limits (OFLs), PPA ABCs, and PPA ACL alternatives will need to be adopted in November 2021, to facilitate the GMT's overwinter analysis.

Management Measures

Based on guidance from NMFS, the biennial process should focus on those management measures that are necessary for the implementation of the harvest specifications (e.g., commercial trip limits, bag limits, and minor adjustments to rockfish conservation areas), rather than general improvements.

Potential Management Measures Identified to Date

The proposed schedule for the 2023-24 harvest specifications and management measures process calls for the Council to adopt a preliminary range of proposed management measures for inclusion in the biennial process at the September 2021 meeting. For the Council's information, several items have been preliminarily identified, via previous Council action, state reports, and public requests, for consideration as part of the 2023-24 biennial management measures package. We will provide additional information on topics forwarded by the Council for inclusion at a later meeting. Currently, these preliminarily identified actions for Council consideration on inclusion in the 2023-24 process are (in no particular order):

1. Adopt management measures necessitated by results of the new stock assessments (e.g., change in stock status).
2. Prohibit directed fishing for shortbelly rockfish (Council motion on Agenda Item G.2, March 2021, [Council Decision Summary](#)).
3. Add Cowcod Conservation Area removal ([Agenda Item G.6.a, Supplemental CDFW Report 1, June 2021](#)).
4. Adopt new coordinates for non-trawl rockfish conservation area boundary lines off of California ([Agenda Item G.6.a, Supplemental CDFW Report 1, June 2021](#)).
5. Allow additional rockfish retention in the salmon troll fishery north and south of 40° 10' N. lat. (Additional discussion below).
6. Remove the daily limit for the sablefish Daily-Trip-Limit Open Access sector north of 36° N. lat.

Request for Guidance on Groundfish Retention in the Salmon Troll Fishery

The GMT has been asked to consider changes to the incidental groundfish retention allowance in the salmon troll fishery multiple times in the last several years. Management of the salmon troll fishery, which is outside of the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP), complicates how these requests should be explored (e.g., biennial management measures, inseason, emergency rule, etc.). We are aware of the overlap between salmon and groundfish harvest, particularly noted in the salmon troll fishery, and the growing interest to increase retention of incidentally caught groundfish. The GMT notes that at-sea discards of groundfish are not currently monitored in the salmon troll fishery. This data scarcity makes mortality projections difficult to accurately quantify at this time (see [Agenda Item C.2.a., Supplemental GMT Report 1, June 2021](#)). Addressing requests by the salmon troll fishery as inseason actions may be challenging if expected groundfish impacts are higher than the amounts deducted from the ACLs for the incidental open access fisheries as part of the biennial process. The GMT recognizes an opportunity for Council guidance to improve the process and outcomes on this complicated and sensitive topic.

For the current specifications cycle, **the GMT recommends the Council define management goals and provide specific guidance on what regulatory pathway the management of groundfish retention in the salmon troll fishery should be addressed.** Doing so will define timelines, processes, roles, and responsibilities; and make it easier for fishery participants, council

members, and advisory bodies to navigate. Policy guidance and clear strategic goals and objectives that balance the needs of multiple user groups across FMPs would benefit all stakeholders. This particular challenge provides a model opportunity for the Council to continue progressing towards comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management and creating the flexibilities highlighted by the Climate and Communities Initiative. Such guidance could also inform analysis of future groundfish retention requests from other unobserved non-groundfish fisheries seeking additional opportunities.

PFMC
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