

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE REPORT ON BIENNIAL MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR 2023-24 AND BEYOND

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) offers this report to assist the Council in selecting a range of alternatives for new management measures associated with the 2023-24 groundfish harvest specifications action.

Overall Workload and Timing Considerations

We appreciate the work done by the Council, advisory bodies, management teams, industry, and public to bring forward items for possible inclusion in the 2023-24 specifications. As we have noted in prior meetings, if the Council would like to prioritize completion of this action by January 1, 2023, the scope of harvest specification and management measure alternatives must be focused and manageable so that it does not detract from other actions in development. Implementation after January 1, 2023 results in additional work for NMFS and may affect progress on other actions as we reallocate staff to ensure specifications and management measures are finalized.

The preliminary range of new management measures brought forward from the September 2021 Council meeting is extensive (Agenda Item [C.8, Supplemental GMT Report 3, September 2021](#)). There are more measures on the list than can reasonably get done by January 1, 2023. We recommend the Council prioritize among items for this action that are most important to be implemented on January 1, 2023. In its prioritization, we recommend the Council also consider the workload associated with potential rebuilding plan(s). If one or more rebuilding plans are needed, we expect this will add substantial workload to the action. If analysis and/or development of any new management measures are incomplete, we will discuss with the Council alternative pathways apart from specifications rulemaking for consideration and implementation.

New Management Measure Considerations

We provide Table 1 below as an overview of timing and workload/complexity considerations for new management measures. Additionally, we offer the following more detailed information on several of the new management measures under consideration.

Prohibit directed fishery for shortbelly rockfish (Item # 7)

Shortbelly rockfish has been the subject of extensive discussion and focus over the last few years. As of January 1, 2021 through Amendment 29 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP), it is identified as an Ecosystem Component Species (ECS). The FMP provides the following definition: “Ecosystem component species are not targeted, are not generally retained for sale or personal use, are not subject to overfishing, and are not overfished or approaching an overfished condition”. Future actions on shortbelly rockfish are not dependent on a January 1, 2023 implementation date because there are no harvest specifications set for ECS.

Additionally, at its June 2020 Council meeting, the Council set a 2,000 metric ton threshold of cumulative catch in a calendar year that would trigger further Council consideration of shortbelly rockfish impacts. For these reasons, we do not see an immediate need at this time to pursue a prohibition on a directed shortbelly rockfish fishery through the biennial specifications process for January 1, 2023. Should the Council want to move forward with such a prohibition, we recognize the value of establishing this management decision in advance of potential future fishery development. The GMT identified several potential paths to prohibition of a directed fishery (Agenda Item [C.8, GMT Report 1, September 2021](#)) and we agree it is potentially a high workload item.

Cowcod Conservation Area removal (Item # 8)

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) proposal ([Agenda Item G.6,a Supplemental CDFW Report 1, June 2021](#)) would re-open the Cowcod Conservation Areas (CCA) to bottom contact and non-bottom contact commercial fixed gear fishing and recreational fishing. We anticipate this item would have a high workload, particularly for allowing bottom contact gear in this area, and note implementation for January 1, 2023 is not necessary.

Opening up the CCA or large portions of the CCA will require analysis of habitat and bycatch impacts and a focus on fishery monitoring tools. There is currently low observer coverage around the area of the CCA and no Federal fixed gear logbook requirement in place yet. We recommend evaluation of scope and timing of catch and discard data by sector and what tools we have to respond to potential issues. We also recommend this item consider allowing retention of cowcod to reduce regulatory discards. The Council should also consider catch of other stocks prevalent in the CCA that have previously been identified as vulnerable, such as bronzespotted rockfish and pink rockfish.

Given timing and complexity, this analysis would be difficult to accomplish in the specifications action. As such, if this item is a Council priority, we recommend the Council consider adding it to the non-trawl rockfish conservation area (RCA) action also under consideration at this meeting. The CCA and non-trawl RCA adjustments could be evaluated efficiently in the same action given the similar impact considerations needed of habitat and bycatch impacts and focus on monitoring for non-trawl sectors.

Groundfish retention in the salmon troll fisheries (Item # 10)

Under this item, salmon trollers would be able to retain groundfish while targeting salmon in the non-trawl RCA. If this item is prioritized for further development, the Council should consider if additional monitoring/reporting is necessary to maintain groundfish management objectives. As the GMT noted in their September report, there is limited data to evaluate potential impacts of this action (Agenda Item [C.8, GMT Report 1, September 2021](#)). WCGOP does not observe the salmon troll fishery. While complete landing data are recorded on fish tickets, groundfish discard data is

unknown. We also note that salmon troll fishery is not subject to the future federal logbook requirements recommended by the Council and being developed by NMFS unless the Council were to expand that requirement beyond fixed gear.

Table 1. New Management Measures - Timing and Workload/Complexity Considerations

Item # (not ranked)	Management Measures	Sector(s)	Description	Timing	Workload/complexity notes
All Sectors					
7	Prohibit directed fishery for shortbelly rockfish	All	See public comment letter (G.2 and C.6 Shortbelly letter Audubon.Oceana 3.1.2021.pdf)	Not necessary for January 1	Potentially high.
8	Cowcod Conservation Area removal	All	See CDFW Report (Agenda Item C.8.a, Supplemental CDFW Report, September 2021)	Not necessary for January 1	High workload
Trawl					
None identified in preliminary range of alternatives					
Non-Trawl					
9	Proposed New Coordinates for NT-RCA Boundary Lines off of CA	Rec, FG	See CDFW September 2021 Supplemental Report 1 and June 2021	Partially necessary for January 1 (correcting crossovers)	Cross-overs are reasonable for consideration, new NT-RCA lines only necessary in tandem with CCA
10	Groundfish retention in the salmon troll fisheries	Troll	Industry requests to increase groundfish retention allowances within the RCA	Changes to off the top deductions would need to be factored into specifications	Limited data to evaluate potential impacts
11	Sablefish primary tier fishery end date	LE FG	Extend the season end date to Dec 31	Not necessary for January 1	Could proceed on its own pathway or in tandem with other regulatory changes from the catch share review process
12	WA rec season structure	WA Rec	bag limits, season structure, length limits, etc.	Necessary for January 1	

13	OR rec season structure	OR Rec	bag limits, season structure, length limits, etc.	Necessary for January 1	
14	CA rec season structure	CA Rec	bag limits, season structure, length limits, etc.	Necessary for January 1	
15	Nearshore trip limits	FG		Necessary for January 1	
16	Non-nearshore trip limits	FG	Remove the daily limit for the sablefish Daily-Trip-Limit Open Access sector north of 36° N. lat	Necessary for January 1	