

## GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS FOR 2023-2024 INCLUDING FINAL OVERFISHING LIMITS AND ACCEPTABLE BIOLOGICAL CATCHES

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) and the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) discussed the 2023-2024 biennial harvest specifications and management measures and considered the documents under this agenda item. The GAP recommends the following suggestions for Council consideration.

### Default harvest control rules (HCRs)

Referencing [GMT Report 1](#), the GAP supports adoption of default HCRs for all species except for the following.

#### Sablefish

The GAP recommends a  $P^*$  of 0.45 for sablefish as a preliminary preferred alternative. However, the GAP agrees with the GMT that the range of alternatives is sufficient for analysis. As we noted in our [September 2021 GAP report](#), the stock is healthy, as evidenced by the recent update stock assessment. Changing the  $P^*$  now to account for management uncertainty does not seem warranted. The stock assessment indicates the biomass is able to support a harvest strategy based on a  $P^*=0.45$ . The Council and GMT have both recognized the economic importance of this stock for open access, fixed gear and trawl fleets; the GAP sees little risk here of using a  $P^*$  of 0.45, yet the reward to fleets and coastal communities is immense.

The GAP also discussed a  $P^*$  of 0.40 out of concern for the long-term management of the resource, uncertainty of trawl surveys during the Covid-19 pandemic and current market conditions. To that end, the stock assessment does show improvement no matter which  $P^*$  is selected. However, to provide the most opportunity and flexibility to all fleets across all three states, the GAP settled on a  $P^*$  recommendation of 0.45. The GAP believes a lower alternative of  $P^*=0.40$  is sufficient to account for the uncertainty of the trawl survey data and therefore does not see the need for an analysis of  $P^*=0.35$ .

#### Lingcod

The GAP suggests retaining  $P^*=0.45$  within the range for analysis and also as the preliminary preferred alternative (PPA). It is important fishermen have access to lingcod, both north and south of 40° 10' N. lat., given the potential cutbacks with copper and quillback rockfish in California. GAP members have noted lingcod is still abundant but most of the lingcod have moved further offshore recently; fishermen are not finding them as readily as in the past. However, the GAP supports the  $P^*$  0.45 as PPA to afford the most flexibility in the future as targeting on other stocks will likely be limited. For charter boat fishermen, this is especially important for creating fishing trips to attract customers. Access to lingcod will be vital for South of Pt. Conception with the proposed reduction in copper and vermilion rockfish. Lingcod can be selectively targeted, typically using larger baits and fishing pinnacles, around the Channel Islands. Commercial GAP members said it appears lingcod are starting to return to the nearshore areas. Like sablefish, it is important to maintain opportunity to fish lingcod.

## Oregon black rockfish

The GAP agrees with the Oregon Department Of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) recommended “case-by-case” acceptable biological catch(ABC) (alternative 1) for black rockfish as the PPA, as noted in the [September 2021 ODFW report](#). The default HCR would likely constrain fisheries in 2023-2024, at a time when sport and commercial fishermen will need alternatives to traditional fisheries that aren’t as abundant, such as salmon. Furthermore, the new ODFW hydroacoustic survey will inform a new assessment.

## Spiny dogfish

As noted in our statement under Agenda Item E.2 (Groundfish Stock Assessments), the GAP greatly appreciates the additional work undertaken to inform stock status of spiny dogfish. The additional work highlighted the effects of West Coast Bottom Trawl Survey (WCBTS) catchability (“q”) on stock status. The spiny dogfish stock assessment demonstrates the stock has been stable for more than the past decade at current harvest levels (see Figure ES-4 in [Agenda Item E.2, Attachment 6](#)). The assessment also projects that the stock will remain relatively stable in the near term if annual catch limits (ACLs) in 2023 and 2024 were set close to current ACLs (see Table ES-7 in [Agenda Item E.2, Attachment 6](#)). Relative to the spiny dogfish decision table, the GAP highlights this decision table is atypical in that the “middle state of nature” is not the most probable state. The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) speaks to this in its report on groundfish stock assessments ([Agenda Item E.2.a, Supplemental SSC Report 1, November 2021](#)):

“[T]he SSC also recommends that the low, base and high states of nature not be assigned specific probabilities (as is typically done with decision tables).” (Page 2)

“The [SSC Groundfish Subcommittee] also discussed potential options for assigning weights to the states of nature in a revised decision table. Typically, these are assigned with higher weight to the middle state of nature (0.5) and lower weights to the low and high states of nature (0.25). Options discussed included equal weights, declining weights from the low to the high states of nature, and greater weight for the revised middle state of nature. Due to the uncertainty associated with the distribution of the revised states of nature, the GFSC recommends not assigning weights.” (Page 8)

While the SSC chose not to assign probabilities to the various states of nature, the GAP stresses that the additional work reviewed at the Mop-up Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panel provided evidence that lower “q” values were more plausible than higher “q” values because of, among other things, seasonal migration patterns and the timing of the WCBTS.

The GAP recognizes the SSC recommended adoption of a new base model with “q” fixed at 0.43 (that is, the “middle state of nature”). However, in setting harvest specifications, the GAP requests the Council consider that the “higher state of nature” could be as plausible as the “middle state” because this is supported by the additional analysis reviewed by the Mop-up Panel and could facilitate analysis of ACLs for 2023-2024 that are close to current ACL values.

With that in mind, the GAP recommends the Council **add an additional alternative**: “Full ACL for 2021 and 2022 catches; P\*0.4 with full ACL from new middle state (q = 0.43) after that,” which is the latter set of rows in the decision table (the ACLs would be 1,456 mt and 1,407 mt for 2023 and 2024, respectively). This alternative would be in addition to the new alternative proposed

by the GMT “ACL=1,075 mt for 2023-2024, then ACL=ABC P\* of 0.40 thereafter under the middle state of nature model (q = 0.43).” Including both of these alternatives for analysis would be informative in balancing the need for stock conservation, the potential negative impacts to the numerous groundfish fisheries that could be constrained by dogfish incidental catch, and the necessity of new management measures for 2023-2024.

#### Vermilion/sunset rockfish

The GAP agrees these rockfish are important stocks to commercial and recreational fishermen, particularly in southern California, and recommends retaining a default HCR of P\* of 0.45 as the PPA. If the fleets are expected to move to the shelf to decrease pressure on some nearshore stocks, it is important to keep these stocks available for flexibility in fishing operations. One charter representative noted these fish are ubiquitous and the problem will be trying to avoid them. The GAP expects to make more comments under Agenda Item E.5, management measures, regarding options for these stocks in order to maintain access while also keeping the vermilion/sunset biomass healthy.

#### California quillback rockfish

The GAP understands this stock, as overfished, will be removed from the nearshore complexes to facilitate a rebuilding plan and that more details will become available in April. The GAP expects to make more comments at that time.

#### Copper rockfish south of Pt. Conception

At this point, the GAP supports the SSC recommendation, as noted in the supplemental [SSC statement under this agenda](#) item:

“After discussion, the GFSC recommendation is that the two California assessments should be pooled for status determination. This results in an overall depletion of 31.7% of unfished spawning stock biomass of copper rockfish in California.”

This would obviate the need for a rebuilding plan, while awaiting a full assessment in the next stock assessment cycle.

**Table 1.** Summary of GAP recommendations for specific stocks.

<b>Stock</b>	<b><u>GMT Report 1</u> (GMT recommendations in bold)</b>	<b>GAP recommendation</b>
Sablefish (coastwide)	<b>ABC P*=0.45 (default HCR)/ ABC P*=0.40 (alt. 1)</b>	P*=0.45; range in GMT Report 1 sufficient for analysis
Lingcod north of 40° 10' N. lat.	Range: ABC P*=0.45 (default HCR)/ ABC P*=0.40 (alt. 1)	Retain P*=0.45; ACL=ABC both north and south; P*=0.40 for analysis
Lingcod south of 40° 10' N. lat.	Range: ABC P*=0.45 (default HCR)/ ABC P*=0.40 (alt. 1)	Retain P*=0.45 both north and south; P*=0.40 for analysis
Oregon black rockfish	<b>ABC P*=0.45/ ODFW “case by case”; ABC=512 mt</b>	ODFW “case by case”; ABC=512 mt
Spiny dogfish	ABC P*=0.40 (default HCR)/ ACL=1,075 mt 2023-2024; then ACL=ABC P*=0.40 under middle state of nature (q=0.43)	<b>NEW alternative:</b> Full ACL for 2021 and 2022 catches; P*0.4 with full ACL from new middle state (q = 0.43) after that
Vermilion/sunset rockfish north of 40° 10' N. lat.	ABC P*=0.45 (default HCR)/ ABC P*=0.40 (alt. 1)	ABC P*=0.45 (default HCR) Range is sufficient for analysis
Vermilion/sunset rockfish south of 40° 10' N. lat.	ABC P*=0.45 (default HCR)/ ABC P*=0.40 (alt. 1)	ABC P*=0.45 (default HCR) Range is sufficient for analysis
<b>Stock</b>	<b>GMT Report XX (GMT recommendations in bold)</b>	<b>GAP recommendation</b>
California quillback rockfish		Default HCR of P* of 0.45
Copper rockfish south of Pt. Conception		Pool both California stock assessments for status determination per SSC

*Reference links:*

<https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2021/10/e-3-attachment-1-2023-and-2024-groundfish-harvest-specifications-under-default-harvest-control-rules.pdf/>

<https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2021/10/e-3-attachment-2-draft-status-of-the-pacific-coast-groundfish-fishery-stock-assessment-and-fishery-evaluation-electronic-only.pdf/>

<https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2021/10/attachment-3-catch-only-projections-for-black-rockfish-sebastes-melanops-off-oregon-in-2021.pdf/>

<https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2021/10/e-3-attachment-4-harvest-specification-projections-for-select-west-coast-groundfish-stocks-under-alternative-harvest-control-rules-for-2023-and-beyond.pdf/>

<https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2021/10/e-3-attachment-5-evaluating-available-information-to-determine-stock-management-delineation-for-copper-rockfish-sebastes-caurinus-off-the-u-s-west-coast.pdf/>

<https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2021/10/e-3-attachment-6-evaluating-available-information-to-inform-stock-management-delineation-for-quillback-rockfish-sebastes-maliger-off-the-u-s-west-coast.pdf/>

<https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2021/11/e-3-a-gmt-report-1-groundfish-management-team-report-on-biennial-harvest-specifications-for-2023-24-including-overfishing-limits-and-acceptable-biological-catches.pdf/>

<https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2021/11/e-3-a-gmt-report-2-groundfish-management-team-report-on-stock-complexes.pdf/>

SSC statement on stock assessments:

<https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2021/11/e-2-a-supplemental-ssc-report-1-2.pdf/>

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