

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT -
BIENNIAL MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR 2023-2024

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) and Groundfish Management Team (GMT) discussed a suite of management measures alternatives for the 2023-2024 biennium. As in the past, we provide some general comments and then work through the items in order as identified in E.5, Attachment 1, Action Item Checklist. The GAP comments on only those items for which we provide additional support, recommendations, and/or suggestions. We do not provide comments on the items we believe represent appropriate ranges for analysis to move forward.

In general, the GAP discussion centered around whether the proposed ranges of management measures were sufficient to provide flexibility to the fleets while managing some likely very strict annual catch limits (ACLs) anticipated for vermilion/sunset rockfish, copper rockfish, and quillback rockfish, particularly in California. The GAP acknowledges there may be significant workload and discussion regarding this new information and is trying to balance expected workload with the needs of the fishing fleets.

Regarding stock complexes, the GAP understands California quillback will be removed from the nearshore rockfish complex, anticipating it will be declared overfished. The GAP does not support inclusion of comprehensive restructuring of the stock complexes in the biennial harvest specifications process due to workload, which the GMT speaks to in [Agenda Item E.3.a, GMT Report 2](#), stock complexes.

Management measures for copper and quillback rockfish will create dire consequences, which is an understatement. As fishermen have said, “We are in survival mode.” That is *not* an understatement: the ACLs and measures necessary for managing to those ACLs will likely be, by necessity, draconian. Fishermen have been grappling with ways to decrease pressure on these nearshore stocks while targeting the shelf species. Fishermen also remain cognizant that yelloweye rockfish are still sensitive to fishing pressure on the shelf, so midwater fishing methods are preferable, if available.

To that end, the GAP reiterates our recommendation to allow the regulatory use of jig fishing gear in the Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA, as explored in the [Yellowtail Rockfish Jig Fishing \(Emley-Platt\) exempted fishing permit \(EFP\)](#)) as soon as possible via whatever vehicle is best. This action could have significant economic benefits to the limited entry fixed gear and open access fleets as the nearshore areas become more restricted.

As noted in our biennial management statement from [September 2021](#), “...recent stock status information indicates midwater species in nearshore zones are relatively healthy and abundant. Therefore, the GAP recommends the Council consider development of measures that facilitate access to these species by commercial and recreational fleets using midwater gear. This is likely to provide fishermen more opportunity and relieve some of the pressure on nearshore bottom-dwelling species.”

2. Area Management

The GAP supports the proposed RCA management line updates as described in California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) reports from June and September 2021, because this action will be helpful to fishermen. GAP members appreciate CDFW's work on this.

3. Off-the-top deductions: Research, Exempted Fishing Permits and Incidental Open Access (OA)

The GAP supports exploring a range of changes to the off-the-top deductions for research and OA to accommodate open access fishermen to target shortspine thornyhead north of 34° 27' N. lat. The current trip limit is 50 pounds per month, but OA fishermen would like to increase that number to 100 pounds. These are valuable fish to the OA fleet and this action would also prevent regulatory discards while fishing for sablefish.

5. Annual Catch Targets (ACT)

The GAP suggests the Council may want to consider revising the cowcod rockfish ACT in light of potentially re-opening some of the Cowcod Conservation Areas (CCAs). The GAP does not have a specific ACT recommendation at this time, and consideration of a revised ACT may be more appropriate in April or June. Similarly, given the increase in the yelloweye ACL for 2023-2024, the Council may consider revising the yelloweye ACT. We flag these issues warranting further consideration and potential action at future meetings.

6b. Rebuilding species allocations: Yelloweye rockfish

The GAP recommends revisiting this in April 2022 as part of the 2023-2024 measures package as the Council considers redistribution of effort from the nearshore to the shelf.

8. Harvest guidelines/State shares for stocks in a complex

The GAP anticipates looking at this more closely in April 2022, especially for nearshore rockfish north of 40°10' N. lat., given the effort to decrease fishing pressure on nearshore stocks.

10. Within trawl set-asides: At-sea whiting for 2023-2024

The GAP recommends continuing to use the at-sea whiting set-aside values from 2021-2022 for the next biennium, recognizing the analysis and [tribal requests](#) under this agenda item could necessitate further consideration in April 2022.

11. Within non-trawl harvest guidelines, ACTs or shares

As has been discussed, the GAP anticipates significant restrictions to some stocks, particularly as more effort will shift from the nearshore areas to the shelf. We anticipate more discussion about this suite of management measures in April 2022.

12. 'New management measures'

Cowcod Conservation Areas repeal

The GAP remains interested in this topic moving forward. However, it is unclear what regulatory vehicle is the most appropriate. During discussions with the GMT, it sounds as if the most appropriate place for this issue is in the non-trawl sector area management action (Agenda Item E.6). The GAP supports removing this from the management measures package and adding it to the non-trawl sector area management *if* that is the quickest path to getting

these area changes into regulation. As we have stated before, measures like this that will provide more flexibility to the fleets, which is needed now more than ever because of the need to reduce impacts on quillback, copper, and vermilion/sunset rockfish. Repealing the CCAs will be extremely important for fishermen to access midwater stocks such as chilipepper rockfish. Furthermore, habitat impacts will be part of the analysis for CCA line changes. It is possible the required analysis will likely take more time than is currently available in the biennial harvest specifications process.

Prohibit directed fishery for shortbelly rockfish

This has been discussed several times and the GAP defers to Agenda Item E.5.a, [NMFS Report 1](#) the [Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Report 1](#) relative to guidance for the Council.

Access to the Non-Trawl RCA with Hook-and-Line Gear

The GAP requests the Council consider including Non-Trawl RCA Alternative 1 (Sub-option A2 and B1) and Alternative 2 (Sub-options A2 and B1) from [Agenda Item E.6., Attachment 1](#) within the new management measures for the 2023-2024 biennium. This is also discussed under Agenda item E.6.a, Supplemental GAP Report 1. This would authorize selected hook-and-line gears to be used within the Non-trawl RCA south of 46° 16' N. lat. Prohibited gears would include bottom longline, pot, bottom gillnet, vertical set lines, and dinglebar. This management measure would be in place to provide immediate relief to the nearshore stocks that were assessed during this cycle (copper rockfish south of Point Conception and quillback rockfish (California and Oregon)), and provide increased fishing opportunity to rebuilt midwater stocks, and economic relief to the fishing industry.

14a. Trip limits, bag limits and season structure: Remove the daily limit for sablefish daily trip limit for open access north of 36° N. lat.

This action would provide more opportunity for open access fishermen, particularly in California, many of whom will need the flexibility due to restrictions in the nearshore fisheries, and the GAP supports this measure.

14b. Routine adjustments to the non-trawl RCA configurations, trip limits, size limits

Sport fishermen in Southern California recommended RCA line changes to access the northwest portion of Nine-Mile Bank. The northwestern corner is all within the 100-fathom line and would allow access to both commercial and recreational fleets out of San Diego. It is an area rich in chilipepper, greenblotched, and bocaccio rockfish. This would allow fleets to more efficiently avoid vermilion/sunset rockfish and is deeper than areas where copper rockfish typically inhabit.

15c. Extension of primary limited entry fixed gear (LEFG) season end date to Dec. 31

This management measure may become part of the trailing actions package from the primary LEFG package that is intended for Council discussion in March 2022. However, like the GAP's CCA line changes suggestion, we would recommend this move forward in whichever vehicle will get it implemented most quickly, in time for the 2023 season.

18. California recreational bag limits, season structure, length limits, etc.

California sport fishermen on the GAP also support the potential use of size limits (that would need to be determined) for vermilion and copper rockfish (as a tool in the toolbox), paired with the use of descending devices to increase fishing opportunity. This may help avoid a major economic fishery disaster (potentially a loss of \$60 million or more) due to boats and businesses going out of business in California.

Furthermore, the GAP supports including an analysis to enable survival credits for use of descending devices for vermilion, copper, and quillback rockfish. These are already in place for canary, cowcod, and yelloweye rockfish and the three vulnerable rockfish stocks have similar physiology; that is, big rib cages, thick gas bladders, etc. GAP members noted there was likely to be expanded use of descender devices regardless, to reduce mortality. However, survival credits may provide a little more flexibility for fishing their operations.

PFMC
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