

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON NON-TRAWL SECTOR AREA MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the materials in the advanced briefing book, including the Analysis To Support The Development Of A Range Of Alternatives ([Agenda Item E.6., Attachment 1, November 2021](#)), and received a briefing from Mr. Brett Wiedoff and Ms. Jessi Doerpinghaus from Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) staff. The Council's action under this agenda item consists of four parts: 1) review priority issues; 2) consider adopting a Range of Alternatives (ROA); 3) consider adopting Preliminary Preferred Alternatives (PPA); and 4) provide guidance for development of additional management measures as needed.

Background

The ROA analyzed in [Agenda Item E.6., Attachment 1, November 2021](#) includes three alternatives, and a variety of sub-options. Briefly, Alternatives 1 and 2 are similar but address open access (OA) and limited entry fixed gear (LEFG) sectors, respectively, accessing the non-trawl Rockfish Conservation Area (NTRCA) using approved hook-and-line gear. Both alternatives include sub-options related to fishing area and allowable gear on board. Specifically, both alternatives include:

- Sub-option A1: fishing inside and outside the NTRCA not allowed on the same trip,
- Sub-option A2: allowing fishing inside and outside the NTRCA on the same trip,
- Sub-option B1: allowing only approved hook-and-line gear on-board when fishing in the NTRCA and not allowing gear switching on the same trip, and
- Sub-option B2: allowing multiple gear types on board when fishing in the NTRCA and allowing OA gear fishing outside of the NTRCA on the same trip.

Throughout this report, references to Sub-options incorporate both Alternatives 1 and 2 unless otherwise stated. Finally, Alternative 3 would reconfigure the NTRCA boundaries.

Draft Purpose and Need

The GMT recognizes that the draft purpose and need statement, adopted in April 2021 ([Agenda Item F.3, Draft Motion in Writing, April 2021](#)), may be overly narrow in scope, given that [Agenda Item E.6.a, Supplemental WDFW Report 1, November 2021](#) highlights the interest in opening the NTRCA off Washington to improve the value of sablefish catch by providing access to larger sablefish in slightly shallower waters. Unlike off Oregon and California, the purpose of opening the NTRCA off Washington would not be to “provide increased attainment of available healthy shelf rockfish stocks,” as described in the draft purpose and need statement. The GMT suggests revising the purpose and need statement to be inclusive of all non-trawl sectors that have been constrained by rebuilding stocks and offers the following revision:

“The actions are needed to provide increased utilization of non-overfished shelf rockfish species, as well as other important target stocks, that reside within the existing non-trawl groundfish conservation areas (GCAs), thereby increasing the overall economic value of the groundfish fishery.”

Adopting an ROA

The GMT focused our discussion on any alternatives and sub-options that were infeasible to move forward as part of the ROA. To that end, **the GMT agrees with the Enforcement Consultants (EC) report ([Agenda Item E.6, Supplemental EC Report 1, November 2021](#)) and recommends the Council not move forward Sub-Option B2 in the ROA, as allowing multiple gear types on board would make enforcing gear restrictions infeasible.** The GMT recognizes that allowing any gear on board under Sub-Option B2 could be more convenient for fishermen, especially if Sub-Option A2 moves forward; however, due to the lack of enforceability the GMT recommends removal. **The GMT recommends that Alternatives 1 and 2, including Sub-Options A1, A2, and B1, and Alternative 3 should move forward in the ROA.**

The GMT expects that the Council will discuss the potential repeal of the Cowcod Conservation Area (CCA) under Agenda Item E.5 at this meeting and may propose moving that action from the 2023-2024 harvest specifications and management measures package into this larger NTRCA package. In order to streamline these similar analyses and to ensure the 2023-2024 harvest specifications and management measures are implemented by January 1, 2023, **the GMT recommends adding the CCA repeal into the ROA.**

The GMT recommends the Council add the requested NTRCA adjustments off Washington as noted in [Agenda Item E.6.a, Supplemental WDFW Report 1, November 2021](#) to the ROA as a stand-alone alternative. The GMT interprets the request to investigate NTRCA adjustments off Washington to be a separate, stand-alone alternative, because the intent behind the request is to open select areas within the NTRCA without necessarily adjusting the entire extent of the 100-fathom boundary off Washington and possibly just for vessels using pot gear. However, since “select areas” have not been identified at this point in time, the entire 75-fathom to 100-fathom area should be considered as within the ROA. Within this range, analysts could consider things such as impacts to habitat, potential yelloweye rockfish bycatch, catch and effort patterns of sablefish, and the likelihood of whale entanglements per the Biological Opinion.

Additionally, The GMT agrees with the GAP recommendation to use the 75-fathom line that is already in regulation, as opposed to the 80-fathom line that was noted in the Attachment 1 analysis and is not currently in regulation. This would relieve the workload involved in establishing new boundary lines that approximate depth contours.

Potential Management Measures

As with many pathways to increasing access to fishing grounds, the potential ROA for this action will include many possible impacts to the ocean ecosystem. As the ROA is selected and analysis continues, the magnitude of these risks will become clearer and the Council may need to consider potential management measures to mitigate these impacts. The GMT outlines some of these concerns and potential management measures to consider as this action progresses.

First, as noted by the Habitat Committee (HC), habitat impacts due to opening this area to fishing are uncertain and will differ between alternatives and sub-options ([Agenda Item F.3.a, Supplemental HC Report 1, April 2021](#)). The GMT supports the HC’s suggestion to assist in the development of future analysis of habitat impacts related to these management measures. The GMT also notes the HC report and the Oceana public comment discussed the proposed openings

of the NTRCA and Essential Fishing Habitat Conservation Areas (EFHCAs) and the differences between bottom-contact EFHCAs and bottom trawl EFHCAs. The GMT will continue to follow and engage in these conversations, which may identify additional concerns or pathways forward for fishing opportunities and habitat conservation.

Second, this proposed action could result in increased yelloweye rockfish bycatch, as noted previously in [Agenda Item F.3.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, April 2021](#). Potential use of Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Areas (YRCAs) could be used to mitigate impacts to yelloweye rockfish (and de facto yelloweye rockfish habitat) as a result of this action. YRCAs are a management measure that are currently in the regulations (Part 660 §600.70). The Council could also consider developing block area closures (BACs) as was done for the trawl fisheries under Amendment 28. BACs can restrict fishing by gear type and sector within specific latitudes and depth contours and can be implemented inseason or preseason. If bycatch of yelloweye rockfish or prohibited species (e.g., salmon) were to occur in reopened areas, then the Council could use these tools to react as needed. However, the development of YRCAs and BACs would require additional workload outside of the current scope of the ROA.

Finally, the analysis ([Agenda Item E.6., Attachment 1, November 2021](#)) recognized that the potential impacts to other protected and prohibited species are mostly uncertain. Once an ROA is selected, analysis can provide additional qualitative assessment of these impacts. Potential management measures, whether already available or new, can be considered to address these risks as they are more clearly defined.

PFMC
11/19/21