POTENTIAL PATHWAYS TO DEFINING STOCKS IN THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has declined making a status determination for quillback rockfish pending approval of a fishery management plan (FMP) amendment to define stocks in need of conservation and management in the FMP (Agenda Item E.3.a, NMFS Report 1). The FMP would define stocks and complexes used for annual management and for making future status determinations. Status determinations would not be made until an FMP amendment is approved.

The following are two potential pathways offered by NMFS to accomplish this action.

1. Considerations for Option 1

Option 1 would have the Council amend the FMP in a separate process from the 2023-24 spex.

Option 1 offers a more deliberative approach at restructuring stock complexes that are more closely aligned with the National Standard 1 (NS1) guidelines.

The recommended process steps for Option 1 would be to signal that pathway under Agenda Item E.3 at the March Council meeting followed by prioritizing this effort with respect to other groundfish initiatives under Agenda Item E.6. Under Agenda Item C.7, the Council should schedule floor time to begin addressing this issue as soon as practicable. For 2023-24 spex, the Council should continue to develop management measures based on the best scientific information available to meet the goals and objectives in the FMP.

It would also be helpful for the Council to signal their preference for how they intend to manage quillback rockfish in 2023-24 under Agenda Item E.3 to prepare for an April action to adopt final harvest specifications. For example, if there is a preference to continue to manage quillback rockfish in the Nearshore Rockfish complexes in 2023-24 under default harvest control rules, the specification values for the Nearshore Rockfish complexes with a California quillback contribution can be reviewed by the SSC and others in April. In this scenario, one of the actions the Council should consider in April is rescinding the November 2021 motion to remove California quillback from those complexes before entertaining any motion to adopt final harvest specifications. Advisory bodies are encouraged to offer their recommendations for a preferred process under Agenda Item E.3 to aid the Council in their decision-making.

2. Considerations for Option 2

Option 2 would have the Council define stocks and stock complexes in the FMP in the 2023-24 spex process.

Deciding an FMP amendment in the 2023-24 spex process is likely to be a less comprehensive consideration of complex restructuring since there are only two meetings left to decide 2023-24 spex. A simpler action such as defining stocks in the FMP as they are described with the current complex structures in Federal regulations could be accomplished in the 2023-24 spex process. A

larger lift to align stock complexes that are more in compliance with NS1 guidelines by June is a less tenable strategy. The Option 2 pathway could also compromise timely implementation of 2023-24 harvest specifications and management measures on January 1, 2023.

The recommended process steps for Option 2 would be to signal that pathway and adopt a preliminary preferred complex structure under Agenda Item E.3 at the March Council meeting to enable timely review of preferred harvest specifications by the SSC and other advisors at the April meeting.

3. Implications for Council Decision-making, Workload, and Process

- Council votes in April, under the groundfish specifications agenda item, to rescind November motion that removes certain nearshore species (i.e., quillback rockfish) from the Nearshore Rockfish complexes (decision during April CM).
- GMT proceeds to develop spex analysis that includes a range of alternatives, one of which includes species like quillback and copper rockfish within the nearshore complexes (decision under Agenda Item E.9).

    - This may or may not include measures that add some protection for quillback, pending Council direction (direction can be provided under Agenda Item E.9).
    - This may entail further evaluation of discard mortality and descending devices.

- Council develops a comprehensive, coastwide evaluation of complex management at a time TBD, including A) which species should be managed in complexes and under Federal management, B) how/whether the complexes should be restructured (discussed and preferred course identified under Agenda Item E.3, prioritize under Agenda Item E.6, schedule under Agenda Item C.7).

    - Under Option 1, this is a bigger picture, longer term project.
    - Under Option 2, this would be lumped in to the 2023-24 spex analysis.

PFMC
03/01/22