

## GROUND FISH ADVISORY PANEL REPORT ON UPDATE ON 2023-2024 HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received an update from the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) on the status of 2023-2024 management measures. The GAP offers the following comments and recommendations.

### **Non-Trawl Rockfish Conservation Area**

As the Council is aware, the non-trawl sector has been working for several years to get the Non-Trawl Rockfish Conservation Area (NT RCA) opened to non-trawl groundfish fishermen. This is a top priority for the non-trawl sector, and it is imperative for the economic vitality of non-trawl fishermen and fishing ports that access is granted soon. The current status of several nearshore stocks heightens this need as pressure should be taken off of vulnerable nearshore species, and allowing fishermen to move into the NT RCA could serve this purpose and facilitate access to healthy midwater stocks.

The GAP reviewed the [NMFS report](#) and the recommendations for narrowing the scope of 12e, Groundfish Retention in the NT RCA. At this time, we support the recommendation to narrow the scope of Action Item 12e to the specific gear used in the Emley/Platt and the Real Good Fish [Monterey] exempted fishing permits (EFPs).

Council staff flagged a related issue for the GAP regarding the need for guidance related to what would occur in the 30-40 fm depths from 40°10' to 46°16' N. lat. under 12e. In 2021-22, vessels are allowed to use any hook-and-line gear except for dinglebar and longline in this area. Under 12e, though, any bottom contact hook-and-line gear (such as vertical hook-and-line gear anchored to the bottom) would also be prohibited. The GAP supports having all areas within the NT RCA be subject to the same fishing requirements and therefore any action taken by 12e should supersede the 21-22 regulations.

We support this approach with the understanding that it will enable regulations to be finalized and implemented by January 1, 2023. To be clear, we view this as a first step, and we will continue to pursue opportunities to allow other gear types in the future.

### **Block Area Closures**

The GMT updated the GAP on a mismatch between the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and Federal Register language that would prevent the use of block area closures (BACs) as a tool for bycatch avoidance in the midwater trawl fishery. The GAP agrees that the FMP should be updated to allow use of BACs as one tool in the toolbox. That said, the GAP continues to believe that industry-developed bycatch avoidance plans can be more surgical, timely, and effective. If BACs are to be used, it should be later in the year when bycatch rates, particularly for dogfish, tend to be higher. The GAP believes that cooperative level industry plans should be the first line of defense with the BACs as a “last resort” backstop.

## **California Recreational RCA**

The GAP supports inclusion of [California Department of Fish and Wildlife's](#) proposed approach to RCA line application for consideration as a new management measure for potential use in the 2023-2024 cycle. The GAP believes this is a tool that, used under the right circumstances, could protect vulnerable species and allow for ongoing recreational opportunity. The GAP notes that it could pose enforcement challenges and recommends that the Enforcement Consultants provide their input on enforceability. The GAP also notes that there could be value (maximum opportunity relative to vulnerable species catch) through consideration of both an inside and outside line as is done for the commercial hook-and-line fishery.

PFMC  
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