

**NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE REPORT
FOR 2023-2024 GROUND FISH BIENNIAL MANAGEMENT MEASURES**

At the March 2022 Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) submitted a report ([Agenda Item E.9.a Supplemental NMFS Report 1](#)) containing proposed revisions to the Council's November 2021 motion on Action Item 12e, which would provide limited fishing access to the Non-Trawl Rockfish Conservation Area (NT-RCA) as a management measure in the 2023-24 Groundfish Harvest Specifications and Management Measures action.

The Council's Enforcement Committee (EC) and members of the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) provided feedback on some elements of NMFS' proposal, namely the proposed definition of the directed open access sector and some of the proposed specifications for the new gear configurations that would be legalized for use inside the NT-RCA. In response to this feedback, NMFS provides a revised proposal for Action Item 12e:

Proposed Revision for Action Item 12e in the November 2021 Motion: Version 2

Allow vessels in the directed open access fishery targeting groundfish to operate inside the NT-RCA from 46° 16' N. latitude to the U.S./Mexico border with non-bottom contact hook-and-line gear only, subject to the specifications below. Prohibited bottom contact hook-and-line gears would include bottom longline, commercial vertical hook-and-line gear (anchored to the bottom), and dinglebar gear. Vessels must declare their intent to fish within the NT-RCA prior to departure. Vessels may fish inside and outside of the non-trawl RCA on the same trip but may only carry legal non-bottom contact hook-and-line gear on-board the vessel when fishing occurs in the NT-RCA.

New gear definition

Non-bottom contact hook-and-line gear means open access groundfish troll gear or stationary jig gear attached to the vessel and not anchored to the bottom. The following requirements apply to groundfish stationary jig gear: 1) gear must be suspended no less than 50 feet from the bottom; 2) no more than 4 vertical mainlines may be used at one time with no more than 25 hooks on each mainline, and; 3) no more than 100 hooks may be on board or in the water at one time. Groundfish troll gear includes a horizontally-suspended monofilament mainline attached to a troll wire. The following requirements apply to groundfish troll gear: 1) gear must be suspended no less than 50 feet off the bottom; 2) no more than 1 mainline may be used at one time, and 3) no more than a total of 500 hooks may be on board or in the water at one time; hooks must be spaced apart by floats, with no more than 25 hooks between each float and no more than 20 floats on the mainline. Both stationary jig gear and groundfish troll gear may be equipped with artificial lures and flies. Natural bait or weighted hooks may not be used nor be on board the vessel during the trip.

New sector definition within the definition for open access fishery

Directed open access means that a fishing vessel is target fishing for groundfish under the requirements of 50 CFR 660 Subpart F and is only declared into an open access groundfish gear type or sector as defined at 50 CFR 660.13(d)(4)(iv)(A) and has not declared into any other gear type or sector.

Summary of Revisions

First, based on feedback from the GAP, NMFS revised the minimum depth requirement for the vertical jig gear configuration to be 50 feet off the bottom as opposed to 30 feet off the bottom. This change makes the requirement consistent across both proposed gear configurations and also conforms to the minimum depth that is practiced by Emley-Platt exempted fishing permit participants. Second, NMFS added a requirement to the troll gear configuration specifications to require the placement of floats along the mainline, with no more than 25 hooks in between each float and no more than 20 floats total. This change would improve the practicality of enforcing the maximum hook requirement at sea. Third, in response to additional EC concerns, NMFS added language dictating that only artificial bait may be used in the water *and carried on board*. Similar to this, NMFS also added language dictating that the hook requirement would apply to the number of hooks allowable in the water *and on board*. Last, in response to feedback from both the EC and the GAP, NMFS revised the definition of directed open access to be predicated on target fishing for groundfish as opposed to landing only groundfish. This change would ensure that groundfish fishers landing a small amount of other species would still be allowed to fish inside the NT-RCA, and would also be subject to the forthcoming non-trawl logbook requirement whether fishing inside or outside of the NT-RCA.