GROUNDFISH ADVISORY PANEL REPORT ON BIENNIAL HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS FOR 2023-2024 FISHERIES

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received a report from Mr. John DeVore, Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) Staff, and discussed the biennial harvest specifications for 2023-2024 fisheries. We offer the following considerations and comments.

General considerations

The GAP appreciates the discussion of default harvest control rules (HCRs) for several species and notes below the species where the Council is considering new harvest control rules (HCRs) as noted in Agenda Item F.3, Supplemental REVISED Attachment 1. Those species include Oregon black rockfish, lingcod north of 40°10' N lat., sablefish, spiny dogfish, vermilion and sunset rockfishes south of 40°10' N lat., and vermilion rockfish north of 40°10' N lat. The GAP offers their recommendations on final preferred alternatives for *some* of these stocks and species, as listed below. For the others, we support the no action alternative. We also include comments regarding copper and quillback rockfish.

Oregon black rockfish

After discussion with Mr. DeVore, the GAP recommends **Alternative 1**, as noted in Agenda Item F.3, Supplemental REVISED Attachment 1 (**ACL=2020 ABC [P*=0.45]; 512 mt ACL for 2023 & 2024**). This is consistent with the GMT's recommendation as listed in Supplemental GMT Report 1 under this agenda item.

As the GAP has noted previously and is pointed out in Attachment 1, this is an important stock for nearshore sport and commercial fisheries in Oregon. It may become even more important as concern over other nearshore groundfish species could result in precautionary management. We also noted in our November 2021 GAP Report 1 that the default HCR would likely constrain fisheries in the next biennium, when salmon stocks may not be as abundant and fishermen will be looking to alternative stocks to remain economically viable. The GAP anticipates a new Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife hydroacoustic survey will produce additional data to inform a new stock assessment.

Sablefish

The **GAP recommends no action on sablefish** (**a P* of 0.45 for sablefish as a final preferred alternative**), consistent with our recommendation from November 2021 and consistent with the Supplemental GMT Report 1. This is a departure from the PPA of Alternative 1 (P*=0.40). We noted in September 2021 that the stock remains healthy, as indicated by the recent update stock assessment. The stock assessment shows the biomass can support a harvest strategy based on a P*=0.45. Changing the P* now to account for management uncertainty is not warranted; there is no conservation concern.

Additionally, the GAP references the supplemental Tribal report under this agenda item, which also supports a P*=0.45. The Council, tribes and GMT have all recognized the economic importance of this stock for open access (OA), limited entry fixed gear (LEFG) and trawl fleets,

especially as management measures to restrict harvest of nearshore rockfish stocks, particularly in California, will limit some OA and LEFG fishermen's abilities to continue operating. As we noted in November, the reward to fleets and coastal communities is immense.

Documents under this agenda item indicate economic conditions may support a lower P* value. However, the GAP notes setting a precedent for a lower value due to economic or market conditions may unfairly promote the economic viability of one sector over another. Therefore, the GAP does not recommend the Council select a lower P* based on this argument. Decisions made on P* should be based on stock assessments and consideration of the viability of communities as a whole. We reference National Standard 5, which states:

> (5) Conservation and management measures shall, where practicable, consider efficiency in the utilization of fishery resources; except that no such measure shall have economic allocation as its sole purpose.

Furthermore, members of the GAP noted that sablefish are prevalent in trawl tows, with catch in the first few months of 2022 exceeding that of previous years. Anecdotal evidence seems to support the stock assessment that shows sablefish improvement.

Spiny dogfish

The GAP references and expands upon our comments and rationale from our November 2021 Report (Agenda Item E.3.a, Supplemental GAP Report 1, November 2021) in recommending the Council adopt the **No Action alternative for spiny dogfish** in 2023 and 2024. The GMT also recommends the No Action alternative.

Stability of the dogfish stock is an important consideration for the Council as they take action to adopt final preferred annual catch limits (ACL) for 2023 and 2024. The spiny dogfish stock assessment demonstrates the stock has been stable for more than the past decade at current harvest levels (see Figure ES-4 in Agenda Item E.2, Attachment 6, November 2021). The assessment also projects that the stock will remain relatively stable in the near term if ACLs in 2023 and 2024 are set close to current ACLs (see Table 2-5 in Agenda Item F.3, Supplemental REVISED Attachment 1, April 2022). Moreover, based on stock assessment (Agenda Item E.2, Attachment 6, November 2021) endorsed by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and adopted by the Council in November 2021, there is little to no difference in the projected status of spiny dogfish stock across a wide range of ACL values (Table 1).

	Year	Catch Level (mt)	Depletion (Middle State of Nature, (q =0.43)
"Old Base Model"	2023	655	0.417
	2024	635	0.418
Alternative 1	2023	1,075	0.42
	2024	1,075	0.42
No Action	2023	1,456	0.417
	2024	1,407	0.417

Table 1. Excerpted from (first set of 2023 and 2024 ACLs) Table E-7, Agenda Item E.2, Attachment 6, November 2021, and (second and third set of ACLs) from Table 2-5 in Agenda Item F.3, Supplemental REVISED Attachment 1, April 2022)

It is clear from the SSC-endorsed science that the spiny dogfish stock has remained stable over the past 10 years and is projected to remain stable into the future across a range of potential ACLs, including harvest levels close to recent ACLs.

With all this in mind, the GAP recommends the Council adopt the No Action Alternative as the Final ACL values for 2023 and 2024. This alternative would balance the need for stock conservation, the potential negative impacts to the numerous groundfish fisheries that could be constrained by spiny dogfish incidental catch under Alternative 1, and the necessity of new management measures for 2023-2024.

Copper and quillback rockfish

The GAP continues to have concerns with respect to data limitations in both the copper and quillback stock assessments. These are noted in our November GAP report under Agenda Item E.2.a. Other statements further describe these in September public comment under C.6.c and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) statement under C.6.a.

The GAP supports managing both copper and quillback rockfish within their complexes. Magnuson-Stevens Act National Standard 3 reads, "To the extent practicable, an individual stock of fish shall be managed as a unit throughout its range, and interrelated stocks of fish shall be managed as a unit or in close coordination."

These fish are caught in concert with other co-occurring congener species within their complexes. Thus, draconian measures restricting the catch of any member species so as to optimize its productivity can de-optimize the productivity of the complex as a whole. This happens when seasons are shortened and spatial access is restricted through closed areas.

Given catch levels attained while these fish were being targeted, all alternatives in developing quillback harvest specification contributions show levels below those which could be attained by restricting bag limits and trip limits alone.

This appears true for California copper rockfish also. In that light, the California recreational fishing community is mobilizing to avoid copper rockfish voluntarily this year, 2022, fishing under current management measures.

This is an effort to demonstrate their ability to reduce catches of these fish through more nimble voluntary measures and without additional spatial closures or shortened seasons. The resulting reduction in catch should not be misinterpreted by assessors as reduced availability indicating reduced stock size.

PFMC
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