

**Suggested Changes to the Pacific Coast Fishery Management Plan to support  
Amendment 30 to the Fishery Management Plan**

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) is considering final action for the 2023-2024 groundfish harvest specifications and management measures at their June 2022 meeting. Several management measures, if adopted as their Final Preferred Alternatives (FPA), would require changes to the [Pacific Groundfish Fishery Management Plan \(FMP\)](#), as described in Table 1.

**Table 1. New management measures, if selected as FPA, the FMP will need to be amended.**

Action Item Checklist # <sup>1</sup>	Item Summary	FMP Section(s)
12c	Specify a 2,000 mt shortbelly rockfish bycatch threshold	4.4.4
12f	Extending the length of the sablefish primary “tier” season	6.8.1
12i(1) & (2)	RCA for more than just overfished species conservation and shoreward extent	6.8.2
12j	Expanding the use of Block Area Closures (BACs)	6.8.3

Regardless of the Council’s FPA selection in June, Council staff note that the description of BACs should be updated for consistency with prior Council action and current regulations, described in Table 2.

**Table 2. Corrections to the FMP, regardless of Council action in June 2022.**

Action Item Checklist #	Item Summary	FMP Section(s)
12g	Corrections to the Block Area Closure definition	2.2, 6.8.3

The following shows the corrections, new text, and the FMP sections for each change in the FMP. Corrections and additions are in red bold lettering and text deletions in red strikethrough. These additions and corrections would require Amendment 30 to the FMP. The following language is only suggested and may be changed by the Council, as appropriate, or may change to reflect Council final action on the 2023-2024 groundfish management measures.

**Shortbelly Rockfish Threshold (12c)**

If adopted for FPA, the following language was adopted by the Council at the April 2022 meeting would be added to the FMP. Adding the shortbelly rockfish threshold text would formalize the threshold and subsequent review of shortbelly rockfish by the Council. This requirement would be added to Section 4.4.4 Ecosystem Component Stocks Without OFL Values, page 27.

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<sup>1</sup> Item number corresponds to F.6 Attachment 1, Action Item Checklist, June 2022

“Shortbelly rockfish is an ecosystem component (EC) species. Shortbelly rockfish is one of the most abundant rockfish species in the California Current Ecosystem (CCE) and is a key forage species for many fish, birds, and marine mammals. The Council has adopted the process to track the bycatch of this species to assess potential fishery impacts on shortbelly stock. The Council shall review fishery-incurred mortality of shortbelly rockfish during the routinely scheduled groundfish inseason agenda item. If the mortality exceeds, or is projected to exceed, 2,000 mt in a calendar year, the Council shall review and investigate all relevant information, including but not limited to, survey abundance trends and other stock status information, changes in fishing behavior, and changes in the market interest for shortbelly rockfish.

In response to the review of the information, the Council will consider voluntary measures taken by the fishing industry to reduce bycatch and consider other management measures including, but not limited to, area closures, gear prohibitions, bycatch limits and seasonal restrictions as deemed necessary to reduce shortbelly rockfish mortality. The Council may also reconsider the EC designation if appropriate.”

### **Sablefish Primary Season (12f)**

If the Council adopts the end-date change for the primary sablefish season from October 31 to December 31, a single change shown below would need to be made to Section 6.8.1: Seasons, page 86

“Seasons have been used to manage the commercial Pacific whiting trawl and LE fixed gear fisheries. The non-tribal whiting fishery is divided into three sectors: catcher boats that deliver to shorebased processing plants, catcher vessels that deliver to MS at-sea, and at-sea catcher-processors. Each of these sectors is managed with its own season. The shorebased sector also includes an early season for waters off California, to allow vessels in that area to access whiting when it is migrating through waters off California. ~~the LE fixed gear sablefish fishery is managed with a seven-month season, April through October.~~ **Both the whiting trawl and the LE fixed gear sablefish fishery are managed with a season that starts in spring and may run to the end of the year, if quota is available. Both the whiting trawl and fixed gear sablefish seasons are specified in regulation and factors affecting the season duration include, but are not limited to, concerns about incidental catch of other species. Outside the primary seasons for both whiting trawl and fixed gear sablefish, incidental catch allowances (e.g., trip limits) are provided. Outside the primary seasons for both whiting and fixed gear sablefish, incidental catch allowances of these species are provided to allow retention of incidental catch.**”

*Section 6.8.1 Seasons page 86*

### **Rockfish Conservation Areas**

If the novel uses of the recreational RCA are adopted by the Council 12i(1)&(2), the changes shown below should be made to Section 6.8.2: Rockfish Conservation Areas, page 87. These changes are also consistent with prior Council action and current regulations that allow the use of the Trawl RCA and Non-Trawl RCA for more than just overfished species conservation.

“In September 2002, NMFS implemented an emergency rule at the Council’s request to implement a Darkblotched Rockfish Conservation Area to close continental shelf/slope waters

north of 40°10' N. latitude. Since January 2003, the Council has used coastwide RCAs, which vary by gear type, to reduce the incidental catch of overfished species in waters where they are more abundant. Appendix F describes the role RCAs play in this FMP's overfished species rebuilding plans. **RCAs may also be used to control catch of groundfish species.**

Different gear types have greater or lesser effects on different ~~overfished~~ species. Thus, RCAs are designed to be gear-specific to better target protection for the species most affected by each gear group. For example, darkblotched rockfish and Pacific ocean perch are continental slope species that are most frequently taken with trawl gear, which means that the Trawl RCA must extend out to greater depths in order to protect these species. Under Amendment 28, the Council took action to remove the groundfish trawl RCA off Oregon and California because the trawl catch shares program (Amendment 20) effectively reduced rockfish bycatch and the trawl RCA was no longer needed as a year-round catch control tool. The trawl RCA is a management measure that remains in place off Washington. Yelloweye rockfish, in contrast, is more frequently taken with hook-and-line gear, which means that both the commercial and recreational hook and-line fisheries require yelloweye rockfish protection measures as part of that species' rebuilding plan. The Non-Trawl RCA is concentrated over the continental shelf. **Recreational fisheries can use RCAs as a means to control catch of groundfish species and could use them in conjunction with other recreational management measures such as season closures and bag limits.** ~~while the recreational fisheries use season closures and MPAs to reduce yelloweye rockfish bycatch.~~

RCAs are areas that can be implemented in the EEZ typically bounded on the east and west by lines drawn between a series of latitude/longitude coordinates approximating certain depth contours. An RCA may also be a polygon, designated by lines drawn between a series of latitude/longitude coordinates, which is closed to fishing for some period less than a year in duration. ~~Some RCAs may extend to the shoreline.~~ Although both the eastern and western RCA boundaries have changed over time for all of the gear groups, the area between the trawl RCA boundary lines approximating the 100 fm and 150 fm depth contours has remained closed since January 2003. Adopted potential RCA boundary lines are described in Federal regulations at 50 CFR 660.71-74. The size and shape of the RCAs may be adjusted inseason via the routine management measures process (Section 6.2.1) by using previously adopted potential RCA boundary lines. Designation and adoption of new potential RCA boundary lines must be made through either a specifications-and-management measures rulemaking (Section 6.2 C) or a full rulemaking (Section 6.2 D)."

*Section 6.8.2 Rockfish Conservation Areas page 87*

Staff also propose to define RCA in Section 2.2: Operational Definition of Terms, as shown below.

**Rockfish Conservation Area means an area of the EEZ closed to fishing with certain gear types to control catch of groundfish. Areas are bounded on the east and west by latitude and longitude coordinates that approximate depth contours and may extend coastwide (north and south) and around islands.**

*Add to Section 2.2 Operational Definition of Terms, in alphabetical order*

**Block Area Closure:**

If the corrections to the BAC definition are adopted by the Council (12g), and the use of BACs are expanded (12j), two FMP sections would require correction to be consistent with Federal regulation as discussed in [Agenda Item E.9, Attachment 1, March 2022](#). The corrections would occur, as shown below, to Sections 2.2 Operational Definition of Terms, page 9 and 6.8.3 Block Area Closures, page 87. If only one of the two BAC changes is adopted, FMP language may need to be adjusted accordingly.

“Block Area Closure (BAC) is a type of groundfish conservation area bounded on the north and south by commonly used geographic coordinates, and on the east and west by boundary lines approximating depth contours, defined with latitude and longitude coordinates. BACs may be implemented or modified, **in the EEZ seaward of Washington, Oregon and California state waters**, as routine management measures” 2.2  
*Operational Definition of Terms, Page 9*

“Block Area Closures (BACs) are a groundfish bottom trawl-specific management tool introduced as part of Amendment 28. BAC boundary lines are latitudes and depth contour approximations described in Federal regulations at [50 CFR §660.11](#) and §§71-74. BACs (one or more) may be closed or reopened inseason via the routine management measures process (Section 6.2.1) using latitude and longitude boundary lines defined in regulation. One or more of those polygons, as necessary may be closed to groundfish ~~bottom~~-trawl gear to control harvest of groundfish species or to reduce the catch of protected species. BACs are available **in the EEZ seaward of Washington, Oregon and California state waters for vessels using limited entry bottom trawl gear and in the EEZ seaward of Washington, Oregon and California state waters for vessels using midwater trawl gear**, and are intended as a catch control mechanism, not for habitat protection. “  
*6.8.3 Block Area Closures, page 87*

PFMC  
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