

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON FUTURE COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA & WORKLOAD PLANNING

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the draft September agenda ([Agenda Item C.8, Attachment 2, June 2022](#)) and draft Year-At-A-Glance (YAG); [Agenda Item C.8, Attachment 1, June 2022](#)) contained in the advanced briefing book, as well as the status of ongoing projects, and offers the following for consideration by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council).

GMT Capacity

The GMT reminds the Council that we have had a vacant seat since January 2021 and requests that the Council consider filling that seat. Specifically, the team has been without an economist or social scientist and feels the lack of that expertise in our discussions and statements, particularly on difficult and economically impactful items like gear switching. The reference to lack of capacity is not one that is new to the Council, with the increasing number and complexity of agenda items, but it is one that remains important to the team's productivity and quality of work.

September Meeting

Descending Device Mortality Rates

A subgroup of the GMT has been working on developing mortality rates for additional rockfish species when descending devices are used by anglers. The GMT believes that work will be ready for review by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) in September 2022. Therefore, we request that the Council add review of this work to the SSC's September agenda. The GMT can also provide an update on that work to the Council as an informational report under the inseason agenda item in September.

Stock Definitions

Based on Council discussion regarding stock definitions at this meeting, the Council is not ready at this time to convene a workshop or ad hoc workgroup. Instead, it is the GMT's understanding that the Council will initiate the process using a small group of "advisors" that will include state, tribal and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) staff. It is our understanding that this small group will meet between now and the September Council meeting with the aim of preparing a Purpose and Need statement to present at the September meeting. The GMT notes that Council decision-making on this item will be necessary for certain stocks being assessed in 2023; the assessors have indicated the need for Council guidance on areas for stock status determination at the November 2022 Council meeting. **The GMT recommends the Council add a Stock Definitions item to the September Council meeting agenda**, but the GMT is unclear whether it should be characterized as scoping or something else. The GMT notes that the September Council meeting is only scheduled for a total of 36.8 hours (compared to 45.3 hours at this June meeting), and there appears to be room to add at least one other groundfish item, such as Stock Definitions.

September Agenda

The draft September agenda only has the GMT scheduled to meet through Sunday, September 11, but there are groundfish agenda items on the Council's agenda on Tuesday, September 13.

Additionally there are ecosystem agenda items and administrative agenda items (Future Council Operations) scheduled for Tuesday, September 13 in which the GMT will have interest in participating. Therefore, the GMT's schedule may warrant reconsideration to ensure we have adequate time to discuss and write reports, as well as be available when agenda items are in front of the Council. Of the agenda items scheduled by the Council for September, the GMT requests guidance on which items the GMT should prioritize, (i.e., which of the 7-9 groundfish items, along with the 2 Pacific halibut items, 1 ecosystem item, and 3-4 administrative items, on the draft September agenda should be prioritized for the team.

GMT Year at a Glance

The GMT also reminds the Council that our groundfish workload in recent Council meetings has reached or exceeded the team's capacity, and our workload often includes tracking other non-groundfish items that does not always result in submitting a report. The GMT reviewed the Council YAG and had some discussion about the items in Table 1 below, acknowledging that many factors and pieces can change between meetings, especially several meetings ahead. The GMT has tried to place items on the list while primarily focusing on GMT items, but want to note that there are many items that the team tracks that are above and beyond groundfish items (e.g., marine planning, ecosystem).

The team would also like to make the Council aware of our duties outside of Council meetings. GMT members will be required to participate in the 2023 STAR panels as well as multiple Council related workshops this year and next. STAR panels result in substantial workload for the team as they require our input, participation, and attendance. Further, the SSC is also holding five workshops throughout the remainder of the year ([Agenda Item C.8.a, Supplemental SSC Report 1, June 2022](#)), which GMT members expect to participate in. Dates for most of these workshops are unconfirmed at this time but are planned for June, July, August, September, and November or December. Additionally, depending on the potential stock definitions agenda item in September, the GMT may need to convene an overwinter meeting. It is also possible that the GMT will have to convene a spring meeting to front-load items like Gear Switching and Non-trawl Area modifications.

Given the potential forthcoming workload for this year and next, the team is concerned about the GMT's ability to accomplish all of the Council's goals while continuing to provide the quality of work the Council has come to expect. Thus, the team requests specific guidance from the Council on prioritization of our workload for each meeting.

Table 1. GMT YAG from the GMT Groundfish Item Perspective.

	September 2022	November 2022	March 2023	April 2023	June 2023
1	NMFS Report	NMFS Report	NMFS Report	NMFS Report	NMFS Report
2	Inseason Management	Inseason Management & Whiting Set Asides	Inseason Management	Inseason Management	Inseason Management
3	Workload & New Mgt. Measure Update	Workload & New Mgt. Measure Update	Workload & New Mgt. Measure Priorities Update	Trawl Cost Recovery Annual Rpt.	Workload & New Mgt. Measure Update Priorities
4	Impact Analysis Methodology Review Preliminary Topic Selection	Impact Analysis Methodology Review Final Topic Selection	Whiting Treaty Implementation	Trawl Catch Share Program & Inter-sector Allocation Review Draft	Adopt Stock Assessments
5	<i>Electronic Monitoring Update</i>	<i>Electronic Monitoring ROA/PPA</i>	<i>Electronic Monitoring FPA</i>	<i>Sablefish Gear Switching FPA</i>	2025-2026 Harvest Specifications & Mgt. Measure Planning
6	<i>Trawl Catch Share Program & Inter-Sector Allocation Review - Scoping</i>	<i>Assessment Methodology Review Approval</i>	Pot Gear Marking Feasibility Report		Endangered Species Workgroup Rpt.
7	<i>Non-Trawl Area Mgt - ROA/PPA</i>	<i>Trawl Catch Share Prog. & Inter-Sector Allocation Rev. - Update</i>	**Stock Definitions**		Strategic Plan - Scoping
8	**Stock Definitions **	<i>Sablefish Gear Switching PPA</i>	**Non-Trawl Area Mgt - FPA**		**Stock Definitions**
9	<i>Stock Assessment Plan - Final</i>				Trawl Catch Share Program & Inter-sector Allocation Review Draft

Bolded and italicized items are those that the GMT recommends unshading on the Council YAAG. Bolded items with strikethrough reflect those that are shaded on the YAAG but that the GMT recommends moving to a later date.** Indicates addition to the YAG from the GMT
Red items are items that were moved from the month they were shaded on.

Multiple Years at a Glance

It is becoming apparent to the GMT that there is a need to consider potentially scheduled agenda items using a multi-year approach, especially given that some groundfish items (e.g., program reviews) are a recurring requirement that should be accounted for when thinking about the ability to take up other actions ([Agenda Item F.2, Supplemental GMT Report 1, June 2022](#)). The GMT is sensitive to the items on the workload prioritization list, capacity of analysts, and Magnuson-Stevens Act mandates (such as program reviews).

Current heavy workload topics include the ongoing gear switching item (Preliminary Preferred Alternative [PPA] in November 2022), the new stock definitions item (potentially some form of progress in September 2022), the Trawl Catch Share Program Review and Inter-Sector Allocation (scoping to start September 2022 based on the YAG), and the Non-trawl Area Management package (ROA/PPA September 2022 on the YAG). Each of these items are expected to continue into, if not through, 2023.

Above, the GMT has attempted to schedule Stock Definitions and the Final Preferred Alternative (FPA) for the Non-trawl Area Management package, which are not currently placed on the YAG. The GMT encourages the Council to be mindful that these items are set to run concurrently, relying on the same analysts. During the gear switching discussion under Agenda Item F.5 at this meeting, Dr. Jim Seger indicated that if gear switching does not stay on the timeline that is on the YAG, the Trawl Catch Share Program Review will be pushed further back. This will have a cascading effect on other groundfish items in the future and potentially delay other items from being finalized as well as new management measures from being prioritized. Similarly, in addition to the significant workload associated with the stock definitions item noted in the GMT statement ([Agenda Item F.4.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, June 2022](#)), there is uncertainty regarding how this item may affect prioritizing or scheduling other related items.

The GMT reiterates the need for some current agenda items to be finalized before prioritizing other items given analyst workload limitations. Therefore, the team suggests that the next Workload Prioritization and New Management Measure Priorities item be moved to June 2023, which will hopefully allow the Council to take final action (i.e., FPA) on already agendized items (e.g., FPA for Gear Switching is currently scheduled for April 2023) before new items are prioritized. The GMT is mindful that there are many items on the workload prioritization list that have not been prioritized and that there is support for those items to be undertaken. However, work on those items cannot be accomplished until finalization of other groundfish items reduces GMT and Council staff workload. Therefore, the GMT urges the Council to stay on track for current items so that other items can be considered for prioritization in the near future.

Using the package that came out of the LEFG review as an example of another complex agenda item that has the potential to be prioritized in the future: if the Council were to prioritize that in June, then that whole package would be prioritized. This package includes: allowance for slinky pots, permit price reporting, cost recovery, allowing a fourth tier permit on a vessel, taking multiple cumulative landing limits for each LEFG permit, and the removal of the base permit. These items vary in the workload required, but the GMT anticipates that scoping could happen in September 2023, as long as items such as gear switching have been finalized, which would then move these items through the 2024 (and possibly 2025) year. There are, of course, many other items in the workload prioritization list and the GMT does not intend this example to indicate a GMT priority, but only reminds the Council that in order to stay within team capacity, items must come off the list before new items are prioritized.