

STOCK DEFINITIONS UPDATE

Amendment 31 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) concerns defining West Coast groundfish stocks, including their area stratifications, in the FMP. Adequately defining the range of a stock is foundational to many aspects of sustainability and the goals contained in the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA), especially National Standard 1 and the ability to attain Optimum Yield. Defining stocks is also necessary to allow the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to make status determinations concerning the health and abundance of West Coast groundfish resources. Due to the lack of stock definitions in the groundfish FMP, in early 2022 NMFS notified the Council that the status of some stocks off the West Coast could not be determined. Amendment 31 thus concerns the appropriate definition of stocks in order to 1) attain sustainability objectives, and 2) to appropriately administer the assessment and monitoring of the health of those stocks.

The Council did initial scoping of Amendment 31 at their June 2022 meeting. A [scoping document](#) provided at the June meeting outlined the issues compelling Amendment 31, including the NMFS recommendation to prioritize stock definitions for those stocks assessed in 2021 and planned for assessment in 2023. Attachment 1, the Amendment 31 “decision roadmap”, provides further scoping considerations, a proposed Purpose and Need, and recommended decision steps for Amendment 31.

Attachment 1 also provides a proposed Amendment 31 timeline with a recommended decision on a preliminary preferred alternative for stocks to be assessed in 2023 in November 2022. This recommendation is to better ensure status of assessed stocks is reported according to their stock definitions. Most stocks scheduled for assessment in 2023 are managed and assessed coastwide (e.g., canary rockfish and petrale sole) and there may not be a desire to consider stock definitions other than a coastwide designation. However, black rockfish and copper rockfish have not been managed coastwide and the stock definitions for these and other nearshore species may require more deliberation before a decision is reached. Attachment 2 provides considerations for determining stock definitions and the areal extent of stock assessments for stocks to be assessed in 2023. Note that Attachment 2 will also inform decisions to be made under Agenda Item G.7.

Also related to the road map and timeline is the staffing of any analytical effort necessary to support Council decision making. The Council should consider whether a new working group is necessary to adequately analyze this issue and provide the Council with recommendations within the proposed timeline.

The Council should consider advisory body recommendations and public comment before deciding a Purpose and Need for Amendment 31, providing guidance on a schedule and next steps for Amendment 31, and identifying a working group.

Council Action:

1. **Adopt a Purpose and Need for Amendment 31.**
2. **Consider adopting a preferred alternative for defining stocks to be assessed in 2023.**
3. **Provide guidance on a schedule and next steps for completing Amendment 31.**
4. **Consider establishing a stock definitions work group.**

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item G.5, Attachment 1: Fishery Management Plan Amendment 31 Stock Definitions: A Decision Roadmap.
2. Agenda Item G.5, Attachment 2: Stock Assessment and Stock Definition Considerations for Selection of Species and Areas for Assessment in 2023.
3. If received, Public Comments are electronic only ([see e-portal](#)).

Agenda Order:

- G.5 Stock Definitions Update John DeVore
- a. Reports and Comments of Management Entities and Advisory Bodies
 - b. Public Comment
 - c. **Council Action:** Review a Project Update and Continue to Scope a Potential Fishery Management Plan Amendment Regarding the Definition of Stocks and Stock Complexes in Need of Conservation and Management; Provide Guidance on a Schedule and Future Work

PFMC
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