

GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON MEMBERSHIP APPOINTMENTS AND COUNCIL OPERATING PROCEDURES

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the materials in the briefing book and listened to the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) discussion on Council Operating Procedure 19 (COP-19) under Agenda Item G.2 at this meeting, and offer the following for consideration.

Membership

The GMT has been without a representative from the Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC) for almost two years. While the GMT is sympathetic to the staffing issues the SWFSC is having, it has left the team shorthanded, reducing our capacity and expertise. If the SWFSC is unable to provide a GMT member, the Council may wish to consider trying to fill that void from another source. The GMT does not have a recommendation on potential sources at this time but is willing to discuss further.

Council Operating Procedure 19

Under Agenda Item G.2 at this meeting, the Council recommended taking a holistic look at COP-19 and the overall exempted fishing permit (EFP) process and timeline. The GMT is supportive of this and willing to work with Council staff, and others, on this process for consideration at a future Council meeting. Completion of this process needs to be concluded by September 2023, at the latest, so that it can be incorporated beginning with the 2025-26 biennial process (EFP applications are due November of odd numbered years). The GMT has heard that multiple fishery management plans (FMPs) are discussing changes to their EFP COPs and suggests that Council staff may gain efficiencies by collating and considering concerns from the various FMPs.

The Council also had some preliminary discussions about the timing and frequency of when groundfish EFPs are considered. The GMT reminds the Council that the current timeline was set by the Process Improvement Committee to align EFPs with the biennial harvest specifications and management measures process. This was done so that any requested set-asides for EFPs can be factored into the off-the-top deductions from the annual catch limit to calculate the fishery harvest guideline, and the resulting allocations to fisheries sectors (including individual fishing quota pounds). For any EFP accepted out of cycle, requested set-asides could be disruptive to fisheries sectors. Given that quota pounds cannot be rescinded once issued, any requested set-asides (outside of the biennial process) would then come solely from the non-trawl sectors. Depending on the species, that could necessitate management changes from what was part of the biennial analysis and regulations. However, if no set-asides are requested/needed, taking up an EFP out of cycle would not create those issues.

The GMT does want to note that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has previously expressed to the GMT that the time and workload associated with a new EFP is equivalent to that of a rulemaking. Taking up one or more new off-cycle EFPs could then impede NMFS progress on other tasks and/or rulemakings, depending on how NMFS workload is prioritized.