

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON
NON-TRAWL AREA MANAGEMENT

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) received an overview of this agenda item from Ms. Jessi Doerpinghaus and Mr. Brett Wiedoff of Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) staff, reviewed the materials in the briefing book, listened to the discussion in the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP), and held a discussion with Ms. Lynn Massey (National Marine Fisheries Service West Coast Region) and Ms. Jessi Doerpinghaus to get further clarity.

The GMT recommends incorporating the additional language proposed in [Attachment 1](#) into the Purpose & Need (P&N); however, the GMT acknowledges that the intended purpose of the action is to provide access to healthy shelf species within the current non-trawl rockfish conservation area (NT-RCA) and cowcod conservation areas (CCA).

The GMT recommends moving Alternatives 1, 2, 3, and 5 forward and selecting them as the Preliminary Preferred Alternative. The GMT recommends that the Council move the Washington Alternative 4 into the workload prioritization list (Table B in [Agenda Item G.2.a, GMT Report 1, September 2022](#)). Under the Alternative 2 sub-options, the GMT believes that a comprehensive review of habitat under the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) review will better inform the type of habitat protections that may be needed in the exposed areas. The GMT does not have the habitat expertise or information to make those specific recommendations at this time. Longline and pot gear effort is not expected to be concentrated on the newly opened areas, since they are not accessing shelf stocks predominantly in the areas that will be opening. We do not have adequate information to inform the potential habitat impacts of pot and longline gear. Therefore, a holistic approach (i.e. EFH review) that can be informed by more time and more habitat analysis is warranted. However, if any of the sub-options do move forward, **the GMT recommends that the Council restrict halibut vessels at a level comparable to groundfish vessels in these areas.** The GMT suggests that this may be able to be accomplished by amending the [Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan](#) via the annual process using “if/then” statements similar to what the recreational fisheries use.

The GMT sees merit in using Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Areas (YRCAs) to protect yelloweye rockfish habitat as tools in the toolbox that have a finer scale than the Alternative 5 Block Area Closures. However, because of the yelloweye rockfish rebuilding status, the Council could look at protecting the habitat (e.g., as EFHCAs) that is used to inform the yelloweye rockfish habitat suitability model during the EFH review. EFHCAs generally allow for longer term protections than YRCAs. While YRCAs could be established as an inseason tool for groundfish vessels, the GMT notes that YRCAs are not currently available as an inseason tool within the halibut regulations.

Currently, the GMT only reports the recent years' landings of non-sablefish targeted trips in the analytical document. Observer coverage rates are on average at about 4 percent in the non-sablefish limited entry fixed gear sector from 2016-19, and approximately 6.5 percent for the open access fixed gear sector, coastwide from 2016-19, which increases the uncertainty around the mortality estimates. Therefore, as this action moves forward in the future, consideration will need to be given to how we inform projections of non-nearshore non-sablefish fleet activity and impacts.

PFMC
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