

AMENDMENT 31 GROUND FISH STOCK DEFINITIONS

Amendment 31 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) would define stock units, including geographic delineations, for 12 managed groundfish species (i.e., priority species). This action is being undertaken in response to the finding that the FMP does not adequately define stocks for managed groundfish necessary to achieve the mandates of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) and its National Standards. 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, which is provided in an annual report to Congress. This action, therefore, is required to align the FMP with the MSA and the National Standards.

The Council has contemplated stock definitions in 2022 at their March, June, September, and November meetings. In September 2022, the Council adopted a Purpose and Need statement for Amendment 31 and tasked staff to develop a white paper to synthesize the state of the knowledge and the management implications for priority species ([Agenda Item H.5, Attachment 1, November 2022](#)). At their November 2022 meeting, the Council adopted a range of alternatives (ROA) for this action. After the November 2022 meeting a project team was convened, comprised of Council staff, NMFS West Coast Region staff, and NMFS Northwest and Southwest Fishery Science Center staff. Over the course of the winter, the project team completed an analytical document for the ROA (Attachment 1). The Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) has prepared a report that details potential methods for determining the acceptable biological catch and annual catch limits for stocks with multiple sub-area assessment models (NWFSC Report 1).

At this meeting, the Council is expected to consider the findings of the overwinter analysis refine the ROA and adopt a Preliminary Preferred Alternative, as appropriate. The Council has been advised by NMFS that Amendment 31 and associated regulatory changes need to be in place for 2024. In order to meet this timeline, the Council will need to adopt a Final Preferred Alternative no later than the June 2023 Council meeting.

Council Action:

- 1. Consider the analytical document findings.**
- 2. Consider refining the ROA.**
- 3. Adopt a preliminary preferred alternative, as appropriate.**
- 4. Provide guidance, as appropriate.**

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item F.7, Attachment 1: Range of Alternatives Analysis for Proposed Amendment 31 to the Pacific Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (*Electronic Only*).
2. Agenda Item F.7.a; NWFSC Report 1: Alternatives for setting catch limits when a stock is assessed using multiple independent sub-area assessment models.
3. If received, Public Comments are electronic only ([see e-portal](#)).

Agenda Order:

- F.7 Amendment 31 Groundfish Stock Definitions Todd Phillips
- a. Reports and Comments of Management Entities and Advisory Bodies
 - b. Public Comment
 - c. **Council Action:** Refine the Range of Alternatives and Select a Preliminary Preferred Alternative, as Appropriate

PFMC
02/21/23