

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS - FINAL ACTION

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) discussed the current status of groundfish fisheries and the need for any inseason adjustments during the June 2023 Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting. Below, the GMT details two action items that have been brought to the GMT for Council consideration. The GMT also provides a status report of the 2023 at-sea set-aside attainments, noting that one set-aside (darkblotched rockfish) has already been exceeded. The requested Pacific spiny dogfish scorecard (Table 5) is below, along with all other scorecards typically provided.

Action Items

The GMT investigated whether sablefish trip limits should be adjusted and concluded that changes are not warranted for any of the sectors, based on 2023 participation and trip limit increases implemented for the 2023-24 biennium.

Bocaccio Trip Limits South of 40° 10' N. lat.

The GMT received a request from the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) to adjust bocaccio trip limits south of 40° 10' N. lat. to be equal to the limits for chilipepper rockfish from 40° 10' N. lat. to 34° 27' N. lat. particularly for open access (OA) and, therefore, limit potential regulatory discards of bocaccio rockfish. The 2023-24 harvest specifications rulemaking allows certain OA gear types to access the non-trawl rockfish conservation area, and therefore, there is potential for increased landings of shelf stocks as fishermen gain more areas to target healthy shelf stocks. So far this year, bocaccio trip limits are not highly attained by most of the fleet. Three of the 78 vessels that landed bocaccio rockfish in the OA fishery south of 40° 10' N. lat. landed more than 80 percent of their trip limit in any one period; none of the vessels have exceeded their trip limit thus far in 2023. Therefore, the GMT has not identified new information and an immediate need from the fishery that would warrant waiving notice and comment at this time. The GMT will continue to monitor landings and how they compare to trip limits to inform potential inseason trip limit changes for either management area in the future.

Lingcod Size Limit South of 42° N. lat.

The GMT received a request to lower the minimum lingcod size limit for commercial fisheries south of 42° N. lat. from 24 inches to 22 inches to allow retention of slightly smaller fish and reduce discards. Based on GMT communication with industry, constraints from copper and quillback rockfishes off California are leading to nearshore participants seeking more opportunity to sell into the live fish market, which prefers fish smaller than the current commercial limit of 24 inches. The current minimum size limit is 22 inches for commercial fisheries north of 42° N. lat. and for recreational fisheries coastwide. The limit of 24 inches for commercial fisheries south of 42° N. lat. has been in place since 1998 and is eligible for routine inseason action ([50 CFR 660.60\(c\)\(1\)\(i\)](#)). If the Council takes inseason action, the adjusted lingcod size limit (i.e., 22 inches) would remain in place until, or unless, the Council took subsequent action.

The GMT does not anticipate that lowering the lingcod size limit to 22 inches would put the annual catch limit (ACL) for lingcod south of 40° 10' N. lat. at risk of being exceeded. ACL attainment has been below 40 percent since 2017 (Table 1), and the model used to project biennial management measure impacts assumes full ACL attainment, meaning any additional mortality impacts from this inseason action are within the scope of the 2023-24 harvest specifications and management measures analysis. However, the only expected impacts to lingcod with this change are that vessels are likely to decrease regulatory discarding practices. The current discard mortality rates for lingcod are 7 percent using fixed gear and 50 percent using trawl gear. Roughly 70-90 percent of lingcod south of 40° 10' N. lat. mortality is attributed to the California recreational fleet (Table 1), for which the size limit is already 22 inches, so impacts from this action are expected to be minimal. **The GMT recommends the Council select Option 1, which lowers the minimum lingcod size limit to 22 inches for commercial fisheries south of 42° N. lat. (Table 2).** This action would align lingcod size limits coastwide and across sectors, thereby reducing regulatory and enforcement complexity.

Table 1. Commercial, recreational, and total mortality of lingcod south of 40° 10' N. lat., along with ACL and ACL attainment, 2014-2022. Source: PacFIN

Year	Commercial Mortality (mt)	Recreational Mortality (mt)	Total Mortality (mt) a/	ACL (mt)	ACL Attainment
2014	76	426	510	1,276	40%
2015	113	597	718	1,205	60%
2016	82	593	682	1,136	60%
2017	89	453	552	1,502	37%
2018	103	346	457	1,373	33%
2019	123	269	397	1,143	35%
2020	88	200	290	977	30%
2021	82	228	311	1,255	25%
2022 b/	94	226	322	1,334	24%

a/ Commercial and recreational mortality may not sum up to the total mortality, because the total mortality values also include mortality from research and non-groundfish fisheries.

b/ 2022 mortality values are a combination of landings data and a 3-year average discard mortality estimate. Final 2022 discard mortality estimates are not available until Fall 2023.

Table 2. Options for inseason action on the lingcod size limit south of 42° N. lat. The bolded option represents the GMT recommendation.

Option	Description
Status Quo	The commercial minimum size limit for lingcod is 24 inches (61 cm) total length south of 42° N. lat.
Option 1	The commercial minimum size limit for lingcod is 22 inches (56 cm) total length south of 42° N. lat.

Informational Items

At-sea Set-asides

At-sea set-asides are a deduction of the trawl allocation to account for expected mortality in the at-sea sectors ([50 CFR 660.55\(j\)](#)). The remainder of the trawl allocation is allocated to the Shorebased individual fishing quota (IFQ) program. [50 CFR 660.150\(c\)\(2\)\(i\)\(B\)\(I\)](#) states that:

“At-sea set-asides of non-whiting groundfish species will be managed on an annual basis unless there is a risk of a harvest specification being exceeded, unforeseen impact on other fisheries, or conservation concerns, in which case inseason action may be taken. Set asides may be adjusted through the biennial specifications and management measures process as necessary.”

Due to fishing operations somewhat unique to the at-sea sectors, a large amount of bycatch can be taken in a single haul. Set-asides provide the flexibility to account for the challenge of avoiding large bycatch events while setting aside an amount of expected mortality for accounting purposes. The GMT does not think any of the criteria listed in 50 CFR 660.150 for inseason action are currently met. The “risk of a harvest specification being exceeded” specific to ACLs is discussed further in the following paragraphs. If the trawl allocation is projected to be exceeded, fishery/sector closures, area restrictions, or other management measures may be used inseason ([50 CFR 660.140\(a\)\(3\)](#)), potentially impacting all sectors within the trawl fishery, but the GMT does not see a need for that at this time. There are currently no conservation concerns for any of the stocks with at-sea set-asides.

The GMT provides an at-sea set-aside scorecard in Table 7 of the Appendix. The set-aside for darkblotched rockfish has been exceeded as of June 15, 2023 (102 percent). The set-aside attainments for yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10' N. lat., sablefish north of 36° N. lat., and canary rockfish are tracking higher by June 15th than they were by that date in 2022 and 2021, with the exception of 2022 sablefish, and have the potential to be exceeded by the end of the fishing season. Regarding catch in other fisheries, 2023 landings of stocks with at-sea set-asides are tracking higher in the shoreside whiting sector than the last two years but lower in the remaining IFQ vessels as well as the non-trawl fisheries. However, trends in these other fisheries could change based on future changes to fishing behavior, management measures, market demands, population changes, or other factors. If an at-sea set-aside is exceeded for a high ACL attainment stock such as widow rockfish, the ACL could be at risk of being exceeded. Widow rockfish ACL attainment through June 15, 2023 is tracking notably higher than that of 2022 and 2021 (Table 8, Appendix), and 42 percent of the set-aside has been attained. The GMT will continue to monitor all stocks with at-sea set-asides and trends in other fisheries against ACL attainment and will notify the Council if an ACL or allocation appears to be at risk.

Chinook Salmon Scorecard

Table 3 shows Chinook salmon bycatch from groundfish fisheries as of June 24, 2023. The whiting sector has caught 3,073 Chinook salmon or 28 percent of the sector’s 11,000 Chinook salmon threshold. The non-whiting sector has caught 789 Chinook salmon or 14 percent of the sector’s 5,500 Chinook salmon threshold. Combined, both sectors have caught 3,862 Chinook salmon or 19 percent of the total 20,000 threshold. In the Trawl Gear exempted fishing permit (EFP), 51

Chinook salmon have been retained and 76 Chinook salmon have been discarded as of June 22, 2023. National Marine Fisheries Service will provide a full report on the Chinook salmon numbers from the Trawl Gear EFP at the April and November meetings.

Table 3. Chinook salmon catch (numbers of fish) in 2023 as of June 24, 2023 in relation to the sector thresholds (Source: PacFIN IFQ021 Combined Sector Salmon Bycatch ESA Report).

Sector a/	Sub-Sector	Catch To Date	% of Threshold	Total Threshold
Whiting	Catcher Processor	2,148	20%	11,000
	Mothership	460	4%	
	Shoreside	201	2%	
	Tribal	264 b/	2%	
	Total	3,073	28%	
Non-Whiting	Bottom Trawl	203	4%	5,500
	Midwater Trawl	67	1%	
	Tribal	19 b/	<0.01%	
	Fixed Gear	500 c/	9%	
	WA Rec.			
	OR Rec. + Longleader			
	CA Rec.			
Total	789	14%		
All groundfish fisheries & EFPs		3,971		

a/ Also, there is a reserve of 3,500 fish, in addition to the number of fish in the whiting and non-whiting thresholds.

b/ Current year tribal landings are estimated as the maximum of the historic landings for the last 5 years.

c/ GMT proposed assumption of annual mortality, which assumed maximum historical mortality (154) plus a 250 fish buffer from the 2017 BiOp and an additional 96 fish to account for some uncertainty in recreational salmon seasons; recreational estimates only apply to groundfish fisheries occurring outside of salmon seasons.

Shortbelly Rockfish Scorecard

To help track shortbelly rockfish throughout the season, Table 4 provides the estimated mortality by each sector.

Table 4. Estimated mortality of shortbelly rockfish by sector, as of June 15, 2023. (Source: PacFIN)

Sector	Estimated Mortality (mt)
At-Sea Catcher Processor	3.0
At-Sea Mothership	3.0
IFQ (non-whiting)	43.9
Shoreside whiting	16.7
Incidental/Miscellaneous	*
Treaty	N/A
Total	66.6
Threshold	2,000

* = confidential data

N/A = no catch to date

Pacific Spiny Dogfish Scorecard

As a result of declining ACLs and recent high bycatch of Pacific spiny dogfish in the trawl sectors, the Council asked the GMT to include a Pacific spiny dogfish scorecard in our inseason statements to track the stock more closely. Pacific spiny dogfish is largely discarded, and as discussed in our June 2022 analysis ([Agenda Item F.6.a, GMT Report 1, June 2022](#)), an accurate inseason estimate of total catches is only available for the at-sea whiting sectors. Estimated mortality reported in Table 5 represents actual landings to date added to a recent 3-year average estimate of year-end discard mortality. Table 5 estimates that 423.1 mt of Pacific spiny dogfish has been taken as of June 15, 2023.

Table 5. Estimated mortality of Pacific spiny dogfish by sector, as of June 15, 2023. (Source: PacFIN)

Sector	Estimated Mortality (mt)
At-Sea Hake Catcher Processor	6.4
At-Sea Hake Mothership	3.0
IFQ (non-whiting)	103.9
Shoreside Hake a/	4.6
Non-Trawl	55.2
Incidental/Miscellaneous	N/A
Treaty	275 b/
Total	423.1
ACL	1,456

N/A = no landings or total catch to date

*confidential data

a/ For the shoreside whiting sector, landings account for roughly 90 percent of total catches, and for the bottom trawl, midwater rockfish, and non-trawl sectors, discards make up the majority of total catch.

b/ 2023 tribal set-aside for Pacific spiny dogfish

Rebuilding Species Scorecard

Table 6 shows yelloweye rockfish projections from groundfish fisheries as of June 15, 2023, in relation to the specified reference points. Projected impacts are updated based on the GMT's best estimates.

Off the top deductions include projections for tribal, research, EFP, and incidental open access (IOA) set asides, which are currently specified in regulation. Tribal projected values are the tribes' best estimate of catch. Research set-asides are based on anticipated research needs of the International Pacific Halibut Commission, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and other projects. EFPs are amounts set aside to accommodate anticipated applications and are estimates provided by the applicants and approved by the Council. The IOA values are the GMT's best estimate of impacts as analyzed in the 2023-2024 groundfish harvest specifications and management measure [Environmental Assessment](#).

Table 6. Allocations and projected mortality impacts (mt) of yelloweye rockfish as adopted for 2023. Bolded rows reflect values that have been updated since the last Council meeting.

Sector	Sub-sector	Projection (mt) a/	Reference Point Type	Reference Point Tracking Limit (mt)	Projected Attainment of Limit (%)
Grand Total		35.1	ACL c/	66.0	53.1%
Off the top b/		10.3	Set Asides	10.7	96.2%
Trawl	CP	--	Trawl allocation	4.4	13.6%
	MS	--			
	Shoreside whiting	--			
	IFQ	0.6			
	<i>Sector Total</i>	<i>0.6</i>	<i>Trawl allocation</i>	<i>4.4</i>	<i>13.6%</i>
Non-trawl	Non-nearshore + Nearshore	3.9	HG	10.7	36.4%
	WA Rec.	3.2		13.2	24.2%
	OR Rec.	5.5		11.7	47.0%
	CA Rec.	12.0		15.3	78.4%
	<i>Sector HG Total</i>	<i>24.6</i>	<i>HG d/</i>	<i>50.9</i>	<i>48.4%</i>
	Non-nearshore + Nearshore	3.9	ACT	8.4	46.4%
	WA Rec.	3.2		10.4	30.8%
	OR Rec.	5.1		9.2	55.4%
	CA Rec.	12.0		12.0	100.0%
	<i>Sector ACT Total</i>	<i>24.2</i>		ACT	40.0

a/ The Grand Total is the sum of the Off the top, Trawl Sector Total, and Non-trawl Sector ACT Total.

b/ off the top set asides: Tribal = 5 mt; EFPs = 0.14 mt; Research = 2.92 mt; Incidental Open Access = 2.66 mt

c/ ACL = Set asides + Trawl allocation + Non-trawl allocation.

d/ The non-trawl allocation is the sum of the non-trawl HGs, 50.9 mt.

Appendix

Table 7. 2023 at-sea catches and set-aside attainment through June 15, 2023, for all stocks with a set-aside, compared to set-aside attainment through June 15 in 2022 and 2021. Stocks are listed in descending order of 2023 set-aside attainment.

Stock	2023					2022	2021
	CP Catch	MS Catch	Total At-sea Catch	At-sea Set-aside	Set-aside Attainment thru June 15	Set-aside Attainment thru June 15	Set-aside Attainment thru June 15
Darkblotched rockfish	70.2	7.9	78.1	76.4	102%	44%	20%
Yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10' N. lat.	235.9	30.2	266.1	320	83%	1%	19%
Sablefish north of 36° N. lat.	44.5	12.3	56.8	100	57%	173%	7%
Canary rockfish	19.5	0.4	19.9	36	55%	2%	5%
Widow rockfish	179.2	18.9	198.1	476	42%	15%	3%
Pacific ocean perch north of 40° 10' N. lat.	67.5	5.9	73.4	300	24%	2%	1%
Longnose skate	0.5	0.6	1.1	5	22%	30%	1%
Shortspine thornyhead north of 34° 27' N. lat.	12.8	1.4	14.2	70	20%	152%	12%
Minor slope rockfish north of 40° 10' N. lat.	43.1	7.2	50.3	300	17%	24%	7%
Minor shelf rockfish north of 40° 10' N. lat.	5.1	0.6	5.7	35	16%	3%	8%
Arrowtooth flounder	5.9	1.2	7.1	70	10%	28%	1%
Dover sole	0.1	<0.1	0.1	10	1%	6%	0%
Other flatfish	0.1	0.1	0.2	35	1%	54%	1%
Lingcod north of 40° 10' N. lat.	1	*	*	15	0%	2%	0%
Pacific halibut	<0.1	<0.1	0	10	0%	0%	0%
Petrable sole	0	0%	0	5	0%	0%	0%

Table 8. Total ACL attainment through June 15 in 2021-2023 for stocks with high 2023 at-sea set-aside attainment, along with total year-end ACL attainment.

		Darkblotched rockfish	Yellowtail rockfish	Sablefish north	Canary rockfish	Widow rockfish	POP
2023	Thru June 15	24%	23%	17%	22%	45%	5%
2022	Thru June 15	23%	15%	38%	15%	33%	3%
	Year-end	43%	53%	94%	53%	88%	11%
2021	Thru June 15	20%	18%	26%	19%	32%	6%
	Year-end	38%	48%	70%	43%	74%	13%

PFMC
06/24/23