

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON INITIAL HARVEST
 SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR 2025-2026

Harvest Specifications for 2025-2026

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) recommends the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) adopt the default harvest control rules (HCR) as shown in [Agenda Item G.6, Supplemental REVISED Attachment 1](#) except for Dover sole, rex sole, and shortspine thornyhead (Table 1). While the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) recommended alternative P* and HCRs for sablefish and canary rockfish, the GAP believes that no additional alternatives are needed as described below.

Table 1. Summary of GAP recommendations for specific stocks.

Species	Default Harvest Control Rule (HCR) (Supplemental REVISED Attachment 1)	GAP recommendation for alternative HCR
Dover Sole	P* of 0.45, ACL=50,000 mt	P* of 0.45, ACL=ABC
Rex Sole	P* of 0.40	P* of 0.45
Shortspine thornyhead	P* of 0.40	P* of 0.45

Dover Sole

The GAP was informed that the default HCR for Dover sole was incorrectly specified in [Supplemental REVISED Attachment 1](#). It describes the specifications using an HCR of P* of 0.45 and Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) = Annual Catch Limit (ACL), when the default HCR is P* 0.45 and a constant catch ACL of 50,000 mt. The GAP understands that new estimates for Dover sole may be available for the October GMT work session and the November meeting to update the assumptions in the 2021 assessment, which assumed ABC removals in 2023-24 even though the ACL was 50,000 mt. Regardless, given the likelihood of the revised values being near 50,000 mt, the GAP recommends the Council adopt a new default HCR of P* of 0.45 and ABC=ACL.

Rex Sole

The GAP agrees with the GMT's recommended inclusion of a P* of 0.45, as it would provide the trawl fleet with the greatest flexibility in the event of future expansion. There appears to be little risk of overfishing this stock.

Shortspine Thornyhead

The GAP agrees with the GMT to include a P* of 0.45 for shortspine thornyhead. Shortspine thornyhead may become a constraining species to the trawl fleet, even under the highest P* available to the Council. Given these expected constraints, examining the potential of a higher P* of 0.45 may help minimize impacts to the trawl fishery.

Canary Rockfish

The GAP perceives the risk of overfishing on canary rockfish to be low and therefore does not recommend an alternative P*. However, the GAP recognizes an analysis of other P* values may be useful for comparison as the Council weighs the tradeoffs between the value of canary rockfish to each sector of the fishery and the risk of overfishing, based on the most recent assessment.

Sablefish

The GAP supports a P*=0.45, ABC=ACL, as outlined in [G.6, Supplemental Revised Attachment 1](#). This stock is an important stock to all fleets and the Council approved a P* of 0.45 for this year and in 2024, prior to the most recent assessment that shows the stock is improving.

The GAP notes the sablefish stock is in very good shape, with good recruitment. The need for changing the P* does not appear to be warranted. As the GAP and Council have noted in the past, sablefish is an economically important stock for trawl, fixed gear and open access fisheries. Additionally, it is becoming an important option for recreational fishermen to consider as restrictions to nearshore stocks become prevalent and some concerns about the shelf stocks are emerging.

Quillback rockfish

The GAP understands values from the rebuilding analysis will not be available until November and we anticipate more discussion and providing comments at that time.

As noted in the [Agenda Item G.6.a, Supplemental CDFW Report 1](#):

CDFW wishes to point out the difficulty in reconciling the total estimated 2022 quillback mortality in California with the total estimated California stock biomass. Per the Status of quillback rockfish (*Sebastes maliger*) in U.S. waters off the coast of California in 2021 using catch and length data page 49, Table 12, the total California biomass in 2022 was estimated at 63.18 MT. Meanwhile, now that the Estimated Discard and Catch of Groundfish species for 2022 showing totally mortality is available (Agenda Item G.1.b, NWFSC Report 1, September 2023), quillback mortality in California from all available state and federal sources was estimated at 10.39 (north) +7.72 (south) = 18.11 MT (Note the 10.39 MT mortality was generated with GMT coordination to partition the data to

address the area between 40° 10' N. lat. and 42° N. lat.). That means 28.66 percent of the total quillback biomass was removed from the California stock as fishery mortality.

The GAP shares the skepticism that so few quillback rockfish landings represent such a large portion of the population; it is contrary to what fishermen consistently see on the water. It seems indicative that the stock size estimate is incorrect. Fishermen in California are incredulous and report an abundance of quillback throughout their range. No significant difference in catch rates/catch per unit effort has been apparent.

Again, the GAP requests additional hook-and-line surveys and remotely operated vehicle surveys be implemented as soon as possible to survey this stock where it lives. This will begin to provide the data needed to remove the aforementioned uncertainties.

Management Measures

The GAP reviewed the routine management measures in Table 3 of [Agenda Item G.6.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1](#) and agrees with the GMT that these items warrant specific exploration. The GAP will continue to work with the GMT on these and all other routine management measures for the 2025-26 biennium.

However, regarding Item #7 in the table, recreational trip limit adjustments, the GAP notes the recommendations would apply *only* to the area north of 34° 27' N. lat.

New Management Measures

With regards to Table 4 in Supplemental GMT Report 1, the GAP recommends items 1 and 2, prohibition on directed fishing for shortbelly rockfish and the use of natural bait in the recreational longleader fishery, should not be considered in the 2025-26 biennial cycle, as noted in the GMT table, but through the groundfish workload list.

However, the GAP would like to signal now that we recommend dropping the shortbelly rockfish directed fishing prohibition proposal from the groundfish workload list for reasons previously presented by the GAP ([Agenda Item C.8.a, Supplemental GAP Report 1, September 2021](#)), and for the reasons described by the requestors themselves: *The Council has recognized the absence of targeted fishing [for shortbelly], and the industry has repeatedly confirmed that it is not interested in directed fishing. And the [Fishery Ecosystem Plan] recognizes that, in the past, low catch limits were a mechanism to prevent directed fishing* ([Agenda Item H.7.b, Public Comment, June 2023](#)).

The GAP agrees with including the rest of the items in Table 4 of the GMT report moving forward in the harvest specifications and management measures for 2025-2026.

In addition, the GAP suggests adding the following new management measures for analysis:

1. Adjust the waypoints around the Rittenberg Bank (south of Bodega Bay) to more closely conform with the 50 fm contour to avoid rockfish species of concern.

2. Model zero retention of copper rockfish south of Pt. Conception (34° 27' N. lat.) and estimate the savings available to attribute to descending device credits (in the future), thus providing additional time to the nearshore portion of the fishery. (Fisheries north of Pt. Conception are restricted by quillback).
3. For the area south of Pt. Conception, modify the regulations to explicitly allow recreational vessels to stop and fish with hoop nets and hand-held dip-nets and/or anchor within nearshore waters during the offshore-only season, with shelf and slope species on board so long as no other fishing gear is deployed.
4. For the area north of Pt. Conception, modify the regulations to explicitly allow for recreational vessels to stop and fish with hoop nets, crab traps and hand-held dip-nets, and/or anchor in nearshore waters during the offshore-only season with shelf and slope species on board as no other fishing gear is deployed.
5. Examine a season alternative for the offshore-only season to include March, in addition to the current season structure for south of Pt. Conception.
6. For the recreational fishery north of Pt. Conception, model various season structure scenarios inshore of 20 fathoms and offshore of 50 fathoms.

PFMC
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