

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM INFORMATION REPORT ON HARVEST
SPECIFICATIONS TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS AND INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS -
FINAL ACTION

[Agenda Item G.8.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1](#) outlines the team's analysis of Spring 2023 bycatch in the Pacific whiting sectors of Chinook salmon and certain stocks with at-sea set-asides. The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) had further discussion at this meeting and provides concluding advice to the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) below.

The GMT does not think Council action is warranted at this time to respond to current Chinook salmon or non-whiting groundfish bycatch or to mitigate bycatch for either salmon or other groundfish for the remainder of the year. The Pacific whiting sectors' cooperatives are able to respond to and avoid bycatch at a finer scale and more efficiently than a Council-implemented spatial closure through cooperative self-management, and there are only five vessels not currently in a cooperative. The GMT will evaluate at-sea set-asides for groundfish stocks and whether adjustments are necessary in the 2025-26 biennium to account for increasing bycatch mortality.

At-sea Set-Asides

The GMT provides an updated at-sea set-aside scorecard in Table 1 at the end of this report, as of September 11, 2023. The set-aside attainments of sablefish, shortspine thornyhead, other flatfish, and lingcod have increased notably since the June Council meeting. The sablefish attainment increased from 57 percent to 83 percent, the shortspine thornyhead attainment increased from 20 percent to 49 percent, the other flatfish attainment increased from 1 percent to 27 percent, and the lingcod attainment increased from 0 percent to 14 percent. All others are comparable to June attainments.

For stocks with at-sea set-asides, the GMT did not identify any stocks for which the ACL was at risk of being exceeded under either a low or average Pacific whiting attainment scenario in the at-sea sectors, even if all other sectors caught their recent maximum catch amounts (Tables 9-12 of [Agenda Item G.8.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1](#)). The GMT also concluded that none of the trawl allocations appear to be at risk of being exceeded.

Chinook Salmon

In Table 6 of [Agenda Item G.8.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1](#), 77-84 percent of the 11,000 Chinook salmon bycatch threshold is projected to be caught under the scenario in which the at-sea sectors reach low attainments of their initial Pacific whiting allocations. In the average attainment scenario, 101-108 percent of the threshold is projected to be caught. In discussions with industry, and based on Tables 1 and 2 of GMT Report 1, the low attainment scenario may be the most likely for 2023. The GMT would also like to clarify that the Scenarios 1 and 2 described for Table 6 in [Supplemental GMT Report 1, September 2023](#) are based on average and maximum annual shoreside Chinook salmon bycatch, not Pacific whiting bycatch as currently described in the report.

If the whiting sector reached the 11,000 Chinook salmon threshold, those non-tribal whiting vessels operating under a Salmon Mitigation Plan (SMP) would be permitted to continue to fish into the 3,500 fish Reserve regardless of Council action. However, if the Council was concerned about Chinook salmon bycatch and the potential of the sector exceeding the threshold and needing access to the Reserve, the Council could take action at this meeting to recommend a Bycatch Reduction Area(s) (BRA) or Block Area Closure(s) (BAC) ([50 CFR 660.60\(i\)\(1\)\(ii\)](#)). The BRA or BAC could either be effective immediately or would be triggered when the 11,000 Chinook salmon bycatch threshold is exceeded or projected to be exceeded. Additionally, the Council could specify that the BRA or BAC only be applicable to a sector or sectors within the Pacific whiting fishery and/or only vessels that are not party to an approved SMP. All vessels in the fishery except five shoreside vessels are part of an approved SMP. The Council would need to clarify that specificity if action is taken.

The GMT does not see merit in implementing a BRA or BAC that is applicable to those vessels party to an SMP (i.e., an entire sector or sectors), because vessels in an SMP are already held to salmon mitigation measures in their respective SMPs for the entire year. If the 11,000 Chinook salmon bycatch threshold is exceeded, those vessels party to an SMP could access the 3,500 fish reserve (if it is not also needed by other sectors), but the five vessels not under an SMP would be required to cease fishing for the remainder of the year, unless they joined an existing SMP or created and submitted a new SMP approved by the National Marine Fisheries Service ([50 CFR 660.60\(i\)\(2\)\(ii\)](#)). The Council could implement a BRA or BAC that would allow those five shoreside vessels to continue fishing if the Chinook salmon threshold is exceeded by accessing the Reserve.

However, the GMT explored all possible sources of spatial data to inform selection of such areas and concluded that there is not sufficient data to confidently inform potential spatial closures that would apply to vessels in the shoreside Pacific whiting sector. Shoreside vessels are required to have either one observer or electronic monitoring (EM), and the vast majority of the sector employs EM. We do not currently have access to 2023 EM data, and our analysis in [Supplemental GMT Report 1](#) indicates that Chinook bycatch patterns are notably different this year for all sectors compared to prior years, so we concluded that using prior years as a proxy was not reasonable.

Table 1. 2023 at-sea catches and set-aside attainment through September 11, 2023. Stocks are listed in descending order of 2023 set-aside attainment.

Stock	2023				
	CP Catch (mt)	MS Catch (mt)	Total At-sea Catch (mt)	At-sea Set-aside (mt)	Set-aside Attainment thru Sept 11 (%)
Darkblotched rockfish	71.5	8.4	79.9	76.4	105%
Yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10' N. lat.	253.9	30.1	284.0	320	89%
Sablefish north of 36° N. lat.	67.3	15.9	83.2	100	83%
Canary rockfish	19.5	0.4	19.9	36	55%
Shortspine thornyhead north of 34° 27' N. lat.	31.0	3.0	34.0	70	49%
Widow rockfish	179.7	20.0	199.7	476	42%
Other flatfish	9.2	0.4	9.6	35	27%
Longnose skate	0.7	0.6	1.3	5	26%
Pacific ocean perch north of 40° 10' N. lat.	67.6	5.8	73.4	300	25%
Arrowtooth flounder	10.9	2.0	12.9	70	18%
Minor slope rockfish north of 40° 10' N. lat.	44.6	7.5	52.1	300	17%
Minor shelf rockfish north of 40° 10' N. lat.	5.2	0.7	5.9	35	17%
Lingcod north of 40° 10' N. lat.	0.7	1.4	2.1	15	14%
Dover sole	0.4	<0.1	0.4	10	4%
Pacific halibut	0.2	*	0.2	10	2%
Petrале sole	0	0	0	5	0%