

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON
HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR 2025-26 - PART I

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the draft 2025 and 2026 overfishing limits (OFLs) and acceptable biological catches (ABCs) for US West Coast groundfish stocks and stock complexes (Attachment 1). This included provisional harvest specifications under default harvest control rules (HCRs), the range of alternatives that were adopted in September 2023, and revisions made by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council).

The SSC endorses the OFLs and ABCs listed in Attachment 1, with the following revisions (now referred to as E.5, Supplemental REVISED Attachment 1):

Table 1-1: 2025 harvest specifications under default HCRs

- Black rockfish off Oregon – Based on the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) recommendation regarding recent (2023-2024) catch projections, these values need to revert to those provided in the most recent stock assessment (Table vii; Agenda Item G.2, Supplemental REVISED Attachment 7, September 2023; OFL 367.50 mt, ABC 343.62 mt).
- Quillback rockfish south of 42° N. lat. – The SSC revised these values based on the SSC-endorsed rebuilding analysis (Agenda Item E.2, Attachment 1) and total estimate of fishing mortality provided by the GMT (Agenda Item E.2.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1), which pertains to all sectors in 2024 and amounts to 10.62 mt. Based on Table 4 of Agenda Item E.2, Attachment 1, the OFL value should be 1.51 mt for 2025. The ABC will depend upon the adoption of a rebuilding plan.
- Vermilion rockfish south of 42° N. lat. – The SSC revised these values using those provided by Agenda Item E.2, Supplemental REVISED Attachment 5 (OFL 315.2 mt, ABC 280.5 mt).

Table 1-2: 2026 harvest specifications under default HCRs

- Black rockfish off Oregon – Based on the GMT recommendation regarding recent (2023-2024) catch projections, these values need to revert to those provided in the most recent stock assessment (Table vii; Agenda Item G.2, Supplemental REVISED Attachment 7, September 2023; OFL 377.12 mt, ABC 350.50 mt).
- Quillback rockfish south of 42° N. lat. – The SSC will revisit these values following final Council decisions on the rebuilding analysis.
- Vermilion rockfish south of 42° N. lat. – The SSC revised these values using those from Agenda Item E.2, Supplemental REVISED Attachment 5 (OFL 314.1 mt, ABC 277.6 mt).

The SSC reviewed proposed changes to the annual catch limit (ACL) apportionment method for shortspine thornyhead (Agenda Item E.5.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1). Although the 2023 stock assessment was coastwide, shortspine thornyhead is managed as two units with separate ACLs north and south of Point Conception. The GMT report presented two options for shortspine thornyhead apportionment. The status quo method relies on long-term (2003 to 2022) mean

biomass estimated from the Northwest Fisheries Science Center's West Coast bottom trawl (NWFSC WCBT) survey whereas Option 1 involves a rolling 5-yr mean estimate of biomass from the NWFSC WCBT survey. The SSC supports the GMT's recommendation of using Option 1, which would be more responsive to changes in survey distribution and aligns with the apportionment method currently used for sablefish.

The last items reviewed under Agenda Item E.5 were two SSC subcommittee reports. The first was a joint Economics and Groundfish Subcommittee report, which included a review of the most recent sablefish trip limit model for the fixed gear fishery. The SSC concurs with the subcommittees' conclusion that the revised model is appropriate for use in harvest specifications and in-season management. The SSC also concurs with subcommittee recommendations for future work, which would involve jointly modeling catch-per-vessel and participation, jointly estimating the probability of fishing and expected revenue for individual vessels, and incorporating forecasted covariates to improve predictions of sablefish catch into the future.

The second subcommittee report was compiled by the SSC's Ecosystem-based Management and Groundfish Subcommittees (EBM-GFSC). This report included a review of the risk table approach (Fishery Ecosystem Plan's Ecosystem and Climate Information Initiative) developed by the Ecosystem Workgroup (EWG) and two pilot risk tables. The risk table approach involves synthesizing environmental or ecosystem, assessment-related, and population dynamics considerations for decision-making processes. Risk categories range from 1 (conditions above or better than normal) to 4 (conditions of major concern). Pilot risk tables presented for petrale sole and sablefish related ecosystem considerations to recruitment. The subcommittees were interested in also understanding how risk tables would perform when they address other components relevant to stock assessment. Potential implementation pathways that were outlined in the EBM-GFSC report involved using risk categories to prioritize stock assessments, adjust the extent of scientific uncertainty (σ) or management risk tolerance (P^*), modify time penalties that account for the age of an assessment, and make in-season adjustments. The SSC subcommittees identified a need to tailor risk tables for their intended use and develop a process that prevents multiple concurrent uses (i.e., "double-counting" uncertainty). For the 2025-2026 harvest specifications cycle, the information in the risk table for sablefish could be used by the GMT or Council to inform their decision on P^* alternatives. The SSC endorses the EBM-GFSC report and EWG's preliminary work on a risk table approach, and recommends operational testing to explore the various implementation pathways presented. The SSC also recommends development of additional risk tables to examine their potential utility for data-poor stocks.

PFMC
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