

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON BIENNIAL MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR 2023-24: TRIP LIMITS, BAG LIMITS, AND SEASON STRUCTURES; NEW MANAGEMENT MEASURES; & QUILLBACK ROCKFISH REBUILDING PLAN

This report covers Items #11-20 from the Action Item Checklist ([Agenda Item E.7, Attachment 1 November 2023](#)). Items #2 & #3 (GMT Report 2) and Items #4-10 (GMT Report 3) will be in separate reports.

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Executive Summary

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) has highlighted potential items for review during our overwinter analysis and seeks Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) concurrence and/or additional guidance on these plans, with specific requests noted below.

The GMT recommends adopting status quo individual fishing quota (IFQ) allocations and trip limits for non-IFQ species. The Council may want to consider increasing sablefish trip limits for the open access (OA) and limited entry fixed gear (LEFG) sectors to account for annual catch limit (ACL) increases. The GMT plans to analyze sablefish trips limit north of 40° 10' N. lat. but does not see a need to adjust trips limits for sablefish south of 36° N. lat. Subject to any potential Council guidance, the GMT also anticipates analyzing bimonthly trip limit adjustments for canary rockfish, shortspine thornyhead, and copper rockfish in the nearshore rockfish complex south of 40° 10' N. lat.

Anticipating that quillback rockfish off California may be declared overfished and a rebuilding plan required, the GMT recommends that quillback rockfish south of 42° N. lat. be removed from the minor nearshore rockfish complexes. The GMT will work over winter to analyze management measures to meet rebuilding plan requirements and trip limit adjustments within the area 42° N. lat. to 36° N. lat. to limit mortality of quillback rockfish, including trip limits for the nearshore rockfish complex, cabezon, kelp greenling, lingcod, and shelf rockfish (including vermilion rockfish).

As a process improvement, the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) requested trip limit tables all use one format, either monthly or bimonthly, for consistency. The GMT thinks this will reduce regulatory complexity but will evaluate whether there may be impacts to cross-over provisions.

Washington, Oregon, and California will be considering various routine management measures to keep recreational fishery impacts within appropriate harvest guidelines. Washington will evaluate the need to maintain or implement routine management measures pending a review of catch trends. Oregon will analyze a combination of depth restrictions and bag limits for black rockfish, canary rockfish, nearshore rockfish, and cabezon, once sector-specific allocations are identified through the Council and state processes. California will be considering routine changes including adjusting season lengths, further reductions to the vermilion rockfish sub-bag limit and may investigate the possibility of creating sub management areas within certain Groundfish Management Areas (GMA) or using different management lines approved by the Council. California will also investigate new or existing management measures to limit quillback rockfish mortality within state waters. Although the proposed changes affect state fisheries, the GMT will investigate ways to present data to the Council to ensure that the sources of mortality from both state and Federal fisheries are accounted for during the Council's season setting process.

Lastly, the GMT recommends keeping all of the new management measures currently on the list for overwinter analysis, with the exception of Item 19c (updating surface release discard mortality rates) for which the GMT recommends taking out of the 2025-26 biennial package and pursuing an alternative pathway.

Action Item #11: Shorebased Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ)

At the time of writing this report, the GMT has not received any requests for changes to the IFQ trip limits for non-IFQ stocks, nor did the team identify any stocks for which IFQ trip limit adjustments need to be analyzed to stay within 2025-26 harvest limits. **The GMT recommends adopting status quo IFQ allocations and trip limits for non-IFQ species.**

Action Item #12 & 13: Open Access Fixed Gear Fisheries

The GMT received a request from the GAP to investigate the possibility of changing commercial trip limit tables to be either monthly or bi-monthly so there is consistency between all trip limit tables. If feasible, this change would minimize regulatory complexity. During the GMT's over winter analysis, the team will look into how changing the trip limit tables may affect cross-over provisions.

12. North of 40° 10' N. Lat.

Sablefish

Sablefish ACLs are expected to increase substantially in the 2025-26 biennium as a result of the 2023 stock assessment. The Council may want to consider increasing sablefish trip limits for the open access (OA) and limited entry fixed gear (LEFG) sectors to account for ACL increases. Particularly in the OA sector, participation has been increasing in recent years due to declining opportunity in the Dungeness crab and salmon fisheries, and increasing sablefish trip limits in the OA daily trip limit (DTL) sector could provide an important source of income to those vessels that operate in multiple fisheries. Starting in January 2024, status quo sablefish trip limits in the OA DTL sector north of 36° N. lat. will be 3,000 lbs. per week and 6,000 lbs. per bimonthly period, based on Council action at this meeting.

Canary rockfish

The GMT will analyze adjustments to bimonthly trip limits for canary rockfish to stay within the 2025-26 ACLs and non-trawl allocations. The status quo OA trip limit for canary rockfish north of 40°10' N. lat. is 2,000 lbs. per two months.

Shortspine thornyhead

The GMT will analyze adjustments to bimonthly trip limits for shortspine thornyhead north of 34° 27' N. lat. to stay within the 2025-26 ACLs and non-trawl allocations. The status quo OA trip limit for shortspine thornyhead north of 34° 27' N. lat. is 50 lbs. per month.

Quillback rockfish north of 40° 10' to 42° N. Lat.

If quillback rockfish off of California is declared overfished, a rebuilding plan will need to be formally adopted. Given the ongoing development of the rebuilding analysis, the GMT will work overwinter to analyze the management measures needed to meet the goals of a rebuilding plan. The GMT anticipates analyzing trip limit adjustments to limit quillback rockfish mortality, specifically but not limited to: quillback rockfish, nearshore rockfish complex (40° 10' to 42° N. lat.), cabezon, greenling, lingcod, and shelf rockfish including vermilion rockfish.

13. South of 40° 10' N. Lat.

Sablefish

See Section 12 of this report for sablefish trip limits in the OA DTL sector north of 36° N. lat.

Status quo sablefish trip limits in the OA DTL sector south of 36° N. lat. are currently 2,000 lbs. per week and 6,000 lbs. per bimonthly period. Both limits are the highest they have been since 2010. The GMT did not identify a need to analyze trip limit adjustments for sablefish south of 36° N. lat. in the 2025-26 biennium despite expected ACL increases, because vessels currently operating in the fishery are not attaining status quo trip limits. The team has also not received any requests to do so.

Quillback rockfish

If quillback rockfish off of California is declared overfished, a rebuilding plan will need to be formally adopted. The GMT will work overwinter to analyze the management measures needed to meet the goals of a rebuilding plan. The GMT anticipates analyzing trip limit adjustments to limit quillback rockfish mortality, specifically but not limited to: quillback rockfish, nearshore rockfish complex south of 40° 10' N. lat, cabezon, greenling, lingcod, and shelf rockfish including vermilion rockfish.

Copper rockfish

The GMT will analyze adjustments to species specific bimonthly trip limits for copper rockfish in the nearshore rockfish complex south of 40° 10' N. lat. to stay within the 2025-26 ACLs and non-trawl allocations. The status quo OA species-specific trip limit for copper rockfish in the deeper nearshore Minor Nearshore Rockfish complex south of 40° 10' N. lat. is 75 lbs. per two months.

Canary rockfish

The GMT will analyze adjustments to bimonthly trip limits for canary rockfish to implement 2025-26 harvest specifications. The status quo OA trip limit for canary rockfish south of 40° 10' N. lat. is 2,000 lbs. per two months.

Shortspine thornyhead

See Section 12 of this report for OA shortspine thornyhead trip limits north of 34° 27' N. lat.

The GMT will investigate whether trip limit adjustments are necessary to stay within the shortspine thornyhead ACLs and non-trawl allocations south of 34° 27' N. lat., but given that recent mortality south of 34° 27' N. lat. has been lower than the anticipated 2025-26 ACLs, the GMT does not expect that trip limit adjustments will be necessary.

Action Item #14 & 15: Limited Entry Fixed Gear Fisheries

In addition to the OA sector, the GMT expects to analyze changing any current monthly trip limits in the LEFG fishery to bimonthly trip limits.

14. North of 40° 10' N. Lat.

Sablefish

The Council may want to consider increasing the sablefish trip limits in the LEFG sector in response to higher sablefish ACLs. Starting in January 2024, status quo sablefish trip limits in the limited entry (LE) sector north of 36° N. lat. will be 4,500 lbs. per week and 9,000 lbs. per bimonthly period, based on Council action at this meeting.

Effective January 2023, the Council chose to extend the primary sablefish season to December 31 from October 31, and LEFG sablefish vessels that participate in the primary sablefish fishery will typically fish in the LEFG DTL sablefish fishery after either fully attaining their cumulative tier limits or after the primary sablefish season ends. With expected increases in the primary sablefish tier limits as a result of higher sablefish ACLs, it is possible that LEFG DTL sablefish fishery participation could be lower than average after October 31 in the 2025-26 biennium. Therefore, setting trip limits high for the entire year may allow the entire fleet to take advantage of the high trip limits more equitably than waiting until June or September to increase trip limits, as has generally been the case.

Canary rockfish

The GMT will analyze adjustments to bimonthly trip limits for canary rockfish to stay within the 2025-26 ACLs and non-trawl allocations. The status quo OA trip limit for canary rockfish north of 40°10' N. lat. is 4,000 lbs. per two months.

Shortspine thornyhead

The GMT will analyze adjustments to bimonthly trip limits for shortspine thornyhead north of 34° 27' N. lat. to stay within the 2025-26 ACLs and non-trawl allocations. Status quo LEFG shortspine thornyhead trip limits north of 34° 27' N. lat. are 2,000 lbs. per two months January through June and 2,500 lbs. per two months July through December.

North of 40° 10' to 42° N. Lat.

If quillback rockfish off of California is declared overfished, a rebuilding plan will need to be formally adopted. The GMT will work over winter to analyze the management measures needed to meet the goals of a rebuilding plan. The GMT anticipates analyzing trip limit adjustments which may impact quillback rockfish mortality, specifically but not limited to: quillback rockfish, nearshore rockfish complex (north of 40° 10' to 42° N. lat.), cabezon, greenling, lingcod, and shelf rockfish complex (north of 40° 10' to 42° N. lat.) including vermilion rockfish.

15. South of 40° 10' N. lat.

Sablefish

See section 14 for sablefish trip limits in the LEFG DTL sector north of 36° N. lat.

The LEFG DTL sector south of 36° N. lat. is only managed with a weekly trip limit and does not have a bimonthly trip limit. The status quo sablefish trip limit in the LEFG DTL sector south of 36° N. lat. is currently 2,500 lbs. per week, which has been the trip limit for this sector since 2021. The GMT did not identify a need to analyze trip limit adjustments for sablefish south of 36° N. lat. in the 2025-26 biennium despite expected ACL increases, because vessels currently operating in

the fishery are not attaining status quo trip limits. The team has also not received any requests to do so.

Quillback rockfish

If quillback rockfish off of California is declared overfished, a rebuilding plan will need to be formally adopted. Given the ongoing development of the rebuilding analysis, The GMT will work overwinter to analyze the management measures needed to meet the goals of a rebuilding plan. The GMT anticipates analyzing trip limit and area management adjustments which may impact quillback rockfish mortality, specifically but not limited to: quillback rockfish, nearshore rockfish south of 40° 10' N. lat., cabezon, greenling, lingcod, and shelf rockfish complex south of 40° 10' N. lat. including vermilion/sunset rockfish.

Canary rockfish

The GMT will analyze adjustments to bimonthly trip limits for canary rockfish to implement 2025-26 harvest specifications. The status quo LEFG trip limit for canary rockfish south of 40° 10' N. lat. is 4,000 lbs. per two months.

Copper rockfish

The GMT will analyze adjustments to species-specific bimonthly trip limits for copper rockfish in the deeper nearshore Minor Nearshore Rockfish complex south of 40° 10' N. lat. to stay within the 2025-26 ACLs and non-trawl allocations. The status quo LE species-specific trip limit for copper rockfish in the deeper nearshore Minor Nearshore Rockfish complex south of 40° 10' N. lat. is 75 lbs. per two months.

Shortspine thornyhead

See Section 14 of this report for LEFG shortspine thornyhead trip limits north of 34° 27' N. lat.

The GMT will investigate whether trip limit adjustments are necessary to stay within the shortspine thornyhead ACLs and non-trawl allocations south of 34° 27' N. lat., but given that recent mortality south of 34° 27' N. lat. has been lower than the anticipated 2025-26 ACLs, the GMT does not expect that trip limit adjustments will be necessary.

Action Items #16-18

The Council indicated interest in considering modifications to the recreational sablefish ACL deductions (i.e., off-the-top). The description of proposed modifications is described under Action Item #3, in [Agenda Item E.7.a., Supplemental GMT Report 2, November 2023](#).

Action Item #16: Washington Recreational

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will review the most recent catch and effort data, along with ACLs and harvest guidelines approved at this meeting, to develop a range of management measure options that will keep catch within state-specific allocations or harvest guidelines in 2025 and 2026. Management measures analyzed in recent biennial cycles have been focused on relaxing restrictions intended to limit encounters with yelloweye and canary rockfishes in recreational fisheries. Because of the uncertainty in projected encounters after a long period of significant fishery restrictions, WDFW with support from Washington recreational anglers took a

very precautionary approach to relaxing restrictions to ensure that harvest guidelines are not exceeded. Additionally, in 2023 and 2024, management measures were analyzed and implemented to address the need to reduce mortality of copper rockfish, quillback rockfish, and vermilion rockfish. WDFW will be considering the need to maintain or implement additional routine changes to recreational fisheries; specific measures may consider revisions to season dates, bag limits, or depth restrictions.

Action Item #17: Oregon Recreational

Oregon will be considering season structures, depth restrictions, and bag limits to keep impacts within appropriate harvest guidelines. Since 2004 until recent years, yelloweye rockfish was the most constraining species to the Oregon recreational fishery. However, lower ACLs for black rockfish, nearshore rockfish complex north of 40° 10' N. lat., and canary rockfish, as well as increased groundfish effort, have resulted in black, canary, China, copper, and quillback rockfishes becoming the primary drivers of recreational fisheries regulations. While depth restrictions are the main tools used to control yelloweye rockfish impacts, limiting fishing to shallower waters has the opposite effect and increases catch of black rockfish and the nearshore complex species, such as quillback rockfish. Bag limit adjustment is the tool used to manipulate impacts to black rockfish, as they constitute 75 to 85 percent of the total number of groundfish landed by the Oregon recreational fishery. Once sector-specific allocations are identified through the Council and state processes (for black rockfish, canary rockfish, nearshore rockfish, and cabezon), combinations of depth restrictions and bag limits will be analyzed.

Due to recent large recruitment year-classes of sablefish, there is a building interest from recreational anglers to target sablefish offshore. Sablefish are found farther offshore than typical bottomfish anglers will venture, though they will encounter sablefish during offshore Pacific halibut trips. Sablefish are currently part of the “general marine bag limit” that includes rockfish species, cabezon, greenling, etc., with a current bag limit of 5 fish in aggregate for 2023 (proposed to be the same in state rule for 2024). If sablefish are to be pulled out of the general marine bag limit allowing anglers to retain a higher number (10 or 12), this may draw interest as the general marine bag limit may decrease in 2025 in response to the recent black rockfish stock assessment. It is unknown at this time if an increased bag limit for sablefish will result in any changed angler effort from the Oregon recreational bottomfish and halibut fisheries.

Action Item #18: California Recreational

California will be considering changes to recreational fisheries, such as season dates, depth restrictions, bag limits, and sub-bag limits. This will likely include further reductions to the vermilion rockfish sub-bag limit. A review of the most recent catch and effort data, along with ACLs and harvest guidelines approved at this meeting, will be used to develop a range of catch control measures intended to keep catch within state-specific allocations or harvest guidelines in 2025 and 2026. Additionally, California may investigate the possibility of creating sub management areas within certain Groundfish Management Areas (GMA) or using different management lines approved by the Council in [50 CFR 660.11](#), other than the recent and historic GMAs. Specifically, around Point Lopez, CA 36° N. lat. to investigate providing additional opportunity to the area south of Point Lopez, since quillback rockfish are almost never caught that far south.

Additionally, in the GAP's [Agenda Item G.6.a, Supplemental GAP Report 1 September 2023](#) statement there were GAP requests that are “routine” management measures but were presented as “new” management measures and therefore have been moved under Action item 18.

18a. Model recreational fishery season structure for areas north of 34° 27' N. lat. for scenarios shoreward of 20 fm and seaward of 50 fm.

Utilization of different Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) boundary lines to meet but not exceed harvest guidelines is a routine management measure considered during each biennial harvest specifications cycle. This specific request submitted as a “new” management measure will be analyzed for fisheries seaward of the 50 fm RCA line. It is the GMT's understanding this request is primarily to avoid quillback rockfish which primarily occur in 20- 50 fm of water.

Currently there are no 20 fm or shallower RCA lines in Federal regulations. Additionally, since the vast majority of the area shallower than 20 fm is in state waters it is not within the Council or National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) jurisdiction to create a 20 fm or shallower RCA line. However, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is currently exploring the feasibility of creating 20 fm and shallower RCA lines in California regulations which could be implemented in state regulations allowing for 20 fm or shallower RCA lines to be used in state water only groundfish fisheries off California. These regulations would be presented to and adopted by the [California Fish and Game Commission](#) during their regular meetings. Allowing fisheries shallower than 20 fm will likely be a critical component to create recreational fishing opportunity within California while staying under the Federal ACLs for quillback rockfish and other groundfish species currently in the Council's Groundfish Fishery Management Plan.

For stocks that occur in both state and Federal waters (including quillback rockfish¹), the Council/NMFS only have jurisdictional authority to manage the stock in Federal waters. However, in order to account for all mortality throughout a stock's range, harvest from both state and Federal waters is counted against the Federal ACL. During the GMT's over winter analysis the team will investigate ways to present data to the Council to ensure that the sources of mortality from both state and Federal fisheries are accounted for during the Councils season setting process.

18b. Include March in the current offshore-only season south of 34° 27' N. lat.

Modeling different season length scenarios to meet but not exceed harvest guidelines is a routine management measure considered during each biennial harvest specifications cycle. This specific request submitted as a “new” management measure will be analyzed for recreational fisheries south of Point Conception.

¹ Quillback rockfish off California is expected to be defined as a stock shortly following the approval of Amendment 31 ([88 FR 57400](#)), for which Decision Day is November 21, 2023.

18c. Regulatory clarification of closed areas around Farallon Islands, California

At the September 2023 meeting in, [G.6.a, Supplemental CDFW Report 1](#), CDFW proposed to remove incorrect language in Federal Regulations referencing California State law pertaining to a groundfish closure inside 10 fathoms around the Farallon Islands. No such state law currently exists. Specifically:

a. [50 CFR 660.330\(d\)\(14\)](#) *Farallon Islands*. Under California law, commercial fishing for all groundfish is prohibited between the shoreline and the 10 fm (18 m) depth contour around the Farallon Islands. An exception to this prohibition is that commercial fishing for “other flatfish” is allowed around the Farallon Islands using hook and line gear only. (See Table 2 (South) of this subpart.) For a definition of the Farallon Islands, see § 660.70, subpart C.

b. [50 CFR 660.70\(p\)](#) *Farallon Islands*. The Farallon Islands, off San Francisco and San Mateo Counties, include Southeast Farallon Island, Middle Farallon Island, North Farallon Island and Noon Day Rock. Generally, the State of California prohibits fishing for groundfish between the shoreline and the 10–fm (18–m) depth contour around the Farallon Islands.

The GMT agrees with the CDFW’s assessments and believes that cleaning up these Federal regulations will help to provide clarity to fishing communities.

18d. Model zero retention of copper rockfish south of Point 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.

Modeling different retention scenarios to meet but not exceed harvest guidelines is a routine management measure considered during each biennial harvest specifications cycle. This specific request was submitted as a “new” management measure, however, the GMT considers this part of CDFW’s routine process for recreational fisheries. If CDFW adopts state-specific regulations requiring the possession of a descending device, any potential “savings” from this new state regulation for copper rockfish and other rockfish species will be included in CDFW’s analysis of the impacts of state regulations on federally managed species.

18e. Allow fishing for non-groundfish species with hoop nets and hand-held dip nets in nearshore waters during the offshore-only season, with shelf and slope rockfish complex species on-board north of 34° 27’ N. lat.

At their September 2023 meeting, the Council recommended that California recreational fishing vessels be required to fish seaward of the Recreational RCA line (*i.e.*, the 50 fm depth contour, a management measure also known as the “offshore fishery”) for the remainder of 2023, consistent with [California state action](#) implemented on August 21, 2023. Like other groundfish closures that

exist in Federal waters, continuous transit rules apply when a Recreational RCA line is in effect, which means recreational vessels may only be transiting shoreward of 50 fm depth contour on their way back to port (*see* [50 CFR 660.360\(c\)\(3\)\(i\)\(a\)](#)). The GAP brought up concerns that these continuous transit rules, in addition to similar transit rules that were applicable in California state waters at the time², prevent recreational vessels from: 1) anchoring overnight on multi-day charter trips for safety shoreward of 50 fm, and 2) anchoring to fish for non-groundfish species (*e.g.*, crab with pots) shoreward of 50 fm. The GAP therefore submitted a new management measure request to allow recreational vessels to anchor and perform these activities for the upcoming 2025-26 biennium, sooner in 2024 if possible.

California took [emergency state action](#)³ to address these concerns, with the new regulations going into effect on October 30, 2023. In Federal waters, addressing this request would require a modification to the continuous transit provisions for recreational vessels at [50 CFR 660.360\(c\)\(3\)\(i\)\(a\)](#). Federal groundfish regulations need not address whether fishing for non-groundfish species is allowed, they need only address continuous transit provisions while groundfish is in possession on board a vessel. The GMT supports this administrative action as it creates consistency between state and Federal waters and provides significant socioeconomic benefits to the recreational fishing fleet.

18f. For the area south of Point 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.

At their September 2023 meeting, the Council recommended that California recreational fishing vessels be required to fish seaward of the Recreational RCA line (*i.e.*, the 50 fm depth contour, a management measure also known as the “offshore fishery”) for the remainder of 2023, consistent with [California state action](#) implemented on August 21, 2023. Like other groundfish closures that exist in Federal waters, continuous transit rules apply when a Recreational RCA line is in effect, which means recreational vessels may only be transiting shoreward of 50 fm depth contour on their way back to port (*see* [50 CFR 660.360\(c\)\(3\)\(i\)\(a\)](#)). The GAP brought up concerns that these continuous transit rules, in addition to similar transit rules that were applicable in California state waters at the time⁴, prevent recreational vessels from: 1) anchoring overnight on multi-day charter

² [“TRANSIT PROVISION:](#) Groundfish species or species groups that are closed to take and/or possession in part of a groundfish management area (state and Federal Marine Protected Areas, or other closure areas) may be possessed aboard a vessel in transit through the closed area with no fishing gear deployed in the water (§27.20(b)(1)(A)).”

³ “This emergency rulemaking action prohibits the take of quillback rockfish statewide, sets up a nearshore fishery closure shoreward of the 50-fathom line in management areas north of Point Conception, and authorizes use of hoop nets, crab traps and dip nets, when legally taken groundfish are aboard in closed areas.”

⁴ [“TRANSIT PROVISION:](#) Groundfish species or species groups that are closed to take and/or possession in part of a groundfish management area (state and Federal Marine Protected Areas, or other closure areas) may be possessed aboard a vessel in transit through the closed area with no fishing gear deployed in the water (§27.20(b)(1)(A)).”

trips for safety shoreward of 50 fm, and 2) anchoring to fish for non-groundfish species (*e.g.*, squid with dip nets) shoreward of 50 fm. The GAP therefore submitted a new management measure request to allow recreational vessels to anchor and perform these activities for the upcoming 2025-26 biennium, sooner in 2024 if possible.

California took [emergency state action](#)⁵ to address these concerns, with the new regulations going into effect on October 30, 2023. In Federal waters, addressing this request would require a modification to the continuous transit provisions for recreational vessels at [50 CFR 660.360\(c\)\(3\)\(i\)\(a\)](#). Federal groundfish regulations need not address whether fishing for non-groundfish species is allowed, they need only address continuous transit provisions while groundfish is in possession on board a vessel. The GMT supports this administrative action as it creates consistency between state and Federal waters and provides significant socioeconomic benefits to the recreational fishing fleet.

Action Item #19: “New” Management Measures

19a. Create open access permit/registration

The GMT reviewed the report (see [Agenda Item E.7.a, NMFS Report 1](#)) submitted by the NMFS, which requests the creation of a permit for the directed open access groundfish sector (defined at [50 CFR 660.11](#) under “Open Access Fishery”) as a new management measure for the 2025-26 groundfish biennium and beyond. The GMT notes that this request is smaller in scope than the proposal added to the Council’s new management measures list in March 2023, which proposes a permit for the entire open access sector, including directed and incidental (see [Agenda Item F.8.a, NMFS Report 1](#)). NMFS is recommending the creation of this permit to better capture information on vessels using “12E⁶” non-bottom contact hook-and-line gear types (defined in the regulations at [660.330\(b\)\(3\)](#)) in order to verify that they have low interactions with quillback rockfish, as documented by the GMT at the September 2023 Council meeting ([Agenda Item G.8.a, Supplemental GMT Report 2](#)). The permit will allow for NMFS to better identify these vessels for more targeted observer coverage by the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (WCGOP). This item is administrative and is anticipated to be a low analytical workload.

The GMT recommends including this proposal as a new management measure for the 2025-26 biennium and beyond.

19b. Require recreational anglers to possess a descending device aboard a vessel when fishing for groundfish in Federal waters

CDFW submitted a request to the Council ([G.6.a, Supplemental CDFW Report 1](#)) to require descending devices (DD) onboard all recreational vessels fishing for or possessing groundfish in Federal waters off California as an additional measure to reduce mortality of quillback rockfish

⁵ “This emergency rulemaking action prohibits the take of quillback rockfish statewide, sets up a nearshore fishery closure shoreward of the 50-fathom line in management areas north of Point Conception, and authorizes use of hoop nets, crab traps and dip nets, when legally taken groundfish are aboard in closed areas.”

⁶ “12E” hook-and-line gear configurations were implemented as legal gear types for use within the Non-Trawl RCA via the 2023-24 Groundfish Harvest Specifications and Management Measures final rule ([87 FR 77007](#); December 16, 2022) as management measure 12E.

and other rockfish species. Washington and Oregon already have state laws related to DDs. California is investigating adding a similar requirement to possess a DD aboard a vessel fishing for or possessing groundfish in state waters. The GMT understands California's original request to require California recreational anglers to possess a DD aboard a vessel when fishing for groundfish in Federal waters off California is now being expanded to Federal waters off Washington, Oregon, and California. The implementation of a Federal measure requiring a DD would provide consistency in Federal waters, while allowing the states to enact more stringent DD requirements, such as requiring the possession and use of a descending device, if they choose. The GMT anticipates this proposal would yield a low analytical workload. The GMT notes that enforcement of this new measure would be limited to ensuring that a functional DD is on board the vessel during a fishing trip, subject to any additional guidance from the Enforcement Consultants.

The GMT supports requiring descending devices onboard all recreational groundfish vessels as a new management measure in Federal waters off Washington, Oregon, and California for the 2025-26 biennium and beyond.

19c. Update surface release discard mortality rates (DMRs) as appropriate for use in management

At the September 2023 Council meeting, the GMT proposed updating surface release DMRs for use in management as part of the new management measures list. This topic was two-prong, one was to develop new surface mortality rates to apply to pole and jig gears, and the second was to apply nearshore mortality rates developed for use in the Groundfish Mortality Report to specific gear in the OA sector. Upon further exploration, it was determined that neither of these tasks are appropriate for the new management measures list as they require a longer timeline than the biennial process would allow, WCGOP assistance, and Groundfish Subcommittee and Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviews.

The GMT proposes an alternative pathway forward pending Council approval. This pathway would be that a sub-group works with the SSC on developing new surface mortality rates (as was recently done for descending device discard mortality rates) and estimating depth-dependent rates for the OA and nearshore sectors based on gear proportions in those sectors. The goal would be to have the values reviewed and approved by the Council in September 2024. **The GMT recommends removing the development of surface release discard mortality rates from the harvest specifications and new management measures process in favor of the alternative pathway outlined above.**

19d. Rittenburg Bank Recreational Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Area

At the September 2023 Council meeting, the GAP discussed concerns about yelloweye rockfish bycatch in the California recreational fishery at Rittenburg Bank, which is an area located seaward of San Francisco Bay and is protected by a bottom trawl Essential Fish Habitat Conservation Area (EFHCA). The Rittenburg Bank EFHCA is also located inside of the Non-Trawl RCA, and therefore receives ancillary protection from most commercial non-trawl gear types. Due to the 50 fm recreational RCA closure (*i.e.*, recreational vessels being required to fish seaward of 50 fm), many recreational vessels fished this area in 2023. Since the Non-Trawl RCA is a commercial

fishery closure, recreational vessels are not subject to the same gear requirements as the OA and LEFG/IFQ gear switching sectors (*i.e.*, the requirement for a minimum of 50 feet between the bottom weight and lowest fishing hook to ensure gear is fished off the bottom; see [660.330\(b\)\(i\)\(A\)](#) and [660.330\(3\)\(ii\)\(A\)](#)). In other words, recreational vessels are permitted to fish with hooks all the way at the bottom because they are not subject to commercial regulations in the Non-Trawl RCA. After the May 15, 2023 recreational fishery opener, CDFW and NMFS received reports from fishermen about yelloweye rockfish discards in this area. In response to this, the GAP submitted a routine management measure request in September 2023 to change certain waypoints along the 50 fm depth contour with the intent of excluding part of the Rittenburg Bank area from fishing opportunity (*i.e.*, encompassing the area shoreward of 50 fm so recreational vessels do not have access to it); however, adjusting waypoints should only be done in the event that they better approximate depth contours, not as an action to reduce take of a specific species.

Since Rittenburg Bank appears to have a significant population of yelloweye rockfish and yelloweye rockfish are still rebuilding, a new Recreational Yelloweye RCA (YRCA) would be the most appropriate management tool to reduce catch at Rittenburg Bank. The GMT sought further clarification from the GAP on the need and desire for this proposed new management tool at the November 2023 meeting, and some GAP members indicated that this issue has been addressed via a shift in fishing strategies to avoid yelloweye rockfish. If the Council is interested, the GMT could still analyze the option to define a new YRCA in regulation for potential use in the future if needed. The analytical workload is expected to be small, and the geographic coordinates of the YRCA could be the same as those defined in regulation for the bottom trawl Rittenburg Bank EFHCA at [660.79\(s\)](#). Therefore, the GMT seeks Council direction on whether this potential new management measure should be considered in the overwinter analysis.

Action Item #20: Rebuilding Plan for California Quillback Rockfish

20a. Range of Alternatives for Potential Rebuilding Analysis

The GMT was advised by NMFS and agrees that in order to do an effective analysis of the needs of communities before a potential rebuilding analysis is adopted, we would need to begin that analysis overwinter. In [Agenda Item E.7.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, November 2023](#), **the GMT recommends analyzing ‘bookends’ of the rebuilding strategies shown in Table 1, F=0 ($T_{\text{target}} = 2045$), which represents the minimum time to rebuild, and the Acceptable Biological Catch Rule ($T_{\text{target}} = 2060$), which represents the maximum time to rebuild.** The GMT may investigate other SPR runs as applicable over winter.

20b. Remove Quillback Rockfish from Complex

Quillback rockfish south of 42° N. lat is anticipated to be declared overfished and a subsequent rebuilding analysis is ongoing. If quillback rockfish south of 42° N. lat. is declared overfished, **the GMT recommends that quillback rockfish south of 42° N. lat. be removed from the minor nearshore rockfish complexes (both the nearshore complex north of 40° 10' N. lat. and the deeper nearshore complex south of 40° 10' N. lat.).** Overfished species need to be managed to their species-specific overfishing limit (OFL) and ACL, and removing quillback rockfish from the

minor nearshore rockfish complexes will facilitate that need. Stocks that are in complexes are not generally monitored or managed to the stock-specific OFL. Additionally, removing quillback rockfish from the minor nearshore rockfish complexes will allow the GMT to identify and conduct any needed analyses to support the 2025-26 harvest specification for the remaining species in the complexes and will follow historic precedent the Council has used in managing other overfished rockfish species. Quillback rockfish would remain in the minor nearshore rockfish complex north of 42° N. lat. This will enable the GMT to move forward with the overwinter harvest specifications and new management measure analysis for the remaining species in the nearshore complex. Additionally, since quillback rockfish south of 42° N. lat could be in a rebuilding plan, the Council would need to track mortality against the quillback rockfish south of 42° N. lat OFL.

PFMC

11/06/23