



Pacific Fishery Management Council

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Brad Pettinger, Chair | Merrick J. Burden, Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 13, 2024

TO: Groundfish Advisory Subpanel, Groundfish Management Team, and Groundfish Interested Persons

FROM: Mr. Todd Phillips, Groundfish Staff Officer

SUBJECT: March 2024 Council Meeting Materials

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) will meet March 5-11 in Fresno, California. The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) and the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) will convene meetings starting Wednesday, March 6, 2024, at 8:00 A.M. and adjourn on Saturday, March 9, 2024. All meetings are open to the public and at least one opportunity for public comment has been scheduled for each meeting day.

The briefing book materials attached to this memorandum provide detailed information for items on the Council's March 2024 agenda. The following agenda items may be of particular interest to the GMT, the GAP, and other groundfish-interested stakeholders.

Groundfish

F.1 National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Report and Electronic Monitoring (EM) Update

The Council is scheduled to receive updates from the NMFS West Coast Region and the Northwest Science Fishery Center (NWFSC). Of interest to the GAP and GMT is the Council will be briefed on Congressional appropriations and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission video review reimbursement processes for the West Coast Electronic Monitoring Program.

F.2 Consideration of Additional California Quillback Rockfish Analyses and Adopt Rebuilding Analysis

In November 2023, the Council requested the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) Groundfish Subcommittee (GFSC) review issues raised by two public comments provided by Dr. Mark Maunder and Dr. Ray Hilborn. The purpose of reviewing this information was to provide the Council with further guidance on using the existing 2021 California quillback rockfish assessment ([Langseth et al. 2021](#)) and corresponding 2023 rebuilding analysis ([Langseth 2023](#)). The SSC GFSC review meeting was held January 26, 2024, which followed a meeting-specific Terms of Reference, with outcomes and a post-meeting summary report to be presented to the full SSC in March 2024. Any GFSC recommendations will be considered by the full SSC, after which the full SSC will advise the Council.

In December 2023, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration notified the Council of the overfished status determination for the California quillback rockfish stock. A draft rebuilding analysis has been developed per the [Terms of Reference for the Groundfish Rebuilding Analysis for 2023-2024](#), to examine a range of alternative rebuilding strategies and inform harvest specification decision-making.

The Council is scheduled to consider the outcome of the GFSC meeting and adopt the California quillback rockfish rebuilding analyses for use in groundfish management in 2025 and beyond.

F.3 Initial Stock Assessment Plan and Terms of Reference

The Council will adopt a preliminary list of stocks to be assessed in 2025 and 2027 which will serve to inform harvest specifications and management decisions for groundfish fisheries in 2027 and beyond. Additionally, the Council will consider Terms of Reference for the stock assessment process. The NWFSC will discuss the preliminary stock assessment priorities for 2025 and beyond with the Council and advisory bodies. The GMT and GAP should consider providing input to the Council on the preliminary list of stocks identified for assessments and the stock assessment terms of reference.

F.4 Trawl Cost Recovery Annual Report

The Council will receive its annual report from the NMFS regarding the trawl Cost Recovery Program. The report covers costs and fee collections from the previous year along with fee rates for the current year. Under this agenda item, the Council has the opportunity to review the costs and fee collections data as well as fee rates for this year.

F.5 Implementation of the 2024 Pacific Whiting Fishery under the U.S./Canada Agreement

The Council will be updated as to the 2024 Joint Management Committee meeting. That meeting is to formalize recommendations for the coastwide (U.S. and Canada) Pacific whiting total allowable catch. The Council will consider any necessary actions regarding the 2024 Pacific whiting U.S. annual catch limit. The GMT and GAP could consider providing comment regarding the outcomes of this annual process.

F.6 Fixed Gear Marking and Entanglement Risk Reduction Measures – Preliminary Preferred Alternative

In September 2023, the Council recommended a range of alternatives for gear marking and entanglement risk reduction measures for groundfish vessels using pot and longline gears. At this meeting, GAP and GMT should consider the analysis in Attachment 2 and provide recommendations to the Council on a preliminary preferred alternative(s).

F.7 2025-2026 Fisheries Analysis Update and Adopt California Quillback Rockfish Harvest Specifications and Rebuilding Parameters

The Council is scheduled to receive a briefing from the GMT regarding their overwinter analytical work on the 2025-26 harvest specifications and management measure analyses. Advisory bodies should consider providing guidance to the GMT specific to the results of the overwinter analyses. Additionally, the Council is also scheduled to adopt preliminary 2025-26 California quillback rockfish stock harvest specifications and rebuilding parameters. The Council's decision process will be linked to the outcome of F.2.

F.8 Inseason Adjustments – Final Action

This agenda item will consider progress to date of the groundfish fisheries as well as routine inseason adjustments to the 2024 fisheries, as necessary, to achieve conservation objectives. The GMT and GAP should expect to consider adjustments to recreational fisheries off of California.

The Pacific whiting cooperatives are expected to discuss their progress on developing an intersector agreement with the Council at this meeting.

Pacific Halibut

G.2 Incidental Catch Recommendations: Options for Salmon Troll and Final Action for Fixed Gear Sablefish Fisheries

The Council is scheduled to adopt final incidental harvest amounts of Pacific halibut in the primary sablefish fixed gear fishery north of Point Chehalis and options for the salmon troll fishery. This action is required to allow incidental harvest while assuring quotas are not exceeded. The GAP should review Attachment 1 under this Agenda Item and consider the 2023 halibut harvest limits, and the 2024 sablefish and halibut quotas and recommend status quo, or new limits for 2024 if warranted.

Cross FMP Items

E.2 Office of National Marine Sanctuaries: Coral Restoration and Research Plan – Range of Alternatives and Preliminary Preferred Alternative

In September 2022, the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) proposed five areas for deep sea coral research and restoration in the Gulf of Farallones and Monterey Bay NMS for bottom longline and pot gear. The Council proposed moving forward two areas with three sites (Ascencion Canyon, Ano Neuvo Canyon, and Sur Ridge) for consideration and analysis that would prohibit all bottom contact gear. The GAP and GMT should consider the analysis provided in Attachment 1 and recommend a range of alternatives and preliminary preferred alternative(s). Specifically, the GAP and GMT should consider the staff proposed list of fisheries that would be subject to these closures (commercial groundfish pot and longline) or if other fisheries should be included. NMFS provides information on their discretionary authority to close off areas to state fisheries in federal waters in NMFS Report 1.

E.3 Marine Planning

The Council is scheduled to receive updates on recent developments regarding offshore wind energy planning, and an update on National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Aquaculture Opportunity Areas in California. The Council's Marine Planning Committee (MPC) developed a report for the March Briefing Book (E.3.a, MPC Report 1), and the MPC and Habitat Committee collaborated on a Quick Response letter on a planned Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the five California leases. That comment period closes February 20, 2024.

Ecosystem

H.1 California Current Ecosystem Status Report

The Council will receive a briefing from the California Current Integrated Ecosystem Assessment (CCIEA) Team regarding the most recent California Current Ecosystem Status Report and appendices. This annual report highlights trends in physical, biological, and socioeconomic components of the ecosystem – taking into account the effects of fisheries and other human activities.

H.1 Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) Initiative 4 – Progress Review

The ad hoc Ecosystem Working Group (EWG) is scheduled to discuss the progress of their work on FEP Initiative 4 with the Council at this meeting. The purpose of the initiative is to develop onramps for integrating ecosystem and climate information into Council fishery management plan decision making, with a focus on harvest specifications processes. At the March 2024 meeting,

advisory bodies should consider briefing book materials and make further recommendations on integrating ecosystem and climate information into Council FMP management processes.

H.3 Climate and Communities Initiative Review and Prioritize Tasks

The Council completed the Climate and Communities Initiative (CCI) in September 2021, which focused on a scenario planning process to elicit ideas on how to mitigate climate change effects to Council fisheries. Potential follow-up activities emerging from the Initiative were identified. The EWG has submitted a report summarizing its revisit of materials produced during the scenario planning process to produce a more comprehensive list of potential tasks, including the connections to the Inflation Reduction Act project proposals. Under this agenda item, the Council has an opportunity to consider whether to prioritize and task the EWG with CCI future work. Advisory bodies may wish to submit their recommendations on which tasks to prioritize.

Other Items

The following are additional pre-Council meeting briefings that may be of interest:

- The GMT will host a [webinar](#) meeting to discuss items on the Council's March Agenda on February 22, 2024 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
- The GAP will host a [webinar](#) meeting to discuss items on the Council's March Agenda on February 21, 2024 from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.
- The EWG will host a pre-Council [webinar](#) on February 27, 2024 from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. to discuss the 2023-2024 California Current Ecosystem Status Report and FEP Initiative 4.

This mailing includes the enclosures listed below. Please review these briefing materials in advance to facilitate an efficient meeting week. Briefing materials for this meeting can be accessed from the [March 2024 Meeting briefing book webpage](#).

Thank you for your commitment to the Council process and management of Pacific groundfish fisheries.

TMP:rdd

Enclosures include:

1. Agenda Item A.3 – Council Meeting Agenda
2. Agenda Item B.1 – Open Comment Items
3. Agenda Item E – Cross FMP
4. Agenda Item F – Groundfish Management
5. Agenda Item G – Pacific Halibut
6. Agenda Item H – Ecosystem
7. Enforcement Consultants Agenda
8. GAP Agenda
9. GMT Agenda
10. SSC Agenda and Draft Minutes
11. Informational Reports
12. General and Hotel Information and Council Roster