

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE REPORT INCLUDING A TAKE REDUCTION TEAM OVERVIEW

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) heard from Craig Russell, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Northwest Fisheries Science Center, that groundfish surveys for this year are fully funded. The GAP appreciates this and the discussion surrounding the need for ways to survey nearshore and shallow areas that are inaccessible by trawl and, in some cases, fixed gear. NMFS West Coast Region and the Science Centers understand the predicament and are working on ways to overcome shallow water survey hurdles.

Regarding the Take Reduction Team (TRT), the GAP appreciates the update presented by Kristy Long, NMFS Protected Resources Division (PRD).

Timing, length and location of TRT meetings

GAP members are disappointed in the timing necessary for the TRT (four to five meetings, each of which are four or more days in length, within six months) and the reluctance to consider a virtual or hybrid option for the TRT. The GAP understands that reaching a consensus with a group of more than 25 members across different fisheries and interests is difficult, especially within a hybrid or virtual format. However, the GAP continues to support the Pacific Fishery Management Council ([Council's](#)) [November 23 letter to Mr. Chris Yates](#), Assistant Regional Administrator, NMFS PRD, which proposes flexibility in meeting times and virtual platforms.

If NMFS is looking for qualified individuals involved in each respective fishery, allowing fishermen to pursue their regular work -- fishing -- is paramount. Attending these meetings as unpaid participants, with only travel and meal reimbursement, also results in foregone income. Additionally, some state regulations mandate Dungeness crab fishermen monitor their gear every few days; attending a TRT meeting may result in some members violating state law if they leave their gear in the water.

As designed, the proposed TRT will meet over the winter in 2025-2026. That is during prime Dungeness crab season (anytime between November and March) and many TRT members will likely be fishing at that time. Sablefish fishing typically starts in the spring, adding another layer of complexity to affording optimum fishermen participation. While the allowance for alternates is helpful, flexibility in meeting formats would provide fishermen the ability to prosecute their fisheries while also staying engaged in the TRT process, as many fishermen can stay connected to virtual platforms while at sea. The timing of the TRT meetings will likely also be difficult for Council members or staff and those involved in the Council process who may want to attend the TRT meetings as members of the public. Full Council meetings in March and April, with additional four-day in-person TRT meetings, will be an extreme burden and time constraint.

Technological advances for facilitating virtual and hybrid meetings have evolved in the past few years and should be fully explored before committing solely to in-person meetings. Alternatively, exploring or negotiating a more appropriate six-month window would be helpful.

The GAP suggests recording the TRT meetings. This would enhance recordkeeping, allow alternates to get up to speed on discussions prior to attending a meeting and also allow more transparency on the TRT process for members of the public.

Finding locations that are easily accessible for fishermen and other stakeholders across all three West Coast states might be challenging. At the same time, the smaller size of the TRT may allow for coastal visits to towns such as Westport, Astoria, Coos Bay, Eureka, San Pedro, Santa Barbara, Ventura or San Diego, for example. Driving time and flights for fishermen should be carefully considered when making meeting arrangements. Given that TRT members are likely to be spread across West Coast communities, resulting in potentially long travel times, this further supports the ability to have hybrid meeting capabilities.

TRT Membership

The GAP understood in November 2023 that the TRT could be limited to only the sablefish pot fishery but that other fisheries, such as Dungeness crab, could be added in the future. Since then, it is apparent the Dungeness fisheries in all three states, plus the California spot prawn fishery, will be part of the TRT. Therefore, we suggest the TRT membership comprise members who are engaged in multiple fisheries (to the extent possible) so the TRT can operate most efficiently.

The GAP continues to support the members proposed in our [November 2023 statement](#) under the Council Operating Procedures/Membership agenda item, with the following changes/additions:

- **Bernie Burkholder:** He was included in our November statement as a proposed TRT member. He participates in the sablefish pot fishery. We note here that he also fishes Dungeness crab off Washington.
- **Scott Hartzell** (addition): Scott has fished for years in the Dungeness crab and sablefish pot and longline fisheries off the West Coast. He's also a member of the GAP and well-versed in fisheries management.
- **Bob Eder** (addition): Bob has fished both sablefish and Dungeness crab for years out of Newport, Oregon. He's also served as an alternate on the GAP.

PFMC
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