

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON BIENNIAL HARVEST  
SPECIFICATIONS FOR 2025-26 INCLUDING OVERFISHING LIMITS AND  
ACCEPTABLE BIOLOGICAL CATCHES

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**Summary of Recommendations**

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) recommends that the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) adopt default harvest control rules (HCRs) as the Final Preferred Alternative (FPA) for all species in the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP), except:

- **Rex sole: Alternative 2 (ACL = ABC P\* 0.45)**
- **Shortspine thornyhead: Alternative 2 (ACL < ABC P\* 0.45, 40-10 HRC applied)**
- **Dover sole: Alternative 2 (ACL = ABC P\*0.45)**
- **California quillback rockfish:**
  - Preliminary Preferred Alternative (PPA) = Alternative 2 (ABC Rule)
  - Keep Alternative 4 (F = 0) in the range for analysis.
  - Remove Alternative 1 (SPR = 0.55) and Alternative 3 (CDFW proposed, ABC = Category 3 buffer with P\*=0.40) from the range of alternatives.
  - Remove California quillback rockfish from the minor nearshore rockfish complexes north and south of 40° 10' N. lat.

The GMT recommends the Council adopt the default HCR for Washington (WA) cabezon with the technical corrections to the OFL/ABC/ACL in Appendix 1 of [Agenda Item F.2, Supplemental REVISED Attachment 1, April 2024](#).

**Action Item # 1: Harvest Specifications for 2025-2026**

**Default Harvest Control Rules**

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) recommends that the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) adopt default harvest control rules (HCRs) for all species in the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) (see [Agenda Item F.2, Attachment 1, April 2024](#)), except for the species listed in Table 1 and discussed below. The GMT recommends the Council adopt the default HCR for WA cabezon with the technical

**corrections to the OFL/ABC/ACL in Appendix 1 of [Agenda Item F.2, Supplemental REVISED Attachment 1 April 2024, Appendix 1.](#)**

*Quillback Rockfish South of 42° N. lat.*

The California stock of quillback rockfish (hereafter ‘California quillback rockfish’) was declared overfished in December 2023 and the rebuilding analysis was adopted by the Council at the March 2024 meeting. Therefore, **the GMT recommends that California quillback rockfish (south of 42° N. lat.) be removed from the minor nearshore rockfish complexes north and south of 40° 10’ N. lat.** to better track mortality against the quillback rockfish south of 42° N. lat. overfishing limit (OFL). Overfished species need to be managed to their species-specific OFL and ACL, and removing California quillback rockfish from the minor nearshore rockfish complexes will facilitate that need. The Oregon and Washington stocks of quillback rockfish would remain in the minor nearshore rockfish complex north.

## Alternative Harvest Specifications

At the November 2023 Council meeting, the GMT provided a detailed analysis of the 2025-26 harvest specifications to support Council decision making ([Agenda Item E.5.a, Supplemental GMT Report 2, November 2023](#)). This report is incorporated by reference, though important decision points are summarized in Table 1 below. For clarity, the report specifically addressed the Council’s action for that Agenda Item, which was to adopt a final preferred alternative (FPA) for 2025-26 OFLs/ABCs and preliminary preferred (PPA) ACLs for stocks and stock complexes, where possible. The GMT recommended the Council adopt the default harvest control rules (HCR) for the majority of stocks and stock complexes. The GMT recommended analyzing alternative HCRs for four stocks (Dover sole, rex sole, shortspine thornyhead, and California quillback rockfish).

Table 1, below, shows stocks with alternative HCRs under consideration by the Council and GMT recommendations for the Council to select as FPA (in bold), except California quillback rockfish, which is found later in this report. Alternative HCRs are typically considered for those stocks that have new or updated stock assessments for the respective management cycle.

**Table 1. Alternative harvest specifications forwarded by the Council in November 2023 for consideration for 2025-26. Bolded values represent GMT recommendations for FPA.**

Stock	Alternative 1	Alternative 2
Rex Sole	ACL = ABC P* 0.40	<b>ACL = ABC P* 0.45</b>
Shortspine thornyhead	ACL < ABC P* 0.40, 40-10 HCR applied	<b>ACL &lt; ABC P* 0.45, 40-10 HRC applied</b>
Dover Sole	ACL = 50,000 mt	<b>ACL = ABC P*0.45</b>

### *Rex Sole*

**Alternatives under consideration:**

Alternative 1: Default HCR ACL=ABC P\* of 0.40

Alternative 2: **ACL=ABC P\* of 0.45 (FPA)**

### Recommendations

**The GMT recommends that the Council select Alternative 2, P\* of 0.45, as the FPA for rex sole.** This will provide the trawl industry the most flexibility in light of other expected constraints in 2025-26. Additionally, the stock is not expected to fall below the flatfish management target of 25 percent of unfished spawning output during the 10-year projection period, even with the projected attainment of the full ACL, which is unlikely to occur based on recent mortality trends. ACL attainment from 2020 to 2022 is approximately 9 percent of the potential 2025 ACL under P\* of 0.45. The GMT also notes that Rex sole is managed within the Other Flatfish complex.

### ***Shortspine Thornyhead***

The GMT's report on a new management measure that would remove the 34° 27' N. lat. management line is included as [Agenda Item F.5.a, Supplemental GMT Report 2](#). If the Council chooses to move forward with this new management measure, **the GMT recommends that the Council delay specifying area-specific ACLs that are based on the management line until the Council selects a PPA or FPA on the new measure that would remove the management line.** However, the GMT sees merit in moving forward with final action on the selection of a P\* value at this time, because the P\* value is applied to the OFL to set the coastwide ABC.

### **Alternatives under consideration:**

Alternative 1: Default HCR ACL<ABC P\* of 0.40, 40-10 HCR applied

**Alternative 2: ACL<ABC P\* of 0.45, 40-10 HCR applied (FPA)**

### Recommendations

In the decision table found in the stock assessment, under the base model scenario, only P\* 0.40 results in a depletion level that is above 0.40 for the last year in the projection period. However, there is effectively no difference between the 2034 depletion estimates of 0.401 under P\* 0.40 and 0.397 under P\* 0.45 given the uncertainty around those estimates. Therefore, **the GMT recommends that the Council adopt Alternative 2, P\* of 0.45, as FPA for shortspine thornyhead**, as it will provide the most flexibility to directed groundfish fisheries while still allowing the stock to rebound towards the management target within the 10-year projection period.

### ***Dover Sole***

### **Alternatives under consideration:**

Alternative 1: Default HCR ACL=50,000 mt (Untenable)

**Alternative 2: ACL=ABC P\* of 0.45 (FPA)**

### Recommendations

**The GMT recommends that the Council adopt Alternative 2, P\* of 0.45, as FPA because Alternative 1 sets the ACL higher than the ABC and is therefore untenable.** Harvest in the past three years has had a maximum value of 4,829 mt in 2020, so either alternative is not expected to constrain the fishery. Given potential Council action under F.4 at this meeting and higher sablefish ACLs in 2025-26, there could be greater Dover sole harvest expected within the 2025-26 harvest cycle. However, shortspine thornyhead may become a constraint to Dover sole harvest despite high sablefish allocations.

## California Quillback Rockfish

### Alternatives under consideration:

Alternative 1: Default HCR: SPR = 0.55

**Alternative 2: ABC Rule**

Alternative 3: CDFW proposed (November 2023): ABC=Category 3 buffer w/ P\*=0.40

Alternative 4: F=0 (i.e. no fishing mortality)

For California quillback rockfish the **GMT recommends Alternative 2, the ABC Rule ( $T_{\text{target}} = 2060$ ), as PPA**. The ABC rule aligns with a projected rebuilding target year of 2060, rebuilding the stock within the maximum time to rebuild of 2071, and would provide the highest socioeconomic benefit to fishing communities, which will be discussed further in the forthcoming California quillback rockfish rebuilding plan. **The GMT also recommends including Alternative 4 which is F=0 (i.e., no fishing mortality) in the range of analysis.** F=0 would rebuild the stock in the shortest amount of time as possible, which provides for a suitable range for analysis in a rebuilding plan, and analyzing this during the biennial harvest specification process will facilitate this process.

**Finally, the GMT recommends removing Alternative 1 Default HCR: SPR = 0.55 and Alternative 3: CDFW proposed (November 2023): ABC=Category 3 buffer w/ P\*=0.40 from the range of alternatives being considered.** Alternative 1, the Default HCR, is very close to the ABC rule with a difference of -0.04 mt in 2025 and -0.03 mt in 2025. Since the difference is minimal but Alternative 2 (ABC rule) provides more socioeconomic benefits, removing Alternative 1 minimizes workload and simplifies Council decision making. Alternative 3: CDFW proposed (November 2023): ABC=Category 3 buffer with P\* of 0.40 was not analyzed as part of the California quillback rockfish rebuilding analysis in March ([Agenda Item F.2, Attachment 1, March 2024](#)), and therefore the selection of this alternative would not conform with Magnuson Stevens Act requirements.

**Table 2. Alternative harvest specifications forwarded by the Council for California quillback rockfish in November 2023 for consideration for 2025-26. Bolded values represent GMT recommendations for PPA. Strikethrough represents alternatives that the GMT recommends removing from the range of alternatives.**

California Quillback Rockfish	<del>Alternative 1</del>	<del>Default HCR: SPR = 0.55</del>
	<b>Alternative 2</b>	<b>ABC Rule as PPA</b>
	<del>Alternative 3</del>	<del>CDFW proposed (November 2023)</del>
	Alternative 4	F=0 (i.e. no fishing mortality)

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