

## PHASE 2 STOCK DEFINITIONS – SCOPING

Under this agenda item, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) is scheduled to adopt the scope and workplan for Phase 2 of the stock definitions process. In Phase 2, the Council will identify and define stocks of the remaining 64 managed groundfish species in need of conservation and management, and revise groundfish stock complexes. These tasks are necessary to align the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) and the National Standards.

The overarching scope of Phase 2 is large and the tasks to accomplish it are highly interdependent. Phase 2 will require a sequence of steps to facilitate an efficient process. Council staff have drafted Attachment 1 which describes the required aspects of this action and provides a recommendation to accomplish the objectives in a stepwise fashion. Council staff focused on the step to identify and define stocks of species in need of conservation and management, which was identified at the November 2023 meeting as a portion of the action that could be completed by June 2024. Staff have drafted a revised process schedule (Attachment 2) which focuses on this facet of Phase 2.

Council staff have identified three sequential steps to this process: Step 1 to identify and define stocks in need of conservation and management (i.e., Federal management); Step 2 to address stock complex insufficiencies in accordance with National Standard 1 (NS1); and Step 3 to consider delegation of management. These steps are outlined below.

Step 1 is the foundation for Phase 2. Stocks of groundfish species in need of conservation and management must be defined before stock complexes can be revised or delegation is considered. The species that should remain under Council management will be determined using guidance from the MSA and National Standard 1. A key aspect of determining if a species is in need of conservation and management is the predominance of catch. Briefly, if the majority of catch occurs in Federal waters, the Council should manage the species. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Reports 1 and 2 provide the methodologies to determine predominance of catch in commercial and recreational fisheries, respectively. Once the species that should remain under Federal management are identified, the next step is to define their respective stocks. That process will utilize the methodology used to support Amendment 31 and Agenda Item I.5. In order to establish stocks of groundfish species, the Council identified population structure for each species based on a detailed literature review of biological aspects such as genetics, adult movement, larval dispersal, etc. The literature review has been completed for the remaining 64 groundfish species (Attachment 3). While the literature review is not necessary for the Council to adopt a scope, it provides the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) the opportunity to review this information for completeness in light of their November 2023 statement ([Agenda Item E.8.a, Supplemental SSC Report 1, November 2023](#)) recommendations prior to the over-winter analysis.

Council staff recommend the Council embark on Step 1 with the objective to identify and define all stocks in need of conservation and management. This holds with the process outlined in Attachment 2, where the Council would adopt Preliminary Preferred Alternatives in March 2025

and Final Preferred Alternatives in June 2025. While not ideal due to the relation of this action to the requirements of the MSA and NS1, the Council could identify and define a subset of species instead of all groundfish. This path would delay full compliance of the FMP to the MSA and the Council would need to specify the species or species groups at this meeting to facilitate an efficient analysis process. If a narrower scope is desired, Council staff offers the following as potential species groupings for consideration: all rockfish, nearshore rockfish only, highly attained species. If, for example, the Council selected to identify and define stocks of just nearshore rockfish, it could reasonably be expected the subsequent steps (i.e. stock complex revisions, delegation) would immediately follow for those stocks.

After completion of Step 1, the Council is expected to address stock complexes, in Step 2. The stock complexes, at present, are not compliant with the requirements of NS1. The outcome of Step 1 will also likely dictate changes to the structure of the current stock complexes. In Step 2, the Council will need to develop, at minimum, status determination criteria and consider developing indicator stocks to comply with NS1. In Step 3, the Council could consider delegation of management authority. While this is not a mandatory requirement for Phase 2, delegation is a process by which the Council would designate certain aspects of management of the groundfish fishery as the responsibility of the states. Delegation allows states to develop management which reflects their needs but also provides oversight by the Council.

Council staff and NMFS are expected to present information relative to this action to the Council, the Groundfish Management Team (GMT), and the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) to inform their discussions. The GMT and the GAP should consider providing reports to the Council regarding the information provided in the Attachments and the NMFS Reports, as appropriate. The SSC should review NMFS Reports 1 and 2 and submit comments in reference to those methodologies, as appropriate.

### **Council Action:**

- 1. Adopt a Purpose and Need Statement for Step 1.**
- 2. Adopt the scope for Step 1 of Phase 2.**
- 3. Adopt a workplan in consideration of the scope.**
- 4. Provide guidance to facilitate the analysis, as appropriate.**

### **Reference Materials:**

- 1. Agenda Item I.8, ) Attachment 1: Stock Definitions Phase II: Scoping Document (*Electronic Only*).**
- 2. Agenda Item I.8, Attachment 2: Updated Process Schedule for Developing the Phase 2 Stock Definitions.**
- 3. Agenda Item I.8, Attachment 3: Literature Review of Life History Aspects of 64 Groundfish Species Managed by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (*Electronic Only*).**
- 4. Agenda Item I.8.a, NMFS Report 1: Estimation of Recent Groundfish Catch Distribution between Federal and State Waters off the U.S. West Coast (*Electronic Only*).**
- 5. Agenda Item I.8.a, NMFS Report 2: Estimating Groundfish Catch Distribution Across State and Federal Waters in Recreational Fisheries.**

6. If received, Public Comments are electronic only ([see e-portal](#)).

Agenda Order:

I.8 Phase 2 Stock Definitions – Planning

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a. Reports and Comments of Management Entities and Advisory Bodies

b. Public Comment

c. **Council Action:** Adopt the Scope and Workplan; Provide Guidance on Next Steps

PFMC

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