

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NON-TRAWL MORTALITY PROJECTION TOOLS

In [Agenda Item I.2.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1](#), the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) outlines recent issues with the non-trawl catch projection tools used in the groundfish harvest specifications and management measures analysis to estimate impacts in the nearshore and non-nearshore fisheries, as well as the need for a new tool to project impacts in the emerging non-trawl shelf rockfish fishery. This report provides GMT recommendations for how to address these concerns in future biennial cycles based on the three options listed in [Supplemental GMT Report 1](#).

Nearshore Catch Projection Tool

With the changes to the non-trawl nearshore fisheries and the uncertainty around removal of some or all nearshore species from the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP), as well as the upcoming cessation of observer coverage in the nearshore fishery, the GMT does not see merit in the continuation of the nearshore catch projection tool (Nearshore-CPT). The Nearshore-CPT will remain available in its current state with known limitations as a reference for the team. However, **the GMT recommends Option 2 to discontinue the Nearshore-CPT as the formal tool and revisit the application of an updated tool once the Council gets more information during phase two of stock definitions on which nearshore species will continue to be managed in the Pacific Coast Groundfish FMP.**

Non-Nearshore Sablefish Catch Projection Tool

Until more data are gathered on primary sablefish attainments under extremely high harvest limits, the GMT proposes continuing to use the 2025-26 methodology of setting primary sablefish attainment assumptions that are less than full attainment based on historical mortality and fishery dynamics. After at least several years of data have been gathered, a more sophisticated method of projecting primary sablefish attainment may be considered. Given the uncertainty regarding to what extent sablefish effort and landings will respond to the threefold Annual Catch Limit increases, the GMT would propose continuing to use low, average, and high attainment scenarios as introduced in the 2025-26 harvest specifications cycle. This would likely be a more realistic estimate than assuming full attainment, as is the default. Bycatch rates applied to the total assumed retained sablefish would still be provided by the Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) Fisheries Observation Science Program (FOS) moving forward. **Therefore, the GMT recommends No Action (i.e., continue using as-is) for the Non-Nearshore CPT, because we do not anticipate the need for major changes at this time and do not have concerns with the uncertainty or risk of continuing to use the current CPT with the low, average, and high attainment scenarios.**

Non-Nearshore Shelf Catch Projection Tool

To anticipate potential impacts on sensitive species from this emerging fishery, the GMT requests that the Council consider developing a model to project discard mortality from non-sablefish, non-nearshore trips. The GMT has begun working on suggestions for a new tool, including the implementation of depth-dependent discard mortality rates similar to those in the Nearshore-CPT and utilizing new directed open access permit information to monitor annual participation. **Similarly, the GMT recommends that previous depth-dependent discard mortality rates for the nearshore commercial sector be analyzed for use in the Open Access (OA) sector¹.** Due to differences among the fisheries, these rates cannot be directly applied to the OA fishery, so there will be workload challenges associated with the analysis, similar to the previous Council action where recreational gear mortality rates were adopted for use in the commercial nearshore fishery. However, noting the small margins to which the GMT manages mortality, we consider this workload vital.

With plans to increase observer coverage on non-bottom contact gear targeting shelf rockfish and the emerging fishery, **the GMT recommends Option 1 to collaborate with external model developers for the creation of a Non-Nearshore Shelf-CPT with a goal to be in place by early 2026, in preparation for the 2027-28 harvest specifications cycle.** While the GMT has modified projection tools in the past, support from FOS, Council staff, and/or other advisory bodies is sought for the development of this new tool.

PFMC

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¹ Depth-dependent discard mortality rates are applied to estimated discards in the nearshore fixed-gear fishery, which are reported in the annual Groundfish Mortality Report, including the Groundfish Expanded Mortality Multiyear (GEMM). Rates can be found in Table A-2 of the latest draft report (Agenda Item [I.1.b NWFSC Report 2](#), September 2024).