

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON STOCK DEFINITIONS FOR  
 SPECIES ASSESSED IN 2025 AND 2027 –  
 PRELIMINARY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) recommends as Preliminary Preferred Alternative (PPA) stock definitions shown as bolded text in Table 1 below based on the current analysis ([Agenda Item I.5, Attachment 1 September 2024](#)) that describes relevant and available information to determine a stock definition for these stocks. Current management and the resulting socio-economic impacts for species with only one proposed alternative would remain unchanged.

**Table 1. Action alternatives analyzed for priority groundfish species’ stock definitions with bolded text denoting GMT recommendations (source Table ES 2, Agenda Item F.5, Attachment 1, September 2024).**

Species considered under a single Alternative		
<i>Priority Species</i>	<i>Alternative</i>	<i>Stock Area(s) Delineation</i>
Chilipepper rockfish	<b>1</b>	<b>Coastwide</b>
English sole	<b>1</b>	<b>Coastwide</b>
Redbanded rockfish	<b>1</b>	<b>Coastwide</b>
Rougheye and blackspotted rockfish	<b>1</b>	<b>Coastwide</b>
Widow rockfish	<b>1</b>	<b>Coastwide</b>
Yellowtail rockfish	<b>3</b>	<b>N. of 40° 10’ N. lat. stock and S. 40° 10’ N. lat. stock</b>
Species considered under multiple Alternatives		
<i>Priority Species</i>	<i>Alternative</i>	<i>Stock Area(s) Delineation</i>
Yelloweye rockfish	<b>1</b>	<b>Coastwide</b>
	2	Washington & Oregon stock and California stock

The No Action alternative would not achieve the mandates of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) and is therefore not a feasible alternative. Therefore, at a minimum, stock areas for all species must be defined for stocks to be assessed in 2025. English sole and chilipepper, redbanded, rougheye and blackspotted, yellowtail, and widow rockfishes are only considered under a single alternative. Under Alternative 1, English sole and chilipepper, redbanded, rougheye and blackspotted, and widow rockfishes would be defined as coastwide stocks. Yellowtail rockfish would be defined as two stocks north of and south of 40° 10’ north latitude (N. lat.) under Alternative 3. Yelloweye rockfish is considered under Alternative 1 (coastwide) and Alternative 2 (a stock north of 42° N. lat. and a stock south of 42° N. lat.).

*Chilipepper Rockfish*

The literature review indicates the range of this species spans the entire west coast. Survey-based indices of abundance suggest considerably greater biomass densities of chilipepper rockfish south of 40° 10’ N. lat. ([Agenda Item F.3, Attachment 4, June 2022](#)); however, it is found north of this latitude, though not at the same abundance levels found to the south. Available information

indicates high population connectivity, i.e., low population structure, which suggests it is a single stock. Chilipepper rockfish is managed as a single species south of 40° 10' N. lat. and as a component species of the Shelf Rockfish Complex North 40° 10' N. lat. Defining the stock of this species as coastwide (i.e., Alternative 1) represents how the species is treated in harvest specifications and preserves existing management structure and flexibility. A coastwide definition is not expected to increase management burden. Alternative 1 is not expected to change socio-economic impacts on coastal communities and does not require new management considerations. **The GMT recommends Alternative 1 as the PPA.**

#### *English Sole*

English sole is a coastwide species and is currently managed on a coastwide basis as a single stock. The literature review indicates there is not enough information to discern population structure; however, survey-based indices of abundance suggest similar biomass densities of English sole from California to Washington ([Agenda Item F.3, Attachment 4, June 2022](#)). This species has been assessed at the coastwide scale in past assessments. A coastwide definition would not alter current management nor is it likely to change current socio-economic impacts on fishing communities. **The GMT recommends Alternative 1 as the PPA.**

#### *Redbanded Rockfish*

The range of this species is coastwide; however, population structure is not well known for redbanded rockfish. [Agenda Item F.4, Attachment 1](#) does not include information to inform stock boundaries of redbanded rockfish, but the species is caught coastwide, and it is the GMT's understanding that a coastwide categorization would be most appropriate for this species. It is currently managed as a component species within Slope Rockfish Complex north and south of 40° 10' N. lat. Though it has never been assessed, it has historically been considered as a coastwide species. Defining this species as a coastwide (i.e., Alternative 1) would be consistent with current management practices and would neither increase management burden nor would it be expected to change socio-economic conditions of fishing communities. The GMT agrees that a coastwide definition is appropriate given the available scientific information presented within the findings in [Agenda Item I.5 Attachment 1 September 2024](#). **The GMT recommends Alternative 1 as the PPA.**

As indicated under [Agenda Item I.4.a, NMFS NWFSC/SWFSC Report 1](#), redbanded rockfish may be removed from the species to be assessed in 2025. If it is removed from the stock assessment list for this cycle, **the GMT recommends that stock(s) of this species still be defined as it reduces future workload and brings the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) further into compliance with the Magnuson-Stevens Act.**

#### *Rougheye and Blackspotted Rockfish*

This cryptic pair is managed together at present due to difficulties in distinguishing the two species. The literature review indicates blackspotted rockfish have a low abundance off of California and rougheye rockfish is present from at least Point Conception north. There is little information related to population structure of these species off the West Coast. Rougheye and blackspotted rockfish were assessed at a coastwide scale but are managed in the Slope Rockfish Complex north and south of 40° 10' N. lat. A coastwide stock definition would not alter current management nor

would it be expected to impact socio-economic impacts on fishing communities. **The GMT recommends Alternative 1 as the PPA.**

#### *Widow Rockfish*

Widow rockfish is a coastwide species and is currently managed on a coastwide basis as a single stock. The literature review indicates there is not enough information to discern population structure. This species has been assessed at the coastwide scale in past assessments. A coastwide definition would not alter current management nor is it likely to change current socio-economic impacts on fishing communities. **The GMT recommends Alternative 1 as the PPA.**

#### *Yellowtail Rockfish*

Yellowtail rockfish are managed south of 40° 10' N. lat. in the Shelf Rockfish Complex, and as an individual species in the area north of 40° 10' N. lat. The literature review indicates there are two distinct subpopulations along the coast, separated by Cape Mendocino, California. This biogeographic split supports what was used as the basis for the most recent assessment work in 2017. All available evidence supports the finding that yellowtail rockfish have a discernible population structure. Defining yellowtail rockfish as two separate stocks would be consistent with current management practices and would neither increase management burden nor would it be expected to change socio-economic conditions of fishing communities. **The GMT recommends Alternative 3 as the PPA.**

#### *Yelloweye Rockfish*

Yelloweye rockfish is observed coastwide and is currently managed as a single coastwide species. The literature review describes recent evidence that suggests yelloweye rockfish may exhibit a high degree of population connectivity along the U.S. West Coast, thus indicating it is likely to be a single coastwide population without structure. Alternative 2 would require two new benchmark stock assessments, which could yield two different stock statuses and two different sets of harvest specifications and management measures. This could consequently cause differing socio-economic impacts between the two management areas. A coastwide definition (Alternative 1) would not alter current management nor is it likely to change current socio-economic impacts on fishing communities. **The GMT recommends Alternative 1 as the PPA.**

PFMC  
09/19/24