

GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS - FINAL ACTION

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) discussed the current status of groundfish fisheries and the need for any inseason adjustments. Below, the GMT details the action items that have been brought to the GMT for Council consideration. Action items include recommended inseason changes for the remainder of 2024, harvest specifications corrections for implementation in 2025, and inseason changes that the GMT recommends be implemented for the remainder of 2024 and carried over to 2025. The 2024 scorecards are available in Appendix 1.

Summary of Recommendations

The GMT recommends the following changes for the remainder of 2024:

- **Vermilion/sunset rockfish bag limit south of 40° 10' N. lat.**
 - 2 fish sub-bag limit (status quo)
- **LEFG “Other Fish” complex trip limit south of 40° 10' N. lat.**
 - Unlimited

The GMT recommends the following harvest specifications corrections for 2025:

- **Yelloweye rockfish HG and ACT corrections presented in Table 2**
- **Greenspotted rockfish corrections presented [Agenda Item I.6 Supplemental Revised Attachment 1](#)**
- **OA Sablefish trip limit between 40° 10' N. lat. and 36° N. lat.**
 - 3,250 lbs. / week not to exceed 6,500 lbs. / 2 months.

The GMT recommends the following trip limit changes for the remainder of 2024 and for carryover into 2025:

- **LEFG and OA Minor Nearshore Rockfish south of 40° 10' N. lat.**
 - 40° 10' N. lat. – 37° 07' N. lat. Shallow Nearshore: 0 lbs. / 2 months
 - South of 37° 07' N. lat. Shallow Nearshore: 2,000 lbs. / 2 months
 - 40° 10' N. lat. – 37° 07' N. lat. Deeper Nearshore: 0 lbs. / 2 months
 - South of 37° 07' N. lat. Deeper Nearshore: 2,000 lbs. / 2 months, of which no more than 75 lbs. of which may be copper rockfish
- **LEFG and OA Cabezon in California**
 - 40° 10' N. lat. – 37° 07' N. lat.: 0 lbs. / 2 months
 - South of 37° 07' N. lat.: Unlimited

Inseason Changes for 2024

Sablefish Trip Limits North of 36° N. lat.

The GMT investigated whether sablefish trip limits should be adjusted and concluded that changes are not warranted as trip limits were recently increased for both limited entry fixed gear (LEFG) and open access (OA) fisheries north of 36° north latitude (N. lat.) during the June 2024 Council

meeting. The final rule was published on July 23, 2024; thus, not enough time has elapsed to determine whether an additional increase is warranted.

Recreational Vermilion/Sunset Rockfish Bag Limit South of 40° 10' N. lat.

The GMT received a request to increase the recreational sub-bag limit on vermilion/sunset rockfish south of 40° 10' N. lat. from 2 fish to 3 fish. The inseason progress report provided by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) ([Agenda Item I.6.a Supplemental CDFW Report 1 September 2024](#)) indicates that vermilion/sunset rockfish catch south of 40° 10' N. lat. shows a decrease in harvest compared to the same time last year. Recreational harvest through July is currently at 76.1 metric tons (mt) and commercial harvest at 60.6 mt. CDFW projects combined vermilion/sunset rockfish mortality at or under the ACL contribution. To date, the additional commercial and recreational restrictions that were put in place seem to be effective at reducing harvest. The recreational fishery south of 36° N. lat. will change to an “offshore only” fishery seaward of the 50-fathom regulatory line on October 1st. As indicated in the inseason request submitted to the GMT, vermilion/sunset rockfish are more abundant in deep waters and there will likely be higher encounters of vermilion/sunset rockfish in the offshore only fishery.

An increase to the recreational sub-bag limit now would create enforcement and outreach concerns. The Council only has jurisdiction over actions in federal waters. [Between 40° 10' N. lat. and 36° N. lat.](#) in November [the recreational fishery](#) is closed in federal waters and open in state waters only shoreward of the state 20-fathom regulatory line. If the Council were to adopt an increased vermilion/sunset rockfish sub-bag limit it would only apply to the federal fishery in October and December, barring emergency action by the California Fish and Game Commission. This would create a scenario where the vermilion/sunset rockfish sub-bag would be three-fish one month, two-fish the next, and then return back to a three-fish sub-bag limit.

The California recreational and commercial fisheries have seen considerable changes over the last few seasons, increasing uncertainty around modeled mortality projections (see section 5. California Recreational Groundfish Model in the [2025-26 Harvest Specifications and Management Measures](#)). Due to over-harvest of vermilion/sunset rockfish between 2015-2023 ([Agenda Item F.8.a Supplemental CDFW Report 1 March 2024](#)), the current tracking harvest levels to date, model uncertainty related to substantial changes to the commercial and recreational groundfish fisheries off California and the increase enforcement and outreach concerns that approval of this inseason request would create, **the GMT recommends status quo, of a two-fish sub-bag limit of vermilion/sunset rockfish south of 40° 10' N. lat.**

Incidental Pacific Halibut in the Primary Tier Sablefish Fishery North of Point Chehalis

The GMT received a request to increase the landing ratio for incidental Pacific halibut (halibut) retention in the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis, Washington, from 130 to 150 lbs. of halibut per 1,000 lbs. of sablefish, and maintain the limit of up to two additional halibut in excess of the ratio. Through September 4, 2024, incidental catch was 11,324 lbs. (net weight) of the 50,000 lbs. (net weight) allocation (23 percent). By September 4th of last year (2023), 26,421 lbs. (net weight) of incidental halibut had been landed, more than double what has been landed this year. In 2023, the landing ratio for the entire year was 150 lbs. net weight per 1,000 lbs. of sablefish, and a total of 45,595 lbs. net weight of incidental halibut were landed. Projected year-end landings of halibut for 2024 are provided in **Table 1** under the two different trip limit scenarios described above.

With West Coast sablefish prices continuing to reach record lows, increasing the incidental halibut allowance by 20 lbs. per 1,000 lbs. of sablefish is expected to boost activity in the primary sablefish fishery by providing additional economic incentive to participate, thereby improving overall sablefish utilization. Additionally, the expectation of more high-value halibut on each landing may further entice buyers to receive landings of sablefish.

If the Council wishes to proceed with this action, we do not see any conservation concerns for sablefish. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) tracks the halibut fishery daily and will update the Council and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) if landings begin to approach the halibut allocation, although this is unlikely given attainment to date.

Table 1. Projected incidental Pacific halibut landings in the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis under the status quo landing ratio and the proposed alternative. Total 2024 landings as of September 16 were combined with projected landings for the remainder of the year using 2023 as the base year.

Option	Landing Ratio	Projected Landings (net wt. lbs.) through December 7	Allocation (net wt. lbs.)	Attainment
Status Quo	130 lbs. halibut per 1,000 lbs. sablefish landed and up to 2 halibut in excess of limit	25,871	50,000 lbs.	52%
Alternative 1	150 lbs. halibut per 1,000 lbs. sablefish landed and up to 2 halibut in excess of limit	27,609		55%

Other Fish Limited Entry Trip Limit South of 40° 10' N. lat.

The trip limit for the “Other fish” complex was mistakenly changed from unlimited to 0 lbs. per 2 months via the November 2023 inseason action, which became effective in January 2024. The trip limit for “Other fish” is unlimited for the open access (OA) fishery north and south of 40° 10' N. lat. and for limited entry fixed gear (LEFG) north of 40° 10' N. lat. Therefore, **the GMT recommends that the trip limit for the “Other fish” complex be changed from 0 lbs. per 2 months to unlimited for the LEFG fishery south of 40° 10' N. lat.** This change has already been incorporated into the proposed rule for 2025-26 harvest specifications and management measures and therefore will be fixed in January 2025 when the final rule is anticipated to publish; this recommendation is intended for the remainder of 2024.

Harvest Specifications Corrections

OA Sablefish between 40° 10' N. lat. and 36° N. lat.

In [Agenda Item F.6.a Supplemental GMT Report 1 June 2024](#) an incorrect trip limit has been found and needs to be corrected. The incorrect trip limit in the report for OA sablefish between 40° 10' N. lat. and 36° N. lat. is 3,000 lbs. per week not to exceed 9,000 lbs. per 2 months. **The GMT recommends correcting the OA sablefish between 40° 10' N. lat. and 36° N. lat. trip limit to 3,250 lbs. per week not to exceed 6,500 lbs. per 2 months.** This change would be implemented in the final rule for the 2025-26 harvest specifications and management measures action.

Yelloweye Rockfish Harvest Specifications for 2026

At the June 2024 Council meeting, the Council took final action on harvest specifications and management measures for the 2025-26 biennium. During the preparation of the proposed rule, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and Council staff identified errors in the yelloweye rockfish 2026 harvest guidelines (HG) and the resulting non-trawl sector and state-specific annual catch targets (ACT). Those errors were corrected in the final version of the Council Analytical Document (CAD) posted to the Council’s website in August 2024; however, since these values were specified in a Council motion, they need to be corrected via a Council motion at this meeting for implementation into NMFS’ final rule. **The GMT recommends the corrected 2026 HGs and ACTs in Table 2 for yelloweye rockfish.** All 2025 values remain unchanged and are provided for reference only. All 2026 values are bolded to signify a correction except the state-specific Washington HG, which remains the same number with the revised calculation due to rounding. All corrected values vary by 0.3 metric tons (mt) or less from the incorrect values.

Table 2. FPA. 2025-26 non-trawl yelloweye rockfish harvest guidelines (HG) and annual catch target (ACT) in metric tons (mt) for the sector and sub-sectors. Bolded values are corrections.

	2025		2026	
	HG (mt)	ACT (mt)	HG (mt)	ACT (mt)
Non-Trawl Sector	37.7	29.6	38.5	30.2
<i>Non-nearshore / Nearshore (20.9%)</i>	7.9	6.2	8.0	6.3
<i>WA Rec (25.6%)</i>	9.7	7.6	9.9	7.7
<i>OR Rec (23.3%)</i>	8.8	6.9	9.0	7.0
<i>CA Rec (30.2%)</i>	11.4	8.9	11.6	9.1

Greenspotted Rockfish and Shelf Complex Harvest Specifications for 2025-26

Over the summer, Council staff determined the 2025-26 harvest specifications for greenspotted rockfish were incorrect for the area between 42° N. lat. to 34° 27' N. lat. off California. The corrected values are presented in [Agenda Item I.6 Supplemental Revised Attachment 1](#). The GMT reviewed these corrections, **and recommends that the corrected harvest specifications values in Tables 1 through 5 of [Agenda Item I.6 Supplemental Revised Attachment 1](#) be incorporated into the final rule for the 2025-26 harvest specifications and management measures action.**

Inseason Changes for 2024 with Carryover to 2025

Nearshore Rockfish and Cabezon Trip Limits between 37° 07 N. lat. and 36° N. lat.

Subsequent to the federal closure of nearshore rockfish and cabezon off California north of 36° N. lat., CDFW took action to implement a 20-fathom regulatory line and establish trip limits for shallow and deeper nearshore rockfish shoreward of the newly established boundary line in state regulation. Simultaneously, harvest of groundfish other than the nearshore permitted species was prohibited in state waters north of 36° N. lat. These [emergency state regulations](#) became effective on February 12th, 2024.

At the March 2024 Council meeting, the GMT updated their commercial quillback rockfish analyses with newly available information, which found commercial encounters of quillback

rockfish to be rare south of 37° 07' N. lat. (Año Nuevo). As such the GMT recommended ([Agenda Item F.8.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, March 2024](#)) modifying the shoreward Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) boundary line from the shoreward Exclusive Economic Zone to the 50-fathom RCA boundary line in the area between 37° 07' and 36° N. lat. The GMT also provided an option that would reestablish cabezon, shallow and deeper nearshore rockfish trip limits in this area. However, at that time state regulations only authorized the harvest of nearshore permitted species in waters north of 36° N. lat. within state waters; therefore, the Enforcement Consultants (EC) recommended ([Agenda Item F.8a, Supplemental EC Report 1, March 2024](#)) maintaining the closure for cabezon, shallow and deeper nearshore rockfish between 37° 07' and 36° N. lat. due to enforceability concerns. The National Marine Fisheries Service implemented the RCA modification while maintaining the closure for cabezon, shallow and deeper nearshore rockfish between 37° 07' and 36° N. lat. on April 1, 2024.

As a result, CDFW modified the emergency commercial regulations to adjust the southern boundary of the original state emergency action from 36° to 37° 07' N. lat. On August 13, 2024, the modified emergency commercial state regulations became effective and only allowed for the harvest of nearshore permitted species shoreward of the 20-fathom boundary line north of 37° 07' N. lat. South of 37° 07' N. lat., the 20-fathom boundary line was removed, while state regulations continue to authorize the harvest of nearshore permitted species, and federal trip limits for other groundfish species were extended into state waters. The result of this latest action taken by CDFW has addressed enforcement concerns raised by the EC.

To reduce the potential for regulatory confusion and align state and federal regulations, the GMT requests that inseason action be taken to reestablish LEFG and OA trip limits for cabezon, shallow and deeper nearshore rockfish between 37° 07' N latitude and 36° N latitude. Specifically, **the GMT recommends LEFG and OA Fixed Gear trip limits south of 40° 10' N. lat. be adjusted as follows:**

- **LEFG and OA Minor Nearshore Rockfish south of 40° 10' N. lat.**
 - **40° 10' N. lat. – 37° 07' N. lat. Shallow Nearshore: 0 lbs. / 2 months**
 - **South of 37° 07' N. lat. Shallow Nearshore: 2,000 lbs. / 2 months**
 - **40° 10' N. lat. – 37° 07' N. lat. Deeper Nearshore: 0 lbs. / 2 months**
 - **South of 37° 07' N. lat. Deeper Nearshore: 2,000 lbs. / 2 months, of which no more than 75 lbs. of which may be copper rockfish**
- **LEFG and OA Cabezon in California**
 - **40° 10' N. lat. – 37° 07' N. lat.: 0 lbs. / 2 months**
 - **South of 37° 07' N. lat.: Unlimited**

Informational Items

Washington Recreational Fishing Regulation Changes

The WDFW extended the prohibition of retention for copper, quillback, and vermilion rockfishes that was set to expire July 31, 2024, till the end of the fishing season on October 19, 2024. Washington regulations prohibit, from May 1 through July 31, the retention of copper rockfish, quillback rockfish, and vermilion rockfish in the coastal recreational groundfish fishery which opens April 1.

Appendix 1.

2024 Chinook Salmon Scorecard

Table 1. Chinook salmon catch (numbers of fish) in 2024 as of September 20, 2024 in relation to the sector thresholds (Source: PacFIN [IFQ021 Combined Sector Salmon Bycatch ESA Report](#)).

Sector a/	Sub-Sector	Catch To Date (# of fish)	% of Threshold	Total Threshold (# of fish)
Whiting	CP	137	1.2%	11,000
	MS	*	--	
	Shoreside	212	1.9%	
	Tribal	264 b/	2.4%	
	Total	613	5.6%	
Non-Whiting	Bottom Trawl	771	14.0%	5,500
	Midwater Trawl	106	1.9%	
	Tribal	*	--	
	Fixed Gear	500 c/	9.1%	
	WA Rec			
	OR Rec + longleader			
	CA Rec			
Total	1,377	25.0%		
All groundfish fisheries & EFPs		1,990		

* Confidential data

a/ There is a reserve of 3,500 fish, in addition to the number of fish in the whiting and non-whiting thresholds.

b/ Current year tribal landings are estimated as the maximum of the historic landings for the last 5 years.

c/ GMT proposed assumption of annual mortality, which assumed maximum historical mortality (154) plus a 250 fish buffer from the 2017 BiOp and an additional 96 fish to account for some uncertainty in recreational salmon seasons; recreational estimates only apply to groundfish fisheries occurring outside of salmon seasons.

2024 Pacific Spiny Dogfish Scorecard

Table 2. 2024 estimated Pacific spiny dogfish mortality in metric tons (mt) by sector, as of September 18, 2024. (Source: PacFIN)

Sector	Estimated Mortality (mt)
At-Sea Hake Catcher Processor	3.6
At-Sea Hake Mothership	*
IFQ (non-whiting)	117.9
Shoreside Hake a/	6.8
Non-Trawl	46.0
Incidental/Miscellaneous	3.3
Recreational	0.3
Treaty	*
Total c/	190.0
ACL	1,456
Percent ACL b/	13.0%

* Confidential

a/ For the shoreside whiting sector, landings account for roughly 90 percent of total catches, and for the bottom trawl, midwater rockfish, and non-trawl sectors, discards make up the majority of total catch.

b/ Does not include any confidential data.

2024 Shortbelly Rockfish Scorecard

Table 3. 2024 estimated shortbelly rockfish mortality in metric tons (mt) by sector, as of September 18, 2024. (Source: PacFIN)

Sector	Mortality (mt)
At-Sea Hake Catcher Processor	*
At-Sea Hake Mothership	*
IFQ (non-whiting)	12.2
Incidental/Miscellaneous	0.7
Shoreside Hake	106.4
Treaty	*
Total	175.0
Threshold	2,000
Percent (%) of Threshold	6.0%

* Confidential

2024 Yelloweye Rockfish Scorecard

Table 4. Allocations and year-end projected mortality impacts (mt) of yelloweye rockfish as of September 20, 2024.

Sector	Sub-sector	Projection (mt)	Reference Point	Tracking limit (mt)	Projected Percent (%) Attainment
Grand Total a/		29.0	ACL c/	53.0	54.8%
Off the top b/		8.2	Set Asides	10.7	76.5%
Trawl	CP	--	Trawl allocation	3.4	11.8%
	MS	--			
	IFQ	0.4			
	Sub Total	0.4			
Non-trawl	Non-nearshore + Nearshore	3.8	HG	8.2	46.9%
	WA Rec	2.6		10.0	25.9%
	OR Rec	4.7		9.1	51.5%
	CA Rec	9.3		11.8	78.6%
	Sub Total	20.4		HG d/	39.2
	Non-nearshore + Nearshore	3.8	ACT	6.4	59.8%
	WA Rec	2.6		7.9	33.0%
	OR Rec	4.7		7.2	65.6%
	CA Rec	9.3		9.3	100.2%
	Sub Total	20.4		ACT	30.7

a/ The Grand Total is the sum of the Trawl Sector Total and Non-trawl Sector ACT Total.

b/ off the top set asides: Tribal = 5.0 mt; EFPs = 0.0 mt; Research = 0.53 mt; Incidental Open Access = 2.66 mt.

c/ ACL = Set asides + Trawl allocation + Non-trawl allocation.

d/ The non-trawl allocation is the sum of the non-trawl HGs, 39.2 mt.

PFMC

09/21/24