

PHASE 2: STOCK DEFINITIONS - SCOPING

The GMT generally agrees with the three-step process in the order proposed by Council staff ([Agenda Item I.8, Attachment 1, September 2024](#)). The proposed schedule ([Agenda Item I.8, Attachment 2, September 2024](#)) for Step 1, however, is likely untenable given the anticipated workload to support the identification of Preliminary Proposed Alternatives (PPA) for all Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) species. Due to the limited guidance and defined scope, at this time GMT is uncertain about how to analyze the available data and if those data are sufficient for identifying species in need of conservation and management. There are 64 groundfish species remaining in the FMP that need to be analyzed to identify PPAs for stock definitions, and all FMP species will need to be evaluated to determine if they should remain in the FMP, be removed, or designated as Ecosystem Component (EC) species. The GMT is concerned the proposed timeline is untenable and adopting a PPA in March 2025 would be rushed, potentially resulting in suboptimal decision making.

The GMT would like the Council to look at all remaining 64 species at once rather than taking a piecemeal approach for the remaining species (e.g., only nearshore species or only slope species) to identify stocks in need of conservation and management. The GMT agrees with the overarching process identified as Step 1 in Attachment 1 and recommends the Council adopt a scope specific to Step 1 as well as a specific Purpose and Need Statement for Step 1 and scope Steps 2 and 3 in subsequent actions.

Step 1, in brief, will determine if a species is to remain under Federal management as a species in need of conservation and management. The revised [National Standard 1](#) guidelines provide a framework that gives more guidance to Councils on how to decide whether a stock requires conservation and management (see Figure 2 of [Agenda Item I.8, Attachment 1, September 2024](#)). The two criteria to consider when determining if a species is in need of Federal conservation and management: 1) is the species overfished or subject to overfishing, or likely to become overfished or subject to overfishing and 2) is the species predominantly caught in Federal waters. If a species does not meet both these criteria the Council should consider that species through the ten non-exhaustive factors at [§600.305\(c\)](#) and any additional considerations that may be relevant to the particular stock.

Regarding the first criterion to consider, to help determine if a species is overfished or subject to overfishing or likely to become overfished or subject to overfishing, the GMT recommends examining the current Report to Congress on the Status of U.S. Fisheries¹ and available stock

¹ See Status of Stocks 2023 at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/sustainable-fisheries/status-stocks-2023#more-information>

assessments. However, that information is likely limited for a portion of species within the FMP. The majority of species in the FMP are managed within complexes, and a large proportion of species currently managed in complexes have not been assessed and are category 3 species without determined stock statuses. Additionally, species managed within complexes are also assigned Annual Catch Limit contributions, which are not used in defining whether an individual species is undergoing overfishing. The GMT will need guidance on how to examine this aspect for species with limited information to no information on their population status. Additionally, the GMT will need guidance on what, if any, additional data may be used.

Regarding the second criterion to consider, identifying whether species are predominantly caught in state or Federal waters will need to be made for all species prior to determining stocks in need of conservation and management. The GMT is concerned that not enough information has been made available to determine predominance. Further, we are uncertain how to apply the available information to each species to determine predominance. To date, three analyses have been done to evaluate commercial, recreational, and Federal survey catch data in order to support the determination of predominance by species. The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the commercial fishery analysis ([Agenda Item I.8.a NMFS Report 1, September 2024](#)) and determined that the applied approach of stratifying and summing the data was appropriate. While inroads have been made on recreational data ([Agenda Item I.8.a NMFS Report 2, September 2024](#)), an approved methodology has not yet been established. The recreational fishery contributes a substantial amount to the overall mortality of many nearshore species, which will be the primary focus of determining predominance in either Federal or state waters for these species. While commercial and recreational catch locations may be similar, this aspect remains unknown until there is a recreational analysis of catch locations for all three states. The third potential source of catch information was derived from the West Coast Federal surveys ([Agenda Item I.8.a. NMFS Report 3, September 2024](#)). However, limited sampling within state waters by the West Coast Federal surveys, results in an incomplete picture of catch between Federal and state waters. Furthermore, survey data does not reveal fishery dependent information, nor where the fishery takes place, and therefore has limited utility for determining the predominance of catch.

Finally, for species that do not meet both criteria, the Council should examine the guideline factors listed at §600.305(c). In general, it is expected that these guideline factors are to be applied to species that do not meet both of the above criteria and that may be considered as ecosystem component species or removed from the FMP. The GMT finds some of the guideline factors to be ambiguous and requests clarity from NMFS/Council staff on their meanings. The rationale for this request is to ensure if/when species are analyzed by these guideline factors that they are analyzed in a consistent manner.

Based on the GMT's review of the available information as provided in the briefing book, the GMT's initial impression is there are key data that have not been explored and could be critical to

identify species in need of conservation and management. While the literature review (Agenda Item [I.8, Attachment 3, September 2024](#)) described the biological information available for each species, fishery related information was not provided (e.g., mortality by sector, etc.). The GMT is uncertain if fishery related information would facilitate evaluation of species and would like more guidance and assistance in determining what additional information is available and what other information may be needed to consider under Step 1. The GMT has identified some data gaps in the recreational and commercial fisheries that are elaborated on in Appendix 1 and proposes the Council direct the GMT during its overwinter-analysis to fully scope the data needs and timeline and provide a report at the March Council meeting. PPA is currently set for March, and the team thinks this is untenable. The overwinter-analysis will help better inform a more realistic timeline to be considered at the March Council meeting.

In summary, the GMT thinks the proposed timeline to complete Step 1 (i.e., by June 2025) is not realistic. Currently we have some biological data from the literature review, and commercial and recreational data, however the GMT recognizes there are data gaps and is uncertain how to apply this information at this time. The GMT suggests the Council task someone(s) (e.g. Council staff, advisory bodies, contractor) to conduct a gap analysis and compile available data in order to have a report at the March 2025 meeting. Then, at the March 2025 meeting the Council would review all available data that has been compiled or identified to determine if this information is sufficient to evaluate the first two criteria (i.e., is a species overfished or subject to overfishing, or likely to become overfished or subject to overfishing and is the species predominantly caught in Federal waters).

The GMT recommends that the Council not adopt a schedule at this meeting but re-evaluate the timeline, additional data needs, and postpone adopting the scope and the purpose and need statement specifically for Step 1 in March 2025. Once Step 1 is complete the Council can scope a timeline/purpose and need for Steps 2 and 3.

Appendix 1.

Commercial Data Needs

Further review by the GMT, and other experts, of the reports and data provided by NMFS under this agenda item is needed to provide useful insights into any caveats associated with their sector/area of expertise. Based on the review the GMT may request adjustments to the original analysis and provide any missing information or clarifications to the NMFS reports prior to the formal stock definition task.

Combining commercial and recreational data.

The GMT appreciates the work done by NMFS staff to separately analyze the commercial and recreational catch data. Additionally, the GMT recommends combining the area specific catch data between the commercial and recreational fisheries to assist in assigning predominance of all FMP species by state. Due to the differing catch scale of certain species between the commercial and recreational sectors it is important to consider them separately as well as holistically.

Washington Recreational Data Needs

Washington recreational catch data does not provide location nor is information collected that could be used as a proxy. Addressing this gap will entail additional work to identify alternative sources, synthesize the information, and evaluate it for use. The degree of difficulty and amount of additional work will vary depending on the stock. For stocks managed for WA-OR, Oregon recreational spatial data could be considered for application to Washington. However, for Washington-only stocks or if Oregon recreational data are found to be inappropriate for use, other sources will need to be explored and could include habitat-based information and fishermen expertise.

Oregon Recreational Data Needs

Further analysis needs to be done with Oregon angler reported information on catch location regarding the 30-fathom regulatory line used as a proxy for the three-nautical mile Federal line. In the [NMFS Report 2](#) Appendix 1 Table 2, 2022 was used as the year to generate the proportion of catch that was located in Federal waters. In 2022, the recreational fishery off of Oregon was limited to shoreward of the 40-fathom regulatory line for the months of July and August, which are the most popular fishing months of the year. The summer depth restriction was removed in 2023, providing access to deeper reefs year-round. Using data beginning in 2023 will better reflect the future of the recreational fishery off Oregon. Additionally, the 30-fathom regulatory line is not currently a strata used for expansions of catch or angler effort. There is a concern that using this data prior to any expansion may not accurately represent the area of catch, as ports with more interviews may not represent ports of higher fishing effort.

California Recreational Data Needs

[NMFS Report 2](#) provides a framework for an analysis of California recreational data in state vs. Federal waters, which provides a starting place for future analysis. This analysis should be expanded to encompass multiple years of recent recreational catch and exclude 2020 due to

anomalous data from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Statewide totals should be presented, as in the NMFS report, but should also be broken down at a finer scale such as CRFS district or management area due to the large size of the state and differences in the catch composition across the state. This would allow for the examination of state vs. Federal predominance in certain management areas and facilitate excluding a management area if needed. For example, the Central management area encompasses Monterey Bay, where the EEZ is not 3 nm from shore. The shoreward boundary of the EEZ contours the coast north and south of Monterey Bay, but then extends in a straight line from Santa Cruz to Monterey. As such the shoreward boundary of the EEZ is roughly 14 miles from shore at its greatest distance (Figure 1). The significant depths of Monterey canyon in this portion of state waters can change the catch composition of species caught within state waters and including catch from the Central management area in a statewide analysis could skew the predominance of certain species in state vs. Federal waters. Removing the Central management area from the analysis could help clarify the predominance of a species in the other management areas where the state/Federal water line follows the typically 3 nautical miles from shore. Additionally, having the analysis broken out at a lower geographic scale than statewide would allow for examinations of catch at different scales that are used for management currently (e.g., : North and South of 40° 10' N. lat or North and South of Pt. Conception) which could be useful in later conversations surrounding stock complexes.

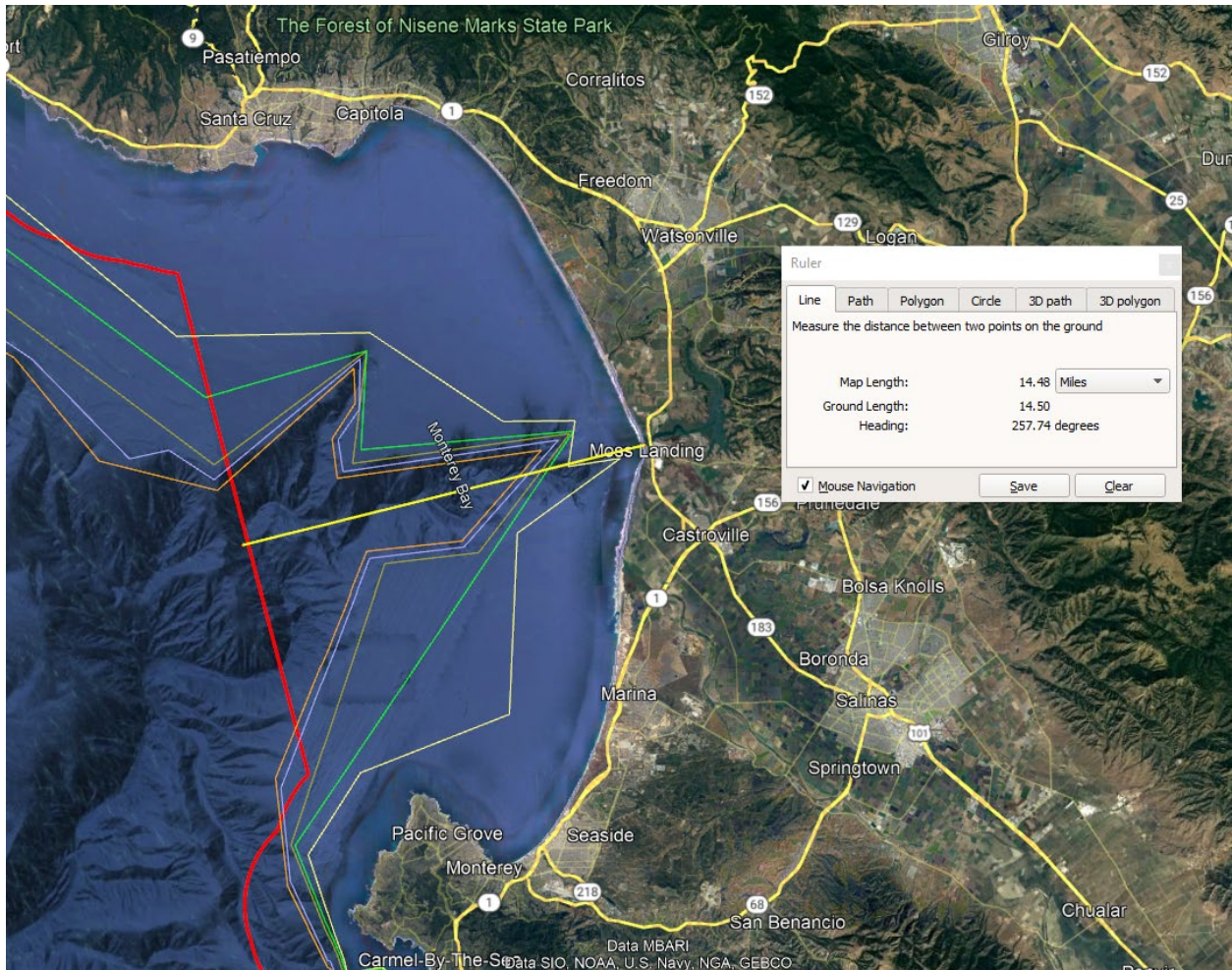


Figure 1: Map of Monterey Bay California. Red line is the state/Federal water line and the other colored lines are RCA lines. The yellow line from moss landing shows the rough distance from shore to the federal/ state water line.

An expanded analysis using NMFS methods will likely identify certain species which can easily be determined as predominantly in state vs. Federal waters or species which should be defined as ECS. For the remaining species where it is ambiguous if the predominance is primarily in state vs. federal waters further exploration of recreational data sources could be done and may provide additional information. This further exploration of recreational data is probably unnecessary for all species and should be targeted only for species where further information is needed to help inform predominance of catch in federal waters. Potential sources of additional recreational data include:

- California Recreational Fishery Survey (CRFS) Private Charter Onboard (PCO) data which includes latitude and longitude information for each drift. This includes catch and discard information for each drift.
- Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey (MRFSS) is a historical dataset which includes information when no depth restrictions occurred in California.

Finally, California Recreational fisheries have significantly changed over recent years in response to the overfishing declaration for quillback rockfish. Forcing anglers to fish in deeper waters will likely alter the predominance of catch of some species in current and future fisheries versus historical fisheries. The recreational analysis should compare 2023 data as a stand-alone year and against historical data to see if recent changes have altered the predominance of catch for certain species.

PFMC
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