

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

In [Agenda Item I.2.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, September 2024](#), the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) outlined the need for a new tool to project impacts in the emerging non-trawl shelf rockfish fishery. The GMT provided subsequent recommendations in a second supplemental report for how to address these concerns in future biennial cycles. In September, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) preliminarily adopted the GMT's recommendations. At this meeting, the GMT is providing a revised recommendation regarding the Non-Nearshore Shelf-Catch-Projection-Tool (CPT), which is the fourth and final recommendation from [Agenda Item I.2.a, Supplemental GMT Report 2, September 2024](#). All other September GMT recommendations remain unchanged.

Non-Nearshore Shelf-CPT

In September, the GMT recommended collaborating with external model developers to create a Non-Nearshore Shelf-CPT with a goal for the tool to be in place by early 2026, in preparation for the 2027-28 harvest specifications cycle. In October, the GMT met with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) staff to discuss model development and NMFS/Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) Fisheries Observation Science (FOS) staff to determine data availability. Based on those meetings, the GMT determined that the development of a Non-Nearshore Shelf-CPT presents significant challenges related to the team's workload and expertise, as well as the model's complexity and development timeline. Given the limited capacity and model-development expertise of the current team, and the constraints on available data that would feed the model, **the GMT recommends the Council contract with an outside group to lead this effort when additional years and more data applicable to the shelf targeting fishery have become available.** In the interim, the GMT will continue to track the mortality of the non-nearshore shelf targeted fishery as it has historically, using a three-year-average discard mortality provided in the Groundfish Expanded Multiyear Mortality report and projecting mortality of a particular stock/species when trip limit adjustments are requested.

Expertise Concerns

A significant concern is the lack of dedicated modeling expertise within the current GMT. While NMFS has offered to assist with the modeling process, the GMT does not currently possess the expertise needed to develop a complex model. The GMT could develop these skills to deliver a model that meets the required standards for review, but the time required to do so would jeopardize other priority agenda items.

Data Limitations

There are limitations in the availability and utility of data that would be needed to develop and test this model. This portion of the fishery began to develop in 2020 and has since continued to actively evolve as participants explore different gear types and targeting practices, increase their use of the new non-bottom contact hook-and-line gears, and access new areas open to fishing using these gears. The currently available observer data is unlikely to be representative of future dynamics, so

any model based on data from previous years is likely to have low skill in forecasting future years. The NWFSC's FOS Program uses spatially stratified, random sampling to ensure the discard rates are representative of the entire non-nearshore open access, limited entry sablefish endorsed, and limited entry sablefish non-endorsed sectors. Currently this selection process does not distinguish the shelf-targeting portions of these fisheries, meaning that observer data may not fully capture the dynamics of that portion of the fishery. In general, the FOS attempts to ensure that any post-stratifications are as consistent as possible with those used during the observer coverage selection process. At this time, the best way to use the available data to inform decisions and project into the future is to continue to use observer data as representative of the entire fishery. If the shelf-targeting portion of the fishery should be considered a separate, unique part of the fishery, the GMT could work with the FOS to consider the potential for focusing observer coverage on that fleet to better inform future models. In summary, we do not think we currently have the data that would be needed to create a robust predictive model for the shelf targeting fishery.

Timeline Concerns

Aside from the aforementioned expertise and data limitations, the GMT is concerned that there would not be enough time to develop an effective tool in time for it to be used in the 2027-28 harvest specifications analysis, which will start November 2025. Given competing workload with stock definitions, the Open Access discard mortality methodology we recommend for development, and other groundfish items scheduled over the next year such as the intersector allocation review, the GMT expects that either (a) any tool we develop would not be robust enough for management by November 2025 or (b) we would not be able to develop a tool at all. Additionally, any catch projection tool the team develops may need to be revisited or redone shortly after completion, depending on the status of other planned activities, such as the California quillback rockfish stock assessment and the outcome of phase two stock definitions. Therefore, the GMT supports this model development be continued but delayed with the intention for use in later harvest specifications analyses.

PFMC
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