

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON CORDELL BANK FISHERY
REGULATION CHANGES – RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES, PRELIMINARY PREFERRED
ALTERNATIVE

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the draft Analysis to inform this action ([Agenda Item I.5 Attachment 1 November 2024](#)), including the Purpose and Need statement:

The purpose of this action is to provide fishing access to previously closed areas surrounding Cordell Bank while protecting sensitive habitats. The Cordell Bank GCA [Groundfish Conservation Area] was initially implemented to reduce catch of several overfished groundfish stocks, which are all now rebuilt or rebuilding ahead of schedule. This action is needed to reduce unnecessary regulatory complexity.

The GMT agreed that Alternative 1 as outlined in Attachment 1 meets the Purpose and Need for this agenda item. The GMT discussion focused primarily on the impact of Alternative 1 on groundfish rebuilding species and species of concern relative to rebuilding timelines and declining annual catch limits (ACLs).

Yelloweye Rockfish

The GMT discussed whether the proposed opening of the Cordell Bank Groundfish Conservation Area (GCA) under Alternative 1 would adversely impact the projected yelloweye rockfish rebuilding timeline. Yelloweye rockfish is a prohibited species (*i.e.*, no retention, mandatory discard), and mortality has been well under the ACL in recent years (72 percent attainment in 2023, 69 percent attainment in 2022, and 37 percent attainment in 2021, according to Somers et al. [2023a](#), [2023b](#), and [2024](#)). Therefore, the GMT does not anticipate that additional yelloweye rockfish mortality from opening this small amount of area would risk exceeding the ACL, and no adverse impacts to the rebuilding timeline are expected. Additionally, other area closure management tools (*e.g.*, Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Areas, Rockfish Conservation Areas, or Block Area Closures) that are currently defined in Federal regulations can be turned “on” or modified via inseason action to mitigate yelloweye rockfish concerns if any arise.

Quillback Rockfish

The GMT also discussed whether the proposed opening of the Cordell Bank GCA under Alternative 1 would adversely impact the projected rebuilding timeline for California quillback rockfish. As stated in the draft Analysis, California quillback rockfish are primarily encountered between 20-50 fathoms (fm). The area proposed to be opened under Alternative 1 is deeper than 50 fm, and the primary depth range in which California quillback rockfish are found lies within the Groundfish Exclusion Area proposed in Alternative 1. Furthermore, the Cordell Bank GCA is located at the southern end of the range for California quillback rockfish where fishery encounters are not as common ([Agenda Item F.8.a Supplemental GMT Report 1 March 2024](#)). Similar to yelloweye rockfish, there is zero retention and mandatory discard of California quillback rockfish, and area closures can be used to address any emerging mortality concerns. Therefore, the GMT

does not anticipate a concerning increase in mortality for California quillback rockfish under Alternative 1 nor adverse impacts to the projected rebuilding timeline.

Canary Rockfish

The GMT discussed potential impacts under Alternative 1 to canary rockfish, as this stock is expected to be in the precautionary zone in 2025 ([Agenda Item G.2 Attachment 10 Status of Canary Rockfish \(*Sebastes pinniger*\) along the U.S. West Coast in 2023, September 2023](#)). Inseason monitoring of canary rockfish catch will inform whether or not the ACL is at risk of being exceeded, and appropriate management actions can be taken (*e.g.*, area closures or trip limit/bag limit reductions) inseason if and when catch approaches the ACL. Additionally, the draft Analysis in Attachment 1 indicates that rather than an effort increase with the opening of these areas, a potential effort shift is more likely. Given that expectation, and that the area to be opened accounts for a very small portion of the overall Exclusive Economic Zone, the GMT expects that activity in the area to be opened would not result in mortality impacts beyond those analyzed in the 2025-26 harvest specifications (see the final [Analysis for the 2025-26 Groundfish Harvest Specifications and Management Measures action](#)).

Bottom Trawl Impacts

In reviewing the draft Analysis, the GMT noticed that the description of Alternative 1 implied that the 10.2 square miles (sq. mi.) proposed to be opened to bottom trawl gear would be opened to *all* bottom trawl gear. However, bottom trawling with large footrope gear would still be prohibited in the 10.2 sq. mi. proposed to be opened to bottom trawl gear under Alternative 1. Per Federal regulations at [50 CFR 660.130\(c\)\(1\)\(ii\)](#), the use of large footrope gear is prohibited south of 46° 16' N. lat. and shoreward of the 100 fm line. The entire Cordell Bank GCA is located south of 46° 16' N lat. and shoreward of the 100 fm regulatory line.

PFMC
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