

GROUND FISH 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 Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) consideration. Action items include inseason changes that the GMT recommends be implemented for 2025. The 2024 scorecards are available in Appendix 1 of this report.

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Summary of Recommendations

- 1. The GMT recommends setting the 2025 Pacific whiting set-aside for research and the pink shrimp fishery at 750 mt, the same as in 2024.**
- 2. The GMT recommends not taking action at this meeting to revise sablefish trip limits, which means the trip limits adopted for 2025-26 harvest specifications would be in place at the start of 2025 (*i.e.*, Status Quo in Tables 1 and 2).**
- 3. The GMT recommends increasing the OA trip limit for shelf rockfish in the area between 40° 10' N. lat. and 42° N. lat. to be consistent with that in the area north of 42° N. lat. (*i.e.*, Option 1 in Table 4).**

Inseason Changes for 2025

Pacific Whiting Set-Aside

As part of this inseason action, the Council is tasked with selecting a value for the Pacific whiting set-aside to accommodate mortality in research and the pink shrimp fishery. This set-aside has been 750 metric tons (mt) since 2021, and annual mortality in those sectors has been well below that value since 2018 with the exception of 2021 ([Agenda Item I.6, Attachment 1, November 2024](#)). The majority of the 828 mt taken in 2021 was due to a research project focused on testing methods to distinguish Pacific whiting from mixed Pacific whiting and rockfish aggregations to improve future estimation of Pacific whiting biomass. To our knowledge, the Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) does not plan to conduct any specific research projects in 2025 that would result in unusually large amounts of Pacific whiting research catch. Starting in 2025, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration will be conducting the Joint Integrated West Coast Pelagics Survey, which will combine data collection of Pacific whiting and coastal pelagic species. Based on communication with the NWFSC, the GMT does not anticipate catches from this survey to result in the status quo 750 mt set-aside being exceeded. **The GMT recommends setting the 2025 Pacific whiting set-aside for research and the pink shrimp fishery at 750 mt, the same as in 2024.**

Sablefish North of 36° N. lat.

Starting in January 2025, the sablefish trip limits north of 36° north latitude (N. lat.) for both Limited Entry Fixed Gear (LEN) and Open Access (OAN) will be lower than the current trip limits in July-December of 2024. This is because the Council adopted 2025-26 trip limits in the harvest specifications package (final action in June 2024) that were reflective of the Council's understanding of the fishery's needs at the time. In other words, despite sablefish allocations increasing threefold in 2025, the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) and GMT recommended minimal increases to the trip limits in 2025-26, largely with the understanding that the fishery would continue to be constrained by markets and would not need substantial increases, among other factors.

In June of this year, the Council also took action to increase the 2024 trip limits for the remainder of the year based on a request from the GAP ([Agenda Item F.7.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, June 2024](#)). Since June of 2024, the GMT has identified 11 LEN vessels and 6 OAN vessels that have made at least one landing that would exceed the bimonthly limit adopted for 2025 (9,000 lbs. bimonthly for LEN and 6,500 lbs. bimonthly for OAN). Therefore, the GMT modeled increasing the 2025 trip limits to match the current trip limits in place for July-December 2024, now that new information indicates at least some vessels would benefit from higher trip limits.

However, while sablefish attainments are expected to remain low in both sectors if the current 2024 trip limits were adopted for 2025, the GMT has concerns about potential additional catch of shortspine thornyhead under higher sablefish trip limits. To estimate the potential shortspine thornyhead catches, the GMT calculated mean catch ratios of shortspine thornyhead to sablefish on sablefish-targeting trips in the LEN and OAN sectors separately, using haul-level observer data from the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (WCGOP). The median catch ratios were lower than the mean catch ratios due to the skewed nature of the data, but to be precautionary, the GMT chose to use mean catch ratios to estimate potential additional catch. For both sectors, mean

catch ratios were calculated across the years 2011-2022 and across all gear types. The GMT did not have time at this meeting to further refine the shortspine thornyhead catch estimation methods beyond this approach.

Limited Entry North

Table 1 below projects sablefish landings in the LEN sector under the 2025-26 trip limits adopted in harvest specifications (Status Quo) and the current trip limits in place for July-December of 2024 (Option 1), which are higher than the Status Quo trip limits. The LEN sector is projected to attain 15-21 percent of the 2025 target (1,413 mt) under Status Quo trip limits and 22-31 percent under the Option 1 trip limits. Using WCGOP catch ratios, the GMT estimates that approximately 39 mt of additional shortspine thornyhead could be caught by the LEN sector under Option 1, compared to the Status Quo trip limits.

Table 1. Options for sablefish trip limit increases in the LEN sector with projected sablefish landings and estimated additional shortspine thornyhead catch. Bolded row represents the GMT recommendation.

Option	Trip Limit	Projected Landings (rd. wt. mt) under Three Price Scenarios			2025 Target (mt)	Attainment under Three Price Scenarios			Estimate of Additional Shortspine Catch (mt; Avg. Price)
		Low	Avg.	High		Low	Avg.	High	
SQ	4,500 lbs./week not to exceed 9,000 lbs./2 months	207	248	290	1,413	15%	18%	21%	-
1	7,000 lbs./week not to exceed 14,000 lbs./2 months	311	374	437		22%	26%	31%	39

Open Access North

Similar to LEN, Table 2 below projects sablefish landings in the OAN sector under the 2025-26 trip limits adopted in harvest specifications (Status Quo) and the current trip limits in place for July-December of 2024 (Option 1), which are higher than the Status Quo trip limits. The OAN sector is projected to attain 23-27 percent of the 2025 target (2,327 mt) under Status Quo trip limits and 25-29 percent under the Option 1 trip limits. Using WCGOP catch ratios, the GMT estimates that approximately 1 mt of additional shortspine thornyhead could be caught by the OAN sector under Option 1, compared to the Status Quo trip limits.

Table 2. Options for sablefish trip limit increases in the OAN sector with projected sablefish landings and estimated additional shortspine thornyhead catch. Bolded row represents the GMT recommendation.

Option	Trip Limit	Projected Landings (rd. wt. mt) under Three Price Scenarios			2025 Target (mt)	Attainment under Three Price Scenarios			Estimate of Additional Shortspine Catch (mt; Avg. Price)
		Low	Avg.	High		Low	Avg.	High	
SQ	3,250 lbs./week not to exceed 6,500 lbs./2 months	545	584	624	2,327	23%	25%	27%	-
1	3,500 lbs./week not to exceed 7,000 lbs./2 months	581	623	665		25%	27%	29%	1

Across the LEN and OAN sectors, an estimated 40 mt of additional shortspine thornyhead could be caught if the Council adopts Option 1 sablefish trip limits for 2025. Combined with the recent 3-year average mortality in these sectors, the GMT is concerned that the shortspine thornyhead non-trawl annual catch target (ACT) north of 34° 27' N. lat. could be at risk of being exceeded in 2025 under Option 1 sablefish trip limits (Table 3). **For this reason, the GMT recommends not taking action at this meeting to revise sablefish trip limits, which means the trip limits adopted for 2025-26 harvest specifications would be in place at the start of 2025 (i.e., Status Quo in Tables 1 and 2).** While our currently estimated impacts to shortspine thornyhead are different between the LEN and OAN sectors, the GMT recommends not making increases to one sector without also increasing the other sector for equity reasons, given that the GMT does not have time at this meeting to thoroughly analyze and consider impacts. Sablefish trip limit increases can be further discussed and analyzed in March 2025, which would allow the GMT more time to further refine our estimation of shortspine thornyhead impacts, including the incorporation of 2023 observer data and total 2024 landings.

Table 3. Estimated shortspine thornyhead mortality in the LEN and OAN sectors in 2025 and 2026 based on Option 1 sablefish trip limit increases.

Year	Non-Trawl ACT (mt)	3-year average GEMM OAN/LEN Mortality (mt)	Estimate of Additional Shortspine Catch under Option 1 (mt; Avg. Price)	Percent of Non-Trawl ACT (mt)
2025	67	31	40	106%
2026	55	31	40	129%

Shelf Rockfish North of 40° 10' N. lat.

The GMT received a request to increase the Open Access (OA) trip limit for shelf rockfish north of 40° 10' N. lat. beginning in 2025. The request is aimed to provide relief to the OA sector who have been affected by closures to protect California quillback rockfish. Some vessels have landed more than 80 percent of their trip limit over multiple periods and this request may allow those participants to utilize the stocks that are under-attained (i.e., bocaccio and chilipepper rockfish). The GMT analyzed the following two options to increase trip limits: 1) increase the trip limit in

the area between 40° 10' N. lat. and 42° N. lat. to be consistent with that in the area north of 42° N. lat., and 2) Option 1 as well as doubling the trip limits north of 40° 10' N. lat.

As a whole, the non-trawl shelf rockfish complex allocation is underutilized (Table 4). To consider increasing the shelf complex trip limits, the GMT evaluated non-trawl species-specific mortality relative to Annual Catch Limit (ACL) contributions to the shelf complex. During analysis, vermilion rockfish attainment arose as a concern, because the California harvest of vermilion rockfish has exceeded area-specific ACL contributions in recent years (Table 6). To prevent overfishing of the California vermilion rockfish stock as defined for status determination, the Council should maintain management measures that aim to keep mortality of vermilion rockfish in all areas south of 42° N. lat. within the Overfishing Limit (OFL) associated with that area (*i.e.*, the combined OFL contributions for northern and southern California). While the combined ACL contribution south of 42° N. lat. has been exceeded in the past, the [Agenda Item I.6.a, Supplemental CDFW Report 1, November 2024](#) notes that vermilion rockfish mortality is lower this year than in recent years and is projected to remain within California-specific harvest targets.

The GMT discussed a sub-trip limit for vermilion rockfish north of 40° 10' N. lat., similar to the shelf rockfish complex trip limit south of 40° 10' N. lat. It was determined this action could not be accomplished inseason and would instead need to be addressed in the biennial harvest specification process.

Table 5 describes the additional projected vermilion rockfish mortality relative to the trip limit options analyzed. A trip limit increase in the area between 40° 10' N. lat. and 42° N. lat. to be consistent with the area north of 42° N. lat. would increase vermilion rockfish mortality by 0.1 mt but result in the total mortality exceeding the non-trawl allocation of the ACL contribution for this area. However, the California ACL is not at risk of being exceeded with the addition of 0.1 mt mortality associated with the Option 1 trip limit. Noting the limited impacts to species-specific contributions to the shelf complex including vermilion rockfish, **the GMT recommends increasing the OA trip limit for shelf rockfish in the area between 40° 10' N. lat. and 42° N. lat. to be consistent with that in the area north of 42° N. lat. (*i.e.*, Option 1 in Table 4).**

The GMT is aware that OA and Limited Entry Fixed Gear (LEFG) trip limits are the same under Option 1. The GMT would highlight that these trip limits were the same prior to the inseason action described in [Agenda Item G.8.a, Supplemental GMT Report 5, September 2023](#), which was taken to reduce fishery impacts on California quillback rockfish. Given this historical parity, the GMT does not consider this change an equity concern. Additionally, LEFG vessels are not attaining their Status Quo trip limits, *i.e.*, the trip limits the Council adopted for 2025-26 harvest specifications. If LEFG attainment were to change, the GMT will consider increasing LEFG shelf rockfish trip limits north of 40° 10' N. lat., as they do not impact vermilion to the same scale as the OA sector. The GMT discussed Option 2 to double the trip limit, but due to the recent high attainment of vermilion rockfish in California, the GMT does not recommend an additional increase in the shelf rockfish north trip limit at this time but can revisit the request once 2024 vermilion mortality has been determined. Furthermore, the shelf rockfish complex trip limits are changing irrespective of this action from monthly to bi-monthly in 2025, which will provide operational flexibility, potentially addressing some weather concerns and costs associated with reaching open areas.

Table 4. Projected shelf rockfish north of 40° 10' N. lat. non-trawl landings, discards, and total mortality in 2025 relative to the shelf rockfish north non-trawl allocation. Bolded row represents the GMT recommendation. N-T = Non-Trawl.

	Sector	Trip Limit	Projected Shelf RF Complex Landings (mt)	Projected Shelf RF Complex Discards (mt)	3 year average GEMM Rec. Mortality	Total N-T Shelf RF Complex Area Mortality	N-T Alloc.	Percent of the N-T Alloc.
SQ	OA	N of 42 (1,600 lbs/ 2 months)	3.2	0.1	22.9	33.7	529	6.4%
		42-4010 (1,200 lbs/ 2 months)	1.7					
	LE	N 4010 (1,600 lb/ 2 months)	2.8	3.0				
Option 1	OA	N of 42 (1,600 lbs/ 2 months)	3.2	0.1	22.9	33.9	529	6.4%
		42-4010 (1,600 lbs/ 2 months)	2.0					
	LE	N 4010 (1,600 lb/ 2 months)	2.8	3.0				
Option 2	OA	N of 42 (3,200 lbs/ 2 months)	3.2	0.1	22.9	35.0	529	6.6%
		42-4010 (3,200 lbs/ 2 months)	3.0					
	LE	N 4010 (3,200 lb/ 2 months)	2.8	3.0				

Table 5. Projected vermilion rockfish north of 40° 10' N. lat. non-trawl landings, discards, and total mortality in 2025. Bolded row represents the GMT recommendation.

	Sector	Trip Limit	Vermilion Landings Projection (mt)	Vermilion Discard Projection (mt)	Vermilion Mortality Projection (mt)
SQ	OA	N of 42 (1,600 lbs/ 2 months)	1.8	0.1	3.0
		42-4010 (1,200 lbs/ 2 months)	1.0		
	LE	N 4010 (1,600 lb/ 2 months)	0.1	0.0	
Option 1	OA	N of 42 (1,600 lbs/ 2 months)	1.8	0.1	3.1
		42-4010 (1,600 lbs/ 2 months)	1.1		
	LE	N 4010 (1,600 lb/ 2 months)	0.1	0.0	
Option 2	OA	N of 42 (3,200 lbs/month)	1.8	0.1	3.7
		42-4010 (3,200 lbs/ 2 months)	1.7		
	LE	N 4010 (3,200 lb/ 2 months)	0.1	0.0	

Table 6. Species projected to exceed their species-specific ACL contributions to the Shelf Rockfish Complex North of 40° 10' N. lat. N-T = Non-Trawl

Species	Assessment	2025 ACL Contributions to Shelf Complex (mt)		Status Quo 2025 OA/LEFG Mortality (mt)			3-yr Avg. Rec. Mort.	Total N-T Mort.	Remaining N-T Allocation
		Total	N-T	Projected Landings	Avg. Discard Mortality	Total Projected Mortality			
Vermilion Rockfish a/	Full 2021	6.2	2.4	1.1	0.1	1.2	4.1	5.3	-2.9
Tiger Rockfish b/	DBSRA 2011	0.8	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.2	1.5	1.7	-1.2

a/ Vermilion rockfish is 42-4010 N. lat. for ACL contribution, commercial landings, and recreational mortality.

b/ Tiger rockfish shows no change between SQ and Option 1.

Informational Items

At-Sea Set-Asides

As of November 16, 2024, both the sablefish north of 36° N. lat. and shortspine thornyhead north of 34° 27' N. lat. set-asides in the at-sea Pacific whiting sectors were exceeded at 221 percent each. All other set-aside attainments are less than 60 percent. The 2024 sablefish north ACL is currently at 60 percent attainment. The sablefish north ACL and at-sea set-aside are both increasing substantially in 2025, so it is unlikely the Council would need to consider action to limit sablefish mortality in the at-sea sectors in the next biennium.

The 2024 shortspine thornyhead north of 34° 27' N. lat. ACL attainment across all sectors is at 38 percent as of the time of writing this report, thus, the 2024 ACL is not expected to be at risk. However, shortspine thornyhead will be managed with a coastwide ACL starting in 2025, and substantially reduced harvest limits are anticipated to constrain some fisheries. Given this, the Council will need to monitor shortspine thornyhead attainment closely inseason. The 2025 and 2026 coastwide shortspine thornyhead OFLs will be 940 mt and 961 mt, respectively (Table 7). The last time total coastwide shortspine thornyhead mortality exceeded 961 mt was 2017, when a total of 1,036 mt of mortality was estimated. The coastwide ACL was 2,619 mt in 2017. Given the substantial reductions in harvest specifications starting in 2025, an exceedance in any sector could risk exceeding the OFL.

The GMT anticipates providing the Council with a shortspine thornyhead scorecard at each inseason meeting starting in 2025 to monitor mortality across all sectors relative to the ACL.

Table 7. Coastwide shortspine thornyhead OFL/ABC/ACL values from 2022 to 2026, along with total coastwide mortality in 2022 and 2023. Data Source: PacFIN and GEMM.

Year	OFL	ABC	ACL	Total Mortality
2022 a/	3,194	2,130	2,130	691.6
2023 a/	3,177	2,078	2,061	461.2
2024 a/	3,162	2,030	2,030	
2025	940	821	815	
2026	961	831	821	

a/ The 2022-2024 OFL/ABC/ACL values in this table are coastwide, but shortspine thornyhead was managed with area-specific ACLs north and south of 34° 27' N. lat. in those years

Appendix 1.

2024 Chinook Salmon Scorecard

Table A1. Chinook salmon catch (numbers of fish) in 2024 as of November 13, 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)	Percent of Threshold	Total Threshold (# of fish)
Whiting	CP	449	4.1%	11,000
	MS	*	--	
	Shoreside	796	7.2%	
	Tribal	264 b/	2.4%	
	Total	1,509	13.7%	
Non-Whiting	Bottom Trawl	799	14.5%	5,500
	Midwater Trawl	127	2.3%	
	Tribal	*	--	
	Fixed Gear	500 c/	9.1%	
	WA Rec			
	OR Rec + longleader			
	CA Rec			
Total	1,426	25.9%		
All groundfish fisheries & EFPs		2,935		

* 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 A2. 2024 estimated Pacific spiny dogfish mortality in metric tons (mt) by sector, as of November 13, 2024. (Source: PacFIN)

Sector	Estimated Mortality (mt)
At-Sea Hake Catcher Processor	41.7
At-Sea Hake Mothership	*
IFQ (non-whiting)	119.1
Shoreside Hake a/	102.0
Non-Trawl	46.6
Incidental/Miscellaneous	3.3
Recreational	1.5
Treaty	*
Total b/	314.1
ACL	1,407
Percent ACL b/	22.3%

* 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 A3. 2024 estimated shortbelly rockfish mortality in metric tons (mt) by sector, as of November 13, 2024. (Source: PacFIN)

Sector	Mortality (mt)
At-Sea Hake Catcher Processor	0.1
At-Sea Hake Mothership	*
IFQ (non-whiting)	66.0
Incidental/Miscellaneous	*
Shoreside Hake	120.2
Treaty	*
Total	186.3
Threshold	2,000
Percent (%) of Threshold	9.3%

* Confidential

2024 Yelloweye Rockfish Scorecard

Table A4. Allocations and year-end projected mortality impacts (mt) of yelloweye rockfish as of November 1, 2024. Changes from the September scorecard are bolded.

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	Trawl allocation	3.4	11.8%
Non-trawl	Non-nearshore + Nearshore	3.8	HG	8.2	46.9%
	WA Rec	3.3		10.0	32.9%
	OR Rec	4.0		9.1	43.8%
	CA Rec	9.3		11.8	78.6%
	Sub Total	20.4	HG d/	39.2	52.1%
	Non-nearshore + Nearshore	3.8	ACT	6.4	59.8%
	WA Rec	3.3		7.9	41.9%
	OR Rec	4.0		7.2	55.9%
	CA Rec	9.3		9.3	100.2%
	Sub Total	20.4	ACT	30.7	66.5%

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
11/16/24