



Pacific Fishery Management Council

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Brad Pettinger, Chair | Merrick J. Burden, Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 14, 2025

TO: Groundfish Advisory Subpanel, Groundfish Management Team, and Groundfish Interested Persons

FROM: Todd Phillips, Groundfish Staff Officer

SUBJECT: March 2025 Council Meeting Materials

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) will meet March 6-11, 2025 in Vancouver, Washington. The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) and the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) will convene meetings starting Wednesday, March 5, 2025, at 8 a.m. and will adjourn on Sunday, March 9, 2025. The GMT and GAP are scheduled to meet in the Oak and Heritage D Conference rooms, respectively. All meetings are open to the public and at least one opportunity for public comment has been scheduled for each meeting day.

The briefing book materials attached to this memorandum provide detailed information for items on the Council's March 2025 agenda. The following agenda items may be of particular interest to the GMT, the GAP, and other groundfish-interested stakeholders.

Cross Fishery Management Plan

D.2 Marine Planning

The Marine Planning Committee met January 30, 2025, and submitted a report in the advanced March Briefing Book (Agenda Item D.2.a, MPC Report 1). The MPC received state and tribal updates, a presentation from the California Energy Commission on suitable sea space for wave and tidal energy, and a presentation on the MPC's cumulative impacts framework. The meeting was recorded and available on the MPC [meeting webpage](#).

Pacific Halibut Management

C.2 Incidental Catch Recommendations: Options for Salmon Troll and Final Action for Fixed Gear Sablefish Fisheries

The Council will consider incidental Pacific halibut retention limits in the salmon troll fishery and the primary fixed gear fishery for sablefish north of Point Chehalis. These actions are required to allow incidental harvest of Pacific halibut, while assuring the quotas are not exceeded. Final halibut retention limits for the primary fixed gear fishery for sablefish north of Point Chehalis will be decided at the March Council meeting. The retention limits will remain consistent with those in place when the fishery closed in 2024 unless a decision is made to modify the limits for 2025. The GAP should review Attachment 1 under this agenda item and consider the 2024 halibut harvest

limits, and the 2025 sablefish and halibut quotas and recommend status quo, or new limits for 2025 if warranted.

Ecosystem Management

F.1 2024-25 California Current Ecosystem Status Report and 2025 Science Review Topics

The Council will receive a briefing from the California Current Integrated Ecosystem Assessment (CCIEA) Team regarding the most recent California Current Ecosystem Status Report and appendices. This annual report highlights trends in physical, biological, and socioeconomic components of the ecosystem – taking into account the effects of fisheries and other human activities. This session is largely informational, however the GMT and GAP can comment on this report.

Groundfish Management

H.2 Humpback Whale and Leatherback Sea Turtle Biological Opinion

The Council will receive a briefing on the Humpback Whale and Leatherback Sea Turtle Biological Opinion released in November 2024. The GAP and GMT should consider the terms and conditions and provide any comments to the Council.

H.3 Implementation of the 2025 Pacific Whiting Fishery under the U.S./Canada Agreement and 2025 Fishery

The Council will be updated as to the 2025 Pacific Whiting Treaty process. In most years, the process to set the Canadian and US total allowable catch (TAC) occurs prior to the Council meeting, which allows the Council to make recommendations regarding the TAC. This year it overlaps with the Council meeting. As such, the Council will not be able to make a timely recommendation regarding the TAC to NMFS. A key item for the GAP and the GMT to consider is the timing of the treaty process and comment as appropriate. Additionally, the Council will be informed of the at-sea set-aside process (Attachment 1). As there have been questions to that process and the Council's ability to invoke inseason management of that fishery related to at-sea set-aside exceedances, the GMT and GAP could speak to this issue and provide recommendations, as appropriate.

H.4 Final Assessment Methodologies

The Council will be briefed by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) regarding assessment methodologies. The SSC Groundfish Subcommittee drafted a revised version of the Accepted Practices Guidelines for Groundfish Stock Assessments in 2025 and 2026 document from their December 2024 meeting (Agenda Item H.4.a, SSC Groundfish Subcommittee Report 1). This document will supplement the Terms of Reference for the Groundfish Stock Assessment Review Process in 2025 and 2026. The Council will review and approve the accepted practices guidelines, as appropriate.

H.5 Cordell Bank Conservation Area Revisions -Final

In September 2023, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) brought forward a proposal to remove the Cordell Bank Groundfish Conservation Area (GCA) and implement a new

Groundfish Exclusion Area (GEA) in order to minimize regulatory complexity. Further, the GCA was originally put into place to minimize impacts to overfished rockfish and is no longer needed given the rebuilding of the stocks (e.g., canary rockfish). The Council is scheduled to adopt a final preferred alternative. The GAP and GMT should consider the analysis in Attachment 1 in their recommendations to the Council.

H.6 Phase 2 Stock Definitions

The Council will consider adopting a range of alternatives (ROA) for the stock definition step of Phase 2. The analysis to support the decision-making process identified a framework pathway to improve efficiency for this process. The framework proposes using a 25 percent threshold of mortality in Federal waters as a means to identify species that could move forward in the stock definition process without further evaluation. These groups could serve to inform the ROA. Staff developed a draft ROA for this Action for consideration. The ROA consists of a No Action Alternative and three Action Alternatives. Alternative 1 identifies the species in need of conservation and stocks of these species will be defined. Alternative 2 identifies species that could be removed from the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan, and Alternative 3 identifies species as ecosystem component (EC) species. Alternative 1 species will be analyzed using the process developed for Phase 1 stock definition process. Species identified to Alternative 2 and Alternative 2 will be analyzed using factors listed in §600.305(c). The Council, GMT and GAP should indicate if there are any other factors that should be explored when considering removal or designation of an EC for any species. The GMT and GAP should consider the threshold and its utility in this process. A non-exhaustive list of questions to stimulate GMT and GAP discussion is provided in Section 6 of Attachment 1. The GMT and GAP should review the analysis and provide recommendations to the Council, notably on the threshold and its percentage, the ROA, and the proposed stock definitions.

H.7 Limited Entry Fixed Gear Actions: Gear Endorsements, Cost Recovery, and Other Administrative Changes

The Council completed its second review of the limited entry fixed gear (LEFG) permit stacking program (i.e., tier fishery) in June 2022 and adopted a series of recommendations for the program. In March 2023, the Council prioritized these changes and expanded the action to include all LEFG participants and adopted a purpose and need and range of alternatives in September 2023. The alternatives are centered around potential changes in gear endorsements to promote flexibility, development of a cost recovery program for the tier fishery, and other administrative changes. While the Council was originally scheduled to adopt a preliminary preferred alternative (PPA) in November 2024, the action was delayed in order to consider the analysis and terms and conditions of the Humpback and Leatherback Sea Turtle Biological Opinion (discussed under Agenda Item H.2). The GAP and GMT should consider the analysis provided in Attachment 1 and recommend any revisions to the alternatives and a PPA to the Council.

H.8 Workload and New Management Measures Priorities

This agenda item provides an annual opportunity for the Council to consider groundfish workload for the coming year. The Council will review the existing list of new management measures (Attachment 1) and may revise it, as applicable. They will also consider adding new management measures to the list and may prioritize measures for development. The GMT and GAP should review the existing list of proposed groundfish management measures and discuss/recommend revisions, as appropriate. Additionally, staff has developed a best practices guidance document for this process (Attachment 3) which should be reviewed by the GMT and GAP.

H.9 Inseason Adjustments – Final Action

This agenda item will consider progress to date of the groundfish fisheries as well as routine inseason adjustments to the 2024 fisheries, as necessary, to achieve conservation objectives. This agenda item is the opportunity for the GAP and public to request inseason adjustments. Requests should be brought to the GMT by no later than noon, Friday, March 7 to ensure adequate analysis time.

Non-Agenda Items

Deputy Director Kelly Ames will meet with the GMT and GAP in a joint session to discuss and answer questions regarding the advisory body practices and procedures webinar hosted by Council staff on January 22, 2025.

Other Items

The following are additional pre-Council meeting briefings that may be of interest:

- The GAP and GMT will host a [joint webinar](#) meeting to discuss items on the Council's March Agenda on February 19, 2025 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- The Ad Hoc Ecosystem Workgroup will host a [webinar](#) meeting to discuss the California Current Integrated Ecosystem Assessment on February 25, 2025 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

This mailing includes the enclosures listed below. Please review these briefing materials in advance to facilitate an efficient meeting week. Briefing materials for this meeting can be accessed from [the March 2025 Meeting briefing book webpage](#).

Thank you for your commitment to the Council process and management of Pacific groundfish fisheries.

TMP:kma

Enclosures include:

1. Agenda Item A.3 – Council Meeting Agenda
2. Agenda Item B.1 – Comments on Non-Agenda Items
3. Agenda Item C – Pacific Halibut Management
4. Agenda Item D – Cross Fishery Management Plan
5. Agenda Item F – Ecosystem Management
6. Agenda Item H – Groundfish Management
7. Agenda Item J – Administrative Matters
8. Enforcement Consultants Agenda
9. GAP Agenda
10. GMT Agenda
11. SSC Agenda and Draft Minutes
12. Informational Reports
13. General and Hotel Information and Council Roster

PFMC

02/11/25