

## At-sea Whiting Set-Aside Management

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) has discussed their concerns regarding exceedances of at-sea sector groundfish set-asides and management responses in recent years (e.g., [Agenda Item I.6.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, November 2024](#) and [Agenda Item H.8.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, June 2023](#)). Discussions in advisory bodies and on the Council floor have indicated additional clarity surrounding the term ‘set-aside’ and the potential management response to overages is needed. The following background information is provided to facilitate broader understanding of at-sea sector set-aside management as it relates to the 2025 fishery.

### At-sea Set-asides

At-sea set-asides are designed to account for assumed non-target groundfish mortality in the at-sea mothership and catcher-processor sectors. They are a type of fishery set-aside, as indicated in the definition in regulation (emphasis added).

**“Fishery set-asides.** Annual set-asides are not formal allocations but they are amounts which are not available to the other fisheries during the fishing year. For Pacific Coast treaty Indian fisheries, set-asides will be deducted from the TAC, OY, ACL, or ACT when specified. **For the catcher/processor and mothership sectors of the at-sea Pacific whiting fishery, set-asides will be deducted from the limited entry trawl fishery allocation.** Set-aside amounts may be adjusted through the biennial harvest specifications and management measures process.” [50 CFR 660.55\(j\)](#)

At-sea set-asides are a specified amount of yield of an actively managed stock or stock complex that is deducted from the overall trawl sector allocation. (Figure 1). The remainder of the trawl allocation is allocated to the shorebased individual fishing quota (IFQ) program. In total, at-sea set-asides are used to account for mortality of 12 groundfish stocks and three stock complexes incidentally caught in the Pacific whiting at-sea fishery. At-sea set-asides are shared between the two at-sea sectors and mortality for stocks and stock complex set-asides counts against the same amount, regardless of sector.

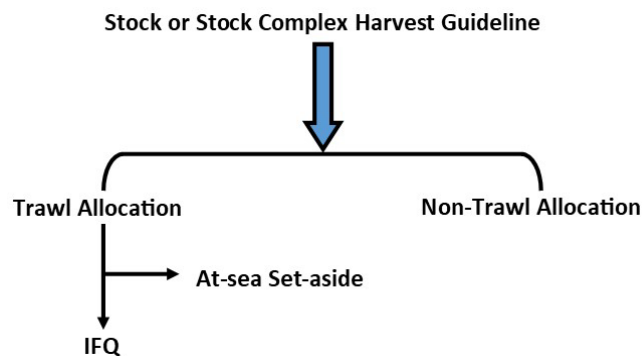


Figure 1. The at-sea set-aside relative to the fishery harvest guideline dispersal to the fishery

At-sea set-aside amounts are developed by the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) and Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) for consideration by the Council during the biennial groundfish harvest specifications and management measures process. As reference, there are two categories of set-asides, ACL deductions (a.k.a. ‘off-the-top’) and at-sea set-asides. Off-the-tops are not discussed herein; however, they are referred to in the text below.

The [Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan \(FMP\)](#) defines set-asides as (emphasis added to at-sea portion):

“Set-aside is the amount of yield of an actively managed stock or stock complex that is deducted from an ACL or sector allocation. A set-aside deducted from an ACL is designed to accommodate catch in Tribal fisheries, research fisheries, exempted fishing permit activities, and bycatch in non-groundfish fisheries. **A set-aside deducted from a sector allocation is designed to accommodate catch for a portion of the sector where within-sector allocations are not specified (e.g., set-asides for the at-sea whiting sectors for many stocks are deducted from formal trawl allocations to accommodate expected bycatch).**”

FMP page 13

### Management Options

The management options for at-sea set-asides are defined at [§660.150\(c\)\(2\)\(i\)\(B\)\(1\)](#) and [§ 660.160\(c\)\(3\)\(i\)](#) for the mothership and the catcher processor sectors, respectively. In brief, inseason action on set-asides is narrow and is applicable if, at minimum, one of the three criteria is met (emphasis added):

“At-sea sector set-asides of non-whiting groundfish species will be managed on an annual basis unless there is a **risk of a harvest specification being exceeded, unforeseen impact on other fisheries, or conservation concerns**, in which case inseason action may be taken. Set asides may be adjusted through the biennial specifications and management measures process as necessary.”

§660.150(c)(2)(i)(B)(1) & § 660.160(c)(3)(i)

If none of those criteria are met, then there is no mechanism for the Council to take action. The GMT informs the Council when the sector(s) have exceeded or are projected to exceed at-sea set-asides under the groundfish inseason action item.