

## PHASE 2 STOCK DEFINITIONS

The Phase 2 stock definitions process was initiated at the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (Council) September 2024 meeting when it adopted the Phase 2 process ([Agenda Item I.8, Attachment 1, September 2024](#)) and plan ([Agenda Item I.6, Attachment 2, September 2024](#)). As indicated in the process document, three sequential steps were identified to, as necessary, achieve Phase 2: Step 1 to identify and define stocks in need of conservation and management; Step 2 to contemplate stock complex revisions based on outcomes of Step 1; and Step 3 to consider delegation of management. In September, the Council directed staff to develop a range of alternatives (ROA) to support Step 1 for decision-making in March 2025.

In developing the analysis (Attachment 1), it became evident that efficiencies were needed to improve the process. For many species, the history of federal management and a review of the proportion of fishing activity for these species occurring in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) suggests these species are strong candidates for continued Federal management, without need for further analysis, and can be defined as stocks using the approach developed through Amendment 31. For some species, further review and analysis using the factors described at National Standard Guidance [§600.305\(c\)](#) (Attachment 2) may be needed to ascertain if they should be Federally managed.

To gain necessary efficiencies, a framework to identify species with principal mortality in the EEZ using a precautionary 25 percent threshold was developed. This threshold was selected to account for uncertainty related to such issues as past management effects on the diversity of catch in terms of state or Federal waters, interannual variation of catch, and how current and reasonably foreseeable future actions may further change the diversity of catch. The threshold was applied to total mortality for each of the 86 managed groundfish species, by state and fishery sector (commercial and recreational). There were four outcomes from this process: 1) species with greater than 25 percent of mortality in the EEZ for both sectors; 2) species with less than 25 percent of mortality in the EEZ for both sectors; 3) mixed mortality in the EEZ (i.e. one sector had mortality greater than 25 percent in the EEZ and the other less than 25 percent); and 3) no mortality in state or Federal Waters.

The analysis relies on understanding the percentage of mortality in state and Federal waters. Commercial fishery mortality by area was estimated using the NMFS analysis (see Attachment 1, Appendix C) and recreational mortality was estimated via sample and estimate data in Oregon and California. Washington does not identify recreational mortality by area and Council staff will continue to work with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to determine the best approach.

In sum, all 86 managed groundfish species are caught off of California and Oregon. There are 60 species with mortality greater than 25 percent in the EEZ that are strong candidates for continued Federal management, and are without need of further analysis, and can be defined as stocks. The analysis identifies these species as Group A. 24 species have mortality less than 25 percent and/or mixed level of mortality in the EEZ and two species have no reported mortality and require further evaluation. The analysis identifies these species, a total of 26, as Group B.

The ROA consists of a No Action Alternative and three action alternatives. Alternative 1 identifies the species in need of conservation and management, which will be defined as one or more stocks. Alternative 2 identifies species that could be removed from the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and Alternative 3 identifies species as ecosystem component (EC) species.

The results from the analysis could serve to inform the selection of species to the alternatives. Based on the analytical findings, Group A species could be identified as in need of conservation and management. Thus Alternative 1 could be adopted for all species in Group A. For species in Group A, the Council could identify their preliminary preferred alternative (PPA) stock definitions for these species at this meeting. If the Council takes this course of action, these species will be analyzed using the process developed for Phase 1 stock definition process using information discerned from the stock structure literature review (Attachment 3). In this case, the Council could adopt their final action for these species in June. The outcomes of the analysis indicate regardless of how Group B species are considered under the ROA, they will require additional analysis using the 10 factors listed in §600.305(c) (Attachment 2).

### **Council Tasks:**

- 1. Consider and approve the proposed 25 percent threshold framework for identifying species principally caught in Federal waters, as appropriate.**
- 2. Adopt the ROA and identify species to Alternatives, where appropriate.**
- 3. For Alternative 1 species, adopt PPA stock definition, where possible.**
- 4. Provide guidance on next steps, as appropriate.**

### **Reference Materials:**

1. Agenda Item H.6 Attachment 1: A Proposed Framework Process and Analysis in Support of a Range Of Alternatives for Step 1 of the Phase 2 Stock Definitions Process. (*Electronic Only*).
2. Agenda Item H.6 Attachment 2: Excerpted Text from National Standard Guidance regarding §600.305(c):
3. Agenda Item H.6, Attachment 3: Phase 2 Literature Review (*Electronic Only*).
4. If Received, Public Comments are Electronic Only ([see e-portal](#)).

### **Agenda Order:**

- H.6 Phase 2 Stock Definitions Todd Phillips
- a. Reports and Comments of Management Entities and Advisory Bodies
  - b. Public Comment
  - c. **Council Action:** Adopt a Range of Alternatives and Preliminary Preferred Alternative(s), Provide Guidance on Next Steps.