

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON PHASE 2 STOCK DEFINITIONS – FINAL ACTION

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) appreciates the hard work and thoughtfulness in Todd Phillips and Katrina Bernaus' clarifying presentations on Stock Definitions Phase 2 and appreciates the presence of the Groundfish Management Team's (GMT) for that presentation. Their presence facilitated our discussion and consideration around whether the proposed list of species didn't warrant further consideration before retaining them within the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) as stocks in need of conservation under National Standard 1 (NS1) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA).

Final Preferred Alternative (FPA) Selection

The GAP recommends Alternative 1 as FPA, with Option 1 to define those stocks shown in Table ES 3 of [Agenda Item E.6, Attachment 1, June 2025](#) as stocks within the FMP, with the exception of harlequin, rosethorn, and stripetail rockfishes.

For harlequin rockfish, the GAP agrees with staff's recommendation that they be dropped from the Alternative 1 list and further consideration be given to that species for Alternative 2 or Alternative 3 under the guidance within MSA NS1 Section 600.305. This is because harlequin rockfish are rarely, if ever, encountered by the fishery.

Rosethorn rockfish are "long-lived (to 64 years), slow-growing, and late in maturing" ([Franklin R. Shaw, 2008; Cal Fish and Game, 94\(3\): 123-136](#)), which indicates these small rockfish are not very productive as a fisheries resource. There is very little information about this species and in the field it is easily confounded with both pinkrose and swordspine rockfish. Managing them for Optimum Yield has the potential to limit access to the many important cooccurring rockfish species found in rocky reefs at depths of 100 to 350 meters. However, while not the target of a fishery, the GAP concurs that they are often retained in the non-trawl commercial fishery and marketed rather than discarded. Recreational anglers have, until very recently, not had access to these fish's primary habitat for over 20 years. In general, recreational anglers had historically not usually retained these smaller fish, preferring larger species within their retained bag limits. This species has never been assessed. The GAP therefore recommends this species for removal from the Alternative 1 list and moving it to Alternative 2 or 3 for further consideration.

Stripetail rockfish life-history indicates that this is a moderately productive rockfish species. Habituating soft bottom substrates, it has been well sampled by trawl methods and is a common catch within the bottom trawl fishery. However, this species is small and commonly discarded rather than marketed. It is rarely caught in recreational fisheries and occasionally encountered within the commercial non-trawl sector. Thus, it is of very low fishery value. However, it has been effectively sampled, regularly assessed (8-yr cycle), and effectively included within the PFMC

management cycle. Continuing to invest limited resources in managing this species for its value to the fishery is of questionable merit. The GAP recommends that it should be given further consideration under Alternatives 2 or 3 rather than retained within the Alternative 1 species list for defining as a stock in need of conservation and management.

Should the Council choose to include harlequin, rosethorn and/or stripetail at this time in its FPA, the GAP recommends the PPA Option 1 for those species as well, as shown in [Table ES 3](#) of attachment 1 under this agenda item.

Preliminary Preferred Alternative Action

For the 40 species being considered in the 10-factor analysis, the GAP recommends the following as PPA for each species. A brief rationale, based on the 10-factor analysis, is provided for each stock and PPA recommendation.

Table 1: PPA recommendation for 10-factor analysis

Species	Alternatives		
Shallow Nearshore	Alt 1 Keep in FMP	Alt 2 Remove from FMP	Alt 3 EC Species
Black and Yellow Rockfish		X	
China Rockfish		X	
Gopher Rockfish		X	
Grass Rockfish		X	
Kelp Rockfish		X	
Treefish Rockfish		X	
Cabazon		X	
Kelp Greenling		X	
<i>Reasoning to Support</i>	The species in this bin are important to commercial and recreational sectors, but they are predominantly not caught in the EEZ. Therefore, they are only important to fisheries in state waters and should be removed from the FMP.		
Deeper Nearshore	Alt 1 Keep in FMP	Alt 2 Remove from FMP	Alt 3 EC Species
Black Rockfish (CA & OR)		X	
Black Rockfish (WA)	X		
Blue Rockfish	X (WA)	X (OR/CA)	
Brown Rockfish		X	
Copper Rockfish (CA & OR)	X (CA)	X(OR)	

Copper Rockfish (WA)	X		
Deacon rockfish	X(WA)	X (CA/OR)	
Olive Rockfish		X (CA/OR)	
Quillback Rockfish (CA)		X	
Quillback Rockfish (OR)		X	
Quillback Rockfish (WA)	X		
<i>Reasoning to Support</i>	<p>For black, copper and quillback rockfish off Washington, these stocks are primarily caught in the EEZ and are targeted. For blue and deacon rockfish off Washington, these are targeted with black rockfish in the EEZ off Washington and therefore should remain in the FMP.</p> <p>Black rockfish off Oregon and California: OR and CA: Important to commercial and recreational sectors but primarily found in state waters (rec fishery in OR). States are already managing within federal management regime</p> <p>Quillback off Oregon and California: While historically targeted in the commercial live fish fishery, they are primarily found in state waters.</p> <p>Brown rockfish in all three states: While targeted, found mostly in state waters. Additionally, there is limited contribution to the north complex.</p> <p>Blue, deacon, and olive rockfish (OR/CA): Targeted, but only in state waters.</p> <p>Copper (CA): Majority of catch is state waters. However, the majority of copper catch south of Conception is in Federal waters (not visible in the CA-coastwide data). Targeted fishery.</p> <p>Copper (OR): Majority of catch in state waters. Not targeted recreationally but targeted for live fish in the commercial fishery.</p>		
Shelf Shallow	Alt 1 Keep in FMP	Alt 2 Remove from FMP	Alt 3 EC Species
Calico Rockfish		X	
Flag Rockfish			X

Freckled Rockfish		X	
Halfbanded Rockfish			X
Harlequin Rockfish		X	
Honeycomb Rockfish			X
Pygmy Rockfish		X	
Rosy Rockfish CA			X
Rosy Rockfish OR			X
Speckled Rockfish	X		
Swordspine Rockfish		X	
<i>Reasoning to Support</i>	<p>All species in this bin except speckled rockfish are encountered and caught in the fishery but are not targeted or considered important to commercial or recreational fisheries the EEZ. They also have very low mortality in the EEZ.</p> <p>Calico, pygmy, freckled, harlequin, and swordspine rockfish had de minimis mortality, hence they do not need to be monitored as EC species in the EEZ and can be removed from the FMP. Flag, halfbanded, honeycomb, and rosy rockfish have somewhat higher mortality, so they should be designated as EC species to more closely monitor them in the EEZ</p> <p>Speckled rockfish are targeted in the EEZ and valued in the recreational sector and should therefore remain in the FMP.</p>		
Deep Shelf	Alt 1 Keep in FMP	Alt 2 Remove from FMP	Alt 3 EC Species
Bronzespotted Rockfish		X	
Chameleon Rockfish		X	
Greenblotched Rockfish	X		
Mexican Rockfish	X		
Pink Rockfish		X	
Pinkrose Rockfish		X	
Tiger Rockfish CA		X	
Tiger Rockfish OR & WA		X	
<i>Reasoning to Support</i>	<p>All species in this bin except Mexican and greenblotched rockfish are not targeted in the EEZ, have de minimis catch, and should be removed from the FMP. Mexican and greenblotched rockfish are caught in the fishery and are considered important in their contributions to the ACL and should therefore remain in the FMP.</p>		
No Mortality Species	Alt 1 Keep in FMP	Alt 2 Remove from FMP	Alt 3 EC Species

Dwarf-red Rockfish		X	
Light Dusky Rockfish		X	
<i>Reasoning to Support</i>	There's no observed mortality of these species and they are not encountered in the fishery. Therefore, they should be removed from the FMP.		
Flatfish	Alt 1 Keep in FMP	Alt 2 Remove from FMP	Alt 3 EC Species
Butter Sole			X
Curlfin Sole			X
Rock Sole	X		
Sand Sole	X		
Starry Flounder	X		
<i>Reasoning to Support</i>	For rock sole, sand sole, and starry flounder, not enough volume off the West Coast when compared to the volume coming out of Alaska, so they are not targeted as economically viable for the fleet. There could conceivably be opportunity for them in the future. For butter and curlfin sole, primarily caught in EEZ but minimal contribution to fishery, not targeted, and minimal overall mortality.		
Elasmobranch	Alt 1 Keep in FMP	Alt 2 Remove from FMP	Alt 3 EC Species
Leopard Shark		X	
<i>Reasoning to Support</i>	Leopard shark is only caught off California, only targeted in state waters, and is already managed by California. It should be removed from the FMP.		

Table 2 provides the GAP's recommendation for stocks where we recommended Alternative 1 as the PPA (Table 1). If the Council chooses to select Alternative 1 as the PPA for another stock, we will comment under the FPA agenda item scheduled for September 2025.

Table 2: Stock definition recommendation for species recommended by the GAP for Alternative 1 as the PPA (Table 1). *The GAP recommends blue, deacon and olive rockfish to only retain a single, state-specific stock in the FMP (see Table 1)

Species	Opt 1 1 stock	Opt 2 2 stocks	Opt 3 3 stocks	Proposed Stock Delineations
Black and yellow rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide or California/Oregon or Opt 2 California and Oregon
Blue rockfish	X (WA-only)*			Opt 1 Coastwide, Opt 2 N/S of 42° N. lat. Opt 3 state-specific
Bronzespotted rockfish				Opt1 Coastwide or California-only
Brown rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide, Opt 2 N/S of 42° N. lat. Opt 3 state-specific
Butter sole				Opt 1 Coastwide
Cabazon				Opt 1 Coastwide, Opt 2 N/S of 42° N. lat. Opt 3 state-specific
Calico rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide or California-only
Chameleon rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide or California-only
China rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide, Opt 2 N/S of 42° N. lat. Opt 3 state-specific
Curlfin sole				Opt 1 Coastwide
Deacon rockfish	X (WA-only)*			Opt 1 Coastwide, Opt 2 N/S of 42° N. lat. Opt 3 state-specific
Dwarf-red rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide or California-only
Flag rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide or California/Oregon or Opt 2 California and Oregon
Freckled rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide or California-only
Gopher rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide or California/Oregon or Opt 2 California and Oregon
Grass rockfish				Opt 1. Coastwide or California/Oregon or Opt 2 California and Oregon
Greenblotched rockfish	X			Opt 1 Coastwide
Halfbanded rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide
Harlequin rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide or Oregon/Washington. Opt 2. Oregon, and Washington
Honeycomb rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide or California-only

Species	Opt 1 1 stock	Opt 2 2 stocks	Opt 3 3 stocks	Proposed Stock Delineations
Kelp greenling				Opt 1 Coastwide, Opt 2 N/S of 42° N. lat. Opt 3 state-specific,
Kelp rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide or California/Oregon or Opt 2. California and Oregon
Light dusky rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide or Oregon/Washington. Opt 2. Oregon, and Washington
Leopard shark				Opt 1 Coastwide or California/Oregon or Opt 2. California and Oregon
Mexican rockfish	X (CA only)			Opt 1 Coastwide or California-only
Olive rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide or California/Oregon or Opt 2 California and Oregon
Pink rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide or California/Oregon or Opt 2 California and Oregon
Pinkrose rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide or California-only
Pygmy rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide
Rock sole	X			Opt 1 Coastwide
Rosy rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide
Sand sole	X			Opt 1 Coastwide
Speckled rockfish	X			Opt 1 Coastwide
Starry flounder	X			Opt 1 Coastwide
Swordspine rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide or California-only
Tiger rockfish				Opt 1 Coastwide
Treefish				Opt 1 Coastwide or California-only

Finally, it is important to note that the recommendations above are only made in the context of NMFS stating directly that it does not intend to continue the historical practice of shared Federal-state management of nearshore species. For decades, nearshore groundfish have been managed under a system in which the states and NMFS collaborate in gathering scientific information and conducting stock assessments, and management decisions are made at the Pacific Council. Once a

management decision is made at the Council, the states adopt conforming regulations to govern fisheries in their waters. The GAP was informed this process will no longer continue, and going forward, Federal management would be limited to any stocks that are predominately caught in Federal waters and are overfished or subject to overfishing, or likely to become overfished or subject to overfishing, are considered to require conservation and management. Beyond that, Councils may determine that additional stocks require ‘conservation and management’ in the EEZ and NMFS could manage those stocks as well. Decisions regarding management of other stocks in the 0-3 mile range would have to take place at state forums.

Many members of the GAP would prefer continued federal management of all groundfish species that are actually important to the fisheries, and either designating as EC species or removing those species from the Groundfish FMP that are not. This would include retaining within the FMP those nearshore species that are directly targeted, or retained in appreciable amounts, or more broadly that play an important role for either the commercial or recreational fisheries.

Federal management under the MSA has greatly facilitated holistic and coordinated management of groundfish species coast wide, and the Pacific Council forum has played a critical role in this regard. The GAP sees great value in continuing this approach. However, NMFS staff informed the GAP this was not a viable option for species where catches within the EEZ were small, especially in comparison to the catch of that species in state waters.

Therefore, the recommendations above reflect the GAP’s views only if it is truly not possible for NMFS to retain management of all important groundfish stocks. The recommendations above should not be viewed as the GAP’s endorsement of NMFS’s new position regarding management of nearshore stocks. Rather, the recommendations above constitute the GAP’s view of the best of the remaining options for stocks primarily caught in state waters—generally full removal from the FMP, as this would allow state management to cover the entirety of the stock, both within state waters and out into the EEZ waters. The GAP reminds the Council that doing so unravels previous West Coast wide coordinated management and would require states to rebuild that coordination themselves. This task could be quite challenging and, indeed, potentially not achievable to the previous level.

PFMC
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