GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON WIDOW ROCKFISH ALTERNATIVE HARVEST CONTROL RULE

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) discussed Attachments 1 and 2 in the briefing book under this agenda item and considered the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) report in our deliberation (Agenda Item C.3.a, Supplemental SSC Report 1, April 2026). Given the SSC's recommended overfishing limit (OFL) of 6,239 metric tons (mt), **the GMT recommends the Council adopt the revised Range of Alternatives (ROA) shown in Table 1 below and select Alternative 2d as the Preliminary Preferred Alternative (PPA). As discussed further below, the GMT only recommends Alternative 2d as PPA if the at-sea set-aside and non-trawl allocation remain as status quo.** Specifically, we recommend removing Alternatives 2a and 2b from the ROA and adding Alternative 2d, which would set the Annual Catch Limit (ACL) at 1 mt lower than the SSC's recommended OFL. Alternatives 2a and 2b both have ACLs that would be higher than the SSC's recommended OFL.

Table 1. GMT-recommended ROA for widow rockfish Harvest Control Rules (HCRs) in 2027-28. The GMT's recommendation for PPA is bolded.

ACL Alternatives	HCR	ACL (mt)	
		2027	2028
Alternative 1 [default]	P* 0.45, ABC = ACL	4,596	4,810
Alternative 2c	Constant catch (Eq. MSY @ SB40), ABC = ACL, reverting to default in 2029	5,858	5,858
Alternative 2d [new]	**ABC = ACL, set at 1 mt less than the OFL, reverting to default in 2029**	**6,238**	**6,238**

Under all alternatives, the widow rockfish Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) allocation could be potentially exceeded due to deficit allowance, which is typically driven by large tows at the end of the fishing season. The IFQ model projects full attainment of the widow rockfish allocation in 2027-28 under any of the HCR alternatives. It is worth noting that IFQ vessel accounts are required to cover any deficit with quota in the following year. Given that widow rockfish is a highly attained stock in the IFQ sector, the GMT discussed buffering the OFL to reduce the risk of exceedance – specifically, what the buffer value should be and where to place it within the allocation scheme to maximize opportunity.

The GMT discussed two options for maximizing fishing opportunity while minimizing risk to the OFL. If the non-trawl allocation and at-sea set aside are lowered for the 2027-28 biennium to address low historical attainment in those sectors and allocate more fish to IFQ, a larger buffer between the OFL and ABC might be needed to prevent an OFL overage (Alternatives 1 and 2c, high IFQ in Table 2) due to the combined risk of non-trawl expansion, at-sea lighting strikes, and IFQ exceedance. On the other hand, if the allocations and set-asides are not changed, the buffer would be provided by the amount of allocation not attained in the at-sea and non-trawl sectors (which is projected to be around 360 to 420 mt, see Table 3; Alternative 2d).

Currently, the management options being considered are: 1) action to lower the at-sea set-aside from 300 mt to 200 mt, and 2) action to lower the non-trawl allocation from 300 mt to 150 mt. These changes amount to 250 mt potentially being redistributed to the IFQ fishery. While the Council's action for allocation changes falls under the C.7 agenda item at this meeting, the GMT considers them important to the decision for widow rockfish HCRs. For example, if the ACL was set one mt lower than the OFL and was paired with the allocation reductions, the risk of exceeding the OFL would be higher. The risk to the OFL under Alternative 2d would be lower if the Council adopted the status quo at-sea set-aside and non-trawl allocations in 2027-28[1], because the probability that both amounts would be fully attained is low, effectively acting as a buffer to the ACL. Additionally, this approach addresses concerns about stifling growth in the non-trawl sector. Finally, as the GMT discusses in our C.7 analysis (Agenda C.7, Attachment 2, April 2026), the widow rockfish HCR decision is more impactful than the considered allocation and set-aside decisions in terms of mitigating the substantial harvest reductions expected in 2027-28.

From the GMT's perspective, the central decision point is where to place the buffer. Selecting Alternative 2d to set the ACL one mt less than the OFL, with ACL set equal to the ABC, and maintaining status quo allocations as a de facto buffer provides more opportunity for all sectors, compared to buffering the ABC from the OFL and reducing the at-sea set-aside and non-trawl allocation. Note in Table 2 that the IFQ allocation is higher under Alternative 2d compared to Alternative 2c, even if Alternative 2c is paired with reductions to the at-sea set-aside and non-trawl allocation. In short, maintaining status quo allocations under Alternative 2d would replace the default buffer between the OFL and ABC, such that overall mortality across all sectors is not expected to exceed the OFL, while providing more fishing opportunity compared to the other two Alternatives.

Table 2. 2027 distribution of the widow rockfish harvest specifications under the GMT-recommended ROA. Gray rows indicate additional information for reference.

	Alternative 1 [default]		**Alternative 2c**		**Alternative 2d** [new] (mt)
	LOW IFQ (mt)	**HIGH IFQ (mt)**	**LOW IFQ (mt)**	**HIGH IFQ (mt)**	
OFL	4,916	4,916	6,239	6,239	6,239
Buffer between OFL & ABC	*320*	*320*	*381*	*381*	*1*
ABC = ACL	4,596	4,596	5,858	5,858	6,238
Off-the-top deductions a/	101	101	101	101	101
Fishery HG	4,495	4,495	5,757	5,757	6,137
Trawl Allocation	4,195	4,345	5,457	5,607	5,837
--At-sea	300	200	300	200	300
--Shorebased IFQ	3,895	4,145	5,157	5,407	5,537
Non-Trawl Allocation	300	150	300	150	300

a/ Revised to account for new Tribal set-aside of 100 mt in Agenda Item C.7.a, Supplemental Tribal Report 1, April 2026.

In reference to the risk of exceeding the OFL under Alternative 2d, it is worth noting that a very small portion of the IFQ fleet is realistically at risk of experiencing deficit in 2027-28. The reason for this is because fewer than 30 vessels target widow rockfish, and of those 30 vessels, an even

[1] This is true under all of the Alternative HCRs, but the risk is more concerning under Alternative 2d.

smaller portion is expected to have a tow large enough to induce deficit. Additionally, IFQ vessels that are at risk of deficit are likely to alter their fishing behavior to be more risk averse under lower allocations. Shoreside whiting vessels also catch widow rockfish as bycatch and are likely to hold onto their widow rockfish quota as insurance against large bycatch events, making it difficult for other vessels to acquire widow rockfish quota. As observed with canary rockfish, this will typically lead to lower than projected overall IFQ attainment. With robust inseason tracking of all trawl sectors, and a <40 percent probability of reaching or exceeding the at-sea set-aside in 2027-28 (per Table 12-8 in Agenda C.7, Attachment 2, April 2026), the trawl allocation may not necessarily be exceeded despite high widow rockfish attainment in recent years. Even so, the GMT advises the Council to consider buffering the OFL under Alternative 2d as described above to lower the risk of overfishing. See Table 3 for the 2027-28 GMT projections of widow rockfish total mortality.

Table 3. GMT projected mortality of widow rockfish by sector in 2027-28.

Sector	Projected 2027-28 Mortality (mt)
Shorebased IFQ a/	3,895 – 5,537
At-sea b/	155
Non-Trawl b/	21 – 82
Off-the-top deductions	101
Total	**4,172 – 5,875**

a/ The IFQ projection is based on applying 100 percent attainment to the range of IFQ allocations in Table 1 of this report. The IFQ model projected 97-107 percent attainment during the overwinter analysis, which was based on the GMT's bookends at the time.
b/ The at-sea mortality projection is the median of projected catches from the bootstrap simulation model, using 2017-2025 as inputs and assuming full Pacific whiting attainment and a southern effort distribution.
c/ Non-trawl projected mortality is shown as the range provided in Section 7.2 of C.7 Attachment 2.

PFMC
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