



## Pacific Fishery Management Council

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Pete Hassemer, Chair | Merrick J. Burden, Executive Director

April 30, 2026

Mr. Eugenio Pineiro-Soler  
1315 East West Hwy.  
Silver Spring MD 20910-3282

Dear Mr. Pineiro-Soler,

Thank you for the opportunity to revisit the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (PFMC or Council) response to the Executive Order on seafood competitiveness, and for providing the summary of public comments.

We have reviewed our prior response to the Executive Order and the public comments received. In this letter we elaborate on our original response to clarify how current and planned workload aligns with the objectives of the Executive Order. The Council's priorities are strongly aligned with those identified by its Advisory Bodies and with public comment received during the Council's deliberative process.

The Council's 2026 Year-at-a-Glance (YAG) schedule, as well as plans into 2027, include a range of actions across fishery management plans that address regulatory burden, operational flexibility, and fishery performance. The Council's initial response identified a limited number of categorical priority items, however many initiatives nest within these categories, ensuring that a broad set of ongoing and planned actions contribute to the objectives of the Executive Order. We have described these actions, as well as other actions that are consistent with the Executive Order, in more detail below.

### **1. Items in response to Executive Order 14276**

#### **1.1. Groundfish Trawl Rationalization Program – Follow-on Actions**

The Council is considering a suite of follow-on actions to the trawl rationalization program. These actions directly respond to recommendations made by the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP), the Council's industry Advisory Body, and public comment regarding program complexity and regulatory burden. There is strong alignment between the Council's priorities and those identified by the GAP and the public. Topics under consideration include:

- Modifications to program requirements to reduce regulatory burden and improve operational flexibility, such as the number of species covered in the program, the limits on accumulation
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of quota, flexibility in the roll-over of quota from one year to another, and requirements regarding observers and shoreside monitors;

- Reporting and monitoring provisions, including cost recovery and cost allocation policies. The Council recognizes that the agency’s catch share cost allocation policy is the foundation of the Council’s monitoring program and is a primary driver of costs that have been higher than expected. In addition, agency positions regarding electronic monitoring (EM) have resulted in EM program design and requirements that are perceived as higher than necessary to many in the PFMC arena. Together, these requirements and positions have resulted in cost and inefficiency issues that many in the PFMC arena find unnecessary. The PFMC is committed to working with NOAA Fisheries Headquarters to address this structural issue; and
- Other program elements identified through implementation experience that affect program performance and participation, which will be identified later in 2026. These actions are scheduled for Council consideration later this year and into 2027.

### **1.2. Risk-based Approaches to Groundfish Harvest Specifications and Harvest Control Rules**

The Council continues to develop biennial harvest specifications based on the best scientific information available. As part of this process, the Council has considered and plans to continue to considering risk-based approaches to harvest control rules that provide for greater stability in catch limits over time. The goal is to prevent overfishing and maintain long-term average stock status at or above target biomass, while moderating socio-economic disruption to the fishing fleet, processing landscape, and coastal communities due to changes in harvest specifications. These efforts are intended to improve predictability in management and reduce the need for in-season adjustments where practicable.

### **1.3. Groundfish “Spex Flex” and Management Measure Adjustments**

The Council is advancing a set of actions related to harvest specifications and management measures (commonly referred to as “spex flex”). The purpose of these actions is to modify the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan to provide flexibility in harvest limits, especially when unforeseen changes occur, when choke stock conditions present themselves, or other factors that may limit fishing activity. We intend to do this in a way that is consistent with the Best Scientific Information Available, however, the objective is to increase the utilization of our healthy and under-attained groundfish stocks, promote overall fishery and market stability, while also protecting species in need of conservation. Component actions under consideration include:

- Carryover provisions to allow unused amounts of the annual catch limit to be utilized in subsequent years;
- Adjustments to management measures affecting attainment to better align access with available stock size; and

- Other framework changes to improve flexibility within the existing management structure.

Other groundfish management matters are likely to arise through Council and Advisory Body deliberations which will work to promote increased access to, and landings of, healthy groundfish resources off the U.S. West Coast and promote the long-term stability of the groundfish fishery. These items are being considered through the Council’s regular groundfish management processes in addition to this “spex flex” agenda item.

#### **1.4. Highly Migratory Species Management**

The Council continues to consider management measures for highly migratory species, including adjustments to retention, gear, and area measures. A priority focus is the development of a pathway to authorize new gear types for the HMS fishery in response to the drift gillnet (DGN) prohibition established through the West Coast Highly Migratory Species Fishery Roadmap. This longer-term effort builds on HMS Exempted Fishing Permits identified in the Council’s initial EO response, with the goal of establishing commercially viable, conservation-compatible alternatives that expand fishing access and opportunity for West Coast HMS fishermen. These actions are addressed through the HMS management process and scheduled consistent with the YAG.

#### **1.5. Exempted Fishing Permits**

Related to the above section, the Council identified HMS EFPs for fishery development as a priority action in its initial EO response. The Council is developing EFP criteria to streamline issuance and encourage innovation in anticipation of the 2027 prohibition on large mesh drift gillnets under the Driftnet Modernization and Bycatch Reduction Act. By establishing clear EFP metrics (targeted for final adoption in March 2026), the Council and NMFS can facilitate timely testing, data collection, and transition to alternative gear types that support sustainable fishing opportunities and market stability. More broadly, and in addition to HMS, the Council continues to review EFP applications across its various FMPs as a mechanism to test new fishing practices and collect information that may inform future management measures.

#### **1.6. Coastal Pelagic Species – Sardine Harvest Control Rule and Stock Structure**

Revisions to the sardine harvest control rule and stock structure, including sardine stock definitions, were a priority in the Council’s initial EO response. The Council is actively working to define all Pacific sardine stocks present off the West Coast to ensure proper catch accounting and access for all sectors. Currently, inseason catch accounting assumes all landings derive from the northern subpopulation—despite the majority coming from the southern subpopulation—which risks premature closures and market disruption. Recent research has indicated that the west coast population is a single stock. A single stock definition and related catch accounting should improve access, reduce closure risk, and stabilize markets for live bait and other sardine-dependent sectors. The Council also intends to collaborate with the West Coast Region and the Southwest Fisheries Science Center to explore near-term solutions to the catch accounting regime that may not require a regulatory amendment. This work is being conducted consistent with the schedule outlined in the CPS management process, with final Council action on stock definitions anticipated in April 2026.

### **1.7. Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan**

The Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan was identified as a priority action in the Council's initial EO response. The Council annually reviews and revises the Catch Sharing Plan and related regulations under the Pacific Halibut Act to maximize both commercial and recreational harvest. Proposed changes include recreational season structures (e.g., opening dates, days open per week, port and area sharing) and changes to the non-tribal commercial season structure. These measures are designed to stabilize markets, ensure fishing opportunities are distributed in ways that sustain both recreational and commercial sectors, and strengthen the competitiveness of U.S. West Coast halibut products.

## **2. Activities consistent with Executive Order 14276**

The following activities are also ongoing which are consistent with the Executive Order, but were not included in our original response because they are ongoing, or their timeline extends beyond the requirements in the Executive Order.

### **2.1. Groundfish Management Measures (Biennial and In-Season)**

The Council's biennial management measure process and in-season adjustment process provide mechanisms to refine management measures based on updated information. These processes allow for targeted adjustments to trip limits, area management, and other measures affecting access and attainment, and are routinely used to address fishery performance and operational considerations in ways that help ensure desired seafood production levels.

### **2.2. Salmon Management**

The Council's annual salmon management process establishes fishing seasons and measures based on stock status and applicable constraints. The process is designed to maximize fishing opportunity to the extent practicable consistent with conservation requirements, and includes in-season management provisions to optimize access as conditions allow.

### **2.3. Stock Assessment and Scientific Process**

The Council is engaged in an ongoing review of its stock assessment process, including consideration of process improvements to support timely and effective use of scientific information in management decisions. The design of this process is part of the foundational architecture of west coast fisheries management. Any re-design that is intended to enhance this process is likely to contemplate the incorporation of important aspects, such as fishermen's knowledge, to a greater extent than is currently used. Improvements in our stock assessment process should lead to better outcomes. Better outcomes should lead to improvements such as greater stability in stock assessment results, which in turn can help to stabilize the fishery.

### **2.4. Regulatory Process and Framework Adjustments**

Across fishery management plans, the Council makes use of framework provisions and in-season processes to implement changes without full plan amendments where appropriate. These processes allow for more timely and targeted adjustments within the existing management framework.

The Council's current workload reflects a full schedule of actions, many of which are underway or scheduled for Council consideration in 2026. Some actions identified above extend beyond the timeframe of the Executive Order but are part of longer-term efforts to improve management processes and fishery performance.

At this time, the Council believes that the actions currently identified in its workload are responsive to the objectives of the Executive Order. The Council's focus remains on advancing these actions consistent with its statutory responsibilities and workload capacity.

The Council appreciates the opportunity to provide this additional information and looks forward to continued coordination with NOAA Fisheries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Merrick Burden', is written over a light yellow rectangular background.

Merrick Burden  
Executive Director  
Pacific Fishery Management Council

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Cc: Katherine Dziejic  
Council Members