

**GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON FINAL STOCK ASSESSMENT
 PLAN FOR 2027, PRELIMINARY PRIORITIES FOR 2029 AND BEYOND**

The Groundfish Management Team’s (GMT) final preferred alternative (FPA) recommended list of species for assessment in 2027 is shown in Table 1. The list of preliminary priority species for 2029 is shown in Table 2. Rationale for each recommendation for 2027 is provided, as is discussion on preliminary priorities for 2029 and beyond.

Table 1. The GMT FPA recommended species to be assessed in 2027 by assessment type, with stock definition as defined in the Fishery Management Plan. Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) preliminary preferred alternatives (PPAs) are also indicated. Catch-only projections are provided for 2027 only, where the order represents the GMT’s preference for completion (first listed equals highest priority).

Assessment Type	Species	Stock Definition	GMT FPA Recommendation	Council PPA
Benchmark	Lingcod	North/South of 40° 10' N. lat.	x	x
	Redbanded rockfish	Coastwide	x	x
	Yellowtail rockfish	South of 40° 10' N. lat.	x	x
	Widow rockfish	Coastwide		x
Update	Petrale sole	Coastwide	x	
	Shortspine thornyhead	Coastwide	x	
Catch-Only Projection <i>(in order of priority)</i>	Canary rockfish	Coastwide	x	
	California scorpionfish	California	x	
	Darkblotched rockfish	Coastwide	x	
	Cowcod	South of 40° 10' N. lat.	x	
	Sablefish	Coastwide	x	

Table 2. The GMT’s preliminary proposed species to be assessed in 2029 by assessment type for benchmark and update assessments, with stock definitions as defined in the Fishery Management Plan in parentheses.

Benchmark Assessments	Update Assessments
Widow rockfish (Coastwide)	Yellowtail rockfish (South of 40° 10' N. lat.)
Black rockfish (Washington)	Yellowtail rockfish (North of 40° 10' N. lat.)
Black rockfish (Oregon)	
Spiny dogfish (Coastwide)	
Bocaccio (Coastwide)	
Vermilion/Sunset rockfish (North of 40° 10' N. lat.)	
Vermilion/Sunset rockfish (South of 40° 10' N. lat.)	
Darkblotched rockfish (Coastwide)	

Rationale for species considered for assessment in 2027

This section provides rationale for species listed in Tables 1 and 2. We note that [Agenda Item E.4, Attachment 1, June 2026](#) already provides rationale for some species, which we do not reproduce. Rather, we provide the following descriptions to highlight discussion by the GMT that may be informative for Council decision making.

The GMT supports a two-STAR panel plan for 2027, as it provides National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) dedicated time to develop a process for streamlining assessment approaches. The GMT supports assessing species without current existing benchmark stock assessments, or that are past their recommended assessment frequencies, and providing NMFS capacity to streamline the assessment process this cycle will support long-term assessment demands. Such a process is likely to provide avenues to assess with greater frequency species such as English sole, stripetail rockfish, and greenspotted rockfish, which the GMT provided as preliminary preferred alternative species to assess for 2027 in March ([Agenda Item D.8.a, GMT Supplemental Report 1, March 2026](#)) but which are not recommended as FPA.

The GMT agrees with the rationale provided in Attachment 1 for lingcod, redbanded rockfish, yellowtail rockfish south 40° 10' N. lat., and petrale sole for 2027; and for black rockfish and spiny dogfish for 2029. The GMT supports the preliminary plan for 2029 as outlined in Table 2 of Attachment 1.

Widow rockfish: The GMT FPA for widow rockfish differs from the Council PPA. While widow rockfish is likely to become a constraining species starting in 2027, the GMT recommends this species be assessed as a benchmark in 2029. As noted in Attachment 1, waiting two years will increase the chance that research will be completed on additional proposed data streams (fishery dependent indices and environmental DNA). The team acknowledges the severe widow rockfish catch limit reductions that the fishing industry has faced, but if research is incomplete in time for a 2027 stock assessment, the outcome is likely to differ little from the 2025 stock assessment.

Bocaccio: The GMT agrees with placing bocaccio on the preliminary schedule for 2029 as a benchmark stock assessment. Attachment 1 notes the current limited age reading capacity for bocaccio. While the SSC has noted that limited age reads should not limit conducting an assessment, the GMT encourages NMFS to prioritize age reading of bocaccio for 2029 to ensure all data sources are used to inform the assessment at the time it is conducted.

Shortspine thornyhead: The GMT recommends that shortspine thornyhead be conducted as an update for 2027, which differs from Council PPA, noting that NMFS states that such capacity is feasible given the proposed two STAR panel benchmark assessment schedule. Should the Council not adopt shortspine thornyhead as an update, the GMT recommends it be adopted as a catch-only projection.

Species Considered for Catch-Only Projections

The GMT considers catch-only projections of constraining species with less than full or near full attainment to provide benefit (or relief) to the fishery. The GMT acknowledges that NMFS has stated in Attachment 1 that its capacity for catch-only projections is up to five. If more can be

conducted, the GMT suggests projections for, in order of priority, chilipepper, widow rockfish (coastwide), and yellowtail rockfish (north of 40° 10' N. lat.). These species have lower priority than those listed in Table 1 for various reasons.

The GMT notes that catch-only projections contain the same assumptions from the previous stock assessment. For assessments used to conduct catch-only projections that are behind their recommended assessment frequencies, there is a chance new assessments could result in large differences in the understanding of the stock, and therefore, catch amounts. The GMT seeks SSC guidance on feasible time frames over which older assessments can be used to conduct catch-only updates.

Canary rockfish: Canary rockfish are constraining in all groundfish sectors. A catch-only projection would provide some relief by updating catch assumptions for 2025 and 2026, as ACL attainment has been low (~60 percent) due to how the individual fishing quota fisheries operate.

California scorpionfish: California scorpionfish has increased in attainment in the recreational fishery since mid-2024 and has become an increasingly important target of the fishery. Attainment in 2025 was 94 percent. However, from about 2017 until 2023, average ACL attainment was 46 percent across all mortality sources (source: GEMM). Since the Harvest Guidelines (HGs) have started to become constraining only over the past two years, yet the assessment was last done in 2017, the fishery would benefit from updating the assumed catch with actual catch to provide some additional room in the HGs. Additionally, the last year with a projected OFL is 2028.

Darkblotched rockfish: Similar to canary rockfish, darkblotched rockfish is a constraining species to multiple sectors of the trawl fishery, but overall ACL attainment is typically less than 50 percent. A catch-only projection for darkblotched rockfish was conducted in 2025. Updating catches for 2025 and 2026 for darkblotched rockfish could relieve some constraints for trawl participants.

Cowcod South of 40°10' N. lat.: While cowcod has been prohibited in the non-trawl commercial and recreational sectors, the Council is considering limited retention of cowcod in 2027-28. Accordingly, ACL attainment in recent years has been very low. With a catch-only projection, future OFL projections would update assumed catch with actual catch, and the OFLs would likely increase, creating an additional buffer in the case that catches trend higher than expected in 2027-28.

Sablefish: Sablefish is an economically important stock for nearly all groundfish sectors, and attainment is typically very high. However, ACLs in 2025 and 2026 increased threefold compared to prior years, which resulted in a large portion of the ACLs going unharvested in those years. With potential market growth and constraints from other stocks such as shortspine thornyhead and canary rockfish, updating sablefish harvest limits with a catch-only projection in 2027, based on realized attainments in 2025 and 2026, could provide additional opportunity to harvest sablefish in 2029 and beyond.

Chilipepper: In our March statement on stock assessment prioritization ([Agenda Item D.8.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, March 2026](#)), the GMT recommended a catch-only projection for chilipepper if the Council selected Alternative 1 harvest specifications for this stock, which the

Council did. Alternative 1 harvest specifications result in a higher ACL than Alternative 2. Updating catch assumptions would likely result in higher future ACLs due to unattained catch, but since chilipepper is not expected to be constraining in 2027-28, the GMT sees this stock as lower priority for a catch-only projection.

Considerations for the 10-year Planning Process

The GMT appreciates moving towards a long-term planning process for assessment activities and sees many benefits in doing so. The GMT agrees with having a mix of regular species categories as well as flexible slots to more frequently assess species without benchmark assessments or that are past their recommended assessment frequencies. The proposed work to develop a process to right-size assessment tools will be valuable towards meeting assessment schedules. While we provide discussion on preliminary 2029 activities in this report, we acknowledge that this plan will be regularly revised and updated. The GMT requests continued involvement in those discussions.

There are a few points about the planned process the GMT views as important for Council consideration. First, the GMT notes that the assessment workload in 2029 seems heavy, and therefore some species currently planned may not be able to be done as planned. However, we defer to the Science Center's understanding of their own capacity, particularly in the context of any alternative methodologies that may be developed by then. Second, based on communication with council staff, it is the understanding of the GMT that the planned flexible slots will not be affected by the results of the planned Phase 3 stock definitions for species complexes (scheduled to start in November 2026). Third, while a long-term planning process will likely spread discussions across cycles, the GMT has concerns with moving to a one-meeting prioritization schedule in the short term. **The GMT recommends having two meetings for prioritization for the 2029 cycle (i.e., in March/June 2028), while the process remains new, and move to a one-meeting plan starting in the 2031 assessment cycle** as the long-term plan becomes more integrated into Council decision making.

PFMC
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