# GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON WIDOW ROCKFISH ALTERNATIVE HARVEST CONTROL RULE: PROBLEM STATEMENT, RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES

## Problem Statement

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) agrees with the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) recommended revisions to the problem statement. Referencing the goal to keep the long-term average stock status at or above the target biomass, the GMT recommends this change because target biomass is a guiding management priority, but we recognize that biomass estimates can be variable year to year due to many factors, including but not limited to fishing pressure or recruitment patterns, and annual point estimates are uncertain. Oscillating around the target—some years with point estimates being above and some years below—can meet the objective of achieving a long-term (such as 10 years) average target biomass balanced against socioeconomic impacts to fishing communities.

## Harvest Policy Priorities

The GMT discussed several broad priorities to guide the Council's adoption of a range of alternatives, as described below. These include (not in a priority order):

1. Use a harvest policy that sets a constant annual catch limit (ACL) for 2027-28 under any alternative (except for the default Harvest Control Rule [HCR]). Discussions with the GAP have indicated that this method would provide relative market stability to offset some socioeconomic impacts.
2. Limit the range of alternatives to three or four specific alternatives, including the default HCR. This will minimize workload between March and June.
3. Acknowledge that opting for higher harvest in 2027-28 is also a commitment to reduce harvest in future biennia (2029 and beyond), pending any change, to keep the long-term average biomass at or above the biomass target.
4. A range of alternatives that characterizes tradeoffs of the zero-sum ACL reductions needed over the next 10 years based on best scientific information available, whether delayed, equalized, or otherwise. In other words, ACL HCR alternatives should include high, low, and one or two intermediate alternatives for the 2027-28 biennium.

Additional considerations for selecting preliminary and final preferred alternatives include: 1) the tradeoffs between higher ACLs in the short-term and lower ACLs in the future biennia; 2) adverse economic impacts such as loss of income and risk of losing markets resulting from reductions in harvesting opportunities; and 3) the Council's risk tolerance for reductions in uncertainty buffers. The GMT notes that the time-varying sigma buffer is not applied to calculate the ACLs in Table 1 of Attachment 3.

## Alternatives that Meet Our Priorities

The following are alternatives from Attachments 2 and 3 that would meet our harvest policy priorities, also shown in Table 1 and Figure 1. **We recommend these alternatives (not in priority order) be adopted for the range, or, pending further information from the Scientific and Statistical Committee on the overfishing limit, alternatives that span a similar range of future**

**ACL catch streams.** The GMT recognizes that there are likely multiple combinations of alternatives that would yield a sufficient range of alternatives. For all alternatives (except for the default HCR), ACLs for 2027 and 2028 should be averaged over the two-year period to calculate a constant catch to improve fishery stability

1. "Council Request 2" from Table 1 of Attachment 2.
2. "20% decrease in forecast catch from Request 2" from Table 1 of Attachment 2
    a. The GMT notes that this alternative is currently based on a percentage of a percent reduction. The GMT has provided the calculated total percent reduction as footnotes to Table 1.
3. "Alternative 3: Eq. MSY at SB40" from Table 1 of Attachment 3

The specific alternatives do not need to be characterized or labeled in the way that they are currently labeled in the attachments, in other words, based on scientific reference points (e.g., "equilibrium MSY at SB40"). Rather, these can be thought of as alternative catch streams for which the Council should compare the tradeoffs between the risk to the stock's health and the short-term and long-term socioeconomic impacts.

**Table 1: Example alternative Harvest Control Rule (HCR) catch limits (mt), referenced from Attachment 2 and Attachment 3, which meets the GMT's harvest policy priorities.**

| Method | Default HCR | "Council Request 2" | "20% less than the Council Request 2" | "Eq. MSY @ SB40" |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2027 ACL | 4,596 | 8,842 | 7,074[a/] | 5,858 |
| 2028 ACL | 4,810 | 7,958 | 6,366[b/] | 5,858 |
| If constant 2027-2028 | * | 8,400 | 6,720[c/] | 5,858 |
| 2029 ACL | 5,137 | 4,529^ | 4,844^ | 5,858 |
| 2029-2036 Avg. ACL | 5,471 | 5,168^ | 5,312^ | 5,858 |

*The default HCR cannot be converted to a constant catch in 2027-28 without adding another alternative, for which the GMT does not see merit.

^ While these values were obtained from Attachment 2, the exact values will likely differ slightly if constant catches are selected for 2027-28.

a/ While presented as a 20% reduction from Council request 2 for clarity, this value is a 28% reduction in total from the 2026 assumed catch value under Table 4 of Agenda Item F.2.a, Attachment 3, November 2025.

b/ This value is a 35% reduction in total from the 2026 assumed catch value.

c/ This constant catch scenario is a 32% reduction in total from the 2026 assumed catch value.

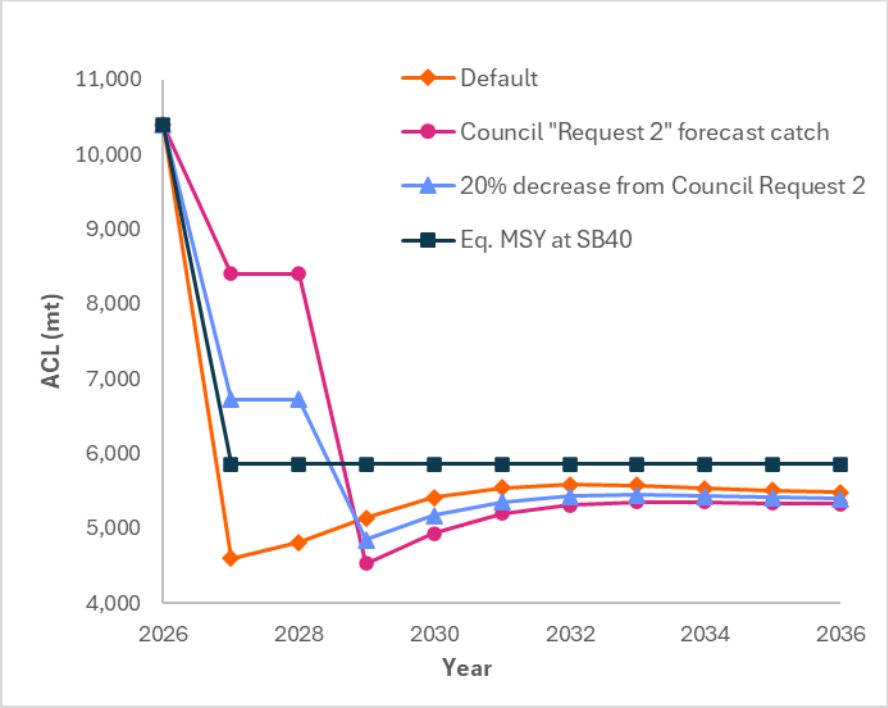



**Figure 1. ACL catch streams under the example HCRs considered in Table 1 above.**

PFMC
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