GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON INITIAL HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS FOR 2027-28

In November 2025, the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) did not make a preliminary preferred alternative (PPA) recommendation to the Council on alternative Harvest Control Rules (HCR) for canary rockfish, chilipepper rockfish, petrale sole, yelloweye rockfish, and yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10′ N. lat., as complete harvest specifications projections were not available at that time. However, the Council did adopt Alternative 2 as the PPA for all stocks in November 2025, and this action item is intended to re-confirm the PPA now that stock depletion projections are available. The GMT also did not make a recommendation on widow rockfish, which is addressed separately from this report in agenda item D.4. The GMT has reviewed the projections in Attachments 1 through 5 of this agenda item and has had thorough discussion with the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP). **The GMT recommends Alternative 2 as the PPA HCR for all stocks under this action item, which aligns with the GAP recommendations.** The joint-GMT/GAP PPA recommendations are captured in Table 1 of the GAP Report. In this report, the GMT provides additional rationale for these PPA recommendations.

Harvest Control Rule Alternatives

Canary Rockfish

Alternative 1 for canary rockfish is the default harvest control rule (HCR) for species in the precautionary management zone, which sets the ACL to a value lower than the ABC using the 40-10 adjustment rule, effectively adding a buffer[1]. Alternative 2 uses an alternative HCR, which sets the ACL equal to the ABC, and does not use the 40-10 rule. The result of Alternative 2 is an increase in the amount distributed to fisheries in 2027-28.

Canary rockfish projections under both Alternative HCRs are provided in Attachment 1; projections in 2029 and beyond assume the default HCR (Table 4 of Attachment 1). While Alternative 2 results in a higher ACL, and, therefore, results in higher stock depletion, this additional depletion is negligible (less than 1 percent annually toward the end of the projection time series; Table 4 of Attachment 1). The higher ACL therefore does not pose a stock conservation concern.

The GMT also notes that a substantial portion of the canary rockfish ACL is not harvested each year. This is largely due to portions of the trawl individual fishing quota (IFQ) allocation being left deliberately unharvested as part of a risk-averse strategy employed by some vessels. The GMT expects 2027-28 attainment patterns in the various sectors to be similar to the previous biennium. Given past patterns in the IFQ market, it is unlikely that the relatively small amount of additional quota afforded to the trawl fishery under Alternative 2 would result in sizeable changes in fishing strategies and IFQ utilization. However, the additional canary rockfish quota available in IFQ accounts may allow for slightly more flexibility in individual vessel operations. At the same time,

[1] The 40-10 control rule is detailed in section 4.6.1 of the Groundfish Fishery Management Plan. Essentially, the 40-10 control rule reduces the allowable catch linearly as the stock declines from 40 percent toward 10 percent, where the allowable catch is zero.

recreational fisheries, which are currently constrained, would benefit from additional allocation to prevent or minimize further restrictions in fishing opportunities and reduce regulatory discards. Therefore, **the GMT recommends the Alternative 2 HCR as PPA for canary rockfish in 2027-28, which sets the ACL equal to the ABC.** The GMT notes that, under Alternative 2, canary rockfish would no longer be eligible for IFQ carryover, because the ACL would be set equal to the ABC.

Chilipepper Rockfish

Alternative 1 for chilipepper rockfish is the default HCR for species above the management target of B40 percent, which sets the ACL equal to the ABC. Alternative 2 uses an alternative HCR, which sets the ACL equal to a flat metric tonnage of 2,114 mt in 2027-28. The default HCR would resume in 2029. The result of Alternative 2 is a decrease in the ACLs for 2027-28 compared to Alternative 1. OFLs are apportioned to the North (7 percent) and South (93 percent) of 40°10′ N lat. based on average historical landings. North of 40°10′ N lat. chilipepper rockfish is within the shelf complex where the trawl/non-trawl allocation is 39.8/61.2 percent. South of 40°10′ N lat. chilipepper rockfish is not within a complex, and the resulting trawl/non-trawl allocation is 75/25 percent.

Chilipepper rockfish projections under both Alternative HCRs are provided in Attachment 2; projections in 2029 and beyond assume the default HCR. Alternative 2 is calculated using the constant catch at the MSY proxy yield (reference point based on the assumed MSY proxy value of SPR50 percent at SB_{SPR}).

The resulting ACLs under Alternative 2 from the split north and south of 40° 10′ N. lat. are 1,996 mt and 148 mt respectively. Recent three-year average mortality was 1,052 mt south of 40° 10′ N. and 59 mt north of 40° 10′ N lat. Given recent fishery performance, it is unlikely that the higher 2027-28 ACLs under Alternative 1 will be fully attained; alternatively, a constant ACL of 2,114 mt could allow fisheries to operate as usual while decreasing the fraction of unfished biomass at a slower rate and thus slow the decline of harvest limits into the future (Attachment 2, Table 1). Although, attainment of chilipepper rockfish has been increasing in both the trawl and non-trawl sectors, it is unlikely the 2,114 mt would be constraining unless mortality doubles in the south and triples in the north. **Therefore, the GMT recommends Alternative 2, which sets the ACL equal to a flat metric tonnage of 2,114 mt in 2027-28.** Compared to Alternative 1, for which a large increase is projected in 2027-28 followed by a steeper decrease over the ten-year projection, Alternative 2 would provide more stable ACLs over the ten-year period. Therefore, Alternative 2 could lower the need for a catch-only update in later cycles. If the Council adopts Alternative 1 out of concerns that industry could be constrained in the next biennium, but actual attainment remains low, a catch-only update could provide additional harvest opportunity.

Petrale Sole

Alternative 1 for petrale sole is the default HCR for flatfish above the management target of B25 percent and sets the ACL equal to the ABC, which is calculated with a P* value of 0.45 and a category 1 sigma. Alternative 2 uses an alternative HCR in which the ACL is still equal to the ABC, but the ABC is set at a fixed value of 2,489 for 2027-28, which is consistent with the 2026 ACL from the Emergency Rule published on January 21st, 2026 (91 FR 2714). Alternative 2 increases the ACLs by 40 mt in 2027 and 66 mt in 2028, relative to Alternative 1.

Attachment 3 provides projected OFLs, ABCs, and ACLs under the two Alternative HCRs; projections in 2029 and beyond assume the default HCR. Across the two Alternatives, the stock status differs minimally (<1 percent) and remains above B25 percent throughout the entire projection period. The additional 40 and 66 mt of petrale sole in 2027-28 would provide additional socioeconomic benefits to the bottom trawl fleet of the IFQ fishery. Given that a fixed amount is allocated to the non-trawl sector and the remainder is allocated to trawl, the IFQ allocation would also be 40 mt higher in 2027 and 66 mt higher in 2028 under Alternative 2.

The petrale sole ACL was fully attained in 2025 after a reduction in the ACL relative to 2024. While Alternative 2 sets the ABC closer to the OFL, the difference is minimal, and petrale sole is a frequently assessed target stock.

Therefore, the GMT recommends adopting the Alternative 2 HCR for petrale sole as the PPA in 2027-28, which sets the ABC and ACL at a constant 2,489 mt for both years.

Yelloweye Rockfish

Alternative 1 for yelloweye rockfish is the default HCR for species above the management target of B40 percent, which sets the ACL equal to the ABC. Alternative 2 uses an alternative HCR, where the ACL is equal to the mid-point of the 2026 ACL (56.6 mt) and the default ACL (113 mt), which is 85 mt (rounded) for both 2027-28. The result of Alternative 2 is a decrease in the ACL for 2027-28 compared to Alternative 1, but an increase from the 2026 ACL.

Yelloweye rockfish projections under both Alternative HCRs are provided in Attachment 4; projections in 2029 and beyond resume the default HCR. In 2036, the stock's depletion level is projected to be 50.3 percent under Alternative 1 and 50.8 percent under Alternative 2.

The 2025 yelloweye rockfish update stock assessment found the spawning stock biomass was at 40.1 percent of the unfished level in 2025, which is above the management target. While assessments project depletion levels and harvest specifications as point estimates for management purposes, there is an inherent level of imprecision to any estimate. Given that the stock status exceeds the target by a tenth of a percent in 2025, and that it is based on an update assessment (not a benchmark assessment), there is merit in choosing a precautionary approach to setting harvest specifications. Additionally, the Alternative 2 ACL is still an increase from the current ACL and may accommodate limited retention of yelloweye rockfish. Limited amounts of yelloweye rockfish retention can be considered under either alternative, acknowledging there is uncertainty in the amount of mortality that will result from allowing yelloweye retention.

Therefore, the GMT recommends adopting the Alternative 2 HCR for yelloweye rockfish as the PPA for 2027-28, which sets the ACL equal to 85 mt for both years.

Yellowtail Rockfish North of 40° 10′ N. lat.

Alternative 1 for yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10′ N. lat. is the default HCR, which sets the ACL equal to the ABC. Alternative 2 uses an alternative HCR where the ACL is still equal to the ABC, but the ABC is determined using an ad-hoc phase-in control rule. These Alternatives are

further explained in Agenda Item G.6.a, Supplemental GMT Report 3, September 2025. The result of Alternative 2 is an increase in the ACL for 2027-28 compared to Alternative 1.

Yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10′ N. lat. projections under both Alternative HCRs are provided in Attachment 5, including depletion estimates; projections in 2029 and beyond resume the default HCR. The projected difference in stock status between the two alternatives is minimal; the stock is estimated to remain above 50 percent unfished throughout the projected time series under both alternatives. The GMT notes that while Alternative 2 sets the ABC one metric ton below the OFL, there is low risk of exceeding the OFL due to the relatively low attainment levels across sectors in past years.

Given that the current trawl/non-trawl allocation framework distributes 88 percent to trawl, the overall trawl allocation including the At-sea whiting set-aside will be 303.9 (9.3 percent) and 182.8 mt (5.9 percent) higher under Alternative 2 than Alternative 1 in 2027 and 2028, respectively. The IFQ trawl fisheries will be most heavily impacted by the ACL reduction from 2026 to 2027. Yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10′ N. lat. is a primary target in the midwater rockfish IFQ fishery. While the overall IFQ trawl allocation was only 44 percent attained in 2025 (1,870 mt mortality of 4,230 mt allocated), individual vessel accounts for vessels targeting midwater rockfish will likely be constrained by reductions under both Alternatives, but Alternative 2 would phase in the reduction over the biennium. The whiting IFQ vessels will also need to cover any bycatch of yellowtail rockfish with available quota, so Alternative 1 would be more constraining to the shoreside whiting fishery than Alternative 2. While both Alternatives are a reduction from 2025 allocation levels, Alternative 2 would allow shoreside whiting vessels to operate in a less risk-averse manner.

Therefore, the GMT recommends adopting the Alternative 2 HCR for yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10′ N. lat. as the PPA in 2027-28, which keeps the ACL equal to the ABC and uses an ad-hoc phase-in approach to set the ABC at 5,050 mt and 4,730 mt in 2027 and 2028, respectively.

Shortspine Thornyhead and Rougheye/Blackspotted Rockfish

For shortspine thornyhead and rougheye/blackspotted rockfish, the GMT continues to support our recommendation for Alternative 2 from November as PPA (Table 1 of Agenda Item F.3.a., Supplemental GMT Report 1, November 2025). As the PPAs for these species were adopted by the Council in November, the GMT understands that further action is not needed at this time.

PFMC
3/6/26