GROUNDFISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON INSEASON MANAGEMENT – FINAL ACTION

SABLEFISH

The sablefish market has strengthened over the winter and into this spring due to very low inventories. Dock prices have increased in some areas, particularly in Washington. Prices tend to decline a bit south of the Columbia River and prices to fishermen in California remain much lower. Historically the sablefish fishery market tends to lag a bit in the south but should improve later this year. We are seeing increased domestic consumption including several supermarket chains, with strong demand in Japan and a developing Chinese market. The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) has actually received periodic requests to increase open access (OA) sablefish trip limits south of Point Conception (i.e., 36° N. lat.), which is somewhat unusual due to traditionally more difficult market conditions in the south.

With that said, the GAP non-trawl reps, both OA and limited entry (LE), requested the GMT analyze some larger sablefish trip limits for consideration. Following a detailed GMT analysis, the GAP is comfortable moving forward with trip limit increases across the board and we support GMT Option 2 for all sectors. Though the GAP and GMT won't be meeting in person at the September Council meeting, we are scheduled to meet online to discuss inseason action. We will be taking a look at the data from over the summer to see if further trip limit increases can be safely accommodated at the September Council meeting.

Working off the Supplemental GMT Report 1, Tables 2-5, the GAP recommends the following:

LE North of 36° N. Lat.: GMT **Option 2**: **7**,000 lbs./week, not to exceed 14,000 lbs./2 months

OA North of 36° N. Lat.: GMT **Option 2**: 5,000 lbs./week not to exceed 10,000 lbs./2 months

LE South of 36° N. Lat.: GMT **Option 2**: 4,000 lbs./week

OA South of 36° N. Lat.: GMT **Option 2**: 3,200 lbs./week not to exceed 9,600 lbs./2 months

VERMILION/SUNSET ROCKFISH SOUTH OF 34˚ 27' N LATITUDE

Due to increasing effort shift out of the nearshore and on to the shelf, non-trawl vermilion rockfish landings have been on the increase south of 34˚27' N. Lat. The market for fresh caught vermilion rockfish has really strengthened with some fishermen getting up to $6 a pound. In years past, vermilion rockfish delivered from Mexico tended to flood the southern California markets but that supply of product has been in decline. Compounding the situation was one of the calmest April's on record and many more fishermen than we would normally expect filled their vermilion limits in Period 2 (March-April). Also, with the increasing demand and corresponding high vermilion prices, there appears to be some OA fishermen shifting into the LE fishery through the leasing of

LE permits. Many southern California fishermen use vertical hook and line gears for vermilion fishing and with Amendment 36 expected to be published this year, LE fishermen will be able to legally retain their LE trip limit with what was formally known as OA gear. This potential for further effort shift into the LE fishery will need to be monitored closely.

The GMT has analyzed some sub-trip limit adjustments for vermilion/sunset rockfish within the south of 40° 10' N. lat. shelf rockfish complex. Specifically, for south of 34° 27' N. lat., the proposal is to reduce the trip limits to keep the commercial sector total mortality projections within its 100 mt informal sharing agreement. As stated earlier in the sablefish section, the GAP and GMT will be meeting via a webinar to work on inseason at the September Council meeting. The GMT will analyze catch data from over the summer prior to that meeting. The GAP notes that we are likely entering a "super El Nino" weather pattern with the current thinking it could begin to establish itself in July. There are many variables that could affect the vermilion fishery over the summer and throughout the Fall. With much warmer waters expected to begin to arrive next month, we may see an influx of migratory species such as bluefin tuna, yellowfin tuna, dorado, and yellowtail. It is very possible that vermilion catch could decline as fishermen change tactics to pursue these migratory species into Summer and the Fall, perhaps even into Winter.

Working from Supplemental GMT Report 1, Table 6, the GAP recommends the following:

LE South of 34˚27' N. Lat.: GMT **Option 2:** 2,500 lb. every 2/months

OA South of 34˚27'N. Lat.: GMT **Option 2:** 750 lb. every 2/months

GROUNDFISH FISHERIES UPDATES

During the GAP/GMT webinar on June 3, 2026, as well as during our meetings this week, GAP members described impacts of the present oceanic conditions and economic challenges in our fisheries so far this year.

High fuel prices combined with high expenses of doing business have impacted all West Coast groundfish fisheries, particularly considering the variability in oceanic conditions. Some ports are more remote than others, and support businesses (such as welders/fabricators, hydraulics, marine electronics, net builders, shipyards, etc.) have either reduced services, left the area, or even closed. The price of travel to get vendors to the vessels/ports and/or to get service has greatly increased.

Commercial

- The spring hake fishery is tracking more northerly the past few years – but the Makah have not yet seen hake in their Usual and Accustomed area
- Positive black cod and hake fishing so far this year
- Widow congregation patterns are different than in past years. There was high abundance and schooling patterns in Oregon in 2025, while in 2026 so far we have seen schooling aggregations in different locations, with higher incidental catch in the at-sea whiting fleets
- fishermen are seeing humpbacks feeding in huge congregations deep offshore
- Processors described large impacts from fuel prices in terms of supplies and transportation

- As noted above in the vermilion section, Southern California experienced some of the calmest April waters on record and many more fishermen than we would normally expect filled their vermilion limits in Period 2 (March-April)

Recreational

- Fishermen are catching bonito as far north as Monterey and Bodega Bay
- Fishermen in California are seeing a 5-degree +/- water temperature difference with upwelling
- Bluefin catch off Central Coast (Monterey to Fort Bragg) is good to excellent when anglers can get out weather wise.
- In Southern California, the yellowtail (jack) fishery collapsed with upwelling, and then rebounded with relaxation of the upwelling process. Concurrently, opportunities for bluefin moved to the Monterey and San Francisco areas. This is taking some pressure off of groundfish and rockfish stocks while illustrating the varying oceanic conditions of the present neutral/pre-El Niño regime.
- Coastwide, participants reported that if albacore or other tuna come in, it could reduce groundfish (specifically rockfish) effort
- High diesel fuel prices (currently up to $7.50/gallon in California) have caused half-day charter boats to stay closer to port.
- Charter boats coastwide are experiencing fewer customers because of the fuel cost to drive to remote areas of the coast resulting in the higher price of a charter day for customers.
- In Oregon, the cost of fishing licenses has increased substantially, but fishing has been excellent for nearshore bottom fish (above all years that there's been tracking) and salmon
- As is the case in Oregon, charter boats are experiencing fewer customers in Washington. Similarly, private boat effort is also down from previous years. Traditional bottomfish trip catches of rockfish and lingcod are down. Recreational halibut effort is also down. Overall halibut catches are tracking well below historic trends. Canary rockfish catches that co-occur with Washington's halibut fishery are also suspected to be down from previous recent years.

During the GAP discussion of Special Project 1 – Adaptive Management and Flexibility, the GAP decided it would be beneficial to submit an annual groundfish fisheries report to document the performance of different sectors as well as any unusual events (see Agenda Item H.1.a, Supplemental GAP Report 1, April 2026). We anticipate that further developments will be captured in future inseason reports and/or in an annual report. The GAP noted that the real impacts may not be fully felt until later this year or future years.

We ask the Council to keep these impacts in mind so we can be ready to respond by emergency action or other means with more flexibility than we have in the past (for example, increasing or decreasing trip limits, considering alternative harvest control rules mid-season, or other management actions). The Council must also keep these environmental conditions in mind for future stock assessments, so that changes resulting from these conditions are not mis-attributed to fishing effort or the seafood industry. For example, past El Niño events have been shown to affect longer term recruitment trends.

The GAP recommends that the Council should identify potential El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) impacts on key species, based on historical records such as those identified in the California Current Integrated Ecosystem Assessment (CCIEA) reports. This would help West

Coast fishing communities to identify early indicators when there is a shift in the cycle, report those to the Council and NMFS, and have some preparation as the cycle progresses. We need to anticipate these effects and be more proactive where possible.

PFMC
06/11/26