GROUNDFISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON MOVING TRAWL GEAR EFP INTO REGULATIONS; UPDATING DECLARATION REQUIREMENTS; REMOVING DUPLICATIVE RECREATIONAL REGULATIONS

Action 1: Midwater Trawl Gear EFP Transfer to Regulation
The GAP recommends the Council adopt the proposed purpose and need and range of alternatives (ROA) presented in Agenda Item E.5, Supplemental Revised Attachment 1 and adopt Options 1 and 2 of Alternative 1 as the preliminary preferred alternative (PPA). This deregulatory action would transfer into management the exempted fishing permit (EFP) that exempted midwater trawl gear outside of the primary whiting season and the selective flatfish trawl (SSFT) gear requirement between 42° N. lat. and 40° 10' N. lat. shoreward of the 100-fathom contour.

The midwater EFP has operated successfully for multiple years and has demonstrated that vessels can effectively target pelagic and semi-pelagic groundfish species while maintaining accountability through 100 percent monitoring requirements, catch accounting and existing salmon bycatch management measures. The EFP has generated extensive operational experience and data, reducing uncertainty regarding fishery performance and impacts, as noted in the analytical document. As described in the document, without the EFP (or moving this into regulation), the loss of the opportunity to fish midwater rockfish prior to the whiting season start date would likely result in significant economic impacts to the fleet. The Trawl Catch Share Program Review (November 2025) highlighted the midwater rockfish fishery has been one of the few successes and a key component of the IFQ fishery, which continues to face rising costs and changes in opportunities through varying allocations. The GAP believes that permanent regulations would provide regulatory certainty and much-needed consistency and stability to fishermen and processors, aiding in year-round and multi-year business planning. As one fisherman noted, the EFP has been extremely beneficial for providing midwater rockfish opportunity to both fishermen and processors prior to the start of the whiting season. It has created a bridge season, provided for better rotations and wages for vessel crew, employment and market opportunities for processors, created a steady year-round supply of rockfish, and supported the redevelopment of a market we lost during rebuilding.

Similarly, the exemption from the SFFT gear requirement has lowered operational costs and improved target catch efficiency without compounding conservation risks.

The GAP notes that the three-year requirement from the 2017 Biological Opinion to collect salmon information has been clearly met. The analytical documents make clear that transferring these provisions into regulation – or, rather, removing regulations that currently prohibit this activity – is not expected to substantially alter fleet behavior from current practices and is therefore not expected to result in significant changes to Chinook salmon bycatch risk relative to ongoing EFP operations. The Chinook bycatch analysis also concludes that changes in bycatch are driven more by fleet distribution, salmon abundance, and ocean conditions than by the regulatory mechanism itself (EFP vs. regulation). Existing bycatch management measures, bycatch reduction areas, sector bycatch guidelines and inseason management tools remain available to address salmon conservation concerns. Continued monitoring and catch accounting provide managers with the information necessary to respond if bycatch levels increase.

Action 2: At-Sea Declaration
The GAP supports the proposed purpose and need and ROA for at-sea declaration changes and recommends the Council adopt Alternative 1 as the PPA.

The action will create economic efficiencies while reducing fuel costs and carbon footprints. Allowing at-sea adjustments for vessels optimizes multi-target trips, drastically cuts down on unnecessary transit time and reduces fuel expenses at a time when costs are skyrocketing. Because these fisheries are subject to 100% monitoring, changing declarations at sea will not compromise data collection integrity or enforcement capabilities.

One clarification the GAP would like to make is that a shoreside vessel on a midwater rockfish trip would not change their declaration to go to the mothership sector, so we do not need the "vice versa" in Alternative 1 (struck out below):

> *Alternative 1: Vessels could change declarations while at sea from shoreside whiting to midwater rockfish (and vice versa) or from mothership sector (catcher vessel) to midwater rockfish ~~(and vice versa)~~. Monitoring type declarations (i.e., electronic monitoring or observer) cannot be changed while at sea. Vessels will need to sort catch by sector and report catch on separate fish tickets (as applicable).*

Action 3: Commercial Sale of Recreational Fish Waste (removal of duplicative recreational regulations)
The GAP wants to emphasize the importance of this issue to the recreational fishery and certain ports such as Westport, Washington, where groundfish entrails and skeletal remains are being dumped outside the entrance to the Westport Marina. This change in regulation will make possible the fish waste to be delivered to a processor that has rendering capabilities. The GAP believes the draft purpose and need statement is sufficient, as is the ROA and recommends Alternative 1 as the PPA. The GAP agrees with the Enforcement Consultants (EC) that the action be limited to just fish waste (entrails and skeletal remains) and appreciates their suggestions regarding proposed wording of the CFR. Similar to the EC, the GAP understands that this is a groundfish action but could see future benefit in expanding to other recreational fisheries.

PFMC
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