

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

A summary of Groundfish Management Team (GMT) recommendations is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of GMT recommendations for each of the three actions. Check marks signify the GMT recommends forwarding for final action, with one revision where indicated.

	Purpose and Need	Range of Alternatives (ROA)	Preliminary Preferred Alternative (PPA)
Action 1: Trawl Gear Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP)	✓	✓	Alternative 1, Options 1 and 2
Action 2: At-Sea Declarations	✓	✓	Alternative 1
Action 3: Recreational Sale of Fish Waste	✓	✓ Revise Alternative 1 language (see below)	Alternative 1

Action 1: Trawl Gear EFP

The GMT recommends adopting the Purpose and Need and ROA as described in [Agenda Item E.5.a, REVISED Attachment 1](#). The GMT also recommends adopting Alternative 1, with both Options 1 and 2, as the PPA. Option 1 would allow the use of non-whiting midwater trawl gear outside of the primary whiting season north of 40° 10' N. lat., and Option 2 would allow the use of any small footrope bottom trawl gear within 100 fathoms in the area 40° 10' N. lat. and 42° N. lat. These actions would provide operational flexibility for trawl participants, improve quota utilization, and allow for year-round midwater rockfish landings, thereby benefitting shoreside processors. Attachments 1 and 2 indicate that environmental and biological impacts are very similar with and without these EFP components in place. This action is also expected to reduce regulatory complexity and lower National Marine Fisheries Service workload associated with tracking these EFP components.

To inform the Final Preferred Alternative, the GMT requests that 2024 and 2025 data be included in the analysis to the extent possible.

Action 2: At-Sea Declarations

The GMT recommends adopting the Purpose and Need and ROA as described in [Agenda Item E.5.a, REVISED Attachment 1](#). The GMT also recommends adopting Alternative 1 as PPA, which would allow vessels to change declarations while at sea from shoreside whiting to midwater rockfish (and vice versa) or from the mothership sector (catcher vessel) to midwater rockfish. The GMT agrees with the GAP to remove “(and vice versa)” after “...from the mothership sector (catcher vessel) to midwater rockfish” in the Alternative language.

This action would provide flexibility for trawl participants so that an individual vessel can choose their target strategy based on resource availability without needing to return to port first. This action could also improve quota utilization by allowing vessels to target both Pacific whiting and midwater rockfish on a single trip, which could also improve profitability given fuel costs. Impacts to groundfish stocks are expected to be the same as No Action, given that all catch is either covered with quota in the Individual Fishing Quota fishery or tracked against a set-aside in the at-sea fishery, and both sectors are fully observed and monitored.

The GMT discussed the importance of continuing catch accounting by the respective groundfish sectors, and we underscore the need for a requirement that vessels keep catch separate based on the different sector declarations. Regulations at 50 CFR 660.112(b)(1)(vii) currently require vessels using multiple trawl gear types on a single trip to, “keep catch from different trawl gears separate and land the catch separately by gear type.” Based on discussions with Council staff, it is the understanding of the GMT that the intent of Alternative 1 would be to implement the same sorting requirements for these declaration types (i.e., sectors).

Action 3: Recreational Sale of Fish Waste

The GMT recommends adopting the Purpose and Need as described in Agenda Item E.5.a, REVISED Attachment 1. The GMT also recommends adopting the ROA with the following revisions (in red) to Alternative 1:

“Regulations would be amended to allow the sale of ~~the skeletal remains~~ fish waste (i.e., entrails, skeletal remains, or other parts of the fish not used for human consumption) of recreationally caught groundfish ~~consistent with state regulations and defer to state regulations for any rules that may be more restrictive.~~”

This revision would provide more accuracy, given that the three states have different language when it comes to the sale of recreationally caught fish waste. Moving forward, states may modify state regulations to allow the sale of fish waste, consistent with this action, or maintain that restriction. The GMT also requests that a definition of “fish waste” be added to Federal regulations, with enough specificity to prevent the sale of recreationally caught groundfish for human consumption. The GMT defers to the Enforcement Consultants’ preferred language for that definition.

With that revision, the GMT recommends adopting Alternative 1 as PPA. Alternative 1 would allow flexibility for the states to determine the level to which fish waste of recreationally caught groundfish can be sold, thereby reducing duplicative regulations and minimizing confusion. In those states that opt to allow the sale of fish waste, recreational participants would be able to more easily dispose of unwanted fish carcasses at little to no cost.