

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FLEXIBILITY

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) appreciates the thorough preliminary analysis offered by Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) staff under this agenda item. The GMT and the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel discussed the problem statement and range of alternatives (ROA) brought forward under [Agenda Item F.5, Attachment 1, November 2025: Harvest Specifications Flexibility Analytical Document](#). The GMT provides the following recommendations for Council consideration.

The GMT recommends that the Council adopt the problem statement as drafted in Agenda Item F.5, Attachment 1, November 2025. The GMT discussed whether a deeper description of groundfish workload challenges would help flesh out the problem statement to inform a future Purpose and Need statement. While the GMT endorses the problem statement as written, the GMT offers the following addition for Council consideration.

Addition to first paragraph: Additionally, a substantial amount of Council time is dedicated to the Biennial Harvest Specifications and New Management Measures development process, as opposed to measures brought forward to holistically improve how the Council manages groundfish fisheries.

Addition to second paragraph: Frameworks considered in this action could streamline and reduce incremental workload each biennial harvest specifications cycle.

The GMT recommends further analysis and coordination between Council and NMFS staff over the next several months, particularly with added information regarding the potential impacts on the long-term health of groundfish stocks and the practical impacts on stock assessment prioritization, Terms of References, and Stock Assessors Team and GMT workload. The GMT sees the most merit in the Council considering the provided measures in aggregate, as the greatest potential benefits and problems for the fishery are likely to be found in the interplay of the options brought forward under this agenda item. The GMT encourages the Council to continue to prioritize these measures, in hopes that some (or all) of them may be available for implementation for the next Biennial Harvest and Management Measure cycle.

The GMT recommends adopting the ROA provided in Agenda Item F.5, Attachment 1, November 2025 with the modifications described for each measure below.

Carryover

The GMT recommends that the Carryover Eligibility Criteria be Alternative-specific, because of the inherent differences in the buffers between overfishing limit and acceptable biological catch (ABC) between the two Alternatives. For example,

- Alt 1 - ABC Carryover:
 - Option A - The stock status is known and stock is above target
 - Option B - The stock is not subject to ABC phase i

- Option C - The stock has not exceeded its annual catch limit (ACL) more than once in past four years
- Alt 2 - ACL Carryover
 - Option A - The stock status is known (e.g., could be “rebuilding”)
 - Option B - The stock has not exceeded its ACL more than once in past four years
 - Option C - NMFS has not made a finding that rebuilding progress is inadequate

The GMT recommends that Carryover Data options remove Option B (projected mortality from year 1 to year 2), because issuing Carryover based on projected mortality could introduce additional uncertainty for little benefit.

The GMT also recommends that the analyses continue to explore the question of whether the same off-the-top deductions for Tribal set-asides should apply to the new ACL and add a new Option C regarding at-sea set asides under Carryover alternatives as follows: Option C: Conditional allocation based on recent attainment.

Phase-In of ABC Changes

The GMT recommends removing Option B from the eligibility criteria for Phase-In of ABC Changes, as this would be an overly prescriptive measure.

Mid-Biennium Harvest Specification Change

The GMT recommends that the analyses continue to explore the question of whether the same off-the-top deductions for Tribal set-asides should apply to the new ACL. The GMT also recommends adding a new Option C regarding at-sea set asides under Mid-Biennium Harvest Specification Change alternatives as follows: Option C: Conditional allocation based on recent attainment.

Accounting for Off-the-Top Deductions

The GMT supports forwarding this for analysis but notes that this would likely provide the most tangible benefits for stocks where the ACL harvest control rule is applied, such as rebuilding stocks or stocks in the precautionary zone. With relatively fewer stocks with ACLs set in this manner in recent years, the team sees this as a lower short-term priority relative to other mechanisms. Having a framework in the fishery management plan, however, could provide potential benefits in the future as needed.

Harvest Specification Frequency

The GMT recommends removing Alternative 1 (annual specifications cycle) from the ROA due to workload and process concerns. Alternative 2 could alleviate workload associated with adopting numerous harvest specifications while maintaining a biennial cycle.