GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON BIENNIAL MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR 2026-2027: ANNUAL CATCH TARGETS, ALLOCATIONS, HARVEST GUIDELINES, SHARES, AND AT-SEA SET-ASIDES

This report covers items #5-11 from the Action Item Checklist (Agenda Item F.8, Attachment 1, November 2025). Items #2-4 (GMT Report 1) and items #12-19 (GMT Report 3) will be in separate reports.

Action Item #5: Annual Catch Targets

Annual catch targets (ACTs) are a management target set below annual catch limits (ACLs). An ACT may be used along with accountability measures to ensure an ACL is not exceeded in cases where there is uncertainty in inseason catch monitoring and the ACL may be at greater risk of being exceeded, or any other reason to more closely monitor mortality.

Copper rockfish south of Point Conception (34° 27′ N. lat.) currently have a recreational ACT in place to respond to area-specific biomass estimates, as outlined in the 2023 copper rockfish stock assessment. For the 2025-26 biennium, the ACT is set equal to a "sub-ACL" value specific to the area south of Point Conception, as produced by the assessment. The status quo approach would be to set the ACT to the sub-ACL value projected for 2027-28, provided in Table 1 below. **The GMT recommends the status quo method to produce the copper rockfish south of 34° 27′ N. lat. recreational ACT.**

Last cycle, the Council adopted an ACT of 67 and 55 metric tons (mt) for 2025 and 2026 respectively for shortspine thornyhead north of 34° 27′ N. lat. equivalent to 25 percent of the coastwide non-trawl allocation to slow the potential for concentration of effort in the north (Table 1). As reported in Agenda Item F.5.a, Supplemental GMT Report 2, April 2024, a non-trawl ACT north of 34° 27′ N. lat. is a tool implemented to align effort to estimate proportional biomass while still meeting coastwide harvest targets. Without the ACT, and if there is an average level of fishing in the south, 92 percent of shortspine thornyhead mortality is likely to occur north of 34° 27′ N. lat. **The GMT recommends the status quo method to calculate the shortspine thornyhead north of 34° 27′ N. lat. ACT.**

Table 1. Status quo 2027 and 2028 ACTs for Copper rockfish south of Pt. Conception (34° 27′ N. lat.) and Shortspine Thornyhead north of 34° 27′ N. lat. assuming default harvest control rules, and status quo set-asides

Stock or Management Unit with ACT	Groundfish Sector(s) Managed to ACT	Status Quo ACT Method	Status Quo 2027 ACT (mt)	Status Quo 2028 ACT (mt)
Copper rockfish south of Pt. Conception (34° 27′ N. lat.)	CA Recreational	"Sub-ACL South" value provided in Table xiv of the 2023 stock assessment	20.1	22.0
Shortspine Thornyhead (north of 34° 27′ N. lat.)	Commercial Non-Trawl	25 percent of the coastwide non-trawl allocation	55.6	59.6

Yelloweye rockfish also has sector and state-specific ACTs. ACTs for yelloweye rockfish are discussed below in the species-specific section under AIC #9.

Action Item #6: Two-Year Trawl/Non-Trawl Allocations

There are some stocks for which trawl and non-trawl allocations are specified every two years. For stocks with two-year trawl/non-trawl allocations, the GMT explored historical mortality, sector specific attainment, and 2027-28 status quo allocations[1] to decide if there is merit in considering biennial allocation changes in 2027-28 based on potential constraints. The GMT determined that biennial allocations for the majority of stocks do not need to be adjusted.

However, the GMT sees merit in reconsidering biennial allocations for the minor slope rockfish south of 40° 10′ N. lat., shortspine thornyhead, and widow rockfish. The current allocation structure of these stocks may cause constraints to fishery sectors. **Therefore, at this time, the GMT recommends the status quo biennial trawl/non-trawl allocations for all stocks except minor slope rockfish south of 40° 10′ N. lat., and widow rockfish for which the GMT recommends further analysis overwinter.**

Blackgill rockfish (within the slope rockfish complex south of 40°10′ N. lat.)

In the 2021-22 biennium, the Council chose to manage blackgill rockfish within the slope rockfish complex south of 40° 10′ N. lat. by setting an HG for blackgill rockfish that was equal to the species-specific ACL contribution to the slope rockfish complex south of 40° 10′ N. lat. The intent was for the blackgill rockfish HG to be used to allocate 41 percent to the trawl sector and 59 percent to the non-trawl sector; these percentages were selected as part of the original Amendment-26 final preferred alternative, which the Council did not adopt. The other species in the slope rockfish complex south of 40°10′ N. lat. were intended to be collectively allocated 91 percent to trawl and 9 percent to non-trawl. The intent was for these shares of blackgill rockfish and "other slope" species to add up and determine the overall trawl and non-trawl allocations for the slope rockfish complex. It was designed to address the needs of the non-trawl and trawl fisheries regarding access to blackgill rockfish. The allocation process and structure is detailed in Agenda Item H.8.a, Supplemental GMT Report 2, November 2019 under action item #65.

However, in the past two biennial cycles, these blackgill and "other slope" sharing proportions were being calculated but not used to set to the trawl and non-trawl allocations. Inadvertently, the trawl and non-trawl allocations were being set at 63 percent to trawl and 37 percent to non-trawl and carried forward each year without accounting for the "blackgill math". Because of this, the GMT and GAP discussed the current allocation proportions (63 percent trawl, 37 percent non-trawl) versus what the allocation would be in 2027-28 using the "blackgill math" concept implemented in the 2021-2022 biennium. Since the initial proposal of the unique allocation process, the mortality in the non-trawl sector has increased relative to the trawl sector for slope rockfish south of 40°10′ N. lat. These changes likely reflect the increased access on the shelf for non-trawl recreational and commercial sectors while some trawl effort has shifted north of 40°10′ N. (Agenda Item F.7 Attachment 1, November 2025). Given the recent changes, **the GMT**

[1] The data for their ACLs, Harvest Guidelines (HG), total groundfish mortality (through 2024), trawl/non-trawl allocations and mortality, and sector-specific mortality as a percentage of total groundfish mortality from 2011-2024 are provided in Appendix A for reference. For all tables in this section and in Appendix A, data were queried from the Fisheries Observation Science (FOS) program's groundfish expanded multi-year mortality (GEMM) product for 2002-2024 (G.1.b NWFSC Report 2, Table 3, September 2025)

recommends analyzing status quo (63 percent trawl, 37 percent non-trawl), Option 1 (utilizing a revised "blackgill math" method with updated mortality proportions), and Option 2 (52 percent trawl, 48 percent non-trawl). Option 2 percentages are based on the recent five year average mortality by sector in the slope rockfish complex (including blackgill rockfish) south of 40°10′ N. lat.

Widow rockfish

When widow rockfish was under a formal allocation structure, the trawl sector was allocated 91 percent of the fishery harvest guideline (HG) and the non-trawl sector was allocated the remaining 9 percent. However, this resulted in underattainment within the non-trawl sector, so the Council chose to transition to a fixed value for the non-trawl sector, which is currently 300 mt.

If the September widow rockfish stock assessment is adopted as the best scientific information available (BSIA), then the trawl allocation will be reduced to 56.5 and 53.1 percent of the 2026 allocation in 2027 and 2028, respectively. This reduction will place added strain on the Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) trawl sector since the midwater rockfish fleet targets this species. Widow rockfish has also been an expanding fishery within the commercial and recreational non-trawl sectors. However, the non-trawl sectors have substantially underattained their share since 2011, so the **GMT recommends analyzing status quo and Option 1 (Table 2) trawl/non-trawl allocations for widow rockfish.** The recommendation is contingent on the outcome of the widow rockfish supplemental review and subsequent adoption of harvest limits.

Table 2. Two-year trawl/non-trawl allocation options for widow rockfish in 2027 and 2028. Note that the allocations shown use the ACL from the 2025 "new base model" for the widow rockfish stock assessment, which has not been adopted by the Council. SQ = Status Quo

Option	2027				2028			
	Trawl Allocation		Non-trawl Allocation		Trawl Allocation		Non-trawl Allocation	
	mt	Reduction from 2026	mt	Reduction from SQ	mt	Reduction from 2026	mt	Reduction from SQ
SQ	4,295	57%	300	0%	4,628	53%	300	0%
Option 1	4,445	55%	150	50%	4,778	52%	150	50%

Action Item #7: Within Non-Trawl HGs/Shares

Cowcod South of 40° 10′ N. lat.

The non-trawl allocation of cowcod south of 40° 10′ N. lat. is currently apportioned to the non-trawl commercial and recreational sectors by a 50:50 informal sharing agreement. Neither sector appears to be constrained by their share. Additionally, the GMT sees merit in continuing to use this sharing agreement for modeling and tracking purposes. Therefore, **the GMT recommends the status quo 50:50 non-trawl commercial and recreational informal harvest guidelines for cowcod south of 40° 10′ N. lat.**

Bocaccio South of 40° 10′ N. lat.

Bocaccio south of 40° 10′ N. lat. is managed with an informal non-trawl sharing agreement between the non-nearshore/nearshore and state-specific recreational fisheries. The non-trawl

allocation is apportioned with 69.1% to recreational, and 30.9% to commercial non-trawl. Neither sector appears to be constrained by their share. Additionally, the GMT sees merit in continuing to use this sharing agreement. Therefore, **the GMT recommends the status quo 69.1 percent recreational, and 30.9 percent non-trawl commercial harvest guideline sharing arrangement for bocaccio south of 40° 10′ N. lat.**

Action Item #8. Sablefish

Sablefish North of 36° N. lat.

The current recreational set-aside for sablefish north of 36° N. lat. is 30 mt. Due to an increase of anglers both harvesting and pursuing sablefish in the recreational fishery, **the GMT recommends an analysis be done to increase the recreational set-aside based on mortality trends**. All other sablefish allocations will remain at status quo.

Action Item #9. Yelloweye Rockfish

The GMT recommends status quo 8 percent trawl, 92 percent non-trawl allocations and the within non-trawl harvest guidelines in Table 3 for yelloweye rockfish in the 2027-28 biennium. Under the default HCR and these status quo allocations, the yelloweye rockfish trawl allocation in 2027 and 2028 would be 7.9 mt compared to 3.3 mt in 2025-26.

Table 3. Status quo yelloweye rockfish within non-trawl sector shares and non-trawl allocation for 2027-2028. The fishery HG is derived from the 2025 yelloweye rockfish update assessment ACLs using status quo off-the-top deductions and will be updated once off-the-top deductions are approved for 2027-28.

Sector	SQ %	2027 HG (mt)	2028 HG (mt)	Reduction factor from HG to ACT a/	2027 ACT (mt)	2028 ACT (mt)
Total non-trawl allocation (92% of the fishery HG)	100%	90.3	90.4	78.4%	70.8	70.9
Non-Nearshore/Nearshore	20.9%	18.9	18.9		14.8	14.8
WA Rec.	25.6%	23.1	23.1		18.1	18.1
OR Rec.	23.3%	21.0	21.1		16.5	16.5
CA Rec.	30.2%	27.3	27.3		21.4	21.4

a/ based on the status quo method to calculate the reduction factor from the previous biennial cycle.

Yelloweye Rockfish Retention - Risk Tolerance

With yelloweye rockfish projected to be rebuilt under the 2025 Update Assessment, but the stock only projected to be at 40.1 percent of unfished spawning biomass, the GMT discussed potential tradeoffs related to precautionarily permitting retention in fisheries in the upcoming biennium. An overview of GMT discussion is provided under this Action Item.

One of the key challenges surrounding yelloweye rockfish assessments is a lack of fishery dependent data streams and comprehensive fishery independent sources that sample the yelloweye rockfish population effectively. Yelloweye retention has been largely absent from West Coast fisheries for over two decades, which was noted as an issue in the 2017 Benchmark Assessment -

the assessment which this year's Update Assessment was based on.

"The available data for yelloweye rockfish remains relatively sparse given the limited sampling effort available under the rebuilding plan. It is essential to continue yelloweye data collection, especially in this recent period, when commercial and recreational catches are considerably lower than the historical period, to provide a fuller picture of age structure and population dynamics. Further length and age collections will also refine estimates of year class strength in the late 2000s, which will improve estimates of stock status and productivity."

Since the 2025 Update Assessment was posted to the briefing book, the GMT has had the opportunity to speak with some of the assessors on the yelloweye Stock Assessment Team (STAT). These assessors highlighted that fishery dependent data from multiple sectors (e.g. recreational, non-trawl commercial, etc) and multiple areas (that is to say, fishery dependent data that is well distributed across Washington, Oregon, and California) would be useful in a future full assessment. This would mean that, if the Council is interested in increasing the amount of fishery dependent data before a full assessment of yelloweye rockfish is conducted, the earliest that a full assessment could be prioritized is in 2029. The GMT's initial discussion indicated that two years of some retention, particularly under a precautionary harvest guideline for yelloweye rockfish, is unlikely to pose a risk to the yelloweye stock. Nonetheless, permitting retention of a long-prohibited species following an update assessment which indicated the species is only 0.1 percent over its rebuilding target is, inherently, a risk-tolerance decision that the Council must carefully consider.

The GMT discussed the risk trade-off between permitting retention before a full assessment can be conducted, and conducting a full assessment in the absence of new fishery dependent data streams. While the GMT did not come to a specific conclusion on that tradeoff at this time, the team does see merit in exploring the issue further over-winter, ideally with Council guidance as to whether that analysis should be limited in some way (e.g. retention only in some sectors, only in some areas, only at some times of the year, etc). It is worth considering that not all sectors will be able to project mortality of a long-prohibited species with the same level of confidence under a new management structure, and that not all sectors are capable of the same rapidity of inseason management response. For instance, inseason commercial data is more readily available than inseason recreational data. This may mean that the Council could be more precautionary in the recreational sector and utilize the greater management responsiveness of the commercial sector to allow limited yelloweye retention that would benefit a future full assessment. **If industry and/or the Council is interested in the GMT analyzing limited yelloweye retention in some or all sectors, we request the Council provide guidance to direct the GMT to do so overwinter.**

During the October GMT work session and discussion with the GAP at this meeting, it became apparent that retention of yelloweye rockfish may be a lower priority than regaining access to long-closed areas of the coast. In the upcoming biennial harvest specification and management measures cycle, the Council cannot remove Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Areas (YRCA) that have restricted fishing opportunities. This would not preclude the Council taking up a holistic review of YRCA, Trawl and Non-Trawl Rockfish Conservation Areas, or other large-scale management area boundaries outside of the biennial cycle. The GMT encourages the Council to carefully consider how retention or prohibition of yelloweye rockfish may impact future review of existing management area boundaries.

Yelloweye Rockfish - ACTs

Currently, yelloweye rockfish has an ACT set at 78.4 percent of the non-trawl HG, as well as individual ACTs for the commercial non-trawl and state specific recreational fisheries, also set at 78.4 percent of each respective sector/area specific HG. Last cycle, the GMT recommended the Council adopt removing the yelloweye rockfish ACTs for non-trawl fisheries (Agenda Item F.5.a, Supplemental GMT Report 4, April 2024). Since then, the 2025 stock assessment was completed, which indicates that the stock has rebounded above the management target of B40. Moreover, since our last recommendation, the GMT recommended the consideration of an Alternative 1, constant ACL equal to 85 mt. As described in the previous GMT report (Agenda Item F.3.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, November 2025) Alternative 1 would provide a precautionary approach for a stock coming out of rebuilding while enabling fishing sectors greater flexibility from a stock that has long constrained fisheries. This precautionary approach could reduce the harvest limit by 28 mt in 2027 and 2028 and will decrease the risk of exceeding the ABC even with removal of the ACTs.

Removal of the ACTs would still leave the within non-trawl shares in place, resulting in no change from the current allocation structure. If retention of yelloweye is not considered for further analysis, removing the yelloweye rockfish ACTs would also reduce management complexity and is unlikely to negatively impact the fisheries or stock because the current suite of monitoring methods for yelloweye rockfish provide timely updates for management responses. However, if yelloweye retention is considered for further analysis, the GMT recognizes the precautionary merits of an ACT given the stock biomass is just over the B40 threshold at 40.1 percent of the unfished spawning biomass. Noting the potential risks outlined with yelloweye rockfish retention, **if the Council tasks the GMT with analyzing yelloweye retention overwinter, then the GMT recommends keeping the ACTs in place. If the Council does not want to pursue retention, then the GMT continues to recommend removal of the yelloweye rockfish non-trawl ACTs.**

Action Item #10. Canary Rockfish

The GMT discussed routine management measures and allocations for canary rockfish with the GAP and amongst the team.

The GMT investigated recent performance of the fishery related to allocative considerations. Based on these investigations and detailed discussions with the GAP, the GMT recommends status quo 72.3 percent trawl, 27.7 percent non-trawl allocations for canary rockfish for the 2027-28 biennium and status quo within non-trawl sharing percentages (nearshore and non-nearshore 36%, WA rec 12.3%, OR 18.5%, CA 33.2%). If the overwinter analysis indicates a different course of action, the Team will update the Council at the March 2026 meeting.

The GMT will analyze management measures needed to achieve but not exceed harvest limits for each groundfish commercial and recreational fishery sector. Many of the specific management measures related to canary rockfish are noted in the sector specific fisheries discussions of GMT Reports 1 and 3. These measures are not repeated here for statement brevity.

Additionally the GMT reviewed and discussed the WDFW Report on Increased Flexibility in Sharing of Canary Rockfish (Agenda Item F.8.a, Supplemental WDFW Report 1, November

2025). The GMT appreciates the WDFW report and the out-of-the-box thinking that went into it. The GMT did not reach consensus on whether to include evaluation of this proposal in our overwinter analysis and requests Council guidance on whether this idea, and any similar concepts that might emerge during analysis of the WDFW proposal, should be analyzed.

Action Item #11: At-Sea Set-Asides

At-sea set-asides are taken from the trawl allocation to accommodate bycatch in the at-sea whiting fishery; the remainder of the trawl allocations are allocated to the IFQ fishery. Similar to off-the top deductions, at-sea set-asides are intended to account for anticipated mortality so as to minimize risk of exceeding the ACL. However, at-sea bycatch mortality is highly variable year-to-year, so it is difficult to predict with certainty. Species with at-sea set-asides will be managed on an annual basis unless there is a risk of a harvest specification being exceeded, unforeseen impact on another fishery, or conservation concerns, in which case inseason action may be taken (§660.150 and §660.160). For most stocks, attainment in the IFQ and non-trawl sectors is low enough to provide some level of buffer in the event the at-sea sectors exceed a set- aside. At-sea set-asides that are set too low may impact the whiting fishery's ability to fully utilize their Pacific whiting allocation due to avoidance and move-along measures. For high attainment stocks in the IFQ fishery, setting at-sea set-asides such that a portion of the set-aside is continually unharvested economically impacts IFQ participants. On the other hand, if stocks are fully attained in all other sectors, setting the at-sea set-aside too low could put the ACL at risk of being exceeded.

During our October work session, the GMT took a holistic look at all stocks with at-sea set-asides and asked the following list of questions for each individual stock when developing a range of options for analysis in the 2027-28 management measures package:

1. How does recent at-sea bycatch mortality compare to the status quo set-aside?
2. What has recent IFQ allocation attainment been?
3. Is the stock economically important to the IFQ fishery?
4. What has recent ACL attainment been?
5. Are the ACLs expected to change in the next biennium and by how much?
    a. If lower, is the IFQ sector expected to be more constrained in the next biennium?
    b. If higher, is there a benefit to increasing the at-sea set-aside to create more of a buffer in the event of high bycatch?
6. Is there a conservation risk to the stock or a risk of exceeding the ACL if the at-sea set aside were to be exceeded?
7. How has fishing behavior impacted recent bycatch levels?
    a. Can we expect similar fishing patterns in the 2025-26 biennium?
8. Is there a conservation or management need for the at-sea set-aside?

To answer some of those questions, Table 6 of this report shows recent three-year average and maximum at-sea mortality for stocks with at-sea set-asides, as well as 2024 ACL attainments, status quo set-asides, 2025 at-sea mortality through November 17th, percent change in ACLs from 2026 to 2027, and average IFQ attainment in the most recent three years as well as in 2025 through October 30. **Based on our consideration of the questions listed above, the GMT recommends analyzing the range of options in Table 4 for 2027-28 at-sea set-asides.** The GMT is proposing adding options to the range that would completely remove the set-asides for Dover sole, lingcod

north of 40° 10′ N. lat., longnose skate, and petrale sole given minimal historical at-sea mortality, low ACL attainment, and low IFQ attainment. The GMT is also proposing adding options that would lower the sablefish north of 36° N. lat., widow rockfish, and yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10′ N. lat. set-asides due to ACL reductions and their economic importance to the IFQ fishery.

Table 4. GMT-proposed range of options for 2027-28 at-sea set-asides to be analyzed.

Stock/Management Unit	Status Quo	Option 1
Arrowtooth flounder	100	
Canary rockfish	20	21.9
Darkblotched rockfish	100	
Dover sole	10	remove
Lingcod north of 40° 10′ N. lat.	15	remove
Longnose skate	5	remove
Other flatfish	100	
Pacific halibut	10	
Pacific ocean perch	300	
Petrale sole	5	remove
Sablefish north of 36° N. lat.	429	305
Shortspine thornyhead north of 34° 27′ N. lat.	70	76.3
Shelf rockfish complex north of 40° 10′ N. lat.	35	
Slope rockfish complex north of 40° 10′ N. lat.	300	
Widow rockfish	300	TBD
Yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10′ N. lat.	360	320

Removals - Dover sole, Lingcod North, Longnose Skate, and Petrale Sole

The GMT proposes analyzing options that would remove the at-sea set-asides for Dover sole, lingcod north of 40° 10′ N. lat., longnose skate, and petrale sole. Maximum historical (i.e., since 2002) at-sea mortality is less than 10 mt for Dover sole and lingcod north of 40° 10′ N. lat., and less than 5 mt for longnose skate and petrale sole. In the case of petrale sole, only six years since 2002 have any reported mortality at all in the at-sea fishery. Recent 10-year average mortality in the at-sea fishery is 1.9 mt for Dover sole, 1.2 mt for lingcod north of 40° 10′ N. lat., 1.4 mt for longnose skate, and <0.1 mt for petrale sole (Table 5). The status quo at-sea set-asides for these stocks are 10 mt for Dover sole, 15 mt for lingcod north of 40° 10′ N. lat., and 5 mt for both longnose skate and petrale sole.

Table 5. At-sea mortality of Dover sole, lingcod north of 40° 10′ N. lat., longnose skate, and petrale sole from 2015 to 2024, along with the 10-year average. "A-S" = At-sea

Year	Dover Sole A-S Mortality (mt)	Lingcod North of 40° 10′ N. lat. A-S Mortality (mt)	Longnose Skate A-S Mortality (mt)	Petrale Sole A-S Mortality (mt)
2015	0.8	0.9	0.5	-
2016	0.3	0.2	0.8	-
2017	0.5	1.0	1.0	<0.1
2018	2.7	3.4	1.9	-
2019	6.3	1.7	0.8	<0.1

2020	0.2	0.8	0.2	<0.1
2021	1.3	1.0	0.6	-
2022	2.9	1.0	3.1	-
2023	1.6	2.2	2.9	<0.1
2024	2.4	0.2	2.2	-
10-yr avg.	**1.9**	**1.2**	**1.4**	**<0.1**

Dover sole, lingcod north of 40° 10′ N. lat., and petrale sole are all targeted and economically important in the IFQ fishery. The recent three-year average IFQ allocation attainments for these stocks are 8 percent for Dover sole, 20 percent for lingcod north of 40° 10′ N. lat., 40 percent for longnose skate, and 90 percent for petrale sole (Table 6). With the exception of petrale sole, these stocks experience low attainment in the IFQ fishery primarily due to the very high allocations, and their ACLs are also typically less than 50 percent attained. Relative to their overall trawl allocations and ACLs, the at-sea set-asides are a very small fraction, and the GMT does not see a need to keep them in regulation in order to responsibly manage these stocks. Total trawl mortality across all sectors (IFQ and at-sea) would still be monitored and accounted for against the trawl allocation.

In 2027-28, the petrale sole IFQ allocation, which is typically fully attained, is expected to limit vessels from fishing their historical amounts due to recent ACL reductions, and thus even an additional 5 mt could benefit IFQ fishery participants. With a default ACL of 2,449 mt in 2027, and an expected trawl allocation of 2,100 mt (based on status quo off-the-top deductions), removing the petrale sole at-sea set-aside would not be expected to risk exceeding the ACL even if the at-sea sectors caught more than the 5 mt originally set-aside. In the last three years (2022-24), around 500 mt of the ~3,500 mt ACLs have gone unharvested each year, some of which is attributed to the IFQ fishery and some to other fisheries. Removing all four of these at-sea set-asides would reduce the burden of the at-sea sectors self-managing to these amounts when there is not a conservation or management need.

Sablefish North of 36° N. lat.

The Council opted to increase the at-sea set-aside for sablefish north of 36° N. lat. from 100 mt to 429 mt in the 2025-26 biennium, an increase which was roughly proportional to the stark ACL increase at that time based on a limited update sablefish stock assessment that indicated very strong recent recruitment. In our November 2023 report, the GMT states that,

> *"Option 2 [FPA] was developed by multiplying the 2023 at-sea catch as of October 31 (158.3 mt) by the percent change in the sablefish north ACL (271 percent), with the expectation that recent high sablefish bycatch could be a result of the recent strong year classes."* (Agenda Item E.7.a, Supplemental GMT Report 3, November 2023)

The 2025 full (benchmark) assessment of sablefish estimated a lower stock status relative to the 2023 assessment and much lower 2027-28 OFLs than had previously been projected in the 2023 assessment (Agenda Item G.3, Attachment 5, September 2025). Although recent recruitment still appears to be strong, the 2027-28 ACLs have returned to levels more similar to those prior to 2025. Given that sablefish is important to the IFQ fishery, there is merit in considering a reduction to the sablefish at-sea set-aside in light of new information. In addition to analyzing the status quo of 429

mt, the GMT proposes a second option of 305 mt, which is the at-sea fishery's recent three-year maximum mortality of sablefish and thus expected to account for higher bycatch reported in recent years, while providing an additional 129 mt to the IFQ fishery.

Widow Rockfish

The GMT is proposing an option for analysis that would decrease the widow rockfish at-sea set-aside from 300 mt to 200 mt in 2027-28. The Council has not adopted the 2025 widow rockfish stock assessment but is scheduled to consider its adoption at this meeting. If it is adopted for use in management, the 2027 widow rockfish ACL would drop to slightly less than half of the 2026 ACL, which would severely impact the IFQ fishery, particularly the midwater rockfish fishery that targets widow rockfish. In the 2025-26 biennium, the Council decreased the widow rockfish set-aside from the historical maximum value of 476 mt to 300 mt, which was expected to sufficiently cover the vast majority of years' bycatch. With the exception of the 476 mt caught in 2017, all other years since 2003 have been below 210 mt. The recent three-year average of widow rockfish mortality in the at-sea fishery is 153 mt, and the recent three-year maximum is 207 mt (Table 6). If the Council adopts the 2025 widow rockfish stock assessment for use in management, the GMT proposes analyzing a reduction of the widow rockfish at-sea set-aside to 200 mt, which is roughly comparable to the recent three-year maximum and is higher than catches in 87 percent of years since 2003.

Yellowtail Rockfish

The GMT is proposing analyzing a reduction to the yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10′ N. lat. at-sea set-aside from 360 mt to 320 mt in 2027-28. In the 2025-26 biennium, the Council adopted an increase to this set-aside from 320 mt to 360 mt in response to yellowtail rockfish ACL increases at the time. The GMT sees merit in analyzing the lower 320 mt again, due to a 22 percent reduction in the yellowtail rockfish ACL from 2026 to 2027. The historical at-sea maximum mortality of yellowtail rockfish is 317 mt from 2019, so a set-aside of 320 mt would be expected to cover expected bycatch. Yellowtail rockfish bycatch in the at-sea fishery tends to be highly variable, with large, infrequent bycatch events driving the high bycatch years. To illustrate, within just the last two years, yellowtail rockfish mortality in the at-sea fishery ranged from 268 mt in 2023 down to 15 mt in 2024. The very large bycatch events tend to occur off of Washington, as discussed in Section 2.2.3 of the 2025-26 Biennial Management Measures Analysis. The IFQ allocation of yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10′ N. lat. tends to be around 76 percent attained, with even lower typical ACL attainment.

Table 6. Recent at-sea mortality, 2024 ACL attainment, status quo at-sea set-asides, percent change in 2027 ACLs (relative to 2026), and recent IFQ attainment for stocks with at-sea set-asides. Pacific halibut final mortality estimates for 2024 are not yet available to the GMT. Pacific halibut has an existing at-sea set-aside of 10 mt. Due to the unique management of Pacific halibut, this species is excluded from the table.

Stock or Stock Complex	2024 ACL Attainment	Status Quo At-Sea Set-Aside	3-Year Avg. Mortality	3-Year Max. Mortality	2025 At-Sea Mortality (mt) Thru 11/17	% Change in ACL from 2026 to 2027 (default HCR)	3-Year Avg. IFQ Attainment	2025 IFQ Attainment Thru 10/30
Arrowtooth flounder	8%	100	54.1	71.4	40.2	-14%	9%	12%
Canary rockfish	45%	20	9	20.3	3.0	+6%	55%	58%
Darkblotched rockfish	44%	100	70	100.4	52.2	+6%	37%	46%
Dover sole	6%	10	2.3	2.9	0.3	-9%	8%	10%
Lingcod N. of 40° 10′ N. lat.	28%	15	1.1	2.2	0.7	-1%	20%	26%
Longnose skate	34%	5	2.7	3.1	1.1	-2%	40%	41%
Other flatfish	9%	100	30.9	47.5	4.3	-8%	8%	10%
Pacific ocean perch N. of 40° 10′ N. lat.	9%	300	40.8	83.6	33.7	-3%	10%	12%
Petrale sole	86%	5	0	0	0	+12%	90%	93%
Sablefish N. of 36° N. lat.	74%	429	229.5	305.9	96.6	-60%	79%	98%
Shelf rockfish complex N. of 40° 10′ N. lat.	27%	35	6.1	10.4	10.2	+2%	38%	40%
Slope rockfish complex N. of 40° 10′ N. lat.	24%	300	151.3	209.7	64.8	+11%	23%	24%
Shortspine thornyhead a/	41%	70	166.6	244.7	49.9	3%	28%	31%
Widow rockfish b/	85%	300	153.4	206.5	36.0	-54%	94%	94%
Yellowtail rockfish	53%	360	103.2	267.6	6.9	-22%	76%	77%

a/ For shortspine thornyhead, spatial management north and south of 34° 27′ N. lat. was removed in 2025-26, so values prior to 2025 are reported for shortspine thornyhead north of 34° 27′ N. lat. only given that the at-sea set-aside was only for the northern portion. Shortspine thornyhead values for 2025 are reported based on coastwide mortality, but the at-sea sector does not operate south of 34° 27′ N. lat. so values prior to and after this management change are functionally comparable.

b/ The widow rockfish ACL change is based on the default HCR if the Council adopts the 2025 update assessment.