GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON BIENNIAL MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR 2027-28: TRIP LIMITS, BAG LIMITS, SIZE LIMITS, AND SEASON STRUCTURES

This report covers Items #12-19 from the Action Item Checklist (Agenda Item F.8, Attachment 1, November 2025). Items #2-4 (GMT [Groundfish Management Team] Report 1) and Items #5-11 (GMT Report 2) will be in separate reports. The GMT would like to note that, due to the ongoing lapse in Federal funding, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Region and Science Center GMT members were not present at the October GMT work session and thereby were unable to provide input on this report's development. Some management measure ideas that were signaled in earlier reports were vetted by Federal staff prior to the ongoing lapse in Federal funding and are noted where applicable. Nonetheless, as this report was submitted before Federal GMT members were able to provide input on its final draft, it is possible that relevant issues are not addressed which the present members of the GMT were not best qualified to explore or elucidate. Any issues which come to the fore, following the review of this report by Federal GMT members, may be addressed in supplemental report(s) under this, or future agenda items, pending the return of Federal employees.

Executive Summary

The GMT recommends adopting status quo Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) trip limits for non-IFQ stocks. For open access and limited entry fixed-gear fisheries, the GMT will analyze potential increases to trip limits for species that have been under-attained or for which Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) are increasing in 2027-28, evaluate species-specific limits within complexes to improve utilization, and consider updates to simplify non-bottom-contact gear and Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) boundaries. For recreational fisheries, the GMT will analyze, among any other routine measures:

- Washington: lingcod depth-based restrictions to simplify regulations;
- Oregon: bag limits, fishery restrictions, and cabezon provisions to improve flexibility; and
- California: management via sub-bag limits over depth-based RCA management, limited cowcod retention, and simplification of recreational regulations by removing cabezon and greenlings from the Rockfish, Cabezon, Greenling (RCG) complex.

Action Item #12: Shorebased Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ)

At the time of writing this report, the GMT has not received any requests for changes to the IFQ trip limits for non-IFQ stocks, nor did the team identify any stocks for which IFQ trip limit adjustments need to be analyzed to stay within 2027-28 harvest limits. **The GMT recommends adopting status quo IFQ trip limits for non-IFQ species.** There is currently an "unlimited" blackgill rockfish IFQ trip limit, which was originally put in place as a component of the blackgill and other slope allocation framework under the slope rockfish complex south of 40° 10' N. lat. When setting the 2021-22 management measures, the GMT stated that,

> *"In theory, the trawl sector could catch all of, or more than, the blackgill rockfish component ACL with their multi-species southern slope rockfish quota pounds (QP). To*

address this concern, the GMT supports potentially implementing a new IFQ blackgill rockfish trip limit that would be unlimited at first, and could be adjusted inseason if needed." (Agenda Item G.6.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, April 2020)

Even with the GMT's current recommendation to remove the separate blackgill and other slope allocation framework (see GMT Report 2 under this agenda item), the GMT does not see a need to adjust that trip limit and sees merit in maintaining it in the event that blackgill rockfish mortality in the trawl sector constrains access to it in the non-trawl sector. Additionally, the rockfish complexes may change as part of stock definitions phase 2, after which the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) could reconsider the need for this trip limit.

Action Item #13-16: Open Access and Limited Entry Fixed Gear Fisheries

Trip Limits

During the GMT's overwinter analysis, the team will investigate increasing trip limits for species with increasing ACLs this biennium or with low non-trawl attainment in the previous biennium. The team will also analyze species-specific trip limits within the shelf and slope rockfish complexes to allow for greater flexibility in attaining individual stocks while considering the conservation needs of all stocks in the complex (Agenda Item G.6.a, GMT Report 2, September 2025). Finally, the team will look at allowing for consistent species trip limits between sub areas (such as north and south of 34° 27' N. lat.) where possible.

Non-Bottom Contact Gear Update

As requested by the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP), the GMT will look into the feasibility of changing the requirements of the non-bottom contact groundfish troll gear so the minimum distance between the bottom weight and the troll wire's connection to the horizontal mainline is 30 feet (9 m) instead of the current 50 feet (15 m) requirement (50 CFR 660.230(b)(6)). Further communication with our Federal partners will be necessary to ascertain the feasibility of this action during this harvest specification cycle. This change would reduce regulatory complexity by matching the non-bottom contact stationary vertical jig gear's requirement for the minimum distance between the bottom weight and the lowest fishing hook.

Reducing Regulatory Complexity

As requested from industry, citing stakeholder confusion, the GMT will investigate the ability to turn off the 150 fathom boundary line around Lausen Knoll in southern California and update relevant regulatory text. The commercial non-trawl RCA boundary south of 34° 27' N. lat., where the knoll exists, is 100 fathom line-150 fathom line (also applies around islands and banks) (Table 2a (South) to Part 660, Subpart E, Title 50). However, there is no 100 fathom boundary line around Lausen Knoll because the polygon it would create would be too thin to effectively enforce. Without a 100 fathom boundary line, Lausen is effectively open to commercial non-trawl fishing. The GMT took similar action in November 2023 for another bank in southern California with enforcement concerns, at the time stating that, "to reduce regulatory complexity the GMT does not find it necessary to implement the 150 fathom RCA around Osborn Bank at this time" (Agenda Item E.9.a, Supplemental GMT Report 2, November 2023). For clarification and simplification of Federal regulations, the GMT will investigate changing the language in the citation above to read (red underlined text indicates GMT-proposed addition):

"100 fm line - 150 fm line (also applies around islands and banks except for Lausen Knoll and Osborn Bank)."

Again, due to stakeholder confusion, the GMT has also been asked by industry to explore the ability to update language in the Federal non-trawl trip limit tables (Table 2a (North) to Part 660,Subpart E, Title 50, Table 2a (South) to Part 660, Subpart E, Title 50, Table 3a (North) to Part 660, Subpart F, Title 50, Table 3a (South) to Part 660, Subpart F, Title 50). The tables state "see appropriate state regulations for state closures," however, the states generally have designed their regulations to extend some Federal regulations (including waypoints) into state waters using their respective authority to govern state waters. The circular regulatory language is confusing to stakeholders and could create enforcement challenges. Therefore, the GMT will investigate the feasibility to clarify the regulatory text to read as follows (red underlined text indicates GMT-proposed replacement):

"The Non-Trawl RCA is an area closed to fishing with particular non-trawl gear types, as defined at § 660.11. Non-Trawl RCA boundaries apply in the EEZ only; ~~see appropriate state regulations for state closures.~~ however, state regulations may extend RCA boundaries into state waters; see appropriate state regulations. Non-Trawl RCA boundaries may be revised via inseason action; therefore, users should refer back to this table throughout the year."

The regulation text, paired with changes to state regulations, would allow for continuous management of fathom-based RCA lines across jurisdictions. Fishery participants would then be able to download the fathom lines from a single site and enforcement could continue to enforce the RCA single unit as opposed to two separate closures. These two adjustments require further communication with our Federal partners to determine if this action is a regulation clean up or if it is better suited in the harvest specification cycle.

Action Items #17-19

The remaining sections of this report outline proposed management changes to the Washington, Oregon, and California recreational sectors, including bag limits, season structure, size limits, and any other routine measures considered each biennium. The team provides comments on yelloweye rockfish holistically under Action Item Checklist (AIC) #9 within Agenda Item F.8.a, Supplemental GMT Report 2, November 2025 for Council consideration and guidance.

Action Item #17: Washington Recreational

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will review the most recent catch and effort data, along with ACLs and harvest guidelines (HGs) approved at this meeting, to develop a range of management measure options that will keep catch within state-specific allocations or harvest guidelines in 2027 and 2028.

For 2027–2028, the GMT received a request to evaluate lingcod retention opportunity in Marine Area 1 (Columbia River) and Marine Area 2 (South Coast). The GMT will analyze the potential effects that changing the lingcod bag limit from zero to two fish seaward of the 30-fathom line (while retaining the deepwater closure) during May 1–31 in Marine Area 2 may have on encounters and mortality of canary and yelloweye rockfishes. In addition, season structure revisions to the

deepwater openings for lingcod retention will be considered, as well as changes to improve lingcod rule alignment between Marine Area 1 and 2. Data from halibut days when lingcod retention is already authorized will aid this analysis. The purpose is to reduce regulatory complexity while maintaining catch within harvest specifications for target and co-occurring species.

Across the Washington coastal recreational bottomfish fishery, depth-based closures for lingcod have been used as a management tool to reduce incidental mortality of co-occurring yelloweye and canary rockfish. In recent biennial cycles, management measures were developed to increase deeper water fishing opportunity for lingcod and canary rockfish (consistent with its rebuilt status) while considering potential impacts to yelloweye rockfish. From 2009–2018, WDFW regulations prohibited lingcod retention seaward of the 30-fathom line in Marine Area 2 (South Coast) from mid-March through mid-June, except on days when the recreational halibut fishery was open. During this period, a separate "deepwater lingcod closure area," approximating the 50 fathom depth contour between the Queets River and Leadbetter Point, also remained closed except on halibut days. In 2019–2020, WDFW shortened the 30-fathom non-retention period to the second Saturday in March through May 31 and introduced limited retention opportunities within the deepwater closure area from June 1–15 and September 1–30. Beginning in 2021, the 30-fathom restriction was further reduced to apply only May 1–31, removing the March–April non-retention period and maintaining the June and September deepwater allowances, a structure that continues under the 2025 regulations. Currently, lingcod retention seaward of 30 fathoms is prohibited May 1–31 except on halibut-open days, and lingcod retention in the deepwater closure area is prohibited except during halibut-open days, and June 1–15 and September 1–30. In Marine Area 1, a similar non-retention provision applies seaward of a defined offshore line, where lingcod retention is prohibited except during halibut days and June 1–15 and September 1–30, a structure that has been in place since 2019 and also continues under the 2025 regulations.

WDFW recommended this management structure as outlined above not over concerns about lingcod catch itself, but because of limited amounts of canary rockfish and yelloweye rockfish available while those stocks were rebuilding. Because these species co-occur with lingcod, allowing targeted lingcod fishing was risky. As noted in the September WDFW and GMT reports, restrictions in Washington's recreational fishery were not relaxed as quickly as in other fisheries following canary rockfish's rebuilt determination. Yelloweye rockfish remaining under rebuilding was a factor in the cautious approach WDFW recommended to the Council. Pending a rebuilt declaration for yelloweye rockfish, WDFW has identified the need to re-examine these measures to ensure fair and equitable sharing of recovery benefits across sectors and areas.

WDFW will also consider routine adjustments to maintain or refine management measures for other species, such as revising season dates, bag limits, or depth-related provisions. Measures adopted in 2023–2024 to reduce mortality of copper, quillback, and vermilion rockfishes, as well as the species-specific five-fish canary sub-bag limit established for 2025–2026, may be reviewed for potential modification or continuation based on updated data and fishery performance.

Action Item #18: Oregon Recreational

Oregon will be considering season structures, depth restrictions, and bag limits to keep impacts within appropriate HGs. Since 2004 until recent years, yelloweye rockfish has been the most constraining species to the Oregon recreational fishery. However, lower ACLs for black rockfish, the nearshore rockfish complex north of 40° 10′ N. lat., and canary rockfish, as well as increased groundfish effort, have resulted in black, canary, China, copper, and quillback rockfishes

becoming the primary drivers of recreational fisheries regulations. While depth restrictions are the main tools used to control yelloweye rockfish impacts, limiting fishing to shallower waters has the opposite effect and increases the catch rate of black rockfish and the nearshore rockfish complex species, such as quillback rockfish. Bag limit adjustment is the tool used to manipulate impacts to black rockfish, as they constitute greater than 50 percent of the total number of groundfish landed by the Oregon recreational fishery, and sub-bag limits are often used for other species at risk of exceeding a species-specific or species-complex ACL. Once sector-specific allocations are identified through the Council and state processes (for black rockfish, canary rockfish, nearshore rockfish, and cabezon), bag limits and sub-bag limits will be analyzed. If there are any new developments regarding the non-trawl canary rockfish allocation, an increase from the one-fish sub-bag limit of canary in both the recreational traditional (nearshore) fishery and the offshore long-leader fishery could decrease the current rate of regulatory discards. In 2024 (absent a canary rockfish sub-bag limit) an estimated 0.6 metric tons (mt) of canary rockfish were discarded dead at sea and through August 31, 2025, an estimated 1.1 mt of canary rockfish were discarded dead at sea.

Unlike other species from the general marine species group, cabezon has a limited season for retention (July 1 - December 31), a minimum size limit (16 inches), and a sub-bag limit of one per angler. As cabezon are managed by both Federal and state regulations, removing the seasonal restriction, size limit and sub-bag limit from Federal rule allows the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to actively manage cabezon outside of the Council process, which would allow for more flexibility to utilize the recreational harvest limits and better attain overall cabezon harvest limits. The ACL for cabezon is adopted through the Council process, while the Oregon nearshore commercial fishery and Oregon recreational fishery harvest limits are approved annually by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (OFWC). Table 1 below shows recent attainment vs harvest limits in recent years for the recreational sector.

Table 1. Percent attainment of cabezon in the Oregon recreational fishery over the past five years (2021-2025), including a projected year-end estimate for 2025.

Year	Total mortality (mt)	Harvest Limit (mt)	Percent (%) Attainment
2021	12.1	19.4	63%
2022	17.2	18.6	93%
2023	13.3	18.0	74%
2024	12.7	17.6	72%
2025	10.8*	17.2	68%

* Projected year-end estimate

Additionally, as yelloweye rockfish are on the verge of being declared rebuilt, another regulation that could be removed is to allow for the retention of lingcod during offshore long-leader fishing trips. The premise for not allowing lingcod on long-leader trips is to avoid yelloweye rockfish as much as possible. Once yelloweye rockfish are declared rebuilt, allowing lingcod in combination with long-leader fishing trips could entice more anglers to fish offshore, thus displacing some of the recreational fishing effort from the nearshore (more accessible) reefs. Further analysis may need to be done regarding yelloweye rockfish impacts that will be better understood once an Oregon recreational annual catch target (ACT), or ACL, is adopted.

Action Item #19: California Recreational

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) will develop and analyze a range of management measure options to keep California recreational fishing mortality within the applicable harvest specifications, while maximizing recreational fishing opportunities. This is anticipated to include routine adjustments to season dates and depth restrictions, bag limits, and/or sub-bag limits. In June 2025, the Council provided guidance that the GMT should explore changes to the California recreational fishery to remove recreational RCAs in favor of management via sub-bag limits only (Agenda Item E.8, Motions in Writing and Guidance, June 2025). The range of options for management measures will be developed overwinter in line with this guidance, using sub-bag limits over depth restrictions to meet management objectives where feasible.

Cowcod retention has remained prohibited since the stock was declared rebuilt in 2019. The Council has taken a stepwise approach when expanding access to the stock. For example, the Cowcod Conservation Areas (CCAs) in southern California were repealed and replaced with smaller Groundfish Exclusion Areas (GEAs) in 2024, allowing recreational anglers to access fishing grounds important to the stock. Yet, incidental catch mortality has remained below HGs since the CCA recreational restrictions were removed. The next step to improve access to this rebuilt, desirable species will be to investigate limited retention. CDFW will be considering a 1 fish cowcod sub-bag limit during lower effort winter month(s) such as December as a first step towards retention.

Within the California recreational fishery, cabezon and greenlings are managed together with rockfish in a RCG Complex (50 CFR §660.360(c)(3)(ii)). As such, cabezon and greenlings are included within the aggregate RCG Complex bag limit (10 fish per day) and subject to the same season dates and depth restrictions as rockfish. However, there does not appear to be a management need within the recreational fishery to group cabezon and greenling within the RCG Complex. Cabezon and greenlings have remained well below the California stocks' ACL/Fishery HGs in recent years. Additionally this is an opportunity to simplify recreational regulations. Removal of cabezon and greenlings from the California RCG Complex is considered a routine bag limit change and would not be a new management measure.

PFMC
11/04/25