GROUNDFISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON INITIAL HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES ACTIONS FOR 2027-28 MANAGEMENT

The GMT supports the use of Overfishing Limits (OFL) in decision tables rather than spawning biomass, as OFLs are tangible management metrics that help inform the Council when setting harvest control rules (HCRs) (Agenda Item G.3.a, Supplemental NWFSC-SWFSC Report 2, September 2025).

Default Harvest Control Rules

Default HCRs, as implemented under Amendment 24[1], will be applied to the best scientific information available to generate the 2027-28 harvest specifications, including overfishing limits (OFLs), acceptable biological catches (ABCs), and annual catch limits (ACLs). **The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) recommends that the Council indicate at this meeting if it would like to depart from the default harvest control rules (HCRs) for any species**. **The GMT also recommends adopting interim final 2027-28 OFLs, stock categories (and sigmas), and P*s for all the species where the default HCR is chosen.** This timing is necessary to coordinate with stock assessors and prepare information for the November 2025 Council meeting when the Council is scheduled to adopt preliminary preferred (PPA) ACL alternatives for overwinter analysis by the GMT. This information will also be discussed during the GMT's October 2025 work session.

Of the stocks that were assessed in 2025, including stocks that received a catch-only projection update, the GMT recommends the Council adopt the default HCRs for quillback rockfish off California, sablefish, petrale sole, black rockfish off Oregon, and darkblotched rockfish as described below and shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Stocks that were assessed in 2025, including catch-only projections, and for which the GMT recommends adopting the default HCRs.

Stock	Assessment Type	Default HCR
Quillback rockfish off California	Full	ABC = ACL, P* 0.45
Sablefish	Full	ABC = ACL, P* 0.45
Widow rockfish	Update	ABC = ACL, P* 0.45
Petrale sole	Catch-only projection	ABC = ACL, P* 0.45
Black rockfish off Oregon	Catch-only projection	ABC = ACL, P* 0.45
Darkblotched rockfish	Catch-only projection	ABC = ACL, P* 0.45
Bocaccio	Catch-only projection	ABC = ACL, P* 0.45

Quillback Rockfish off California

For the California quillback rockfish stock, the default HCR is a P* of 0.45 with the ACL set equal to the ABC. The default coastwide ABCs with a P* 0.45 and sigma = 0.75 for quillback rockfish

[1] https://www.pcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/GF_A24_FMP_Language_Feb2015.pdf

are 11.60 mt and 11.93 mt in 2027 and 2028, respectively (Agenda Item G.6. Supplemental Attachment 2). The results of the 2025 California quillback rockfish stock assessment indicated the stock had never been overfished and the application of the default HCR of P* of 0.45 will provide the greatest management flexibility.

Sablefish
For sablefish, the default HCR is a P* of 0.45 with the ACL set equal to the ABC. The default coastwide ABCs with a P* of 0.45 for sablefish are 13,964 mt and 15,103 mt in 2027 and 2028, respectively. The coastwide sablefish ABC is apportioned into ACLs north and south of 36° N. lat. based on five-year rolling average survey biomass estimates by area. Under the default HCR, the sablefish ACL north of 36° N. lat. would be 10,962 in 2027 and 11,856 mt in 2028. The sablefish ACL south of 36° N. lat. would be 3,002 mt in 2027 and 3,247 mt in 2028. The GMT did not see a need for an alternative HCR for sablefish given that the projected ACLs are not expected to constrain the fishery, and a P* 0.4 projection changes the projected OFLs minimally (Agenda Item G.3.a, Supplemental NWFSC Report 1, September 2025). Additionally, the 2025 benchmark stock assessment includes many improvements from the 2019 benchmark assessment and is well-informed. The stock status is projected to continue increasing through 2031 before beginning to decline, and the Council could conduct another assessment (or catch-only projection) before then to account for realized catches below the ABC.

Widow rockfish
The GMT will give consideration to widow rockfish alternative HCRs after the results of the supplemental review. The GMT recommendations, if made, will be brought forward at the Council's November 2025 meeting.

Black Rockfish: Oregon
For black rockfish off Oregon, the default HCR is a P* of 0.45 with the ACL set equal to the ABC. The default HCR will provide the greatest management flexibility for a stock already expected to constrain fisheries, therefore the GMT does not support an alternative HCR for black rockfish off Oregon. ABCs in 2027-28 are 372 mt and 378 mt, respectively, based on the accepted time-varying buffer values. If the new buffer values as proposed by the SSC are adopted (Agenda Item G.3. Revised Attachment 17, September 2024), the ABCs in 2027-2028 are 371 mt and 376 mt, respectively.

Darkblotched rockfish
For darkblotched rockfish, the default HCR is P* 0.45 with the ACL set equal to the ABC. The default ACLs with a P* of 0.45 for darkblotched rockfish are 773 mt and 754 mt in 2027 and 2028, respectively. Maximum mortality in the most recent five years (2020-2024) is 363 mt, so the 2027-28 ACLs are not expected to constrain the fishery. The 2027-28 ACLs are also projected to change minimally compared to the adopted 2025-26 ACLs (754 mt and 732 mt). Therefore, the GMT did not see a need for an alternative HCR for darkblotched rockfish. While the 2025 catch-only projection projects the ACLs declining over the 10-year projection period, catches are generally below the ACL, and another catch-only projection or assessment can be conducted in the future.

Bocaccio
The default HCR for bocaccio is to apply a P* of 0.45 and set the ACL equal to the ABC. The ABCs with a P* 0.45 for bocaccio are 2,471 mt and 2,360 mt in 2027-28 based on the accepted buffer values. If the new time-varying buffer values as proposed by the SSC are adopted (Agenda

Item G.3. Revised Attachment 18, September 2024), the ABCs in 2027-2028 are 2,446 mt and 2,334 mt, respectively. Bocaccio was last assessed in 2015 as a benchmark assessment, along with an update assessment in 2017 indicating the stock was rebuilt with an estimated depletion of 48.6 percent. OFLs are apportioned to the North (between 43° and 40°10′ N lat. 7.4 percent) and South (92.6 percent) of 40°10′ N lat. based on average historical landings. Recent landings trends for bocaccio continue to support the default apportionment percentages. Mortality is generally below the ACL, and another catch-only projection or assessment can be conducted in the future.

Alternative Harvest Control Rules

Under this agenda item, the Council is scheduled to adopt a preliminary range of P* values, ABCs, and ACLs for stocks where alternative HCRs are to be considered. This action will allow the GMT to initiate preliminary analyses at our October meeting. The GMT recommends alternative HCRs be considered for the following stocks (Table 2).

Table 2. GMT-recommended range of 2027-28 alternative HCRs for Council consideration.

#	Stock	Assessment Type	Default HCR	Alternative 1
1	Yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10′ N. lat.	Full	ABC = ACL, P* 0.45	Ad hoc phase-in
2	Chilipepper rockfish	Full	ABC = ACL, P* 0.45	Constant ACL = 2,114 mt
3	Rougheye/blackspotted rockfish	Full	ABC = ACL, P* 0.45	Constant ACL = 519 mt
4	Yelloweye rockfish	Update	ABC = ACL, P* 0.40 (SPR = 0.50)	Constant ACL = 85 mt
5	Canary rockfish	Catch-only projection	ABC > ACL, P* 0.45 (40-10 rule)	ABC = ACL, P* 0.45
6	Shortspine thornyhead	Catch-only projection	ABC > ACL, P* 0.45 (40-10 rule)	Constant ABC = ACL 902 mt
7	Petrale sole	Catch-only projection	ABC = ACL, P* 0.45	Constant ACL[a/]

a/ The GMT's recommendation for petrale sole depends on the Council's action under G8 at this meeting, i.e., whether or not the Council adopts revised 2026 petrale sole harvest specifications. See the text below for more details. This table will be updated with the specific recommendation at the November meeting.

1-Yellowtail Rockfish North of 40° 10′ N. lat.

The default HCR for yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10′ N. lat. is to apply a P* of 0.45 and set the ACL equal to the ABC. The OFLs for the next management cycle are 5,051 mt for 2027 and 4,882 mt for 2028 under this default HCR with a P* of 0.45 and full attainment of the ACL for 2027 and beyond. The last assessment was a benchmark in 2017. The fishery has changed since then and commercial catches have increased with the rebounding of the midwater trawl fishery which is dependent on yellowtail rockfish. During the Stock Assessment and Review (STAR) panel, a 10-year projection was conducted with a catch scenario assuming 55 percent of the ACL is attained (recent 5-year average attainment across all sectors) for 2027-2036, to compare to the standard assumption of full attainment. The OFLs predicted from this assessment, which are based on full attainment of the ACL, are only 20-24 percent above estimated catches in 2025 and 2026, and thus, are likely to put constraints on individual commercial trawl vessel limits. The GMT proposed Alternative 1 as an ad hoc 3-year phase-in approach. This alternative HCR would entail setting the 2027 ABC and ACL (5,050 mt) right below the OFL (5,051 mt). For 2028, the ABC and ACL

(4,711 mt) would be set half way between the original OFL (4,882) and ACL (4,540 mt) with P* 0.45 from 2028, and in 2029, the ABC and ACL would be set equal to the original ABC and ACL (4,445 mt) with P* 0.45 from 2029 (Figure 1 and Table 3). This phase-in approach would keep the ABC and ACL below the OFL and would provide the trawl fleet immediate relief while transitioning to the lower limits.

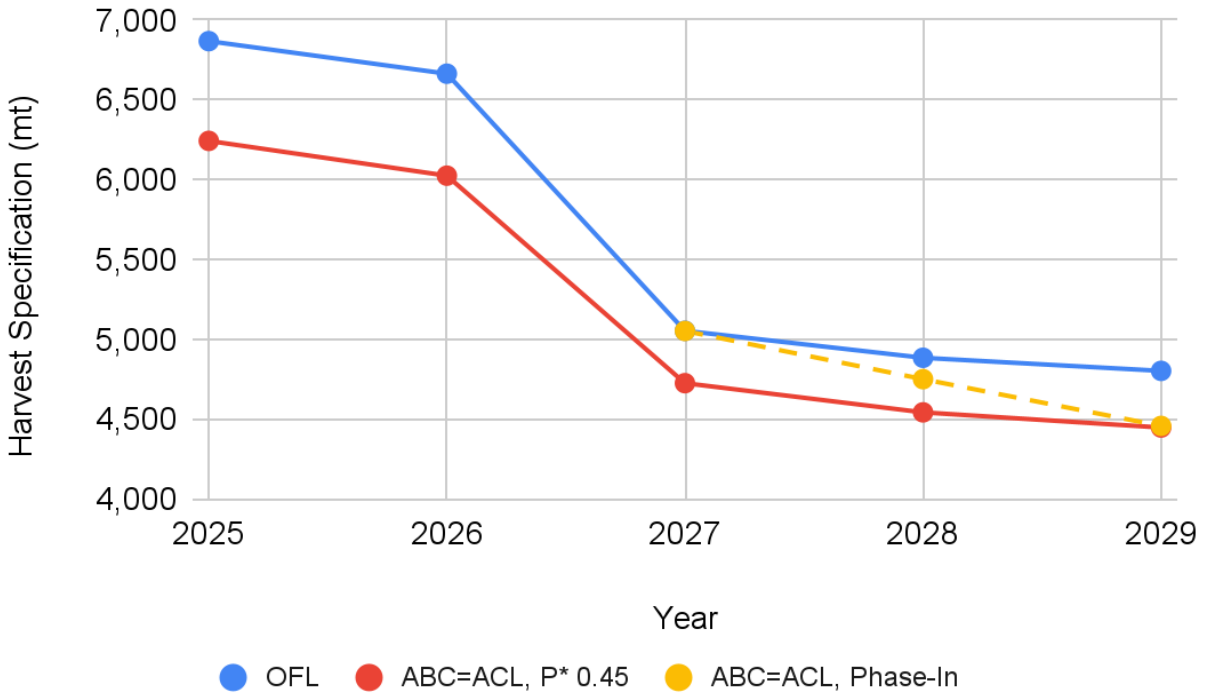


Figure 1. Yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10′ N. lat. harvest specifications under the default HCR (ABC=ACL, P* 0.45) and the proposed alternative HCR (ABC=ACL Phase-In), 2027-2029.

Table 3. Yellowtail rockfish north of 40° 10′ N. lat. harvest specifications (mt) under the default HCR (ABC=ACL, P* 0.45) and the proposed alternative HCR (ABC=ACL Phase-In), 2027-2029, alongside 2025-26 adopted harvest specifications.

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
OFL	6,866	6,662	5,051	4,882	4,800
ABC=ACL, P* 0.45	6,241	6,023	4,723	4,540	4,445
ABC=ACL, Phase-In	-	-	5,050	4,748	4,455

2-Chilipepper Rockfish

The default HCR for chilipepper rockfish is to apply a P* of 0.45 and set the ACL equal to the ABC. With a P* = 0.45 for chilipepper rockfish, the ABCs are 3,211 mt and 3,086 mt in 2027-28 based on the accepted time-varying buffer values. If the new buffer values as proposed by the SSC are adopted (Agenda Item G.6. Supplemental Attachment 2), the ABCs in 2027-2028 are 3,204 mt and 3,080 mt, respectively. Chilipepper rockfish was last assessed in 2007 as a benchmark assessment, along with an update assessment in 2015 and catch-only updates in 2017 and 2023. OFLs are apportioned to the North (7 percent) and South (93 percent) of 40°10′ N lat. based on average historical landings. Recent landings trends for chilipepper rockfish continue to support the

default apportionment percentages (Agenda Item G.1.b, NWFSC Reports 1 and 2, September 2025). The SSC designated the 2025 assessment as a category 1 full benchmark assessment. Because the OFLs predicted from this assessment are more than three times greater than current catches, an additional alternative catch projection was run based on constant catch at the MSY proxy yield (reference point based on assumed MSY proxy value of $SPR_{50\%}$ at SB SPR). The harvest limits based on predicted MSY proxy values are already provided in a decision table in the status report. Given recent fishery performance, it is unlikely that the higher 2025 ACL will be fully attained; alternatively, a constant ACL of 2,114 mt could allow fisheries to operate as usual while decreasing the fraction of unfinished biomass at a slower rate and thus slowing the decline in harvest limits into the future.

3-Rougheye/Blackspotted Rockfish

The default HCR for rougheye/blackspotted rockfish is a P* 0.45 with the ACL set equal to the ABC. The coastwide rougheye/blackspotted rockfish OFL is apportioned into OFLs north and south of 40° 10′ N. lat., because the stock is managed in the slope rockfish complex north and south. The current apportionments are 98 percent to the north and 2 percent to the south, based on average landings during 1985-2012. The GMT discussed whether it is more appropriate to use landings or survey biomass estimates to apportion species north and south of a management line, as the location of landings may not necessarily reflect abundance and resource availability. The GMT looked at WCGBTS data and concluded that the recent 10-year rolling average proportion is approximately 99 percent north and 1 percent south. The GMT will gather more information following the September Council meeting and consider next steps and recommendations during our October meeting regarding rougheye/blackspotted area apportionments.

The rougheye/blackspotted Stock Assessment Review (STAR) panel included thorough discussion on the high uncertainty in stock scale, yet the stock status was less uncertain and estimated to be very healthy (i.e., 87.7 percent in 2027; Agenda Item G.3, Attachment 11, September 2025). Given this uncertainty in the scale, and therefore the OFL point estimate, the Council should consider a precautionary HCR that is set lower than specifications projected by the stock assessment. The projected coastwide ABC under the default HCR is 844 mt in 2027 and 826 mt in 2028. Additionally, a rougheye/blackspotted rockfish ACL contribution as high as 800-900 mt to the slope rockfish complex could risk overfishing the other species in the complex with lower ACL contributions. **To explore a more precautionary HCR, the GMT recommends adding an alternative HCR that sets a constant ACL at the sustainable total yield using the MSY proxy $SPR_{50\%}$ of 519 mt for 2027 and 2028 (Agenda Item G.3, Attachment 4, September 2025).**

4-Yelloweye Rockfish

For yelloweye rockfish, the default HCR is a P* of 0.40 with the ACL set equal to the ABC and an SPR of 0.5. The default OFLs with a P* of 0.40 for yelloweye rockfish are 129 and 131 mt with an ACL of 113 mt (for both years) in 2027-28. With the update assessment finding yelloweye rockfish is no longer overfished, utilizing a P* of 0.40 with the ACL set equal to the ABC will 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.

Given that the stock is coming out of rebuilding with stock status just above the management target, and that default ACLs would result in an increase in potential harvest over the most recent five-year average, a more conservative HCR would allow the Council to take a precautionary

approach. **The GMT recommends adding an alternative HCR that sets the ACL at 85 mt in both 2027 and 2028 as a precautionary option.** The 2026 ACL is 56.6 mt and the 2027 ACL under the default HCR is 113 mt; 85 mt provides a catch limit in the middle, providing some relief with the higher ACLs while balancing a precautionary approach.

5-Canary Rockfish

For canary rockfish, the default HCR is a P* of 0.45 with the ACL set below the ABC due to application of the 40-10 rule. The default ABCs with a P* of 0.45 for canary rockfish are 643 and 665 mt with ACLs of 606 and 623 mt in 2027-28, respectively, assuming the Council adopts the revised 2026 ACL that removes the 40-10 rule (Agenda Item G.3, Attachment 14, September 2025). **The GMT recommends adding an alternative HCR in 2027-28 that would extend the removal of the 40-10 rule into 2027 and 2028, maintaining the P* 0.45.** Application of the 40-10 rule is a policy call by the Council, and canary rockfish ACLs are generally underattained. However, even when the ACL is underattained, individual sectors or vessels can be constrained by lower allocations. Utilizing the ABCs without application of the 40-10 rule would provide all fishing sectors greater flexibility and help to minimize socioeconomic impacts from this constraining stock.

6-Shortspine Thornyhead

For shortspine thornyhead the default HCR is a P* of 0.45 with the ACL set below the ABC due to the stock being in the precautionary zone, with the application of the 40-10 HCR applied. Applying the 40–10 rule and a P* 0.45 results in ACLs of 848 mt and 857 mt in 2027-28, respectively. The most recent assessment for shortspine thornyhead was a category 2 conducted in 2023, followed by the catch only projection in 2025. The projected ACLs using the default HCRs are comparable to the GMT-predicted catch projections for 2025 and 2026. Hence, shortspine thornyhead will likely continue to constrain the commercial fleets. Given these expected constraints, the GMT proposes a constant ABC = ACL for 2027 and 2028 of 902 mt, which would provide an additional 55 mt and 45 mt in 2027 and 2028 respectively. The 902 mt is provided in G.3 Attachment 15: Catch Only Projection for Shortspine Thornyhead on table 3 as the ABC for 2026. This ramp down may allow the fleet to adjust to the new lower limits without exceeding the OFL and provide time for a new full assessment if additional information becomes available.

7-Petrale sole

For petrale sole, the default HCR is P* 0.45 with the ACL set equal to the ABC. If the Council adopts a revised 2026 ACL of 2,489 mt, the default ACLs with a P* of 0.45 for petrale sole are 2,449 mt and 2,423 mt in 2027 and 2028, respectively (Agenda Item G.3, Attachment 13, September 2025). The currently adopted 2026 ACL is 2,238 mt with the 25-5 rule applied as a buffer between the ABC and ACL. Maximum mortality in the most recent five years (2020-2024) is 3,097 mt, so the 2027-28 ACLs are expected to constrain the fishery, particularly the bottom trawl sector. If the Council adopts a revised 2026 ACL, the catch-only projection for petrale sole projects the ABC declining from 2026 to 2028 before then steadily increasing again through 2034, with stock status projected to remain above the management target of 25 percent for flatfish throughout the entire 10-year projection. **If the Council adopts a revised 2026 ACL, the GMT recommends adding an alternative HCR that sets the 2027-28 ABC=ACL at the revised 2026 ABC of 2,489 mt in both years**, which is still 156 mt and 139 mt below the OFL in 2027 and 2028, respectively. After 2027-28, the default HCR of P* 0.45 ABC=ACL would be implemented.

If the Council does not adopt a revised 2026 ACL, the default ACLs with a P* of 0.45 for petrale sole are 2,501 mt and 2,462 mt in 2027 and 2028, respectively. Given maximum recent mortality, the fishery would also be constrained under the default HCR under this scenario. If the Council does not adopt a revised 2026 ACL, the catch-only projection projects the ABC declining from 2027 to 2029 before then steadily increasing again through 2033, with stock status projected to remain above the management target of 25 percent for flatfish throughout the entire 10-year projection and slightly higher than if a revised 2026 ACL were adopted. **If the Council does not adopt a revised 2026 ACL, the GMT recommends adding an alternative HCR that sets the 2027-28 ABC=ACL at the 2027 value of 2,501 mt in both years.** After 2027-28, the default HCR of P* 0.45 ABC=ACL would be implemented.

Routine Management Measures

The GMT reviews all routine[2] management measures every harvest specifications cycle and is planning an October work session to explore routine management measures for the 2027-28 biennium. The items noted in Table 4 are routine measures that the team or members of the public have identified at this time as warranting specific exploration. The noted measures are those that may need to be adjusted to improve the ability of the fishery to attain the goals and objectives of the FMP, including keeping catches within adopted harvest limits. Items may be added to the team's investigation based on additional information brought forward at this meeting and guidance from Council. The team requests guidance and prioritization of items the Council would like evaluated to inform their decision-making process in selecting a range of management measure considerations at the November 2025 Council meeting.

As the yelloweye rockfish stock assessment indicated the stock is rebuilt, the GMT could consider limited yelloweye rockfish retention if the Council or industry has interest. Currently the GMT has heard support for a cautious approach with expansion of fishing areas followed by consideration of yelloweye rockfish retention in future cycles. The GMT requests guidance from the Council and industry if analysis of a different approach for yelloweye is desired.

Table 4. Select routine management measures to be explored in the 2027-28 harvest specifications action.

Item # (not ranked)	Management Measures	Sector(s)	Description
1	Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) Modifications	All	• Waypoint modifications, as needed
2	Off-the-top deductions	Research, EFPs, and IOA	Incidental open access (IOA) • **Consider converting default approach from recent 10-year maximum to recent 10-year average for some or all stocks** Research

[2] In the biennial process, the Council regularly adjusts routine management measures to attain but not exceed ACLs. Routine measures are described in the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan as well as in regulation (see 50 CFR 660.60(c)). In brief, management measures such as trip limits, bag limits, etc. are considered "routine".

Item # (not ranked)	Management Measures	Sector(s)	Description
			• **Consider converting default approach from recent 10-year maximum to recent 10-year average for some or all stocks**
3	Two Year Allocations	Trawl/ Non-Trawl	2-year trawl/non-trawl allocations: • **Canary rockfish, pending Council guidance at this meeting (Agenda Item G.6.a, GMT Report 1, September 2025)**
4	Rebuilding Species Allocations	All	If yelloweye rockfish is determined to be rebuilt, this line item may not be necessary in the 2027-28 biennium.
5	Within trawl Set-aside	At-sea whiting	Review At-sea whiting 2027-2028 set-asides.
6	Within non-trawl HGs, ACTs, or Shares	LEFG/OA/ Recreational	Preliminary 2-year within non-trawl HGs or shares for: • **Canary rockfish, pending Council guidance at this meeting (Agenda Item G.6.a, GMT Report 1, September 2025)**
7	Commercial Trip Limit Adjustments	OA (north of 40°10 N. lat., south of 40°10 N. lat.) and LEFG (north of 40°10 N. lat., south of 40°10 N. lat.)	Routine adjustments to this fishery's management measures (e.g., trip limits, size limits, etc.) • **Sablefish trip limit adjustments to accommodate new ACLs** • **Cowcod trip limits off of CA (Agenda Item G.6.a, GMT Report 2, September 2025)** • **Stock complex species-specific trip limits (Agenda Item G.6.a, GMT Report 2, September 2025)**
8	Recreational Trip Limit Adjustments	OR, WA, CA Recreational	Routine adjustments to bag limits, season structure, length limits, etc. *-limited to federal waters only* • **Explore All Depth fishing off California** • **Cowcod bag limit off California** • **Lingcod retention off Leadbetter Point in the YRCA**

New Management Measures

The GMT did not identify any new management measures that warrant being analyzed alongside the 2027-28 routine management measures. However, the GMT notes that there are many items on the groundfish workload and new management measures list that the Council could consider taking up outside of the harvest specifications process, some of which have been prioritized but not worked on yet (Agenda Item H.8.a, GMT Report 2, March 2025). Given the rebuilt status of yelloweye rockfish, the GMT suggests the Council include consideration of a comprehensive action that looks at RCA modifications and/or removals on the March 2026 agenda under Workload and New Management Measure Priorities.

PFMC
09/22/25