GROUNDFISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON *EMERGENCY RULE*

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) thanks the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) for adding an agenda item to consider a recommendation to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) of an emergency rule to increase the annual catch limits (ACL) for canary rockfish, shortspine thornyhead, and petrale sole in 2026.

The GAP reviewed the public testimony from multiple sectors of the groundfish fishery under Agenda Item B.1, Open Public Comment, and agree that requesting emergency action at this time is warranted. In response to a June 2025 Council request, the Northwest Fisheries Science Center provided catch-only updates for these three species, which included updated harvest specification values for 2026. These updates included meaningful ACL increases for these three species. Absent emergency action, the status quo ACLs will remain in place for 2026. The catch-only updates demonstrate that ACL increases for 2026 could be made without jeopardizing spawning output or long-term stock sustainability. Specifically, the GAP recommends the following HCRs (with associated tables referenced) for 2026::

- Canary rockfish: Alternative harvest control rule (Table 3): +53 mt (~9 percent increase)
- Shortspine thornyhead: Alternative harvest control rule (Table 3): +72 mt (~9 percent increase)
- Petrale sole: Default harvest control rule (Table 2): +251 mt (~11 percent increase)

The ACLs for these species each drastically declined in 2025 (canary by 55 percent, shortspine by 60 percent, petrale by 28 percent), which took effect all at once. Throughout this year, groundfish participants have asked for relief. Several of our past statements (Agenda Item E.3.a, Supplemental GAP Report 1, June 2025 and Agenda Item E.7.a, Supplemental GAP Report 1, June 2025) and multiple public comments (Agenda Item E.7, Written Public Comment, June 2025) summarize the negative impacts of these declines.

Should the Council and NMFS approve these increases, they would provide meaningful relief to *all* sectors of the industry through:

- Increased access to target species, more flexibility for fishermen to choose their harvest strategies;
- Decreased costs of movement (i.e., fuel, provisions, monitoring);
- Increased revenue for commercial/charter sectors;
- Increased access for recreational sectors (leading to longer seasons, more trips, for example). Already, restricted salmon seasons have meant more recreational fishermen seeking alternative fisheries in which to participate. Higher ACLs may also allow for higher bag limits, which encourage fishery participation. A low bag limit – along the lines of three or four fish – discourage participation for both charter and non-charter recreational fishermen;

- Recreational fishermen in Washington and Oregon are already close to or have exceeded their sector's harvest guideline for canary rockfish. More participation in the long-leader ("Holloway gear") fishery in Oregon reduces impacts on black rockfish. A higher limit of canary rockfish encourages anglers to participate in this fishery instead of fishing inshore, where black rockfish make up the majority of the bag limit;
- Changes to quillback restrictions in California will allow recreational fishermen to fish all depths, thereby potentially encountering more canary rockfish. An increase in the canary ACL will help ensure the recreational fishery does not exceed its allocation and keeps the season open longer and in more areas;
- Non-trawl commercial fishermen noted their sector had to reduce some fishing effort so as not to exceed canary allocations for the sector; for 2026, the higher ACL would allow them a longer season or, at minimum, more flexibility throughout the year;
- Shorter, more efficient trips across a season or year allows time for more trips, time to access opportunities in other fisheries, and/or the ability to end operations earlier instead of extending into bad weather;
- Decreased gear conflicts with other fisheries;
- More stability for vessel owners and crew;
- More stability for processors and improved supply to markets; and
- In the trawl Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) fishery, additional quota allocation to target, cover bycatch, or trade, more availability of quota, decreased hoarding.
- Low ACLs automatically create "choke species" dynamics, constraining access to other, target species. This situation may be sector- or fleet-specific or, in the case of canary rockfish, affects all sectors. The emergency rule would provide additional quota to help access target species.

The GAP reviewed the tables in the Staff Report (Agenda Item G.8, Supplemental Attachment 5, September 2025), which update allocations only and do not include changes for tribal or at-sea sectors or the non-trawl sector allocation for petrale. The at-sea sectors (mothership and catcher-processor) are two of the trawl sectors who have experienced significant harm from the reduction in ACLs, and the tribes and at-sea sectors should also benefit from this emergency rule. The GAP recommends using an approach that would provide proportional increases for all fishing sectors and allocations from the 2025 values to the revised 2026 values. This would result in increases to Tribal set-asides and at-sea allocations at a proportional level of increase to what the trawl and non-trawl allocations will receive, and is more fair and equitable to address impacts to affected sectors. We have provided tables at the end of our statement showing the updated values we recommend the Council adopt.

In Summary:

1. All groundfish sectors report substantial economic and operational hardship under the current ACL levels and those approved for 2026;

2. Catch-only projections (Agenda Item G.8, September 2025, for canary, shortspine thornyhead and petrale sole) support modest ACL increases for 2026 without adverse conservation effects;

3. Emergency rulemaking is the only mechanism available to address these issues before the 2027–2028 harvest specification cycle; and

4. The justification for taking action in this emergency is based on both social and economic factors and the action proposed does not create conservation issues; and

5. The GAP recommends that if the emergency rule is approved by the Council and NMFS, **the increased ACLs should benefit all sectors** in proportion to the 2026 set-asides and allocations, with the exception of IOA/research (see tables below).

Table 1. Canary Rockfish recommendations for 2026

			GAP Recommendation		
	Status Quo	Staff Paper - allocation change only, no change to set-asides	**Proportional increase for all fishing sectors (no change research/IOA)**	**Change for 2026 from Status Quo**	**% Change for 2026 from Status Quo**
OFL	655	673	**673**	**18.0**	**3%**
ABC	609	626	**626**	**17.0**	**3%**
ACL	573	626	**626**	**53.5**	**9.5%**
EFP/Research/IOA	12.9	12.9	**12.9**	**0.0**	**0%**
Tribal	50.0	50.0	**54.7**	**4.7**	**9.5%**
Fishery HG	509.6	563.1	**558.4**	**48.8**	**9.5%**
Trawl %	72%	72%	**72%**		
Trawl Allocation	368.4	407.1	**403.7**	**35.3**	**9.5%**
At-Sea Set Aside	20.0	20.0	**21.9**	**1.9**	**9.5%**
IFQ	348.4	387.1	**381.8**	**33.4**	**9.5%**
IFQ Annual Vessel Limit (AVL, lbs)	76,818	85,346	**84,178**	**7,360**	**9.5%**
Non-Trawl %	28%	28%	**28%**		
Non-Trawl Allocation	141.2	156.0	**154.7**	**13.5**	**9.5%**
WA Recreational	17.4	19.2	**19.0**	**1.6**	**9.5%**
OR Recreational	26.1	28.9	**28.6**	**2.5**	**9.5%**
CA Recreational	46.9	51.8	**51.4**	**4.5**	**9.5%**
Commercial	50.8	56.2	**55.7**	**4.9**	**9.5%**

Table 2. Shortspine Thornyhead Recommendation for 2026

			GAP Recommendation		
	Status Quo	Staff Paper - allocation change only, no change to set-asides	**Proportional increase for all fishing sectors (no change research/IOA)**	**Change for 2026 from Status Quo**	**% Change for 2026 from Status Quo**
OFL	961	970	**970**	**8.9**	**1%**
ABC	831	902	**902**	**70.7**	**9%**
ACL	825	897	**897**	**72.2**	**9%**
EFP/Research/IOA	22.0	22.0	**22.0**	**0.0**	**0%**
Tribal	50.0	50.0	**54.4**	**4.4**	**9%**
Fishery HG	752.8	825.0	**820.6**	**67.9**	**9%**
Trawl %	71%	71%	**71%**		
Trawl Allocation	534.5	585.8	**582.6**	**48.2**	**9%**
At-Sea Set Aside	70.0	70.0	**76.3**	**6.3**	**9%**
IFQ	464.5	515.8	**506.3**	**41.9**	**9%**
IFQ Annual Vessel Limit (AVL, lbs)	92,158	102,333	**100,464**	**8,307**	**9%**
Non-Trawl %	29%	29%	**29%**		
Non-Trawl Allocation	218.3	239.3	**238.0**	**19.7**	**9%**

Table 3. Petrale sole recommendations for 2026

			GAP Recommendation		
Petrale Sole	Status Quo	Staff Paper - allocation change only, no change to set-asides	**Proportional increase for all fishing sectors (no change research/IOA)**	**Change for 2026 from Status Quo**	**% Change for 2026 from Status Quo**
OFL	2,424	2,676	**2,676**	**252.0**	**10%**
ABC	2,255	2,489	**2,489**	**234.0**	**10%**
ACL	2,238	2,489	**2,489**	**251.0**	**11%**
EFP/Research/IOA	28.5	28.5	**28.5**	**0.0**	**0%**
Tribal	290.0	290.0	**322.5**	**32.5**	**11%**
Fishery HG	1,919.5	2,170.5	**2,138.0**	**218.5**	**11%**
Trawl Allocation	1889.5	2140.5	**2104.6**	**215.1**	**11%**
At-Sea Set Aside	5.0	5.0	**5.6**	**0.6**	**11%**
IFQ	1884.5	2135.5	**2099.0**	**214.5**	**11%**
IFQ Annual Vessel Limit (AVL, lbs)	186,957	211,858	**208,242**	**21,284**	**11%**
Non-Trawl Allocation	30.0	30.0	**33.4**	**3.4**	**11%**

PFMC
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