

AD HOC FISHERIES INNOVATION WORKGROUP REPORT ON HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES ROADMAP: EXEMPTED FISHING PERMITS PERFORMANCE GOALS AND METRICS - PRELIMINARY

The Pacific Fishery Management Council’s (Council) Ad Hoc Fisheries Innovation Workgroup (FIW) convened virtually on September 25–26, 2025. All FIW members, Council staff (with contractor support), and several members of the public attended the meeting. Consistent with its charge, the FIW continued its work to develop and refine Council procedures to facilitate the more rapid creation of new Highly Migratory Species (HMS) fishing gears and achieve the goals of the HMS Roadmap (I.4 Attachment 1). At the meeting, the FIW discussed performance goals and metrics for the evaluation of exempted fishing permits (EFPs) and agreed to further define a subset of performance metrics. The FIW also continued discussions about EFP process improvements, with a particular focus on the pre-application stage. This report provides a summary of the discussion and an update on the FIW’s progress in implementing the HMS Roadmap tasks within its scope of work.

Based on the discussions at the September meeting, the FIW offers the following recommendations and requests for Council guidance:

1. **EFP performance metrics:**
 - a. Review the FIW’s overall approach to developing performance metrics for EFP evaluation (described below) and provide feedback, including any guidance on the workplan to advance this task (Appendix C).
 - b. Discuss and provide guidance on the development of a multispecies index (see description below) for evaluating the economic and bycatch performance of HMS gears/methods (HMS Roadmap Action Item 3f), which would be a helpful resource in the development of EFP performance metrics. Identify a lead and timing for creating the index.
2. **EFP applications:** Review the proposed guidance materials for prospective EFP applications and provide feedback.
3. **FIW workplan:** Review the FIW’s updated work plan outline (Appendix C) and list of remaining EFP topics for the FIW to address (Appendix D). Provide guidance as appropriate.

EFP Evaluation - Performance Metrics

At its September 2025 meeting, the FIW agreed that EFP performance goals and metrics would provide a transparent way for evaluating various gear types, including new configurations and methods, and would not be intended to create any new regulatory requirements or penalties. Failure to meet a goal would not result in any regulatory action for any individual EFP. The group had an extended discussion on the roles and tradeoffs of performance “goals” versus “metrics.” Performance goals are desired outcomes (i.e., what the Council wants to achieve), while metrics measure progress toward goals (i.e., how the Council will track progress). Metrics can be defined and used in different ways, including as a measuring stick. For example, the Council developed a

finfish retention performance metric of 70 percent for the drift gillnet fishery, and every year the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) reports on the actual retention rate of the fishery as compared to the performance metric.

The FIW considered a broad range of performance goals and metrics (See Appendices A and B). Some FIW members stressed the need for quantitative goals and fulfilling a key task in the FIW's charge ("development of HMS EFP performance goals, including acceptable bycatch and metrics to evaluate EFP performance"), while others cautioned against setting specific goals or targets that could be misconstrued as being binding or regulatory in any way. The group agreed to prioritize the development of a set of performance metrics (with specific numbers to serve as measuring sticks or points of comparison) to enable systematic evaluation of EFP performance, rather than a set of prescriptive goals.

Further, some FIW members found the effort to create EFP performance goals duplicative of the HMS Roadmap work. For example, the HMS Roadmap has a goal to "support and test fishing practices that have the potential to be economically viable and consistent with National Standard 9 guidelines" (Roadmap Goal B), which could serve as one of the overarching goals for the performance metrics to measure progress against.

The FIW also discussed the categories for EFP evaluation. They considered a variety of potential categories including economic viability, bycatch, data collection, safety, impacts to habitat, impacts to other fisheries/coastal communities, use of dynamic ocean modeling tools, etc. They agreed to narrow the broad list down to two priority categories: economic viability and bycatch (including bycatch mortality). The group recognized that economic viability and acceptable levels bycatch were the most important factors to be considered, and they are also complicated topics that need to be carefully unpacked and considered. Thus, the FIW determined these topics would provide the most useful info for Council consideration of EFPs. In addition, while the FIW found the other categories to be very important topics (e.g., data collection, safety, impacts to habitat, impacts to other fisheries/coastal communities, use of dynamic ocean modeling tools), the group decided that they are generally not well-suited for measurement and tracking through Council-established performance metrics. FIW members commented that some of these categories such as safety are better assessed through other requirements and means (e.g., National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) regulatory requirements).

The narrowing of categories allowed for a deeper look at potential performance metrics specifically for economic viability and bycatch (including bycatch mortality). Prior to the meeting, staff worked with NMFS to conduct a technical review for performance metrics deemed "workable," meaning that they were technically feasible to implement; did not create a burden for fishermen, NMFS, or the Council to use; and were not redundant of each other. Staff incorporated the list of "workable" metrics into a suite of options for assessing economic viability and bycatch for FIW consideration.

- *Economic Viability Performance Metrics:* For economic viability, the FIW agreed that a suite of metrics, rather than any single measure, will provide a more comprehensive picture. The group advanced a subset of the metrics (see Table 1 and Appendices A and B) presented for further development, which included metrics that assessed economic viability qualitatively and

quantitatively. The FIW expressed interest in individual fishery operators' views of economic viability of the gear/method tested in the EFP. This information would need to be collected through a series of focused questions. The FIW also agreed to develop metrics for ex-vessel revenue (scaled appropriately), catch per unit of effort (CPUE) (of landed species), and price per pound (of landed species). As a next step, staff will work with NMFS and other technical experts to further develop these metrics (including creating appropriate numeric baselines for comparison).

- *Bycatch Performance Metrics*: Similar to the approach for economic viability, the FIW expressed interest in a suite of metrics for bycatch including bycatch mortality (see Table 1 and Appendices A and B). FIW members agreed to advance the following metrics for further development: discard rates and catch of individual species bycatch (bycatch-to-catch ratios and counts). The FIW discussed which species to include in evaluations of bycatch. One starting point could be the list currently used for HMSMT evaluations of the drift gillnet fishery. The FIW will review this list during future discussions. Staff will research approaches and datasets to set baselines (for measuring and comparison purposes only) for discard rates and individual bycatch species rates and counts, while coordinating closely with NMFS and others for technical review.
- *Multispecies Fisheries Production Index*: The HMS Roadmap includes an action item (3f) to develop a multispecies fisheries production index for comparing HMS harvest methods and evaluating bycatch. In its [June report](#), the FIW identified the need for further clarification on the lead for this work. The development of such an index would be instrumental for the next step of further defining the performance metrics with numeric comparative baselines if it includes standardized data summaries (including West Coast HMS and other HMS fisheries) for the FIW's preferred metrics (e.g., ex-vessel revenue, CPUE, price per pound, discard rates, bycatch to catch species ratios, and individual counts). Further guidance from the Council on the lead (e.g. a Council Advisory Body, Council staff in partnership with an agency partner etc., a contractor, etc.) and timing for developing this tool/resource would help the FIW and staff plan accordingly.

Table 1: Summary of EFP Performance Metrics to Be Further Developed

Category	Performance Metric
Economic Viability	Economic viability views through survey responses with EFP holders
Economic Viability	● Ex-vessel revenue ● CPUE ● Ex-vessel price per pound
Acceptable Levels of Bycatch	Discard rate
Acceptable Levels of Bycatch	● Individual bycatch-to-catch ratios ● Individual counts of interactions

EFP Process Improvements - Questionnaire and Guidance Materials

At its September meeting, NMFS introduced a draft voluntary questionnaire designed to help prospective EFP applicants understand the information requirements for NMFS's review process. The questionnaire is intended to streamline applications by clarifying, at the outset, the data and information needed for NMFS review and for meeting environmental compliance obligations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NMFS emphasized that the questionnaire is not a substitute for the technical support provided by agency liaisons, which remains a valued part of the process. NMFS anticipates that some back-and-forth with applicants will still be needed unless a proposal closely mirrors an existing, previously approved configuration. The FIW provided initial feedback focused on improving usability and clarity (e.g., use of terminology that is clear and accessible to fishery operators), and the group will revisit the questionnaire once performance metrics are more fully defined to consider additional Council-requested content from applicants.

In addition to the questionnaire, the FIW discussed creating and posting other guidance materials and resources to help EFP applicants understand the process and requirements, such as sample permits (recently made available on the [NMFS West Coast HMS EFP website](#)), infographics (such as flowcharts), and checklists. The FIW will continue these discussions and development of high-priority guidance materials in close collaboration with NMFS and provide relevant recommendations to the Council at a future meeting.

Updated Work Plan Outline and Remaining Topics for EFP Process/Timing Recommendations

The FIW has updated its work plan outline (see Appendix C) and a list of EFP-related topics for which the FIW is planning to develop Council recommendations (see Appendix D), including through future revisions to Council Operating Procedures (COP) 20. For the work plan outline, the FIW has sequenced topics based on their interdependence (e.g., the performance metrics will inform the evaluation and reporting process) and prioritized EFP applications and guidance materials/resources. The FIW is seeking Council guidance as appropriate at the November Council meeting.

Future Meeting Planning

The FIW will hold a virtual meeting on October 29 to continue discussions on performance metrics and topics related to EFP process improvements. The FIW is also working to schedule meetings in December 2025 and early 2026, and the group maintains interest in convening in-person for a future meeting pending available funding, with early 2026 identified as a potential timeframe.

APPENDIX A: OPTIONS CONSIDERED BY THE FIW FOR EVALUATING ECONOMIC VIABILITY

The FIW considered a range of performance goals and metrics for evaluating economic viability. The group agreed to focus on further developing options 1A, 2B, 2D, and 2E (in bold below and see Table 1) as performance metrics, not as goal statements. For options 2B, 2D, and 2E, the FIW discussed the establishment of metrics to serve as bars for measuring on-the-water performance of EFPs and focusing on all landed species, not just target species for 2D and 2E.

Goal Type	Goal Statement	Metrics
1A. Individual Economic Viability - Qualitative Goal	The fishing gear/method used in the EFP contributes to the individual economic viability of the fishery participant.	• Fishermen survey responses (e.g., 5-point scale, short answers) • Questions: viability as sole method, added portfolio value, adaptations needed, etc.
2A. Overall Economic Contribution - Qualitative Goal from HMS Roadmap language	The fishing gear/method used in the EFP has the potential to be economically viable and provide net economic benefits. (HMS Roadmap Goal B, Action Item 3d)	• CPUE of target species (swordfish, bigeye tuna) • CPUE of other marketable species • Ex-vessel revenue
2B. Overall Economic Contribution - Quantitative Ex-Vessel Revenue Goal	The fishing gear/method used in the EFP achieves or exceeds an average annual ex-vessel revenue per individual vessel of \$X.	• Ex-vessel revenue
2C. Overall Economic Contribution – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound (SMART) Ex-Vessel Revenue Goal	By 20XX, the fishing gear/method used in the EFP achieves or exceeds an average annual ex-vessel revenue per individual vessel of \$X.	• Ex-vessel revenue
2D. Overall Economic Contribution - Quantitative CPUE Goal	The fishing gear/method used in the EFP achieves or exceeds CPUE of X for target species and CPUE of Y for other marketable species.	• CPUE of target species • CPUE of other marketable species
2E. Overall Economic Contribution - Quantitative Ex-Vessel Price per Pound Goal	The fishing gear/method used in the EFP achieves or exceeds an average price per pound of \$X for target species (swordfish and/or bigeye tuna).	• Average ex-vessel price per pound for target species (swordfish and/or bigeye tuna)
3A. Domestic Harvest/Supply of HMS - Qualitative Goal from HMS Roadmap language	Options: 1. The fishing gear/method used in the EFP increases the domestic supply of and meets the demand for swordfish and other marketable species. (HMS Roadmap Goal A) 2. The fishing gear/method used in the EFP can help the U.S. meet harvest goals for target HMS. (HMS Roadmap Action Item 1c) 3. The fishing gear/method used in the EFP allows for more full access of underutilized HMS stocks. (HMS Roadmap Action Item 2a)	• CPUE of target species (swordfish, bigeye tuna) • CPUE of other marketable species • Total landings of target/marketable catch • Proportion of U.S. demand met by EFP catch (with extrapolations for scale-up)

APPENDIX B: OPTIONS CONSIDERED BY THE FIW FOR ACCEPTABLE LEVELS OF BYCATCH PERFORMANCE GOALS/METRICS

The FIW considered a range of performance goals and metrics for evaluating bycatch and agreed to further develop options 4C and 6D (in bold below and see Table 1) as performance metrics, not as goal statements. The quantitative metrics are to serve as bars for measuring on-the-water performance of EFPs.

Goal Type	Goal Statement	Metrics
4A. Overall Acceptable Bycatch (and Bycatch Mortality) - Qualitative Goal from HMS Roadmap Language	Options: 1. The fishing gear/method used in the EFP is consistent with National Standard 9 guidelines (HMS Roadmap Goal B). 2. The fishing gear/method used in the EFP minimizes bycatch to the extent practicable, and to the extent bycatch cannot be avoided, minimizes the mortality of such bycatch. (Mirrors National Standard 9 language). 3. The fishing gear/method used in the EFP meets acceptable levels of bycatch/bycatch mortality for protected and non-marketable species. (HMS Roadmap Action Item 1b)	• BPUE • Bycatch-to-catch-ratio • Discard rate • Interactions with protected/prohibited species • Disposition of discards (alive, injured, dead, unknown)
4B. Retention Rate - Minimum Threshold Goal	The fishing gear/method used in the EFP achieves or exceeds a total retention rate of X%.	• Retention rate
4C. Discard Rate - Maximum Threshold Goal	The fishing gear/method used in the EFP achieves a discard rate lower than X%.	• Discard rate • Other options: overall BPUE or overall bycatch-to-catch ratio
4D. Discard Rate - SMART Maximum Threshold Goal	By 20XX, the fishing gear/method used in the EFP is lower than a discard rate of X%.	• Discard rate
5A. Zero Mortality for Protected/Prohibited Species - Quantitative Goal	The fishing gear/method used in the EFP achieves a zero mortality rate for protected/prohibited species with every protected/prohibited species caught being released alive (or injured).	• Number of interactions with protected species • Number of interactions with prohibited species • Disposition of releases (alive, injured, dead)
6A. Bycatch Species Groups - Maximum Threshold Goal	The fishing gear/method used in the EFP achieves BPUEs lower than: • X for finfish, • X for sharks/rays • X for marine mammals • X for sea turtles • X for seabirds	• BPUE for each species group (standardized methods developed with NMFS/HMSMT)
6B. Individual Bycatch Species - Maximum Threshold Goal	The fishing gear/method used in the EFP achieves a lower bycatch to catch ratio than X for species X.	• Ratio = BPUE/CPUE (The FIW also agreed to develop metrics for counts of interactions with bycatch species.)

APPENDIX C: UPDATED FIW WORK PLAN OUTLINE

In June, the Council adopted the Fisheries Innovation Workgroup (FIW) work plan outlined below. The table below includes the original objectives, deliverables, tiers, and timing and provides a status update for each item. As with the original outline, the objectives, deliverables, tiers, and timing are subject to change or evolve depending on any guidance received from the Council, including related to the draft HMS Roadmap.

<i>Tier</i>	<i>Work Period</i>	<i>Council Meeting Target for Deliverable</i>
1 = 0-5 months	June through October	September or November
2 = 6-9 months	November through February	March
3 = 10-12 months	March through May	April or June

Categories/Objectives		Deliverable	Tier/Deliverable Timing/Notes	Status Update
EFP process and timing (limited to a few key topics)		Surgical, high priority COP 20 proposed revisions	T1 (September 2025)	Complete; the Council adopted the revisions at the September Council meeting
EFP process and timing (for issues not addressed in the first round of proposed revisions)		Proposed revisions to COP 20*	T1/T2/T3 (March/April 2026)	In progress
EFP applications (required/desired contents and review criteria)		Proposed revisions to COP 20*	T1/T2/T3 (March/April 2026)	In progress
EFP guidance		Proposed revisions to COP 20; identification of new materials (e.g., webpage, video, etc.), development of enhanced practices (e.g., technical support and pre-submittal review)	T3 (June 2026) – Suggest tackling after development of proposed revisions to COP 20.	In progress
EFP evaluation	Reporting	Proposed revisions to COP 20*	T2/T3 (March/April 2026)	To be covered early 2026

	Performance goals/metrics	Recommended performance goals/metrics (as proposed revisions to COP 20)*	T1 (check-in with the Council in November 2025) T2/T3 (deliverable submitted in March/April 2026)	In progress (with a focus on performance metrics)
Other (non-COP 20 related) ideas to support facilitate EFPs		Additional recommendations to the Council.	Ongoing/as needed	Ongoing
Review the draft HMS Roadmap		HMS Roadmap	Clean version to be submitted for the Nov Council meeting	Ongoing
National Seafood Strategy alignment		Crosswalk between the National Seafood Strategy and Roadmap (F.4.a FIW Report 1).	Ongoing collaboration between NMFS and the Council	Ongoing
Discuss relevant innovative fishery tools or measures to support a robust HMS fishery		TBD. SMART goals, other Council recommendations, workshop reports (e.g., from the Dynamic Ocean Management workshop), etc.	T3 (June 2026) – To be tackled once the other elements above have been advanced	

*The appropriate form for each deliverable will be discussed as each topic is covered by the FIW. For some information/procedures, COP 20 will be the appropriate place for documentation, while other topics may be more appropriately documented in the HMS Fishery Management Plan or other sources (e.g., Council webpages, other resource documents, etc.).

APPENDIX D: REMAINING EFP TOPICS FOR THE FIW TO ADDRESS

The FIW will address the following EFP topics during the next several months. The FIW plans to provide final recommendations on these topics, tentatively scheduled for March 2026.

<i>EFP Process Recommendations in Progress or to be Covered</i>	
Topic	Subtopic
EFP Application and Guidance	Submission protocol
	Application contents*
	Guidance materials*
EFP Review Process	Renewal process
	“Fast tracking” applications under certain conditions?
	Priority consideration of EFPs addressing certain topics
	Review from the Advisory Bodies (including the SSC)
	Review criteria/questions
	Recommending denial of an EFP application
	Other ways to simplify, streamline, or clarify the process
EFP Evaluation	Performance metrics*
	Requested reporting elements*
	Review and evaluation process*
Other COP 20 Elements	Updates to other sections (definitions, purpose, roles)

*To be informed by the performance metrics in development.

PFMC

10/22/25