

April 2022 Decision Summary Document

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Council Meeting Decision Summary Documents are highlights of significant decisions made at Council meetings. Results of agenda items that do not reach a level of highlight significance are typically not described in the Decision Summary Document. For a more detailed account of Council meeting discussions, see the Council meeting record and transcripts.

Habitat Issues

Current Habitat Issues

The Habitat Committee (HC) provided updates on several habitat-related issues including an update on the status of Sacramento River Chinook salmon, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program, and more. The Council considered a draft comment letter on the Klamath Dam Removal Environmental Impact Statement and approved it for transmittal to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. The Council also gave direction to develop a comment letter via the quick response procedure, on the Morro Bay Wind Energy Area Draft Environmental Assessment.

Salmon Management

Methodology Review Preliminary Topic Selection

The Council supported the majority of items for review submitted by the Model Evaluation Workgroup (MEW), Salmon Technical Team (STT), and the Scientific and Statistical Committee including:

1. Technical review of the updates associated with 'Round 7.1.1' of the Fishery Regulation Assessment Model (FRAM) base period as they relate to modeled abundances of Chinook salmon stocks used in determining the southern resident killer whale (SRKW) Chinook salmon abundance threshold (assigned to MEW and STT, with support from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Northwest Indian Fish Commission and National Marine Fisheries Service [NMFS]).
2. Technical review of the updates to Chinook salmon ocean distribution models that derive from two publications (Shelton et al. 2019, 2021) and are used to apportion the modeled abundance of Chinook salmon stocks among ocean regions (assigned to the SSC with support from Northwest Fishery Science Center and Southwest Fishery Science Center).
3. Discussion of whether the Sacramento Index forecast should be expressed as a mean or median (assigned to STT and SSC).
4. Review of the basis behind the Sacramento River Fall Chinook conservation objective (assigned to SSC, with support from California Department of Fish and Wildlife and NMFS).

5. Fisheries Regulation Assessment Model (FRAM) technical detail documentation (assigned to MEW).

2022 Management Measure – Final Action

The Council adopted management measures for 2022 ocean salmon fisheries and will transmit its recommendations to National Marine Fisheries Service for implementation by May 16, 2022. Detailed management measures and a press release are posted on the Council's webpage.

Coastal Pelagic Species Management

Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs) for 2022-2023 – Final Action

The Council approved three EFP proposals designed to support stock assessments for Pacific sardine. This includes a total amount of up to 830 mt for nearshore acoustic-trawl sampling, nearshore aerial surveys, and directed biological sampling.

Pacific Sardine Assessment, Harvest Specifications, and Management Measures – Final Action

The Council adopted the following 2022 sardine stock assessment update, harvest specifications, and management measures for the 2022-2023 sardine fishing season.

Biomass	27,369 mt
Overfishing Limit	5,506 mt
P* (Uncertainty) Buffer	0.40
Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC _{Tier 2})	4,274 mt
Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	4,274 mt
Annual Catch Limit (ACT)	3,800 mt

In addition, the Council endorsed up to 830 mt of sardine catch by the EFPs recommended under Agenda Item E.2.

Management accountability measures include:

1. Incidental landing limit in CPS fisheries of 20 percent.
2. If landings in the live bait fishery attain 2,500 mt, a per landing limit of one mt of Pacific sardine per trip will apply to the live bait fishery.
3. If the ACT of 3,800 mt is attained, a per trip limit of one mt of Pacific sardine applies to all CPS fisheries.
4. An incidental per landing allowance of two mt of Pacific sardine in non-CPS fisheries until the ACL is reached.

Fishery Management Plan Management Categories – Final Action

The Council approved final amendatory language for CPS FMP Amendment 19, which will remove the categories of Active, Monitored, and Prohibited. The Council also expressed support for a housekeeping amendment for future consideration.

Groundfish Management

Trawl Cost Recovery Report

The Council received the annual trawl cost recovery report from the National Marine Fisheries Service and discussed the ongoing questions about the cost recovery determinations and whether there might be opportunities to reduce program costs. The Council will consider focusing on cost recovery as part of its upcoming periodic catch share program review. Planning for an initiation of that review is currently scheduled for the September 2022 Council meeting.

Biennial Harvest Specifications for 2023-2024 Fisheries – Final Action

The Council adopted final 2023 and 2024 harvest specifications under default harvest control rules (HCRs) for all stocks and complexes except Oregon black rockfish, quillback rockfish, and the Nearshore Rockfish complexes north and south of 40°10' N. lat. (see Tables 1-3 and 1-4 in the analytical document informing this action). The Council adopted Alternative 1 for Oregon black rockfish, which maintains an acceptable biological catch (ABC)/annual catch limit (ACL) of 512 mt for 2023 and 2024 before returning to the default HCR (ACL = ABC with an overfishing probability (P*) of 0.45 thereafter). The Council deferred a final decision on quillback rockfish harvest specifications and those for the Nearshore Rockfish complexes until June. While the Council decided to continue to manage quillback rockfish in the Nearshore Rockfish complexes for the next two years, they requested an analysis to help determine the contribution of quillback to the Nearshore Rockfish complex ACLs, and an analysis to help determine the apportionment of quillback rockfish north and south of 40°10' N. lat. The contribution of quillback rockfish using projections from the Oregon and Washington assessments will be based on the default HCR (ACL = ABC, P* = 0.45) with the following alternatives for the California quillback rockfish contribution based on projections from the rebuilding analysis:

- No Action: ACL < ABC with 40:10 adjustment; P* = 0.45, 2023 ACL contribution = 0.11 mt ("Method 2" as recommended by the GMT),
- Alternative 1: spawning potential ratio (SPR) = 0.55; 2023 ACL contribution = 1.76 mt, 2024 ACL contribution = 1.93 mt; P* = 0.45, and
- Alternative 2: SPR = 0.60; 2023 ACL contribution = 1.46 mt, 2024 ACL contribution = 1.61 mt; P* = 0.45.

In addition to the above alternatives, the Council requested the calculation of a coastwide OFL of quillback rockfish to help determine quillback's contribution to the Nearshore Rockfish complex OFLs. This calculation would be apportioned north and south of 40°10' N. lat. according to area-based contributions.

Preliminary Preferred Management Measure Alternatives for 2023-2024 Fisheries

The Council adopted their preliminary preferred groundfish management measure alternatives for 2023 and 2024 as described and recommended by the Tribes, the GAP, and the GMT (Supplemental Report 3 and Report 4). The Council directed the GMT and Council staff to continue to develop and analyze a series of management measures for consideration and final decision at their June 2022 meeting, which include, but are not limited to routine management measures, catch control mechanisms (such as block area closures for Pacific spiny dogfish) annual catch targets for quillback rockfish and copper rockfish off of California, and proposed revisions to the Non-trawl Rockfish Conservation Area boundaries and allowed gear types. Additionally, the Council specified language for an amendment to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan that would specify a 2,000 mt threshold that would trigger Council review of shortbelly rockfish policy. Final action on 2023-2024 groundfish management measures is scheduled for the Council's June 2022 meeting.

Implementation of the 2022 Pacific Whiting Fisheries Under the U.S./Canada Agreement

The Council received a briefing on this year's U.S./Canada Pacific Whiting Treaty process. The Joint Management Committee, the decision-making body in the whiting treaty process, recommended a 2022 coastwide (U.S. + Canada) whiting total annual catch (TAC) of 545,000 mt. NMFS anticipates publishing a proposed rule for a 2022 U.S. whiting TAC and interim sector allocations in late April/early May and a final rule after public notice and comment on the proposed TAC.

Non-trawl Sector Area Management Measures

The Council is considering the following revisions to the Non-trawl Rockfish Conservation Area (in addition to those proposed for the 2023-24 fisheries) and Cowcod Conservation Areas. The Council revised the range of alternatives as recommended in Supplemental GMT Report 1 and CDFW Report 1:

Alternative 1: Allow non-trawl fishery vessels (open access and limited entry fixed gear) and vessels that use fixed gear in the individual fishing quota program ("gear switchers") to use approved non-bottom contact hook and line gear in the Non Trawl Rockfish Conservation Area (NT_RCA) between 46°16' and the border of Mexico. Vertical hook and line gear anchored to the bottom, longline, and dinglebar gear would be prohibited for use under this measure.

- Suboption 1: Limited Entry Fixed Gear (LEFG) vessels targeting groundfish to fish in the NT_RCA using approved hook & line gear may fish up to LEFG trip limits.

Alternative 2: Adjust the seaward boundary of the NT_RCA from 100 fathoms to 75 fathoms from 46° 16' North Latitude to 34° 27' N. lat. for both groundfish and directed halibut fishing activity.

- Suboption 1a: Prohibit all bottom contact groundfish gear in groundfish essential fish habitat (EFHCA) that would otherwise be reopened under this action.
- Suboption 1b: Prohibit groundfish non-trawl bottom contact gear in the entire EFHCA for trawl EFHCAs with small portions outside the existing nontrawl RCA seaward boundary, as recommended in F.6.a Supplemental HC Report 1.
- Suboption 2: Prohibit commercial groundfish fishing with nontrawl bottom contact gear in the area west of the Heceta Bank EFHCA, as proposed in F.6.a Supplemental ODFW Report 1.
- Suboption 3: Identify potential new Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Areas that could be used to mitigate impacts to yelloweye rockfish resulting from this action, which could be implemented in biennial management measures or inseason action.

Alternative 3: Repeal the Cowcod Conservation Areas (CCA) For Commercial and Recreational Fisheries.

- Include development of new non-trawl RCA lines around islands and banks for management within the current boundaries of the CCA as described in E.5.a., Supplemental CDFW Report 1
- Include analysis of new proposed area restrictions identified in F.6.a CDFW Report 1 for a) Hidden Reef, b) West of Santa Barbara Island c) Potato Bank, d) 107/118 Bank, e) Cherry Bank, f) Seamount 109, g) Northeast Bank, and h) the 43-Fathom Spot.

Alternative 4: NT_RCA adjustments off WA for pot gear

This alternative would open areas generally located seaward of the 75 fm line to pot gear off of Washington but may be defined by coordinates that do not necessarily follow a single depth contour. This alternative will be refined in the future to ensure the open areas would satisfy the objectives described in Agenda item E.6.a, Supplemental WDFW Report 1, November 2021. The Council also recommended analyzing pot gear impacts from groundfish fishing to any bottom trawl EFHCA that overlap with the area 75-100 fathoms off Washington.

The Council eliminated an alternative which would have removed the NT_RCA from 46 16 N. latitude to 34 27 N. latitude from the range of alternatives due to the lack of data available for analysis. This alternative was moved to the groundfish workload prioritization list instead, for consideration at a later date. Additionally, the Council recommended developing block area closures for non-trawl gears under each alternative for mitigating bycatch of other groundfish stocks, as well as protected or prohibited species. The Council also recommended that staff revise the Purpose and Need Statement to reflect the development of new area management measures that provide for the protection and conservation of sensitive habitats.

The Council is scheduled to adopt preliminary preferred alternatives for this item at its September 2022 meeting.

Electronic Monitoring Update

The Council's Groundfish Electronic Policy and Technical Advisory Committees reported on efforts to create a more cost-effective method for catch accounting that is intended to verify the accuracy of logbook entries. They also identified subgroups of committee members to work with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission on potential industry funding mechanisms and to evaluate sampling, data handling, and data processing protocols related to the 3-week turnaround requirement. Committee members also plan to track the NMFS Information Law Procedural Directive. The Council's next update on electronic monitoring is scheduled for September 2022.

Inseason Adjustments – Final Action

The Council did not receive any inseason adjustment recommendations from the GMT, GAP, or stakeholders and took no action.

Pacific Halibut Management

Incidental Catch Limits for the Salmon troll Fishery – Final Action

The Council adopted final incidental halibut catch limits as follows:

Open May 16, 2022, through the end of the 2022 salmon troll fishery, and beginning April 1, 2023, until modified through inseason action or superseded by the 2023 management measures. License holders may land no more than one Pacific halibut per two Chinook, except one Pacific halibut may be landed without meeting the ratio requirement, and no more than 35 halibut landed per trip.

Enforcement

Annual U.S. Coast Guard West Coast Fishery Enforcement Report

The Council received an annual report from the USCG. Council members were pleased to meet Rear Admiral Melvin Bouboulis and expressed their appreciation for the important role of the USCG in fishery management both with respect to enforcement activities and search-and-rescue activities.

Administrative Matters

Final West Coast Regional Framework for Determining the Best Scientific Information Available

The Council considered the NMFS draft regional framework for determining best scientific information available, and requested the NMFS West Coast Region consider the comments and recommendations provided by the Scientific and Statistical Committee. The policy directive requires the Best Scientific Information Available framework be completed by May 7, 2022.

Membership Appointments and Council Operating Procedures

The Council made the following Advisory Body Appointments:

- Dr. Brittany Schwartzkopf was appointed to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) position on the Coastal Pelagic Species Management Team (CPSMT) currently held by Dr. Kevin Hill
- Ms. Taylor Debevec was appointed to the NMFS position on the CPSMT currently held by Mr. Joshua Lindsay.

- Ms. Laura Brown was appointed to the WDFW position on the Habitat Committee currently held by Ms. Randi Thurston.
- Ms. Emily Shallow was appointed to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife position on the Model Evaluation Workgroup.

The Council reviewed existing vacancies and recommended soliciting nominations for the following vacancies after the April meeting (Visit the Council's Vacancy Page):

- Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) – Processor At-Large
- Habitat Committee – Northwest or Columbia River Tribal

The Council anticipates soliciting nominations for the following positions in late-June:

- Coastal Pelagic Species Advisory Subpanel – Washington Commercial Position
- Salmon Advisory Subpanel – Washington Charter Operator
- Habitat Committee – Sport Fishery Representative

Finally, at its June 2022 meeting, the Council is scheduled to revisit the proposed formation of a new ad hoc committee focused on the issue of stock definitions in the Groundfish Management Plan.