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NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Report from the Joint Meeting of the Groundfish Plan Teams

September 8-9, 2026

BSAI Groundfish Plan Team Members:

Steve Barbeaux	AFSC REFM (co-chair)	Kirstin Holsman	AFSC REFM
Kalei Shotwell	AFSC REFM (co-chair)	Andy Kingham	AFSC FMA
Cindy Tribuzio	AFSC ABL (vice chair)	Beth Matta	AFSC REFM
Diana Stram	NPFMC (coordinator)	Andrew Seitz	UAF
Lukas DeFilippo	AFSC	Jane Sullivan	AFSC ABL
Allan Hicks	IPHC	Steven Whitney	NMFS AKRO
Lisa Hillier	WDFW		

GOA Groundfish Plan Team Members:

Jim Ianelli	AFSC REFM (co-chair)	Pete Hulson	AFSC ABL
Chris Lunsford	AFSC ABL (co-chair)	Nat Nichols	ADF&G
Sara Cleaver	NPFMC (coordinator)	Paul Spencer	AFSC REFM
Meaghan Bryan	AFSC REFM	James Thorson	AFSC REFM
Abby Jahn	NMFS AKRO	Sophia Wassermann	AFSC RACE
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Introduction

The Joint Bering Sea Aleutian Islands (BSAI) and Gulf of Alaska (GOA) Groundfish Plan Teams met at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, Seattle, WA from September 8-9, 2026 to review a joint [agenda](#) of information to inform the 2027 specifications process. All Team members were present (in person or remote) with the exception of one member of the GOA team on sabbatical. Between 30-60 members of the public, state and agency staff were also in-person or online throughout the meeting.

Council Updates

Sara Cleaver and Diana Stram provided an overview of upcoming Council activities and the revised Council meeting schedule whereby the February meeting will occur late in February with the spring meeting will be late May 2027. Upcoming items in 2027 include on-going HCR work, ACL analysis, GOA Tanner crab protection measures in the GOA and a Bering Sea herring PSC limit adjustment analysis. The Teams discussed potential meeting dates in 2027 noting that the November meeting would occur Nov 15-19, 2027 but that dates for September 2027 were still in flux with options to meet early in September 7-10; 13-17 or 20-24 with pros and cons to each of those meeting weeks. The Team will revisit setting a September date at the November 2026 Plan Team meeting.

AFSC Updates

Melissa Haltuch provided a presentation on several recurring issues pertaining to SSMA and MESA assessments.

The Teams agreed with the suggested process for data updates: changing model structure/data treatment, adding all available (finalized) data to the September models, and then making model changes to fit the data. The Teams did not want to prescribe a specific date for data pulls; but suggested authors use their discretion to use the most current data that allows them to meet their September document deadlines. **The Teams recommended AFSC leadership work with authors to provide general protocols in the stock assessment guidelines for retrieving data.** The Teams also discussed effects of a partial year of data for stocks which have significant catches in the latter part of the year. FMA indicated that authors looking at more recent data earlier helps FMA staff fix the data for the assessments.

The Teams suggested that assessment authors use a standardized set of projection scenarios across all assessments, with scenario numbers kept consistent and updated in the guidelines as needed. Exceptions or stock-specific issues can be addressed on an ad hoc basis.

The Teams supported the proposal that authors each provide a standardized stock summary slide for the Teams to use as the basis for the SSC presentation. A template will be developed, with content adjustable following the Plan Team meeting. This is intended to distribute workload and improve efficiency.

The Teams addressed significant concerns about reduced age data capacity. About 40% of aging staff capacity has been lost, particularly experienced readers for difficult-to-age species, leading to fewer ages available for 2026 assessments. **The Teams acknowledged the erosion of this capacity and recommended the AFSC increase aging capacity.** While the Teams discussed potential alternative methods like FT-NIRS and epigenetic aging, these still require experienced staff for validation and maintenance. **The Teams recommended maintaining age sample collections despite lack of aging capacity.**

ESR Climate Update

Bridget Ferriss presented the joint Ecosystem Status Report (ESR) update on climate and physical oceanography for the eastern Bering Sea (EBS), Aleutian Islands (AI), and GOA. The presentation described a very weak winter 2025/26 Aleutian Low, which drove cooler Arctic air into all three regions and produced extensive sea ice in the EBS and the largest 2°C cold pool since 2012. The AI continued to experience warm conditions and sustained marine heatwave patterns since 2015, though a reprieve from heatwave thresholds occurred April–July before waters warmed again in August. The GOA saw average to cool 2026 ocean temperatures at the surface and depth following a warm 2025, with the exception of Southeast Alaska, which remained warm. Reduced surface shelf circulation in the GOA was tied to the weak Aleutian Low. The authors highlighted a 90% chance of a “very strong” El Niño developing in fall/winter 2026/27, potentially the strongest since 1950.

Discussion mainly focused on forecasting potential El Niño impacts. In response to a question about whether an emerging marine heatwave (“blob”) event could be detected in advance, the author noted that satellite data can track warm water masses in real time, that the GOA is currently cooling toward average conditions, and that this is a more favorable starting point than entering a strong El Niño with elevated heat already present in the system, as occurred with the 2014 blob. Kirstin Holsman noted that new forecast tools using the MOM6 climate model, which performs historical reconstructions to depth and is being used for projections from Baja to the Bering Sea, are expected to be available in October, though skill assessment is still underway. Ivonne Ortiz added that forecast outcomes are sensitive to the dominant wind used in the model (Northeast Pacific versus West Pacific El Niño patterns), that an alternative seasonal forecast model runs to April 2026, and that forecasting past the winter boundary in Alaska (January/February) remains difficult. Responding to a question on timing, Bridget indicated that El Niño effects are already appearing in the California Current and could reach the GOA, particularly Southeast Alaska, as early as late fall 2026 to early 2027. A longer lag is expected for the AI and Bering Sea. The authors plan to provide an update at the November meeting.

A member of the public raised a question regarding the expected timeline and intensity of impacts to groundfish stocks. Bridget noted that responses would be stock-specific, with age-0 fish typically the most sensitive and cohort-level effects (strong or weak year classes) likely taking a few years to become apparent. Adult impacts, if they occur, would more likely be indirect, through prey availability or shifts in distribution to deeper/cooler water, and would require a stronger El Niño event. Regarding a question about impacts to marine mammals, Bridget noted higher-than-average gray whale stranding rates during the northward migration this year, similar to strandings observed in 2019/2020 that were linked to poor Bering Sea feeding conditions. However, it is not yet known whether this year's strandings are related to warmer waters encountered along the migration route.

ESP and DSEM Update

Kalei Shotwell presented an update on Ecosystem and Socioeconomic Profiles (ESPs) and dynamic structural equation model (DSEM) workflow.

During the ESP workflow presentation, the authors provided a high-level overview of the ESP structure and workflow to give the team broad context ahead of the specific GOA Arrowtooth Flounder and Pollock presentations. The authors requested feedback on their development of a standard set of diagnostics and walkthrough workflow. In response to concerns regarding how teams should review the new workflow, the authors clarified that specific assessment feedback will be collated into a general Plan Team discussion, recorded in the minutes, and incorporated into future iterations. The Teams suggested exploring alternative tools beyond the current Directed Acyclic Graph (DAG) toolbox. Finally, the authors clarified the distinction between report stages, noting that a draft represents a partial ESP; the Teams are encouraged to provide feedback on this preliminary work so the authors can integrate it into the final ESP report.

The authors requested feedback on three questions:

1. Should the ESP-DSEM workflow become the standard for AFSC ESPs, and what concerns should be addressed?
2. Are the proposed diagnostics sufficient to evaluate ESP-DSEMs, or are additional diagnostics needed?
3. Given the proposed workflow, should the current list of stocks identified for ESPs be revised, and which stocks should be prioritized or added?

The Teams and members of the public discussed the timeline and process for integrating ESP products into stock assessments, including the testing needed to establish operational readiness and evaluate the stability of results as new data are incorporated. The authors reported that estimates from the GOA pollock ESP remained similar after additional data were included. They acknowledged uncertainty about how long DAG structures would remain appropriate and suggested a three- to five-year timeline for reevaluating them and incorporating new variables and data, followed by continued testing. They requested feedback from the Plan Teams and SSC and suggested that stock assessment authors were well placed to propose reevaluation schedules suited to their assessments.

The Teams asked how uncertainty could be accounted for across biological processes and how relationships among variables would be represented in DAGs. The authors explained that uncertainty could be incorporated across processes and that DAGs could share variables and represent recruitment and growth together. The Teams also asked how a model focused on a single process, such as recruitment, would be evaluated and used in projections. The authors described the workflow as an effort to improve understanding of these processes and noted that they had not yet applied DSEM to projections, which

they viewed as a major challenge. DSEMs could also be developed for growth where assessment authors considered this useful. The authors emphasized that these remain research models that inform the risk table. The Teams noted that the ESP process adds value by identifying potentially informative covariates and correlations that might otherwise be overlooked.

The Teams discussed whether DSEM development could proceed before completion of a full ESP to accelerate its potential use in assessments and management. The authors emphasized that the ESP-DSEM workflow provides a collaborative process for developing mechanism tables and DAGs before fitting DSEMs. Although an assessment author could proceed independently, the collaborative approach provides additional expertise and support for identifying stock-specific indicators. The authors also clarified that ESP development could be initiated by an assessment author or recommended by a Plan Team or the SSC.

The Teams recommended adding a step to the stock-specific workflow to document available evidence for linkages among variables. The authors considered the GOA pollock application promising and emphasized the need to develop a workflow that could be applied across stocks, with Plan Team input helping to guide that development. **The Teams suggested reviewing the workflow jointly to build shared experience with the process.**

The Teams also discussed staff capacity to develop ESPs and review the resulting assessment products. The authors indicated that requests from the Plan Teams, SSC, or Council could provide a basis for assigning work to staff. **The Teams recommended that expansion or further development of existing ESPs, and creation of new ESPs, be supported by dedicated staff time rather than relying solely on stock assessment authors.** The authors acknowledged that implementation would depend on available staff time and that requests might need to be queued according to priorities. The Teams expressed concern about capacity both to develop ESPs and to review stock assessments.

Longline Survey

Pat Malecha presented results from the 2026 AFSC longline survey, conducted over 35 days from June 2 to July 4 aboard the F/V Alaska Leader. The 2026 survey followed the reduced-effort design implemented in 2025. Under the revised design, the GOA is sampled in odd years and the BSAI is sampled in even years, compared with the historical design in which the GOA was sampled annually and the BS and AI were sampled in alternating years.

The survey program is discontinuing extrapolation into unsampled areas. Historically, annual changes in the GOA RPN were used to estimate the unsurveyed BS or AI component and produce an Alaska-wide index. Because the GOA is no longer surveyed annually, that approach can no longer be applied consistently. The survey is also discontinuing the extrapolated western Aleutian Islands RPN, which was based on historical relationships rather than direct sampling in that area.

The AI were last sampled in 2022 and the BS in 2023. Relative to those surveys, sablefish RPN increased by 26% in the AI and decreased by 14% in the BS; abundance remained well above the long-term mean and was at or near historical highs in the AI. Pacific cod RPN decreased by 22% in the AI and increased by 33% in the BS. Greenland turbot RPN decreased by 58% in the AI and 41% in the BS, continuing the recent declining survey trend. Killer whale depredation was lower in the BS and was not observed in the AI, and no sperm whale depredation was recorded. Temperature patterns were generally consistent with those reported in the Ecosystem Status Reports.

The Teams discussed whether increasing sablefish abundance could increase hook competition and affect RPNs for other species. Pat noted that most non-sablefish RPNs are not used directly in stock assessments, with GOA Pacific cod, shortspine thornyhead, and BSAI Greenland turbot among the exceptions, and that uncertainty in the estimates is sufficiently large that precise correction for hook competition would be difficult.

HCRs Update

Diana Stram, Kirsten Holsman, Paul Spencer, Angela Abolhassani, and Meaghan Bryan presented an informational update on the NPFMC directed work on risk and uncertainty in the groundfish and crab harvest specifications process and development of alternative harvest control rules (HCRs). The Teams recognized the incredible amount of work done by this team and greatly appreciated their presentation and the opportunity for discussion. Of ten proposed HCRs, four are being considered: status quo (HCR1), a constant catch to a slow increase in catch at high biomass (HCR5), an HCR responsive to an environmental relationship (HCR7), and a constant catch at higher biomass (HCR10). Projections were being done with various models and climate assumptions of status quo, an optimistic warming scenario (meaning slight warming), and a pessimistic warming scenario (increased warming). The authors noted that these projections will use the MOM6 model climate projections in the future.

Investigations of HCR7 had been done using the relationship between recruitment and temperature for EBS walleye pollock. Following the questions from the Teams and the public, the authors clarified that the parameters (omegas) of HCR7 that determine the changes in F_{abc} , B_{target} , and B_{lim} were determined by calculating F_{abc} , B_{target} , and B_{lim} in a population dynamics model and estimating a relationship to temperature (although it could be a different environmental covariate). The uncertainty in projecting the environmental covariate was discussed, and it was noted that less frequently assessed stocks are a bigger concern due to a longer period needed to forecast. The Teams also noted that there is also uncertainty in the relationship with the environmental variable. The EBS pollock example uses an estimated stock-recruit curve to determine how the reference points change with the environmental variable, and these relationships may not be simply transferable between stocks. Additionally, non-Tier 1 stocks do not base their reference points on stock-recruitment relationships. However, an analysis of the temporal patterns in recruits per spawner is possible for most age-structured stocks, and has been published in recent research on productivity for U.S. stocks. This type of analysis can provide the relative relationship regarding how reference points may proportionally change with an environmental covariate in HCR 7, even if the overall scale of the reference points are determined by Tier 3 analyses. It is an important step to determine if an environmental relationship can be estimated for individual stocks, and at a minimum it is necessary to get the direction of the relationship correct.

HCRs 5 and 10 can be evaluated using either a climate-robust approach (e.g., examining various maximum catch levels) or using a climate-informed approach (parameterizing the HCR based on a climate event such as a marine heat wave or other threshold event). Analyses can be done to determine threshold events using first and second derivatives of GAMs. A question from the public was whether the application of the HCRs would have to be reconciled with the 2 million ton cap in the Bering Sea. This was an important discussion point because the HCR determines the ABC and it depends how the NPFMC would determine a TAC.

The Teams discussed whether it was optimistic to do this for many species. It can be done because there are many multi-species models, recruit-spawner analyses for many Alaskan stocks are reported in Marshall et al. (2026), and Rceattle has the ability to estimate environmental relationships using DSEM. Also, multispecies analyses could be done and environmental relationships estimated for pooled similar species.

The discussion ended with the topics of performance metrics and stakeholder engagement. **The Teams recommended considering three additional types of performance metrics: 1) how often the stock collapses, 2) how quickly the stock rebuilds if below a certain threshold, and 3) how often catch (or ABC) falls below a defined threshold (or is zero).**

The Teams commended the authors for initiating a stakeholder engagement strategy and supported their work to develop plain-language summaries regarding potential future impacts of alternative HCRs. The Teams recognized the importance of this work and look forward to future updates. **The Teams would**

like to see a progress report presentation on stakeholder involvement following the May 2027 Council meeting.

The Teams concurred with the SSC recommendation to revisit testing model skill and evaluating performance metrics. The Teams discussed ways to evaluate outcomes of having alternative HCRs in place during outlier events, such as the marine heat wave that led to the closure of the GOA Pacific cod fishery in 2020. **The Teams recommended simulating conditions similar to this event to determine performance of the HCRs at the extremes.**

Josh Zahner presented on the sablefish MSE tool development and results of the spatial analysis. The Teams appreciated the clarity of the presentation and ongoing work by the sablefish MSE authors as a robust example of alternative HCR evaluation. There was some discussion regarding the stability of the movement model and its appropriateness for use in the MSE. The authors acknowledged there is still some difficulty estimating movement but it doesn't have an impact on the interpretation of HCR performance. There was also discussion regarding economic data limitations, which prevented direct integration of an economic module to change pricing in the model simulations.

Sablefish Proposed Models

Daniel Goethel and Matt Cheng presented the 2026 sablefish model development and results of the CIE review. The Teams acknowledged and greatly appreciated the substantial effort, thorough documentation, and extensive model development completed by the assessment team for the CIE review. The Teams considered the fleets-as-areas (FAA) approach an improvement over previous work and agreed that Model 26.2_FAA represented the best available science for moving forward.

The Teams discussed persistent difficulties fitting the plus group in both the single-region and FAA models. A sensitivity analysis that removed the Aleutian Islands plus-group observations had essentially no effect on model results, indicating that the current assessment was relatively robust to this lack of fit. Age-varying natural mortality was identified as one potential way to improve the plus-group fit. The Teams also noted that the poor fit to the plus group was primarily associated with a limited historical period and was much less evident in recent years.

Natural mortality remained an important source of model tension. Likelihood profiles supported lower M values when fitting the age-composition data and higher M values when fitting the abundance indices. The Teams discussed the potential for age-varying natural mortality, particularly at older ages, as a future research direction. One-step-ahead residuals did not identify additional major red flags beyond the composition-fit issues already discussed; however, the Teams noted that strong downweighting of the composition data reduced the power of the OSA diagnostics to identify lack of fit.

The CIE reviewers and assessment authors recommended removing the GOA bottom trawl survey index from the assessment because of its noise. Although the trawl survey had previously provided some early recruitment information, the longline survey appeared to provide a stronger recruitment signal. The Teams discussed whether Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands trawl survey information could be useful in the future, particularly as supplemental information or through the ESP, but noted that these surveys currently have shorter time series and limited sampling of sablefish habitat. Fishery-dependent trawl catch and length-composition data remain included in the assessment through a separate trawl fishery fleet.

The Teams discussed the carryover assumption required to construct an Alaska-wide longline survey index in the single-region model and considered it a strong assumption. The FAA model was viewed as an appropriate response to the realized survey design because it fits the regional data directly rather than requiring the data to be coerced into a single-region index. As a possible alternative for future single-region models, the Teams discussed using REMA to smooth regional survey estimates, sum them to obtain a predicted total, estimate the proportion of the population available to the regions surveyed in a given year, and include that proportion as a catchability or availability covariate. This approach could also

propagate uncertainty in the estimated proportion, but it would address only the survey index and would not resolve the corresponding problem for regional age compositions.

The Teams recommended Model 26.2_FAA as the candidate model for 2026 management advice. For November, the Teams recommended bringing forward Model 26.2_FAA, the updated single-region Model 26.1_1Reg, and the continuity/base Model 25.12_1Reg_Cont. Models 26.1_1Reg and 25.12_1Reg_Cont should be presented for comparison only; full diagnostic results are needed only for Model 26.2_FAA.

The Teams recommended avoiding further reductions in longline survey coverage and age-data collection and emphasized that maintaining the current level of sampling should be considered a minimum. The Teams further supported augmenting age information where Age and Growth capacity allows. The Teams noted that further reductions in survey coverage could make the assessment substantially more difficult and increase the likelihood of missing important recruitment events.

The author proposed updated apportionment methods. Given the change in the survey design, the previous methods were no longer applicable, and the proposed methods match with the survey design. The author described how the combination of the updated model and apportionment methods could potentially result in substantial changes to the BRDs from previous years. The Teams appreciated the author flagging this information and noted that decisions on BRDs are not made in September. Updated BRDs will be available for review in November.

For future work, the Team supported consideration of age-varying natural mortality for older age classes. The bootstrap method for determining composition input sample sizes should also be examined for the longline survey and fishery age compositions when possible.

Pacific cod Research Updates

Pacific cod in Alaska have been managed as three distinct stocks since the Aleutian Islands assessment was separated from the Bering Sea assessment in 2013, with the Gulf of Alaska managed separately under a different FMP. However, genetic and tagging data indicate substantial connectivity between the Western Gulf of Alaska (WGOA) and Eastern Bering Sea (EBS). Conventional tagging showed substantial movement between the WGOA and EBS and limited movement between the Central and Western GOA, with much of the inter-area movement occurring during January–March. Pop-up satellite tagging similarly indicated seasonal movement between the WGOA and EBS. Because current abundance indices are based on summer surveys and current operational assessment models are region/FMP-specific, they may not fully represent these seasonal spatial dynamics.

The Teams received a two-part presentation on Pacific cod connectivity and development of spatial assessment approaches. Steve Barbeaux presented exploratory two-area Stock Synthesis models for the EBS/NBS and WGOA. Models allowing annual variation in catchability fit the survey indices better, whereas models allowing movement fit length and age compositions better by altering growth, selectivity, and movement. Despite these differences, the models produced generally similar estimates of the spatial distribution of biomass, indicating greater agreement about the spatial state of the population than about the processes generating that state. Steve noted substantial confounding among catchability, movement, recruitment allocation, growth, and selectivity and described Stock Synthesis as capable of implementing a two-area model but cumbersome for rigorously comparing alternative hypotheses about spatial dynamics. He presented SPoRC, a spatial-first assessment framework implemented in R/RTMB, as a more flexible platform for continued spatial model development and incorporation of direct movement data.

The Teams discussed whether the observed confounding reflected limitations of Stock Synthesis or limitations of the available data. The Teams noted that spatial models can be implemented in Stock Synthesis and cautioned that moving to SPoRC would not by itself resolve confounding among

movement, recruitment, and other population processes. SPoRC was nevertheless considered better suited to explicitly testing alternative spatial hypotheses because of its spatial-first structure and support for random effects, tagging data, and simulation. The Teams emphasized the importance of incorporating conventional and satellite tagging data to better inform movement and discussed using SPoRC's simulation tools to evaluate the information gained from alternative tagging designs and numbers of tags. The Teams also noted that simulations alone would not resolve limitations in the real-world data and that further evaluation of model performance with the tagging data would be needed.

Pete Hulson presented ongoing WGOA Pacific cod spatial assessment research using SPoRC. The work is evaluating alternative definitions of subpopulations and regional boundaries using genetic, movement, tagging, and fishery information, including alternative treatment of area 620 in defining the WGOA and Central GOA regions. Four combinations of two- versus three-subpopulation structures and alternative regional definitions are being evaluated. Current data inputs include seasonal and regional catch, summer bottom-trawl survey indices, age and length compositions, and regional and seasonal biological information.

The proposed timeline is to continue refining model and data assumptions and present spatial model results to the Teams in September 2027, conduct a CIE review of the spatial model and apportionment alternatives in spring 2028, and present the CIE results and potential apportionment alternatives in fall 2028. The longer-term goal is to use MSE to evaluate the consequences of alternative and status quo ABC/TAC apportionment between the EBS and WGOA.

The Teams discussed the sequencing of spatial-model development and MSE and the potential management consequences of changing regional apportionment. The Teams clarified that the spatial model must first be developed and evaluated before it can be used within an MSE; MSE would then be used to evaluate the consequences of alternative spatial structures and apportionment approaches. The Teams also noted that any substantial change to Pacific cod management, particularly one involving seasonal allocation or cross-FMP considerations, would require careful development, clear communication with stakeholders, and sufficient time for the Council process.

The presenters emphasized two important data limitations. There is no abundance index for the winter/A season, so winter abundance must be inferred from catch, composition, and tagging information, and tagging data remain limited across space and time. The Teams discussed the need for continued tagging, including improved spatial representation in the Bering Sea, particularly if movement is to be related to environmental conditions.

During public comment, a question was raised about whether the genetically distinct northern Bering Sea group was defined from a single Russian sample location. The presenters clarified that the genetic baseline included samples from two locations, including a Russian sample and an additional northern Bering Sea sample. Additional discussion raised concern that tagging coverage might inadequately represent the Bering Sea. The presenters clarified that the majority of the historical conventional tagging data were actually from the Bering Sea, while agreeing that substantially more tagging would improve inference about movement and spatial proportionality.

Inseason Management Updates

Steve Whitney provided an overview of BSAI inseason management and catch through September 1. Overall catch in 2026 was similar to 2025, although he noted a broader decline in fishery utilization in recent years and continued reductions in the number of active Amendment 80 vessels. Flathead sole and rock sole catches have varied in recent years, with the colder conditions in 2026 contributing to changes in fishing patterns. Steve also emphasized the importance of voluntary industry cooperatives in managing choke species and avoiding exceedances of catch limits.

Abby Jahn provided the GOA inseason update. For pollock, Area 620 was fully utilized during the A season, while Area 610 was not fully utilized because of limited vessel participation and shifts in processing to other species. Pacific cod prices were reported to be high, contributing to new entrants in the Central GOA fixed-gear fishery, where full utilization was expected. The Western GOA Pacific cod A season was not fully utilized because of low catch rates and a pause in fishing, but increased effort was expected in the B-season pot fishery, including vessels moving from the Bering Sea.

Abby also reviewed GOA shortraker, thornyhead, rougheye/blackspotted rockfish, and skate catches in the context of the Council's interest in apportionment flexibility. None of these stocks had reached TAC as of the meeting, although some could do so before the end of 2026. Over the previous five years, Central GOA shortraker reached TAC and was placed on PSC status in 2022 and 2025, while thornyhead and rougheye/blackspotted rockfish had not reached TAC in any area. Central GOA big skate reached TAC and was placed on PSC status in 2025, and Western GOA longnose skate reached TAC and was placed on PSC status in 2023.

There was no substantive Team discussion or formal recommendation following the inseason updates.

Halibut DMRs

Mike Fey presented the annual update from the Halibut Discard Mortality Rate (DMR) Working Group. The primary methodological change for 2027–2028 was removal of the Gulf of Alaska Rockfish Program catcher-vessel operational group as a separate DMR category. This group had few recent assessments and relatively high variability in estimated DMRs. The category was originally separated because of concern that halibut condition might differ in Rockfish Program hauls, but the available assessments did not indicate a consistent difference. The Working Group therefore incorporated these observations into the broader non-pelagic trawl catcher-vessel operational group. Mike also noted that most Rockfish Program non-pelagic trawl activity occurs on catcher-processors, making the affected catcher-vessel sector relatively small.

Most other DMRs changed little. The GOA hook-and-line catcher-processor DMR declined from 12% to 8%. Because relatively few vessels operate in this sector and the estimated rates can be variable, the Working Group may consider using a longer averaging period, such as four years rather than the current two-year average, in future updates.

There was no substantive Team discussion or formal recommendation following the presentation.