



C4/C5 Joint, Gulf of Alaska, and Bering Sea Aleutian Islands Groundfish Harvest Specifications

December 2025 SSC Meeting

SSC Action Memo

- Council Staff: Sara Cleaver, Dr. Diana Stram
- Other Presenters: Dr. Ebett Siddon (AFSC - ESR); Gretchen Harrington, Krista Milani (NMFS)
- Action Required: Recommend final Gulf of Alaska (GOA) and Bering Sea Aleutian Islands (BSAI) Groundfish, and Alaska sablefish, harvest specifications for 2026 and 2027, including:
- Overfishing level (OFL) and Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) for all stocks.

Background

At the December meeting, the SSC will review available information and make recommendations to the Council for final harvest specifications (OFLs and ABCs) to manage the 2026 and 2027 BSAI and GOA groundfish fisheries. Once published in the Federal Register, the 2026 and 2027 harvest specifications (also including Council-recommended total allowable catch, TAC) will replace the 2026 harvest specifications implemented in March 2025 ([90 FR 12468](#) and [90 FR 12640](#)), and the 2027 specifications will be superseded in 2027 when the final 2027 and 2028 harvest specifications are published. The 2026 harvest specifications are set to expire March 17 (GOA) and March 18 (BSAI), 2026. The final 2026 and 2027 harvest specifications must publish before March 17 or 18, 2026 to prevent a lapse in specifications. The proposed rule which adopts the [harvest specifications recommended by the Council in October](#) had not been published as of November 20, 2025, and is behind schedule due to the recent government shutdown.

OFLs, ABCs, and Apportionments

The lapse in Federal appropriations from October 1 - November 12, 2025, has impacted the information available for the Council's typical process, in that Federal stock assessment authors did not have the time to complete new groundfish assessments as planned, and the Council's Groundfish Plan Teams did not convene to review stock assessments and provide recommendations on harvest specifications. As a result, the GOA and BSAI Groundfish SAFE Reports were not compiled this year. Instead, staff have identified in the [December 2025 process document](#) the information that is available to support final 2026-2027 specifications this year, so that decisions remain consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), including National Standard 2, as well as the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) and other federal requirements.

Catch reports ([GOA](#)) and ([BSAI](#)) were prepared in November 2025 for all stocks except GOA deepwater flatfish, which was scheduled for a harvest projection and completed and reviewed by the SSC in October 2025. The Council's most recent complete peer review process for groundfish assessments occurred in September-December 2024, with assessment products coming out of that process documented in the 2024 SAFE Reports ([GOA](#)) and ([BSAI](#)).

Historically, ESRs for the Eastern Bering Sea, the Aleutian Islands and the Gulf of Alaska have been presented during BSAI and GOA groundfish harvest specifications in December. At this meeting, AFSC staff will provide an Ecosystem Status Report preview / climate update in lieu of those reports. The presentation will be similar to that provided to the Joint Groundfish Plan Teams in September 2025, which included an overview of climate and oceanography sections of the ESR. Although complete 2025 ESRs are not available at this time, AFSC is in the process of determining if 2025 ESRs will be completed and if so, when they will be available. Prior year ESRs can be found [here](#).

GOA Groundfish

For the GOA, the SSC's recommendations for OFLs and ABCs for *proposed* harvest specifications for 2026 and 2027 were based on the 2024 SAFE Report, and were adopted by the Council in October 2025. [GOA Table 1](#) on the eAgenda includes the OFLs, ABCs, TACs, and area apportionments from those recommendations.¹ The sum of the 2026 and 2027 ABCs are compared to the final sums of 2025 and 2024 ABCs below. These sums include the Alaska-wide sablefish ABC. The 2027 OFLs, ABCs, and TACs are a rollover of the 2026 values.

2024	2025	2026	2027
599,784	590,762 mt	539,295 mt	539,295 mt

The decrease from the 2025 specifications to 2026/2027² is primarily driven by a ~25% decrease in the Western GOA/Central GOA/Western Yakutat pollock ABC. The proposed specifications reflect maximum permissible ABC (maxABC)s for all stocks in the GOA in 2026 and 2027, except for Alaska sablefish and rougheye/blackspotted rockfish.

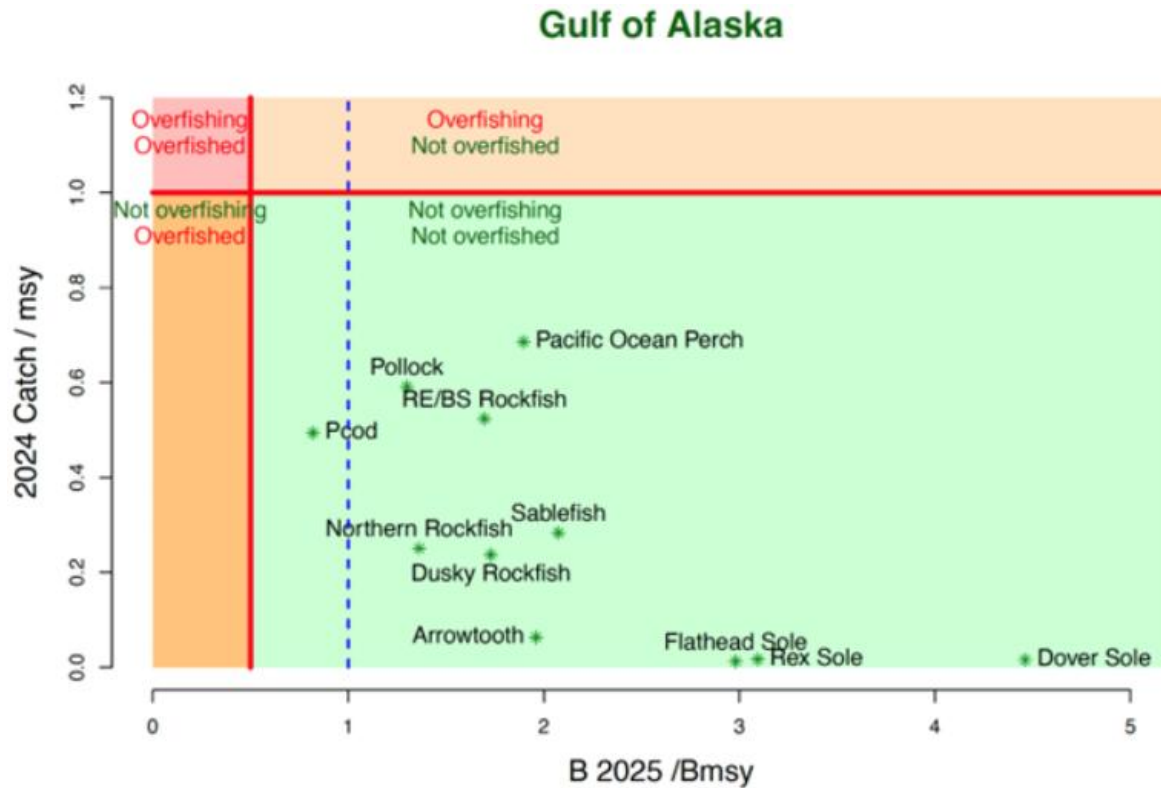
As illustrated in Figure 2 of the 2024 GOA SAFE introduction (shown below), **no stocks for which status determination criteria are available were overfished in 2024.**³ All stocks except for GOA Pacific cod ($B_{28.7\%}$) are above B_{MSY} or the B_{MSY} proxy ($B_{35\%}$), which is indicated by the blue dotted line in the figure below. GOA Pacific cod is determined to not be overfished because it is above its minimum stock size threshold (MSST).⁴ The determination of overfishing is assessed for the previous year (e.g., in 2025 the determination for overfishing in 2024 will be made). This is documented using the official catch estimate for the most recent complete year of catch (2024) in conjunction with the OFL for that year. Considering the 2024 information contained in Table 1 on the eAgenda, **no stocks were subject to overfishing in 2024.**

¹ With an adjustment to WGOA Pacific cod, per Alaska Board of Fish action, described below.

² For December 2025, projections for 2027 are not available except for GOA deepwater flatfish.

³ All stocks with age-structured stock assessments (Tiers 1-3)

⁴ As described in the GOA Groundfish FMP, per National Standard 1 guidance

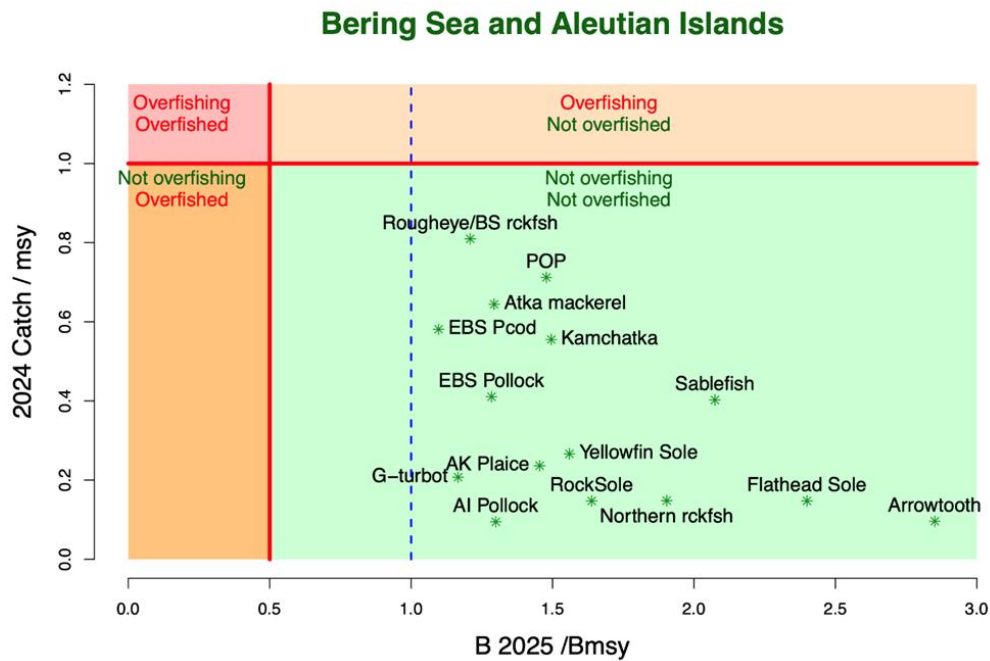


BSAI Groundfish

For the BSAI, the SSC's recommendations for OFLs and ABCs for *proposed* harvest specifications for 2026 and 2027 were based on the 2024 SAFE Report, and were adopted by the Council in October 2025. [BSAI Table 1](#) on the eAgenda includes the OFLs, ABCs, TACs, and area apportionments from those recommendations, if no changes are recommended by the SSC, the sum of the 2026 and 2027 ABCs are compared to the sums of 2025 and 2024 ABCs below. These sums include the Alaska-wide sablefish ABC. The decrease in ABCs from 2025 to 2026 is driven largely by decreases in EBS pollock (16%), EBS Pacific cod (8%), and Atka mackerel (10%), balanced against some increases in some flatfish stocks (Yellowfin sole, Northern rock sole, and flathead sole). The 2027 OFLs and ABCs recommended in October mirror the 2026 values. The proposed specifications reflect maximum permissible ABC (maxABC)s for all stocks in 2026 and 2027, except for Greenland turbot and sharks.

2024	2025	2026	2027
3,476,077 t	3,588,066 t	3,188,585 t	3,188,585 t

As illustrated in Figure 2 (below) of the 2024 BSAI SAFE report introduction, the status of BSAI stocks as estimated for 2025 continues to appear favorable. All stocks are above B_{MSY} or the B_{MSY} proxy of $B_{35\%}$, which is indicated by the blue dotted line in the figure below. Therefore for those stocks for which status determination criteria are available (as shown in the figure), **no stocks were overfished in 2024**. The determination of overfishing is assessed for the previous year (e.g. in 2025 the determination for overfishing in 2024 is made). This is documented using the official catch estimate for the most recent complete year of catch (2024) in conjunction with the OFL for that year. Considering the information contained in Table 1 on the eAgenda, **no stocks were subject to overfishing in 2024**.



BSAI SAFE Report Introduction Figure 2: Summary of Bering Sea stock status in 2025 (spawning biomass relative to B_{msy} ; horizontal axis) and current year catch relative to fishing at F_{msy} (vertical axis) where F_{OFL} is taken to equal F_{msy} . Note due to model changes in 2024, Aleutian Island cod is not included in this figure.

Spatial apportionment

In October 2025, the Council made a motion regarding [spatial apportionment of groundfish stocks](#). At that time, staff had indicated that resulting changes to harvest specifications tables and nomenclature (using the term “Biologically-informed Recommended Distribution, “BRD” to reflect spatial apportionments of a stock’s ABC) would be implemented in December 2025. Due to the shutdown of the federal government, these changes are delayed and will be implemented beginning in the fall 2026 harvest specifications cycle. Tables for December 2025 do not reflect the new nomenclature or format.