

E1 Groundfish Management Policy Review

Katie Latanich, June 2026



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Background

- Groundfish Management Policy Reviews are a long standing, self-imposed requirement established by the BSAI and GOA Groundfish FMPs to support adaptive management
 - Most recently completed 2022 for 2019-2021
 - Current review covers 2022-2025
 - Process requirement; does not require changes to be made
- The Management Policy includes a Management Approach statement, 9 goals, and 45 objectives (provided as Appendix 1 in Review Report)
 - Established in 2004 based on the analysis in the Programmatic Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement



Background

Review tasks

- Review the Groundfish Management Policy
- Review the Council's activities in support of the Management Policy
- Consider whether any modifications to the Management Policy are warranted
- Consider additional activities in support of the Management Policy



Background

Review document structure

1. Introduction
2. Summary of Council actions and activities (table format)
3. Discussion and themes
4. Next steps for the Council
5. Additional context for goals and objectives
6. Appendices



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Tasks and Potential Next Steps

Corresponds to Section 1: Introduction and Section 4: Next Steps



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Review takes a cumulative approach to:

- Reflect on the history of groundfish management
- Consider the Council's work on climate resilience planning and incorporation of LKTKS
- Consider FMP goals and objectives in the context of other Council policy guidance (e.g., Ecosystem Policy, Bering Sea FEP goals and objectives)



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The Council's work during the review period continues to generally align with and support the Management Policy as written, and staff did not identify any strong concerns or mismatches between the Management Policy and current Council practices. However, this document does identify opportunities for further Council discussion, including where the interpretation or implementation of a goal and/or objective may have evolved since it was written. (p. 2)



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Big picture questions:

- Does the Management Policy continue to provide timely and relevant guidance in light of current Council practices and priorities, operations of the groundfish fisheries, and understanding of the BSAI and GOA marine ecosystems?
- Does the Council want to consider updates, revisions, or clarifications, for example for purposes of communicating about the Council's values and priorities, providing guidance to staff, and providing transparency regarding how the Council considers information and tradeoffs in its management recommendations?



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Decision point: Modify the existing Management Policy? (p. 25)

- No action
 - Could reflect that FMP guidance can be interpreted in the context of current practices and information
- Modify the Groundfish FMP Management Approach, goals, and/or objectives; would require FMP amendment



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Decision point: Consider other actions in support of the Management Policy?

Other potential next steps could include the following (whether or not the Council wants to consider changes to the Management Policy). These are not mutually exclusive.

- Develop new policy guidance
- Develop a workplan for implementing goals and/or objectives
- Provide guidance for future policy reviews
- Provide guidance for future Groundfish Workplan updates
- Conduct policy review for other FMPs (crab)
- Outreach and communication opportunities
- Other ideas



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Additional sections of review document:

- Brief review of the Management Policy, including goals and objectives and highlights of Council work during and prior to the review period (Sections 2 and 5)
- Cross-cutting themes (Section 3)



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Review of Management Policy

Review of Council work in support of the Policy

Corresponds to Section 2: Summary of Council actions and activities (table format) and Section 5: Additional context



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2 sections of the review document provide a summary of Council work relative to goals and objectives.

- Section 2: Summary table by goal (p. 3)
 - Includes work during the review period (2022-2025) and examples of earlier work (2004-2021)



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Excerpt from Table 1: Summary of Council actions and activities (Section 2)

Goal 1: Prevent Overfishing		
Management objectives	Council actions and activities during the review period (2022-2025)	Examples of earlier actions 2004-2021
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adopt conservative harvest levels for multi-species and single species fisheries and specify optimum yield. 2. Continue to use the optimum yield cap for the BSAI and GOA groundfish fisheries. 3. Provide for adaptive management by continuing to specify optimum yield as a range. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Annual proposed and final groundfish harvest specifications for 2023-2027 ● Consideration of Harvest Control Rule (HCR) adjustments for climate resilience (also see Climate Resilience section) ● Best Scientific Information Available (BSIA) review ● Groundfish stock prioritization review ● Clarification of subarea apportionment procedures ● Consideration of modifying accountability measures by adding inseason management authority ● Separation of GOA Demersal Shelf Rockfish stock complex from Other rockfishes stock complex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establishment of current tier system, harvest policies, and harvest specifications process ● Establishment of OY as a range in BSAI and GOA ● Amendments to bring FMPs in line with 2006 MSA annual catch limit requirements ● Actively manage using appropriate species categories ● Ongoing improvement of stock assessment processes through CIE reviews ● Council policy and ongoing discussion of spatial management of stocks

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2 sections of the review document provide a summary of Council work relative to goals and objectives.

- Section 5: Additional context for goals and objectives (narrative; supplements summary tables. P. 28)
 - Key points, accomplishments, and challenges
 - Context for review of goal and objectives
 - Summary of Council work aligned with each objective

5. Additional context for individual goals and objectives

Section 5 of this review document provides a narrative description of how the Council's work during the review period (2022-2025) aligns with each goal and its associated objectives. **This is provided as additional detail and context for the discussion in Sections 1-4.** The description of each goal includes a discussion section with a summary of key points, accomplishments, and challenges, and context for the Council's review of each goal and the associated objectives. The description of individual FMP objectives provides additional information on recent Council actions and issues during the review period. In some cases, actions prior to the review period are included to provide more context for the evolution of groundfish management since 2004, though this is not intended to be comprehensive.

5.1 Goal 1: Avoid Overfishing

Objectives

1. Adopt conservative harvest levels for multi-species and single species fisheries and specify optimum yield.
2. Continue to use the optimum yield cap for the BSAI and GOA groundfish fisheries.
3. Provide for adaptive management by continuing to specify optimum yield as a range.
4. Provide for periodic reviews of the adequacy of F40 and adopt improvements, as appropriate.
5. Continue to improve the management of species through species categories.

Discussion

Key points, accomplishments, and challenges

The Council continues to achieve Goal 1 and implement the precautionary management approach stated in the Management Approach. Since the Management Policy was adopted no groundfish stock has been overfished or subject to overfishing. The Council has also been a national leader in setting and adhering to sustainable harvest levels over time. The harvest specifications process established by the Council pre-dates and helped shape the 2006 reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and subsequent revisions to the National Standard 1 Guidelines¹⁵, that established more stringent standards for Councils to avoid and end overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks and provide guidance for accounting for uncertainty in setting harvest levels. The Council also supported Goal 1 during the review period by participating in national-level dialogue with NMFS and the other Regional Fishery Management Councils, and by hosting the 7th national meeting of the Scientific Coordination Subcommittee, which focused on adapting fisheries management to a changing ecosystem.

The Council may increasingly face climate-related impacts to the performance of the established groundfish harvest strategies. For example, Gulf of Alaska Pacific cod experienced high natural mortality due to unusually warm conditions 2014-2016, prompting significant reductions in ABC compared to previous years. The Council, with the support of NMFS AFSC stock assessment authors, Plan Teams, and the SSC, continues to make progress on tools for documenting and considering climate-related uncertainty. Moving forward the Council may consider adjustments to improve climate resilience and strengthen consideration of uncertainty and risk through ABC control rules (Section 5.10).

¹⁵ NOAA Fisheries resources for MSA National Standard 1, including a timeline of revisions, available from: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/laws-and-policies/national-standard-1-related-resources>

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Goal 1: Avoid Overfishing (p. 28)

1. Adopt conservative harvest levels for multi-species and single species fisheries and specify optimum yield.
2. Continue to use the optimum yield cap for the BSAI and GOA groundfish fisheries.
3. Provide for adaptive management by continuing to specify optimum yield as a range.
4. Provide for periodic reviews of the adequacy of F40 and adopt improvements, as appropriate.
5. Continue to improve the management of species through species categories.



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Goal 1: Avoid Overfishing (p. 28)

Highlights

- Implementation of a precautionary management approach in line with NS1 and the Management Approach statement, including tier system, harvest policies, harvest specifications process, and establishing OY as a range
- No groundfish stocks have been overfished or subject to overfishing
- Climate-related impacts to performance of established harvest strategies and consideration of modified HCRs



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Goal 2: Promote Sustainable Fisheries and Communities (p. 34)

6. Promote conservation while providing for optimum yield in terms of the greatest overall benefit to the nation with particular reference to food production, and sustainable opportunities for recreational, subsistence, and commercial fishing participants and fishing communities.
7. Promote management measures that, while meeting conservation objectives, are also designed to avoid significant disruption of existing social and economic structures.
8. Promote fair and equitable allocation of identified available resources in a manner such that no particular sector, group or entity acquires an excessive share of the privileges.
9. Promote increased safety at sea.



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Goal 2: Promote Sustainable Fisheries and Communities (p. 34)

Highlights

- Objectives derived from the National Standards and are durable over time
- Because these considerations are applied to all Council management recommendations, specific Council actions are not tracked relative to Goal 2 and objectives



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Goal 3: Preserve Food Web (p. 36)

10. Develop indices of ecosystem health as targets for management.
11. Improve the procedure to adjust acceptable biological catch levels as necessary to account for uncertainty and ecosystem factors.
12. Continue to protect the integrity of the food web through limits on harvest of forage species.
13. Incorporate ecosystem-based considerations into fishery management decisions, as appropriate.



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Goal 3: Preserve Food Web (p. 36)

Highlights

- EBFM focus; early and proactive commitment to incorporating ecosystem information and considerations
 - Use of Ecosystem Status Reports, Ecosystem and Socioeconomic Profiles, Risk Tables to consider uncertainty and ecosystem factors in harvest specs
- Proactive limits on forage
- Milestones include Bering Sea FEP and LKTK and Climate action modules



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Goal 4: Manage Incidental Catch and Reduce Bycatch and Waste (p. 40)

14. Continue and improve current incidental catch and bycatch management program.
15. Develop incentive programs for bycatch reduction including the development of mechanisms to facilitate the formation of bycatch pools, vessel bycatch allowances, or other bycatch incentive systems.
16. Encourage research programs to evaluate current population estimates for non-target species with a view to setting appropriate bycatch limits, as information becomes available.
17. Continue program to reduce discards by developing management measures that encourage the use of gear and fishing techniques that reduce bycatch which includes economic discards.
18. Continue to manage incidental catch and bycatch through seasonal distribution of total allowable catch and geographical gear restrictions.
19. Continue to account for bycatch mortality in total allowable catch accounting and improve the accuracy of mortality assessments for target, prohibited species catch, and non-commercial species.
20. Control the bycatch of prohibited species through prohibited species catch limits or other appropriate measures.
21. Reduce waste to biologically and socially acceptable levels.



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Goal 4: Manage Incidental Catch and Reduce Bycatch and Waste (p. 40)

Highlights

- Evolution of bycatch management strategies over time including:
 - Incentive-based approaches
 - Cumulative refinements to PSC management
 - Movement toward more dynamic regulatory and non-regulatory management strategies and tools
 - Importance of monitoring and catch accounting, including new technology
- Objectives durable over time



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Goal 5: Avoid Impacts to Seabirds and Marine Mammals (p. 49)

22. Continue to cooperate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to protect ESA-listed species, and if appropriate and practicable, other seabird species.
23. Maintain or adjust current protection measures as appropriate to avoid jeopardy of extinction or adverse modification of critical habitat for ESA-listed Steller sea lions.
24. Encourage programs to review status of endangered or threatened marine mammal stocks and fishing interactions and develop fishery management measures as appropriate.
25. Continue to cooperate with NMFS and USFWS to protect ESA-listed marine mammal species, and if appropriate and practicable, other marine mammal species.



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Goal 5: Avoid Impacts to Seabirds and Marine Mammals (p. 49)

Highlights

- Reflect requirements for consistency with other Federal laws; durable over time
- Protection for the western DPS of Steller sea lions a major influence at the time the Management Policy was adopted
- Similarities with Ecosystem Policy and Bering Sea FEP objectives



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Goal 6: Reduce and Avoid Impacts to Habitat (p. 53)

26. Review and evaluate efficacy of existing habitat protection measures for managed species.
27. Identify and designate essential fish habitat and habitat areas of particular concern pursuant to Magnuson-Stevens Act rules, and mitigate fishery impacts as necessary and practicable to continue the sustainability of managed species.
28. Develop a Marine Protected Area policy in coordination with national and state policies.
29. Encourage development of a research program to identify regional baseline habitat information and mapping, subject to funding and staff availability.
30. Develop goals, objectives and criteria to evaluate the efficacy and suitable design of marine protected areas and no-take marine reserves as tools to maintain abundance, diversity, and productivity. Implement marine protected areas if and where appropriate.



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Goal 6: Reduce and Avoid Impacts to Habitat (p. 53)

Highlights

- Several objectives align with Council's Essential Fish Habitat responsibilities and related actions.
 - Proactive habitat conservation measures
 - High quality EFH data
 - Fishing Effects model
- Two objectives refer to Marine Protected Areas; language may be dated



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Goal 7: Promote Equitable and Efficient Use of Fishery Resources (p. 58)

31. Provide economic and community stability to harvesting and processing sectors through fair allocation of fishery resources.
32. Maintain the license limitation program, modified as necessary, and further decrease excess fishing capacity and overcapitalization by eliminating latent licenses and extending programs such as community or rights-based management to some or all groundfish fisheries.
33. Provide for adaptive management by periodically evaluating the effectiveness of rationalization programs and the allocation of access rights based on performance.
34. Develop management measures that, when practicable, consider the efficient use of fishery resources taking into account the interest of harvesters, processors, and communities.



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Goal 7: Promote Equitable and Efficient Use of Fishery Resources (p. 58)

Highlights

- Address allocation and access; reflect National Standards 4 and 5
- Proactive focus on evaluating program effectiveness; now consistent with MSA requirements and NMFS procedural guidance on LAPP and allocation reviews
- Objective 32 reflects intent at the time to decrease and manage effort including through the license limitation program and rationalization programs



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Goal 8: Increase Alaska Native consultation (p. 65)

35. Continue to incorporate local and traditional knowledge in fishery management.
36. Consider ways to enhance collection of local and traditional knowledge from communities, and incorporate such knowledge in fishery management where appropriate.
37. Increase Alaska Native participation and consultation in fishery management.



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Goal 8: Increase Alaska Native consultation (p. 65)

Highlights

- Development and adoption of LKTKS Protocol a major milestone providing guidance on identifying, analyzing, and incorporating LKTKS for the Bering Sea region
- Several points for Council consideration
 - Use of the term “consultation”
 - Alignment of topics, including local knowledge, public participation, and rural community engagement



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Goal 9: Improve Data Quality, Monitoring, and Enforcement (p. 70)

Objectives

38. Increase the utility of groundfish fishery observer data for the conservation and management of living marine resources.
39. Develop funding mechanisms that achieve equitable costs to the industry for implementation of the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program.
40. Improve community and regional economic impact costs and benefits through increased data reporting requirements.
41. Increase the quality of monitoring and enforcement data through improved technology.
42. Encourage a coordinated, long-term ecosystem monitoring program to collect baseline information and compile existing information from a variety of ongoing research initiatives, subject to funding and staff availability.
43. Cooperate with research institutions such as the North Pacific Research Board in identifying research needs to address pressing fishery issues.
44. Promote enhanced enforceability.
45. Continue to cooperate and coordinate management and enforcement programs with the Alaska Board of Fish, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and Alaska Fish and Wildlife Protection, the U.S. Coast Guard, NMFS Enforcement, International Pacific Halibut Commission, Federal agencies, and other organizations to meet conservation requirements; promote economically healthy and sustainable fisheries and fishing communities; and maximize efficiencies in management and enforcement programs through continued consultation, coordination, and cooperation.



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Goal 9: Improve Data Quality, Monitoring, and Enforcement (p. 70)

Highlights

- Importance of timely, high quality catch accounting and monitoring to groundfish management programs
- Partnerships with Federal and state agencies to help communicate research needs and meet conservation and management goals
- Objective 40 focuses on increasing economic data reporting requirements; recent Council actions focus on utility relative to cost and burden



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Additional section: Climate Resilience (p. 76)

- The Management Policy does not include climate-related goals or objectives; climate resilience work primarily tracked relative to Goal 1 (Avoid Overfishing) and 3 (Preserve Food Web)
- This section highlights the factors contributing to climate resilience as a focus of Council work, and summarizes completed and ongoing initiatives



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Cross-cutting themes

Corresponds to Section 3, Discussion and themes



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- **The Council's work continues to generally align with and support the Management Policy as written. Section 3 of the review document is not intended to suggest the Management Policy or specific goals or objectives are in need of revision.**
- The review document provides **examples** to illustrate questions the Council could consider when determining whether it is useful to revise or update elements of the Management Policy



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3.1 Relationships with other entities and legal requirements (p. 13)

- The Council could consider whether the Management Policy should continue to restate the National Standards and the need for compliance with other Federal laws.
 - Also see Table 2: Alignment between Groundfish FMP Management Approach, goals, and objectives and the MSA National Standards on p. 14
- The Council could consider whether relationships, requirements, and practices should continue to be reinforced and formalized as objectives, or whether they are adequately captured in other ways.



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3.2 Durability of FMP guidance over time (p. 15)

- References to intended management actions: The Council could consider whether it views any of the Groundfish FMP objectives as mostly completed, or whether it views them as ongoing needs.
 - Obj. 39 – refers to observer Program restructuring
 - Obj. 32 – refers to decreasing excess capacity and overcapitalization



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3.2 Durability of FMP guidance over time (continued)

- Use of terms that have evolved or changed: The Council could consider updating or clarifying these terms.
 - Goal 3 – Preserve food web
 - Obj. 12 – limits on forage (fish?)
 - Obj. 28 and 30 – Marine Protected Areas
 - Goal 8 – Increase Alaska Native Consultation



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3.2 Durability of FMP guidance over time (continued)

- Research-focused objectives: The Council could consider whether it continues to be useful to include research objectives that are primarily supported through the setting of multi-year research priorities. Research-oriented objectives include the following:
 - Goal 4 (Bycatch), Obj. 16 – Setting limits for non-target species
 - Goal 5 (Marine mammals and seabirds), Obj. 24 – Status of endangered or threatened marine mammal stocks
 - Goal 6 (Habitat), Obj. 29 – Habitat information and mapping
 - Goal 9 (Data quality) Obj. 42 – Ecosystem monitoring



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3.2 Durability of FMP guidance over time (continued)

- Evolving priorities and tradeoffs: Some goals and objectives describe a desired outcome along with a strategy, which may evolve or become more nuanced over time.
 - Obj. 40 – Improve community and regional economic impact costs and benefits through **increased** data reporting requirements



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3.2 Durability of FMP guidance over time (continued)

- Alignment of goals and their associated objectives: The Council could consider whether objectives continue to be appropriately organized under broader goal statements.
 - Particularly relevant to Goal 8: Increase Alaska Native Consultation



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3.2 Durability of FMP guidance over time (continued)

- Other clarifications: Opportunities for minor cleanup and revisions
 - Obj. 40: Improve (Evaluation of? Assessment of?) community and regional economic impact costs and benefits through increased data reporting requirements
 - Obj. 45: Refers to other agencies and entities; could update Alaska Fish and Wildlife Protection to Division of Alaska Wildlife Troopers



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3.3 Climate resilience (p. 19)

- The Council could reflect on the attributes that make a management policy climate resilient, and other considerations such as:
 - Whether value might be added by updating the Management Policy or other guidance to support climate resilience
 - Alignment between the Management Policy and strategies that have been discussed for climate resilience and adaptation
 - Whether there is a need to be more explicit or consistent regarding when, why, and how to consider climate resilience and integrate climate information



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3.4 Council policy guidance (p. 21)

- The Council could consider how other policy guidance including the Ecosystem Policy and the Bering Sea FEP Goals and Objectives supplement and align with the Groundfish Management Policy



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3.5 Management Approach statement (p. 22)

- The Council could consider whether the Management Approach continues to capture aspirational statements and distinctive attributes of the NPFMC process



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Potential Next Steps

Corresponds to Section 1, Introduction and Section 4, Next Steps



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Decision point: Modify the existing Management Policy? (p. 25)

- No action
- Modify the Groundfish FMP Management Approach, goals, and/or objectives (would require FMP amendment)



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Decision point: Consider other actions in support of the Management Policy?

Other potential next steps could include the following (whether or not the Council wants to consider changes to the Management Policy). These are not mutually exclusive.

- Develop new policy guidance
- Develop a workplan for implementing goals and/or objectives
- Provide guidance for future policy reviews
- Provide guidance for future Groundfish Workplan updates
- Conduct policy review for other FMPs (crab)
- Outreach and communication opportunities
- Other ideas?

