

E1 Groundfish Management Policy Review



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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



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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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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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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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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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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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E1 Groundfish Management Policy Review Report
JUNE 2026

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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Cross-cutting themes

Corresponds to Section 3, Discussion and themes



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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
- Use of terms that have evolved or changed
- Research-focused objectives (multiple)
- Evolving priorities and tradeoffs
- Alignment of goals and their associated objectives
- Opportunities for minor cleanup and revisions



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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 Decision Points

- Modify the existing Groundfish Management Policy
- Consider other actions in support of the Management Policy



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Groundfish Management Policy Reference Slides



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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.
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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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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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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

