

Groundfish Management Policy Review

Ecosystem Committee, May 8 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
- The Management Policy includes a Management Approach statement, 9 goals, and 45 objectives
 - 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
- 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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Next steps for this discussion:

- Brief review of the Management Policy, including goals and objectives
- Cross-cutting themes
- Return to potential next steps and EC recommendations



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Review of Goals and Objectives

(Reference: Section 2, Summary of Council actions and activities (table form) and Section 5, Additional context for goals and objectives (narrative))



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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 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



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Cross-cutting themes

(Reference: 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 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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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

*Note there is an error on page 16; the wording of Objective 12 as it appears in the Groundfish FMPs is “forage” not “forage fish”; this will be corrected



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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

(Reference: Section 1, Introduction and Section 4, Next Steps)



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