

AMENDMENT 16-3

TO THE PACIFIC COAST GROUND FISH FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

REBUILDING PLANS FOR

BOCACCIO, COWCOD, WIDOW ROCKFISH, AND YELLOWEYE ROCKFISH

FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT INCLUDING REGULATORY IMPACT REVIEW AND INITIAL REGULATORY FLEXIBILITY ANALYSIS

PREPARED BY

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COVER SHEET
AMENDMENT 16-3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Proposed Action: Implement legally-compliant rebuilding plans, consistent with the framework established in Amendment 16-1, that will set strategic rebuilding parameters to guide stock rebuilding for bocaccio (*Sebastes paucispinus*), cowcod (*S. levis*), widow rockfish (*S. entomelas*), and yelloweye rockfish (*S. ruberimus*).

Type of Statement: FINAL Environmental Impact Statement

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Abstract:

The U.S. Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) has declared nine fish species managed under the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) to be overfished, based on criteria and procedures described in the Magnuson-Stevens Act (§304(e)), and overfishing criteria adopted by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) under Amendment 11 to the FMP. The Magnuson-Stevens Act (§304(e)(3)) also requires councils to “prepare a fishery management plan, plan amendment, or proposed regulations” in order to prevent overfishing and implement a plan to rebuild the overfished stocks. The Council has chosen to adopt legally-compliant rebuilding plans for overfished groundfish through a series of FMP and/or regulatory amendments. Amendment 16-3 adopts rebuilding plans for four of the eight currently overfished species in order to rebuild these stocks to a size capable of supporting MSY, or to a stock size less than this if such stock size results in long-term net benefit to the nation, and according to the requirements of the Magnuson Stevens Act. The Act requires rebuilding plans to identify a time period, which “shall be as short as possible,” while accounting for various mitigating factors, such as the biology of the stock, ecological considerations, and the needs of fishing communities. This environmental impact statement (EIS) evaluates alternatives with different strategic rebuilding parameters. These parameters include the harvest rate, the probability that the stock will rebuild in the maximum statutorily-permitted time period, and the median, or most likely, year in which the stock would be rebuilt to its target biomass for the given harvest rate. The use of the Mixed Stock Exception, identified in National Standard 1 guidelines (50 CFR 600.310(d)(6)), is not considered for these four overfished stocks. (Under this exception overfishing could continue in cases where the overfished species co-occurs with other species that are the target of the fishery.) A range of management measures, implemented through the biennial harvest specification process, will be used to constrain total fishing mortality within levels identified by these parameters. The range of measures implemented in this fashion is not expected to differ in kind among the alternatives. New measures, different from the types of measures implemented through the biennial harvest specification process, are not considered at this time as part of the four rebuilding plans evaluated here. However, new management measures, consistent with stock rebuilding, could be part of some separate, future action.

Comments due by: August 30, 2004

