

CONSIDERATION OF TRAWL ROCKFISH CONSERVATION AREA (RCA) BOUNDARY MODIFICATIONS

Rockfish conservation areas (RCA) are closed to commercial gear types targeting groundfish in order to protect a complex of species, such as overfished species. RCA boundaries are defined by latitude and longitude points, and are intended to approximate depth contours. Although both the eastern and western trawl and non-trawl RCA boundaries have changed over time, the area between 100 and 150 fathoms (fm) has remained closed to bottom trawl and non-trawl gears targeting groundfish since January 2003. Other fishing gears and activities, including mid-water trawl, recreational fishing, non-groundfish fishing (e.g., pink shrimp trawl, salmon troll, etc.), and scientific research are permissible in the RCA. Adjustments to the RCA boundaries are considered routine actions, which can be modified through a single Council meeting and implemented through a single *Federal Register* notice, when appropriate.

At their March 2013 meeting, the Council considered the performance of the shorebased individual fishing quota (IFQ) fishery in 2011 and 2012, progress to date in 2013, as well as additional pre-IFQ bycatch rate data, and recommended the shoreward boundary of the trawl RCA be moved from 75 to 100 fm from the area 40°10' to 48°10' N. latitude in Period 2. The RCA modification was intended to provide greater access to target species while allowing the individual accountability afforded by the rationalized fishery to minimize bycatch of overfished species.

At the April 2013 Council meeting and in a subsequent letter, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) announced that the RCA modifications could not be implemented under the inseason procedures and that such adjustments should allow for public input through a notice and comment rulemaking ([Agenda Item F.9.b, NMFS Letter 2, June 2013](#)). The Council recommended the following adjustments for implementation through a notice and comment rulemaking: between 40°10' and 48°10' N. latitude, implement a 100 fm shoreward boundary and 150 fm seaward boundary beginning in Period 6 in 2013 through 2014. Routine adjustments of the RCA would still be available to address emerging concerns, if necessary. At its June 2013 meeting, the Council was notified that NMFS was preparing an additional analysis of the proposed action in the form of an Environmental Assessment (EA).

Under this agenda item, the Council should consider the impact analysis contained in the draft EA (Agenda Item G.6.b, Draft EA). Alternative 1 describes the Council-recommended RCA structure as described above from the April meeting. Alternative 2 is the same as Alternative 1, except that in the area from the 40°10' N. latitude to 45°46' N. latitude, the seaward RCA boundary would be 200 fm modified year-round. The additional alternative was added by NMFS because that area may have had a greater opportunity to recover from bottom trawl gear impacts. In the event the Council decides to recommend an alternate RCA configuration in light of the new analysis, recommendations can be made at this time.

Council Action:

1. **Consider analysis in the draft EA and recommend a trawl RCA structure for the 2013-2104 fisheries.**

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item G.6.b, Draft EA: Trawl Rockfish Conservation Area Boundary Modifications.

Agenda Order:

- a. Agenda Item Overview Kelly Ames
- b. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies and Management Entities
- c. Public Comment
- d. **Council Action:** Consider Recommendations for Trawl RCA Boundary Modifications for 2013-2014 Groundfish Fisheries

PFMC
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