

REBUILDING PLANS FOR CANARY ROCKFISH AND COWCOD

Situation: The West Coast canary rockfish and cowcod rockfish resources are currently classified as overfished. Therefore, the Council must prepare rebuilding plans for these stocks before the November 2000 meeting. The cowcod stock is found almost exclusively in California, primarily in the Conception and Monterey areas; canary rockfish are found coastwide. The 1999 cowcod stock assessment addressed only that portion of the stock in the Conception area, but the assessment authors and the Groundfish Management Team expressed concern the Monterey portion of the stock is almost certainly overfished as well. The extremely low levels of abundance and productivity of this stock will likely restrict the rebuilding alternatives, but the generally narrow geographic range of the stock in U.S. waters should limit the geographic distribution of social and economic impacts. The revised rebuilding analysis (Exhibit G.4, Attachment 1) estimates 2001 harvest levels ranging from a few hundred pounds to about 6 mt for the Conception area. Information on geographic distribution of the stock and areas of higher abundance was also presented at the June 2000 meeting, and the Council stated its intent to explore specific closed areas to protect this sedentary species. The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) has proposed to consider closing two areas to bottom fishing (Exhibit G.4, Attachment 2). At its August 9-10 meeting, the Council's Ad-Hoc Allocation Committee recommended the Council consider a zero retention option (Exhibit G.4.b, Allocation Committee Report).

The widespread geographic distribution of the canary rockfish resource results in its harvest by several fisheries, including groundfish trawl, groundfish commercial hook-and-line, groundfish sport, and several incidental fisheries such as the pink shrimp trawl fishery. A preliminary draft rebuilding analysis was presented to the Council at the June 2000 meeting and Council asked that additional information be included in the next draft. The completed rebuilding analysis was not available in time for the Ad-Hoc Allocation Committee meeting. Therefore, the committee developed a range of "what if" scenarios to bracket a range of possible 2001 harvest levels. At that time, there was also little 2000 harvest data available. Without that information, the committee was unable to judge the effectiveness of current management. The rebuilding analysis is now available and provided as Exhibit G.4, Attachment 3. It presents a range of rebuilding times and initial harvest levels. On the low side, it could take 136-217 years, with initial harvest of only 15 mt. On the high (optimistic) side, rebuilding could be complete in about 41-45 years with initial catch as high as 185 mt in the north. An intermediate view would reduce harvest to 25-40 mt with rebuilding in 80-100 years. Whatever the Council's decision, management options for 2001 will be affected by harvest in the pink shrimp fishery, availability of recreational salmon fishing opportunities as alternatives to groundfish fishing, and the amounts of discarded canary rockfish catch by commercial and recreational fishers.

Stock rebuilding plans must include the length of time necessary to rebuild the stock, traditional harvesters, and initial harvest levels. The plans should also include target biomass and trajectories as the stock recovers and, if possible, expected harvest levels over the rebuilding period. The first step in the process is determining the rebuilding schedule and initial harvest levels. With this information, the Council can begin to consider any allocations to equitably distribute the costs and benefits among fishery sectors, and other management measures necessary to achieve the rebuilding goals.

The draft summary minutes of the August 9-10 Ad-Hoc Allocation Committee meeting are provided as Exhibit G.4.b, Allocation Committee Report. The document outlines a series of alternatives developed at the meeting. This report was distributed to the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel prior to the Council meeting to help them develop more specific proposals and perhaps narrow the options. The document includes a list of proposals CDFG has submitted to its Fish and Game Commission for consideration during the California management cycle.

The Council should identify specific management and allocation options at this time in order to take final action at the November 2000 meeting.

Council Action:

- 1. Council guidance on the length of the rebuilding schedule and initial harvest levels.**
- 2. Preliminary decision on allocation and/or regulations.**

Reference Materials:

1. Cowcod rebuilding analysis (Exhibit G.4, Attachment 1).
2. Memorandum from Mr. Robert C. Hight to Mr. Robert R. Treanor (Exhibit G.4, Attachment 2).
3. Canary rockfish rebuilding analysis (Exhibit G.4, Attachment 3).
4. Exhibit G.4.b, Allocation Committee Report.

PFMC
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