

REBUILDING PLANS FOR CANARY ROCKFISH AND COWCOD

Situation: The West Coast canary rockfish and cowcod rockfish resources are currently classified as overfished. The Council is required to prepare and submit rebuilding plans for these stocks before the end of this year. Preliminary action was taken at the September meeting, and final adoption is scheduled for this meeting. The draft canary rockfish rebuilding plan is provided as Exhibit C.1, Attachment 1, and the cowcod plan is Attachment 2. The Council scheduled a meeting of its Ad-Hoc Allocation Committee October 23-24 to address these plans and other 2001 management issues. The committee will present an oral summary of its meeting and any recommendations.

The groundfish fishery management plan describes the intended elements of rebuilding plans. The purpose of stock rebuilding plans is to provide the overall guidance for rebuilding overfished groundfish stocks. The Council should lay out its vision of how the stock will rebuild over time, including targets, checkpoints and strategies for rebuilding overfished stocks to healthy and productive levels. Rebuilding plans should provide the objectives that regulations are intended to achieve, and proposed regulations and results will be evaluated for consistency with the rebuilding plans. It is likely rebuilding plans will be revised over time to respond to new information, changing conditions, and success or lack of success in achieving the rebuilding schedule and other goals. In general, the goals of rebuilding programs are to (1) achieve the population size and structure that will support the maximum sustainable yield within the specified time period; (2) minimize, to the extent practicable, the social and economic impacts associated with rebuilding, including adverse impacts on fishing communities; (3) fairly and equitably distribute both the conservation burdens (overfishing restrictions) and recovery benefits among commercial, recreational, and charter fishing sectors; (4) protect the quantity and quality of habitat necessary to support the stock at healthy levels in the future; and (5) promote widespread public awareness, understanding, and support for the rebuilding program. Rebuilding plans should explain the status of the overfished stock, pointing out where lack of information and uncertainty may require that conservative assumptions be made in order to maintain a risk-averse management approach; identify present and historical harvesters of the stock; and provide the basis for any harvest sharing plans during the rebuilding period and for when rebuilding is completed. The Council, NMFS, and the states will set harvest levels to achieve the specified rebuilding schedule; implement any necessary measures to allocate the resource in accordance with harvest sharing plans; and should promote innovative methods to reduce bycatch and bycatch mortality of the overfished stock. Rebuilding plans must be reviewed at least every two years; this includes monitoring fishing mortality and the condition of the stock.

Canary Rockfish - Canary rockfish occur over wide geographic range of the continental shelf and are caught in several fisheries, including groundfish trawl, groundfish commercial hook-and-line, groundfish sport, and several incidental fisheries such as the pink shrimp trawl fishery. There is considerable uncertainty about the abundance of the stock and its ability to rebuild, even in the absence of all fishing. The draft rebuilding plan presents a range of rebuilding times and initial harvest levels. In September, the Council initially endorsed an intermediate view that results in rebuilding in 80-100 years. Coastwide harvest would be 60 mt every year, based on an analysis that the northern portion of the stock could support harvest of 25-40 mt and the southern portion could support about half that amount. For comparison, the 1998 combined recreational and commercial harvest was over 1,200 mt; the recreational fishery alone took about 90 mt. Potential harvest in the pink shrimp fishery must be accounted for as well. The Council does not manage the shrimp fishery but indicated it will ask the states to require pink shrimp trawl vessels to use fish excluder devices.

At this time, the Council is voting on a proposed rebuilding plan for canary rockfish that has a rebuilding period of 98 years; a fixed annual catch of 60 mt, is based on Scenario 1 in the rebuilding analysis (Appendix A); assumes recruitment similar to the 1978-1997 period; and has 47% of the rebuilding projections achieving the target population size in time (see Table 3, page A-14 of the rebuilding analysis).

Cowcod - Cowcod in U.S. waters occur almost exclusively in California, primarily in the Conception and Monterey areas. 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 that the Monterey portion of the stock is almost certainly overfished as well. The extremely low levels of abundance and productivity of this stock restrict the rebuilding alternatives. Information on geographic distribution of the stock and areas of higher abundance was presented at the June 2000 meeting, and in September the Council reviewed proposals for two area closures intended to protect this sedentary species. The rebuilding analysis estimates 2001 harvest levels ranging from a few hundred pounds to about 6 mt for the Conception area; this is the equivalent of about 50-1,000 fish for the year. If all fishing mortality was eliminated, the stock is projected to rebuild in 61 years; a total annual catch rate that is equivalent to 2.4 mt (about 350 fish) in 2001 would add about 37 years to the rebuilding period.

At this time, the Council is voting on a proposed rebuilding plan for cowcod that has (1) a 98 year rebuilding period; (2) an annual fishing rate that equates to 2.4 mt in 2001; and (3) the use and extent of area closures to reduce bycatch. At this fishing rate, there is a 60% likelihood the stock would rebuild in the allotted time.

Council Action:

1. Adopt rebuilding plans for canary rockfish and cowcod.

Reference Materials:

1. Draft canary rockfish rebuilding plan (Exhibit C.1, Attachment 1).
2. Draft cowcod rebuilding plan (Exhibit C.1, Attachment 2).
3. Exhibit C.1.d, Public Comment.

PFMC
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