

GMT COMMENTS ON PROJECTED RECREATIONAL SAVINGS OF CANARY ROCKFISH
ASSOCIATED WITH BAG-LIMIT REDUCTIONS IN OREGON AND CALIFORNIA, AND ADDITIONAL
SEASON CLOSURES IN CALIFORNIA

In materials provided by CDFG, California recreational catch of canary rockfish for Option 2B is projected to be 24 mt, based on assumed reductions in catch associated with 1) an additional 2-month closure encompassing May-June, and 2) reduction in the canary bag limit from 3 fish to 1 fish, within the overall 10-fish rockfish bag limit. Projected landings for 2000 of 55 mt are reduced by 32% for the additional closure, with the remaining tonnage reduced by an additional 36% to reflect the bag limit change. While these magnitudes of savings are plausible, given available data from recent fisheries, they are likely towards the high end of expected canary mortality savings.

The 32% savings from adding May-June (wave 3) to the already closed March-April period is based on the seasonal distribution of catch from 1996-99. This level of savings is highly influenced by the wave 3 catch in 1997, where the amount attributable to this 2-month wave accounted for 54% of the tonnage from all waves excluding wave 2 (which was already closed this year). In subsequent years, however, this percentage has been considerably lower: 23% in 1998 and 6% in 1999. If the total tonnage for 2000 is close to projected amount of 55 mt, the percentage occurring in wave 3 will be less than 20%. From 1997-99, the percentage of total catch from the 5 2-month waves open this year that occurred during the last 4 months of the year has increased from 33% to 45%. This latter percentage would also imply a higher base estimate for this year's fishery of 60 mt.

The amount of reduction attributed to the change in bag limit is based on the percentage savings from constraining the bag distribution in recent fisheries to one fish. The analysis assumes that catch of canary will not continue beyond the available limit, even though no additional reductions in the ability to retain other shelf species are implemented. If fishing continues for these other species, and canary cannot be avoided, a portion of the currently assumed savings of 36% would instead represent discard mortality.

If the amount saved by the additional 2-month closure were really 20% (instead of 32%) and if only half of the reduced retention of canary translates into reduced mortality, the projection of 24 mt would increase to 36 mt (using the base estimate of 55 mt for 2000). If a base amount of 60 mt is used for 2000, these same alternative assumptions would result in 39 mt of recreational canary mortality.

Similarly, Oregon estimates a savings of 5 mt (24%) would be associated with a reduction to a 1-fish bag limit. As in California, if opportunities for other shelf targets remain unchanged, some part of these projected savings may, instead, take the form of discard mortality.

In the "tentative" assignment of expected canary mortalities developed by the allocation committee, recreational mortality from all three states summed to 44 mt. For the management options considered, this is a possible outcome. However, it is important to stress that, in light of the above discussion, recreational mortality could potentially amount to 56-59 mt.

The uncertainty surrounding the projections for 2001 recreational catch gives rise to additional management concerns, relating to the timing of proposed closures in central California. If the fishery is closed from March-June, there will be little indication, by the June Council meeting, of the likelihood that year-end catches would exceed expectations. Even measures of recreational landings for the July-August wave would likely not be available until October. By this time, most of any anticipated commercial canary mortality would have already occurred. Further, with data from four months of recreational fishing (out of eight) from central California still unknown by the November Council meeting, the effectiveness of measures adopted for 2001 will remain highly uncertain at a time when targets and management measures for the 2002 recreational and commercial fisheries must be finalized.

An additional concern relates to the new provisions that would allow fishing for nearshore species to continue during the closed periods for shelf species. If the intent is to enforce the closure solely through prohibiting retention of shelf species during the closures, then there is concern over potential discard mortality of canary and bocaccio occurring throughout the closed periods. Since the distributions of many nearshore species extend into depths where canary and bocaccio are more common, there would be little assurance that some fishing for nearshore species was not occurring in areas/depths where bycatch and associated mortality of discarded canary and bocaccio would be expected. The alternative approach to providing year-round nearshore opportunities would be to rely on a depth restriction--with a closed zone probably from 20-150 fathoms--with the assumption that any canary or bocaccio caught inside 20 fathoms could be released with much lower rates of mortality.