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NOAA
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**NOAA Relaxes Regulations to Give Fishermen Access to Healthy Stocks While
Protecting Dark Blotched Rockfish**

In efforts to keep Pacific fishermen working while providing a necessary safeguard for darkblotched rockfish, emergency regulations – effective today through Dec. 31 – create a temporary conservation area for the species and give fishermen alternative fishing opportunities, today announced the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

"Today's action provides a win-win solution to overfishing by ensuring that darkblotched rockfish remain on target with its rebuilding schedule while minimizing economic hardship to fishermen," said Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries. "These temporary, critical measures will help us rebuild the fishery and will lead to more plentiful and sustainable fish harvests in the future."

NOAA Fisheries scientists have determined that the change in regulations will still allow darkblotched rockfish to rebuild within the approved rebuilding schedule.

Darkblotched rockfish are managed along with 80 other groundfish species off the coasts of Washington, Oregon and California by NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) and the Pacific Fishery Management Council, located in Portland, Oregon. Currently overfished, the species is regulated under a 34-year rebuilding program that prohibits fishermen from targeting it but allows for a small trip limit in surrounding groundfish fisheries. The trip limit is intended to allow fishermen to land darkblotched rockfish that is caught incidental to their primary fishery. This year, however, darkblotched rockfish harvest rates have been higher than expected. In June, coastwide commercial landings of darkblotched rockfish represented up to 75 percent of the 2002 allowable harvest.

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Projections showed that, if further action were not taken, the catch would exceed allowable landings by up to 40 metric tons, thus throwing off the rebuilding schedule.

In order to avoid exceeding the 2002 allowable catch of darkblotched rockfish, this emergency rule establishes a darkblotched rockfish conservation area where darkblotched rockfish are commonly found, south from the U.S./Canada border (48°30' N. latitude) to 40°10' N. latitude, bordered by straight-line coordinates on the east (at approximately the 100 fathom depth contour) and on the west (at approximately the 250 fathom depth contour). The area between 100-250 fathoms is closed to all bottom trawling.

To offset economic impacts to fishermen, the rule also reopens fishing grounds, seaward of 250 fathoms, that were closed earlier this month. This action will allow limited entry trawl access to healthy deepwater groundfish in an area where darkblotched rockfish are not aggregated in great abundance. The area inside 100 fathoms will reopen on October 1.

More detailed information about this announcement, including the trip limit adjustments, can be found online at:
<http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/1sustfish/groundfish/public2002/SepEmerAdjustments.pdf>

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries, please visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

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Fact Sheet

Pacific Groundfish Emergency Rule, 9/10/02

The emergency rule, effective 9/10/02, establishes the following temporary measures aimed at providing necessary protections for the Pacific groundfish fishery:

Darkblotched Rockfish Conservation Area

- The conservation area extends south from the U.S./Canada border (48°30' N. latitude) to 40°10' N. latitude and is bordered by straight-line coordinates on the east (at approximately the 100 fathom depth contour) and on the west (at approximately the 250 fathom depth contour).
- The conservation area is closed to limited entry groundfish trawl fishing and fishing with limited entry groundfish trawl gear is prohibited within the conservation area. It is unlawful to take and retain, possess, or land groundfish taken with limited entry groundfish trawl gear in the conservation area. Limited entry groundfish trawl vessels may transit through the conservation area, with or without groundfish on board, provided all groundfish trawl gear is stowed either: (1) below deck; or (2) if the gear cannot readily be moved, in a secured and covered manner, detached from all towing lines, so that it is rendered unusable for fishing.
- Trawling shoreward of the conservation area during is permitted October - December and trawling seaward of the conservation area is permitted September - December. Small footrope gear is required shoreward of the conservation area and large footrope gear is permitted seaward of the conservation area.

Trip Limit Reductions in the Pacific Groundfish Fishery

- **Limited Entry Trawl Fishery in the Area North of 40°10' N. Latitude**
Trip limits are reduced for the following species and/or species groups: minor shelf rockfish, Pacific ocean perch, sablefish, longspine thornyhead, shortspine thornyhead, Dover sole, all other flatfish, petrale sole, rex sole, arrowtooth flounder, minor shelf rockfish, canary rockfish, yellowtail rockfish, and lingcod.
- **Limited Entry Trawl Fishery in the Area South of 40°10' N. Latitude**
Trip limits are reduced for minor slope rockfish in the area between 40°10' N. latitude and 36° N. latitude and for canary rockfish in the area south of 40°10' N. latitude.
- **Limited Entry Fixed Gear Fishery and Open Access Fisheries**
Pacific whiting will be closed for limited entry fixed gear and open access fisheries.

More information can be found online at:

<http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/1sustfish/groundfish/public2002/SepEmerAdjustments.pdf>

