

November 2003



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
 NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
 Northwest Region
 7600 Sand Point Way N.E., Bldg. 1
 Seattle, WA 98115

OCT 21 2003

1504-13-WOC-OB-010

Mr. Donald Hansen, Chair
 Pacific Fishery Management Council
 7700 NE Ambassador Place
 Portland, OR 97220

RECEIVED

OCT 23 2003

PFMC

Dear Mr. *Dan* Hansen:

Based on new information obtained since the September 8-12, 2003 Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting, I have decided not to implement the Council's recommendation to increase commercial minor deeper nearshore rockfish trip limits in season south of 40°10' N. lat. in the Pacific Coast groundfish fishery. As you'll recall, the Council recommended the increase because commercial landings of minor deeper nearshore rockfish south of 40°10' N. lat. were lower than expected in 2003. Subsequent to the Council meeting, the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) held a meeting in Seattle, WA, October 14-16, 2003. The GMT discussed new information from the Recreational Fisheries Information Network (RecFIN) at that meeting. The RecFIN data showed that landings of minor nearshore rockfish (which includes minor deeper nearshore rockfish¹) in the recreational fishery south of 40°10' N. lat. during July and August, the first two months open to recreational groundfish fishing, have exceeded the projected recreational landings of minor nearshore rockfish for the remainder of the year. The GMT raised concerns over the accuracy of RecFIN's catch estimates, since the estimates for July and August were substantially higher than in recent years and has requested that the RecFIN program review its estimates reported for the 2003 California recreational fishery.

While landings in the commercial sector south of 40°10' N. lat. continue to remain lower than expected in 2003 (landed catch data through October 10, 2003, indicate that minor deeper nearshore rockfish catch was at 44 percent of the annual target—21 mt landed out of a 48 mt commercial total catch OY), combined recreational and commercial landings are still estimated to have exceeded the minor nearshore harvest guideline, even if RecFIN estimates are adjusted downward. The state of California intends to close recreational fishing for nearshore rockfish at the beginning of November.


¹ As you know, minor deeper nearshore rockfish are managed within an overall harvest guideline for minor nearshore rockfish. The minor nearshore rockfish harvest guideline is shared between the commercial and recreational sectors. In addition, the minor nearshore rockfish harvest guideline is included as a subset of the minor rockfish OY. There are two minor rockfish OYs, one for the area north of 40°10' N. lat. and one for the area south of 40°10' N. lat.



In light of this new information, I can no longer concur with the Council's September recommendation to increase minor deeper nearshore rockfish trip limits for the commercial sector (limited entry fixed gear and open access) south of 40°10' N. lat. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will implement all of the groundfish inseason actions recommended at the September Council meeting, except for the recommendation to increase minor deeper nearshore rockfish trip limits. Minor deeper nearshore rockfish limits for limited entry fixed gear and open access fisheries south of 40°10' N. lat. will remain as previously scheduled for the remainder of the September through October cumulative limit period at 300 lb per 2 months. During the months of November through December, the limited entry fixed gear and open access minor deeper nearshore rockfish limit south of 40°10' N. lat. will also remain as previously scheduled at 200 lb per 2 months.

In the interim before the November Council meeting in San Diego, CA, NMFS will review any additional information on the nearshore rockfish fishery and may take inseason action to conform with the state of California's closure of the recreational fishery. Any further adjustments to the nearshore rockfish fisheries will need to be discussed in more detail during the agenda item on inseason groundfish management at the upcoming November Council meeting.

Sincerely,


D. Robert Lohn
Regional Administrator