

California Department of Fish and Game

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Recreational Lingcod Minimum Size and Bag Limits to Change

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To comply with new federal recreational fishing regulations expected to be effective April 1, 2004, the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) is recommending an increase in the lingcod minimum size limit to 30 inches, and a reduction in the daily bag limit to one fish. The new regulation changes will apply to recreational anglers fishing for lingcod in all waters off California. The DFG will make this recommendation to the Fish and Game Commission at the Commission's March 4-5, 2004 meeting in Redding, when the Commission will consider taking emergency action to conform to the new federal regulations.

The regulation changes are necessary to ensure that catches of lingcod in California remain at or within the coastwide acceptable harvest levels. The lingcod stock off the coast of California, Oregon and Washington has been formally classified as overfished by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC), and is currently managed under a rebuilding plan to achieve recovery of the stock. A key element of the rebuilding plan is to constrain catches to levels that allow the stock to increase to a healthy level within a specified period of time. In 2002 and 2003, coastwide lingcod catches have well exceeded allowable levels needed to achieve rebuilding of the stock.

"While the Department is reluctant to make in-season changes to recreational size and bag limits, this was the only feasible way to keep catches within allowable levels short of prohibiting all take of lingcod," said Patty Wolf, DFG Marine Regional Manager. "This management approach continues to provide some fishing opportunity for lingcod throughout the remainder of the year, and allows those anglers who catch large fish to retain them."

The DFG anticipates by increasing the minimum size limit to 30 inches and reducing the allowable daily bag limit to one lingcod per person, California's lingcod catches will be held to the allotted amount for the recreational fishery. Current regulations allow two fish per person at a minimum size of 24 inches.

Public testimony will be allowed during the March 4-5 Fish and Game Commission meeting. The need for additional measures has been determined in part from new information on fishing during the last part of 2003 which was not available to managers when the current regulations were established prior to the start of the 2004 season.

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