

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON CATCH OF UNIDENTIFIED  
ROCKFISH SPECIES IN THE RECREATIONAL FISHERY

**Introduction**

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the reports provided by California, Oregon, and Washington regarding accounting for unidentified rockfish catch in Recreational Fishery Information Network (RecFIN). Each report included the magnitude of unidentified rockfish catch, assessment of the conservation risks presented by unidentified rockfish catch, and the associated management implications.

Catch accounting is central to the GMT's role in the Council's management of the Pacific Coast groundfish fisheries. As reflected in the revised National Standard 1 guidelines, an accounting of total fishing removals, including uncertainty in our ability to account for catch, is essential to sustainable fisheries management. For recreational fisheries, the challenges and complexities involved with surveying catch are well known. These challenges and complexities have been an issue of national focus, stemming from a 2006 National Research Council report and new mandates and programs included in the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act of 2006.<sup>1</sup> NMFS has begun implementation of new projects and regulatory programs through the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). The recreational survey programs in the three west coast states are currently on par or ahead of those in other regions of the country. Although the GMT would always prefer better catch information, we fully recognized that recreational monitoring involves prioritization amidst limited resources.

The magnitude of the 2008 unidentified rockfish catch varies between regions within states. Estimates of unidentified rockfish catch in 2008 varied from less than 1 percent of total rockfish catch in Washington, Oregon, and Northern California to 13.8 percent in Southern California (CRFS District 1) (Table 1). The statewide unidentified rockfish catch represented less than 7 percent of the total rockfish catch in each state.

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<sup>1</sup> National Research Council, Review of Recreational Fisheries Survey Methods (2006).

Table 1. Total rockfish catch, unidentified rockfish catch, and unidentified rockfish catch as a percentage of total rockfish catch, by region in 2008 reported numbers of fish.

<b>State/Region</b>	<b>Total Rockfish Catch (# of Fish)</b>	<b>Unidentified Rockfish Catch (# of Fish)</b>	<b>Unidentified Rockfish as a % of Total Rockfish Catch</b>
<b>Washington</b>	225,139	454	0.2%
<b>Oregon</b>	304,319	1,121	0.4%
<b>CA, District 1</b>	189,201	26,199	13.8%
<b>CA, District 2</b>	201,988	17,168	8.5%
<b>CA, District 3</b>	381,194	16,773	4.4%
<b>CA, District 4</b>	253,978	17,937	7.1%
<b>CA, District 5</b>	52,233	591	1.1%
<b>CA, District 6</b>	99,260	213	0.2%
<b>CA Total</b>	1,177,854	78,880	6.7%

None of the states reported an overage in any species optimum yield (OY) in 2008 based on their preliminary estimates of unidentified rockfish impacts. However, we do not have information to inform ongoing conservation risk inseason at this time. As mentioned in our report under Agenda Item E.5.b, the GMT will evaluate the management uncertainty associated with all fisheries in analyzing control rules under Amendment 23.

The GMT could not reach consensus on whether the Council should move forward with accounting for unidentified rockfish catch. Concerns expressed include the results of the quantification of conservation risk, work load associated with accounting for unidentified rockfish catch, the amount of unidentified rockfish catch, the magnitude of error in existing catch estimates, other priorities of the state programs in improving the existing catch estimates, and the potential biases to be introduced in the apportionment of unidentified rockfish catch given limited data.

**Methodology Review Steps**

The states’ evaluation of conservation risks involved use of preliminary estimation methods, which need refinement and review prior to final implementation. The following sequence represents an outline for developing and implementing catch apportionment methods:

- State and Science Center personnel develop and submit proposed methodology for historical apportionment of unidentified rockfish to species-specific catch estimates to the RecFIN Technical Committee.
- State representatives develop and submit proposed methodology for inseason apportionments to the RecFIN Technical Committee.
- RecFIN Technical Committee provides comments and refinement.
- SSC review and approval of inseason apportionment methodology.

The GMT recommends implementation of the apportionment of the historical unidentified rockfish catch be conducted as part of each state's historical catch reconstruction effort. Assessments informing the 2013-2014 management cycle will be conducted in early 2011. The proposed historical apportionment methodology should be provided to the RecFIN Technical Committee early enough to allow for review during their October 2010 meeting.

In addition to historical catch reconstruction, each state needs to develop inseason unidentified rockfish catch apportionment methods. The GMT, the RecFIN Technical Committee and the SSC should review this methodology prior to approval by the Council for final implementation. Partitioning unidentified rockfish into species would also inform catch projection models pre-season and may affect catch sharing agreements or allocations.

### **Considerations for the Timing of Implementation**

The time needed for methodology development and review would preclude implementation in the 2010 season for all three states. Stock assessments have been adopted for the 2011 and 2012 biennial specification process. Likewise, there is not sufficient time for development and review of methods before the estimates are needed for implementation in other aspects of the management process for 2011-2012. In other words, historical catch estimates cannot be used in assessments until 2011 at the earliest. Likewise, development of methodologies by state personnel for inseason accounting and review of those methodologies cannot happen prior to development of preliminary management alternatives for the 2011-2012 cycle.

The unidentified rockfish catch could be accounted for in the 2013-2014 biennial specification process with sufficient time for methodological review and would be the first opportunity to incorporate it in all aspects of the management cycle. Development and review of the unidentified rockfish catch apportionment methodology may proceed in the interim in 2010 and the results integrated into the management processes for the 2013-2014 regulatory specification development.

Lastly, as mentioned above, the NMFS MRIP is focused on improving recreational survey methodologies. The Highly Migratory Species Management Team was able to initiate and coordinate with RecFIN and the states on two recreation survey project proposals that were funded by the NMFS Marine Recreational Information Program in Fiscal Year 2009. The GMT recommends that this unidentified rockfish issue be submitted for MRIP funding in Fiscal Year 2010. Funding from MRIP could help address some of the budgetary and staffing concerns of the states and bring in outside experts to help examine the issue. If the Council concurs, members of the GMT have expressed their willingness to assist the RecFIN Technical Committee in developing the proposal.

PFMC  
09/17/09