



Pacific Fishery Management Council *NEWS RELEASE*

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WEST COAST GROUND FISH STOCKS IMPROVE

SPOKANE, WASHINGTON – Two important West Coast groundfish stocks—Canary rockfish and petrale sole—that were formerly overfished have now been rebuilt ahead of schedule, the Pacific Fishery Management Council announced today. The stocks have been the subject of strict rebuilding plans that severely constrained West Coast fisheries for more than a decade. Managing groundfish fisheries in the last 15 years, under the canary rockfish rebuilding plan in particular, has been an immense challenge for the Council and the National Marine Fisheries Service and has caused significant disruption of fisheries. “This is a huge achievement and reflects many hard decisions made by the Council and its advisors, as well as difficult sacrifices by the fishermen and communities that depend on groundfish,” said Council Chair Dorothy Lowman. “While five groundfish stocks are still rebuilding, the Council looks forward to new fishing opportunities based on the fact that these two stocks have completely recovered.”

Canary rockfish, prized by both recreational and commercial fishermen, were declared overfished in 2000 and a rebuilding plan was put in place in 2001, affecting groundfish fisheries off all three west coast states. Because canary rockfish coexist with so many healthy groundfish stocks, they have been known as a “bottleneck species” limiting many fisheries. Further, canary rockfish are a long-lived, slow-growing species, making them difficult to rebuild. Under the plan, catch quotas were dramatically reduced and large area closures put in place, and the stock was expected to rebuild by 2057.

However, the new 2015 canary rockfish assessment adopted today by the Council shows the coastwide canary stock has already been rebuilt, thanks to the strict protections and good ocean conditions. Former Council Chair Dan Wolford stated, “This a big deal. We now have six times more canary rockfish than when we scaled back so many fisheries. This shows the Pacific Council’s conservation policies work.”

Petrale sole, an important species for commercial fisheries, were declared overfished in 2010 after an assessment showed that the stock had fallen below the overfished threshold. Beginning in 2011, a rebuilding plan was put in place to rebuild the stock by 2016. The petrale sole harvest limit was cut by half, and fisheries in which petrale sole could be caught incidentally were also reduced and area closures were implemented. A stock assessment conducted this year shows that the rebuilding plan was successful and the stock has increased over the target level. “Petrale sole is known as our Cadillac flatfish,” said Ralph Brown, a long-time commercial fisherman from Bookings, Oregon. “Restaurants will love that these fish are now back so strongly.”

Process

The petrale sole and Canary rockfish assessments were developed by scientists at National Marine Fisheries Service and the University of Washington (in the case of petrale) and were reviewed by the Council’s scientific advisory bodies. The recommendation to declare these stocks rebuilt will be forwarded to the National Marine Fisheries Service for approval. New harvest specifications and regulations informed by these assessments are expected to be put in place beginning in 2017.

Council Role

The Pacific Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional fishery management councils established by the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 for the purpose of managing fisheries 3-200 nautical miles offshore of the United States of America coastline. The Pacific Council recommends management measures for fisheries off the coasts of California, Oregon, and Washington.

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On the Web

- Pacific Fishery Management Council: <http://www.pcouncil.org>
- Stock assessments and other technical information: <http://tinyurl.com/oyuk4ey>