

Pacific Council News

Summer 2015 | www.pcouncil.org

This newsletter reports on decisions made at the June Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting, held in Spokane, Washington. The Council recommends commercial & recreational fishery management measures for Federal waters off the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California. All Council recommendations are subject to approval by National Marine Fisheries Service. [Sign up for other notices here.](#) The Council has five public meetings a year. The public comment deadline for the September 2015 Council meeting is August 14; email pfmc.comments@noaa.gov.

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Groundfish News

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Update on Salmon ESA Consultation

CANARY ROCKFISH AND PETRALE SOLE REBUILT

Two important West Coast groundfish stocks—canary rockfish and petrale sole—that were formerly overfished have now been rebuilt ahead of schedule. 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 (NMFS) and has caused a significant disruption of fisheries.

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 2030. However, the new 2015 canary rockfish assessment adopted in June by the Council shows the coastwide canary stock is now above the biomass management target prescribed in the

rebuilding plan, thanks to the strict protections and good ocean conditions that have resulted in good recruitment.

The petrale sole stock, an important target for the limited entry bottom trawl fishery, was declared overfished in 2010 after an assessment showed that the stock had fallen below the overfished threshold. Beginning in 2011, a rebuilding plan was implemented 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. A stock assessment conducted this year shows that the rebuilding plan was successful and the stock has increased over the target level.



Petrale sole (Photo credit: Daniel W. Gotshall, NOAA)

“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.”

The petrale sole update assessment was developed by scientists at NMFS and the University of Washington and reviewed by the Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). The canary rockfish full assessment was developed by NMFS scientists and reviewed by a Stock Assessment Review panel and the SSC.

The recommendation to declare these stocks rebuilt has been forwarded to NMFS for approval. New harvest specifications and regulations informed by these assessments are expected to be put in place beginning in 2017.

The stock assessments and other technical information can be found [here](#). In addition, the Council adopted a new full assessment for darkblotched rockfish; new update assessments for chilipepper rockfish and sablefish; and new catch reports for cowcod, Pacific ocean perch, and yelloweye rockfish. These new assessments and catch reports will be integrated into the biennial specifications for 2017-2018 and beyond.

INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS TO 2015 GROUND FISH FISHERIES

The Council adopted a revised discard mortality rate for big skate caught with trawl gears as recommended by the SSC. Additionally, the Council considered the latest information on groundfish landings and adopted increases to the big skate trip limits for the Shorebased Individual Fishing Quota Program. The recent trip limit adjustments have been recommended in response to higher big skate landings than anticipated. The Council also adopted trip limit increases for the fixed gear fleets, including the limited entry and open access sablefish daily trip limit fisheries north of 36° N. latitude; open access fishery for minor shelf rockfish complex, shortbelly, widow, and chilipepper between 40° 10' and 34° 27' N. latitude; limited entry and open access blackgill rockfish south of 40° 10' N. latitude; and limited entry and open access fisheries for California scorpionfish. The Council reduced limited entry and open access fixed gear black rockfish trip limits between 40° 10' and 42° N. latitude. The specific recommendations and implementation dates can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/pq3mz4s>.

COUNCIL ADOPTS SCHEDULE FOR DEVELOPING HARVEST LEVELS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR 2017-2018 GROUND FISH FISHERIES

The Council adopted the process and schedule for developing 2017-2018 fishery specifications (see <http://tinyurl.com/p2q6nuh>). In September, the Council will discuss a contingency plan in case the January 1 fishing year start date is delayed as in prior years. The Council will also discuss establishing a process to allow for a mid-biennium

NMFS: National Marine Fisheries Service
SSC: Scientific and Statistical Committee

change to the annual catch limits in the event a species is declared rebuilt. Additionally, in September, the Council will adopt a preliminary range of new management measures for analysis. New measures are those that have not been previously analyzed or implemented in regulation.

GROUNDFISH ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT AND ROCKFISH CONSERVATION AREA UPDATE

The Council received an update on the process of considering changes to groundfish essential fish habitat and Rockfish Conservation Areas, including an update from a collaborative group of industry and nongovernmental organization members who are developing a proposal. The group will continue outreach meetings and plans to submit a proposal for the advance September briefing book. In September, the Council is scheduled to review and adopt a purpose and need statement for the action as well as a range of alternatives for modifying EFH and Rockfish Conservation Areas.

The Council also passed a motion recognizing that any EFH changes affecting tribal “usual and accustomed” areas would be subject to government-to-government consultation between the NMFS and affected tribe or tribes.



Canary rockfish. Credit: Tippy Jackson, California Academy of Sciences

UPDATE ON SALMON ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT CONSULTATION

NMFS plans to convene a workshop on July 29 to brief stakeholders on the progress of their biological opinion for ESA-listed Chinook salmon caught in the groundfish fishery, and to get input on ways to reduce Chinook bycatch. This information will help the Council develop incidental catch levels for various groundfish fisheries, which will be evaluated by NMFS. The Council will discuss this further in September.

The Council also asked NMFS to look at incidental take of eulachon in the shorebased and at-sea whiting fishery, and to incorporate new information on short-tailed albatross populations and fishery takes into their ESA consultation.

EFH: Essential fish habitat
ESA: Endangered Species Act
NMFS: National Marine Fisheries Service

Coastal Pelagic Species

PACIFIC MACKEREL BIENNIAL MANAGEMENT MEASURES SET FOR 2015-17

The Council heard a report on the recent full stock assessment for Pacific mackerel, which indicated that the mackerel population remains well below the peak in the mid-1980s. The Council adopted the stock assessment, which provided biomass estimates for both the 2015-16 and the 2016-17 fishing years, of 120,435 metric tons (mt) and 118,968 mt, respectively. Based on those estimates, the Council set annual catch targets of 20,469 mt and 20,161 mt, with an additional 1,000 mt of incidental set aside to account for mackerel caught in other coastal pelagic species fisheries, once the annual catch target has been reached. Once the directed fishery is closed, it will shift to incidental only for the remainder of each season, with a 45 percent mixed load allowance, and the exception that up to 3 mt of Pacific mackerel per landing may be landed in non-coastal pelagic fisheries.



Pacific mackerel (NOAA)

Highly Migratory Species News

Exempted Fishing Permit Application Approved

Swordfish Management and Monitoring Plan Hard Caps

EXEMPTED FISHING PERMIT APPLICATION APPROVED

The Council recommended that NMFS issue an exempted fishing permit (EFP) to the Alliance of Communities for Sustainable Fisheries based on their application (<http://tinyurl.com/nqefgle>).

The purpose of the EFP is to allow up to two drift gillnet vessels to test gear and operational changes inside the Pacific Leatherback Conservation Area.

The Council recommended several changes to the proposal. No more than two large mesh drift gillnet vessels may fish under the EFP with 100% observer coverage; one leatherback sea turtle mortality or injury, as determined by the observer, would terminate the EFP; and similar caps would be applied to other protected species and striped marlin. Fishing will be prohibited in leatherback sea turtle critical habitat and other areas.

In addition to these requirements, EFP applicants will be required to consult with scientists in order to identify the best ocean conditions and areas to conduct the test fishery. This will involve the use of near-real-time oceanographic data to predict times and areas where target catch rates are expected to be high relative to bycatch rates, especially of protected species.

This EFP is intended as the initial phase of a multi-year project to gather data on allowing drift gillnet vessels to fish in the PLCA. The PLCA was established in 2001 to reduce incidental take of Pacific leatherback sea turtles, which are endangered. The PLCA is closed each year from August 15 to November 15. The area encompassed by the PLCA (approximately from south of Monterey to the mid-Oregon coast) was traditionally a prime fishing ground for drift gillnet vessels. The applicants have proposed gear modifications that could reduce the risk of catching leatherbacks and other protected species. They also propose to monitor ocean conditions and employ forecasting techniques to identify areas where the risk of encountering protected species is lower and swordfish are more abundant. They will collect data on catch and bycatch, gear deployment, and ocean conditions.



Swordfish (NOAA)

SWORDFISH MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING PLAN HARDCAPS

The Council is considering “hard caps” for high-priority protected species that are occasionally taken in the California drift gillnet fishery for swordfish. If the number of encounters with any one of the identified protected species reach the hard cap, the fishery would close for the remainder of that fishing season.

In June, the Council adopted new alternatives and directed the Highly Migratory Species Management Team to analyze them for Council final action in September 2015. These alternatives are variations on current hard cap alternatives, where a two-year average of takes of high priority protected species would be counted against the hard caps. The two-year period would be aligned with the two-year biennial management period

EFP: Exempted fishing permit
PLCA: Pacific Leatherback
Conservation Area

(beginning April 1 in odd years), or would be a rolling period where encounters in the current fishing season and the previous fishing season would be counted against the caps.

The Highly Migratory Species Management Team was also directed to further develop the Swordfish Fishery Management and Monitoring Plan and to continue investigating optimal levels of observer coverage to detect rare-event bycatch while considering the costs of observer coverage.

Advisory Body Appointments

The Council elected **Ms. Dorothy Lowman** Chair and **Mr. Herb Pollard** Vice Chair of the Pacific Fishery Management Council for the 2015-2016 term. In addition, the Secretary of Commerce reappointed **Mr. David Crabbe**, **Mr. Buzz Brizendine**, and **Ms. Dorothy Lowman** to the California and Oregon obligatory seats, respectively, on the Council; appointed **Mr. Joseph Y. Oatman**, of the Nez Perce Tribe, to the Tribal seat, replacing **Mr. David Sones**; and appointed **Mr. Phil Anderson** to the Washington obligatory seat, replacing **Mr. Dale Myer**.

The Council appointed **Mr. David Crabbe** to represent the Council on the Pacific Off-shore Cetacean Take Reduction Team.

The three-year terms of all advisory subpanel members, seven at-large members of the Scientific and Statistical Committee, and four non-agency members and the California tribal member of the Habitat Committee, expire on December 31, 2015. The current advisory body compositions and membership are available on the [Council Website](#). Following the September meeting, Council staff will solicit nominations for the 2016-2018 term, from which the Council will make appointments at the November 2015 meeting. Interested parties should review the duties and responsibilities for appointed members in the [Council Operating Procedures](#) when considering submitting nominations, or contact the staff officer responsible for facilitating the advisory body of interest:

Salmon Advisory Subpanel - [Mike Burner](#): 503-820-2414

Groundfish Advisory Subpanel - [Brett Wiedoff](#): 503-820-2424

Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel - [Kit Dahl](#): 503-820-2422

Coastal Pelagic Species Subpanel - [Kerry Griffin](#): 503-820-2409

Ecosystem Advisory Subpanel - [Kit Dahl](#): 503-820-2422

Scientific and Statistical Committee - [John DeVore](#): 503-820-2413

Habitat Committee - [Jennifer Gilden](#): 503-820-2418

Enforcement

In June 2014, the Eureka-based U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Barracuda discovered a small salmon troll vessel commercial salmon fishing in Federal waters in a closed area north of the 40°05'00" N. latitude (Horse Mountain) boundary line. The boat was initially spotted trolling southward, approximately 1.21 miles north of the closure line. At the time of the boarding, the boat was 0.3 miles north of the northern boundary closure line and in Federal waters with 15 Chinook salmon on board. The captain claimed he was

told by a California Department of Fish and Wildlife employee the northern boundary was the N. 40° 10' line and claimed to have the 2013 regulations.

The vessel operator had fished among the troll fleet for two days prior to the violation on the third day. There was ample opportunity to obtain regulations in his home port. The closure line had been the same for the last several seasons. On the same day of the violation, two other trollers were cited for fishing in the closure, but were boarded in State waters.

A Settlement Agreement was executed this week where the vessel operator paid a reduced civil penalty of \$5451.90.

Upcoming Meetings

SEPTEMBER COUNCIL MEETING

The next meeting of the Pacific Fishery Management Council is scheduled for September 2015 in Sacramento, California. A single-page draft proposed agenda summary is available on the Council website and a draft detailed proposed agenda will be available by August 27. On the agenda:

GROUND FISH

- Mid-Water Recreational Fishing Regulations
- Consideration of Trawl Gear Changes
- Final Stock Assessments
- Electronic Monitoring Regulations and Exempted Fishing Permit Update
- Harvest Specifications and Process for 2017-2018 Management
- Re-initiation of Salmon Endangered Species Act Consultation
- Blackgill-Slope Rockfish Quota Share Allocation
- Groundfish Essential Fish Habitat and Rockfish Conservation
- Inseason Adjustments
- Groundfish Management Science Improvements and Methodology Review Topics

SALMON AND HALIBUT

- Salmon methodology review
- Sacramento Winter Chinook Update
- Halibut Catch Sharing Plan Changes

HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES

- Update on International Issues
- Swordfish Management and Monitoring Plan Hardcaps
- Scoping of Amendment 4 to the Fishery Management Plan: Authorizing a Shallow Set Longline Fishery Outside of the Exclusive Economic Zone

ECOSYSTEM

- Unmanaged forage fish regulations
- Fishery Ecosystem Plan Initiative Scoping

OTHER TOPICS

- Habitat Report
- Legislative Issues
- Update on Council Coordination Committee meeting

STOCK ASSESSMENT REVIEW PANELS

Date/Time: Two stock assessment review panels are scheduled:

- Black rockfish (July 20-24), NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center, Newport, Oregon
- Widow rockfish and Oregon kelp greenling (July 27-31), NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center, Newport, Oregon

Purpose: To review draft 2015 stock assessment documents and any other pertinent information for benchmark stock assessments for black rockfish, widow rockfish, and the population of kelp greenling in waters off Oregon; work with the Stock Assessment Teams to make necessary revisions; and produce STAR Panel reports for use by the Pacific Council and other interested persons for developing management recommendations for 2017 and beyond fisheries. No management actions will be decided by the Panel. [See this link for more information.](#)

SARDINE DISTRIBUTION WORKSHOP

Date/Time: August 17-19, 2015

Location: Southwest Fisheries Science Center, La Jolla, California

Purpose: To consider scientific information, data, and potential alternative means for establishing the Distribution value used in the Pacific sardine harvest control rule (HCR). The workshop is not intended as a review of other aspects of the HCR, Pacific sardine harvest management, or policy.

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