

**WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE (WDFW) REPORT ON
INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS FOR 2017**

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) would like to provide the following updates and recommendations regarding revisions to Washington recreational bottomfish regulations for 2017 and 2018.

In June 2016, WDFW recommended, and the Council approved, Washington recreational bottomfish regulations for 2017 and 2018 that were largely based upon the catch information we had through 2015 and the input we had received at our public meetings held in September 2015 and February 2016. At that time, our preferred management measures were focused on keeping Washington recreational yelloweye rockfish catch within its harvest guideline and the black rockfish catch within its harvest target.

While we had discussed the potential need to reduce the bottomfish bag limit or the rockfish sub-bag limit to stay within the black rockfish harvest target, anecdotal information suggested that the higher black rockfish catch that occurred in 2015 continued in 2016, but without final 2016 catch data, we did not know how far the catch was from the target. In particular, we did not want to go through what we anticipated to be a lengthy, and perhaps contentious, stakeholder process regarding bag limit reductions based on 2015 catches only to potentially repeat the process once we had 2016 catch information.

Once 2016 catch information became available, WDFW held three additional public meetings—on September 1, 2016, January 5, 2017, and February 7, 2017—to develop and discuss bag limit reduction alternatives and other management measures intended to achieve the black rockfish savings necessary to stay within the 2017 and 2018 targets. Table 1 describes how the 2015 and 2016 black rockfish catches compare to the 2017 and 2018 harvest targets, which are specified in weight (mt).

Table 1. Washington recreational black rockfish catch (mt) for 2015 and 2016, as compared to harvest targets (mt) for 2017 and 2018.

Stock	2015 Catch	2016 Catch	2017 Target	2018 Target
Black Rockfish	305.2	369.28	287	283

Of particular note, the difference between the 2016 catch and the 2017 and 2018 targets is 82.28 mt and 86.28 mt, respectively. Using the current average weight of black rockfish (1.25 kg, or 2.75 lbs), the Washington recreational fishery needs to achieve a catch reduction on the order of about 65,824 black rockfish in 2017 and 69,031 fish in 2018.

Based on the input we received at those public meetings, on February 15, 2017, WDFW adopted additional management measures by emergency rule, which we believe to be consistent with the guidance that state regulations may be more restrictive, but not more liberal, than federal regulations. Those measures are listed below along with a brief description of the rationale for the change.

1. Reduce the rockfish daily bag limit from 10 to 7 rockfish per angler

Rationale: Based on the best available science, our analysis indicates that a 7 rockfish daily bag limit is necessary to keep the Washington recreational black rockfish catch within the harvest targets for 2017 and 2018 described above. Several bag limits were explored, including a sub-bag limit for black rockfish within a higher aggregate rockfish limit; however, two objectives we wanted to achieve were to: 1) keep fishing regulations relatively simple for anglers to understand and comply with, and 2) avoid having further bag limit reductions inseason. Given that there are many factors to consider relative to fishing behavior (e.g., anglers continuing to target rockfish once their black rockfish sub-bag limit had been filled) the 7 rockfish bag limit provided the greatest assurance of achieving both of these objectives.

2. Reduce the aggregated bottomfish daily bag limit from 12 to 9 per angler

Rationale: The aggregate bottomfish limit has traditionally been two fish higher than the rockfish bag limit, which allows anglers to retain their lingcod bag limit of two fish in addition to filling their rockfish bag. We recognize that there are areas, particularly off the northern coast of Washington, where anglers may catch cabezon as well as lingcod. In such cases, anglers may have to choose between discarding fish or forgoing rockfish catch to stay within their aggregate limit. However, we believe that the risk associated with allowing anglers to retain three bottomfish in excess of their rockfish bag limit and the potential additional incidental rockfish catch that may occur as a result, was too high to warrant a change at this time.

3. Remove the 22-inch minimum size limit for lingcod

Rationale: WDFW's angler interview data indicates that the amount of discarded lingcod has increased in recent years. Anecdotal information suggests that this is a result of anglers catching undersized lingcod. The intent of this measure is to encourage anglers to retain the first two lingcod they catch—this would allow anglers to fill their bag limits faster, reducing the time spent on the water. This reduction in time on the water could, in turn, reduce angler encounters with rockfish, including yelloweye and black rockfish, depending on the area fished.

As part of the 2013-2014 biennial management process, revising and removing the lingcod size limits were analyzed for all sectors, including the Washington recreational fishery. That analysis indicated that reductions in rockfish catch resulting from this measure may be relatively low;

however, a reduced size limit would not have a negative effect on the lingcod population. Given that any rockfish benefits accruing from this measure would be in the positive direction and the effect on the lingcod stock is neutral, our stakeholders advocated for its inclusion.

In summary, WDFW believes that the combination of management measures described above are necessary to ensure that the Washington recreational bottomfish catches will achieve, but not exceed, its harvest targets. As such, we intend to adopt these changes in our permanent regulations and we respectfully request that the National Marine Fisheries Service take conforming action as well.

Additionally, WDFW intends to adopt a regulation to require anglers to have a descending device on board their vessel when fishing for bottomfish or halibut, beginning July 1, 2017. This measure is consistent with a regulation approved by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission for Puget Sound with the same effective date for ease of implementation. While the reductions in rockfish mortality that are expected to result from this requirement cannot be quantified, we anticipate that there will be some contribution to the overall rockfish savings achieved. This state regulatory change will likely occur following the April Council meeting; therefore, WDFW anticipates bringing this measure forward for the Council's consideration in June.