



Pacific Fishery Management Council *NEWS RELEASE*

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TWO IMPORTANT WEST COAST GROUND FISH STOCKS REBUILT

PORTLAND, OREGON – Two important West Coast groundfish stocks that were formerly overfished have now been rebuilt.

Bocaccio and darkblotched rockfish, which are managed by the Pacific Fishery Management Council, were under strict rebuilding plans that have constrained West Coast fisheries for more than a decade. Bocaccio was declared overfished in 1999, and darkblotched rockfish in 2000; both were rebuilt well before their original target dates.

The Pacific Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional fishery management councils that manage ocean fisheries in the United States. Altogether, the Pacific Council manages more than 100 species of groundfish.

Managing groundfish fisheries under rebuilding plans has been an immense challenge for the Council and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries). These plans required sharp reductions in commercial and recreational fisheries targeting groundfish, which included widespread fishing closures through the establishment of Rockfish Conservation Areas off the West Coast and other measures. Since 2003, managing overfished species through area closures such as the Rockfish Conservation

Areas has helped to reduce fishing impacts and rebuild overfished groundfish species. In addition, the groundfish fleet has had to limit fishing for other more abundant species to avoid unintentional catch of the overfished stocks.

“The rebuilding strategies used to achieve this conservation success, coupled with favorable environmental conditions for groundfish productivity, have paid huge dividends in rebuilding our overfished groundfish stocks and resurrecting West Coast groundfish fisheries,” said Council Chair Herb Pollard.

The successful rebuilding of these species reflects the support and sacrifice of West Coast ports and fishermen who recognized the difficult actions and fishing cutbacks necessary to restore the stocks. The rebuilding of bocaccio and darkblotched rockfish will lead to increased harvest opportunities beginning in 2019.

“By working together, we’ve brought bocaccio and darkblotched rockfish back to where they will again be part of a sustainable West Coast groundfish fishery that creates renewed opportunity for the fishing fleet, as well as more options for seafood consumers,” said Barry Thom, Regional Administrator of NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region.

Between 1999 and 2017, ten West Coast groundfish stocks were declared overfished, as surveys documented their declining numbers. Pacific whiting, for example, was declared overfished in 2002. The Council, working with NOAA Fisheries and the fishing industry, reduced commercial harvests. Combined with strong reproduction and recruitment, the fishing cutbacks led to the rapid rebuilding of Pacific whiting by 2004. The Council and NOAA Fisheries developed rebuilding plans for the other nine overfished stocks—bocaccio, darkblotched rockfish, lingcod, canary rockfish, cowcod, Pacific ocean perch, widow rockfish, petrale sole, and yelloweye rockfish.

Lingcod was declared rebuilt in 2005, and widow rockfish in 2012. Both petrale sole and canary rockfish were declared rebuilt in 2015. Rebuilding plans remain in place for three remaining overfished species: cowcod, Pacific ocean perch, and yelloweye rockfish. New assessments for Pacific ocean perch and yelloweye rockfish will be reviewed this summer and may be adopted in September. Cowcod is expected to be rebuilt by 2019.

“The Council is a transparent, science-based, inclusive approach to fisheries management,” said Council Executive Director Chuck Tracy. “Our progress in rebuilding overfished stocks shows the effectiveness of this approach. West Coast fisheries are a model of sustainable resource management, and they will continue to

provide healthy seafood, jobs, and support for coastal communities, as well as access to this resource for all Americans.”

Process

The bocaccio and darkblotched rockfish assessments were developed by scientists at NOAA Fisheries and were reviewed by the Council’s scientific advisory bodies. NOAA Fisheries confirmed the stocks’ status as rebuilt on June 16.

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>
- Bocaccio stock assessment: <http://tinyurl.com/yaycynmq>
- Darkblotched rockfish stock assessment: <http://tinyurl.com/ybzm3ob6>
- NOAA Fisheries article on rockfish rebuilding: <https://go.usa.gov/xNvCV>