

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON INSEASON
ADJUSTMENTS TO THE RECREATIONAL CANARY ROCKFISH SUB-LIMIT FOR 2018

In response to requests received from recreational fishery representatives in 2017, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) recommends the Pacific Fishery Management Council consider an inseason increase to California's canary rockfish sub-bag limit from one to two fish.

As part of the 2017-2018 Biennial Harvest Specifications and Management Measures process (SPEX), CDFW evaluated a range of alternatives for canary rockfish sub-bag limits (one to five fish) given the improvement in stock status and recent declaration by National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) that it had rebuilt to healthy levels. Because retention of canary rockfish had been prohibited in recreational fisheries off California for over a decade, CDFW expressed the need for caution when allowing retention of canary rockfish given concern that too high of a bag limit could trigger a targeted fishery. Meanwhile, there was a competing interest in reducing discards. Taking into consideration the uncertainty in predicting angler behavior and projected mortality, a one fish sub-bag limit was recommended by CDFW in 2016 as part of the biennial SPEX and implemented early in 2017.

Last year, in response to the new bag limit, CDFW intensified its inseason monitoring for canary rockfish and provided informational updates as the season progressed¹. Throughout the year canary rockfish mortality accrued slower than anticipated and tracked well below the harvest guideline (HG). Preliminary 2017 estimates indicate canary rockfish mortality was 77.4 mt, or 57.3% of the California recreational HG (135 mt) (Table 1). Seasonal catch trends for canary rockfish were consistent with trends observed for other rockfish. Higher catches were observed during spring and summer months when effort was greater and favorable weather prevailed.

¹ http://www.pcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/E10a_Sup_REVISED_GMT_Rpt1_SEPT2017BB.pdf;
https://www.pcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/F13a_Sup_CDFW_Rpt1_NOV2017BB.pdf

Table 1. Number of sampled (sampler observed and angler reported) canary rockfish statewide by month and corresponding catch estimate. Data are from CDFW. (Note: Discrepancies in total are due to rounding)

Month	Total Sampled Fish	Catch Estimate (mt)
January	0	0
February	1	0
March	93	0.1
April	486	4.5
May	1,188	10.9
June	1,288	7.8
July	1,463	10.4
August	2,373	15.9
September	954	9.7
October	642	6.8
November	920	7.1
December	828	4.1
Total	10,236	77.4

CDFW staff received several requests to increase the canary rockfish sub-bag limit from one to two fish. A number of those making the requests indicated that they or their passengers had to release canary rockfish in excess of the one-fish bag limit during 2017, despite that the stock is considered healthy. As noted previously, CDFW analyzed a range of bag limits (up to five fish) during the 2017-2018 SPEX; therefore, the Council could consider modifying the bag limit at this meeting because it is a routine action.

CDFW analyzed the projected impacts under a two fish-sub bag limit taking into account the most current information on recent fishery performance. The analysis was completed using an established recreational bag limit tool, coupled with recent information on fishery performance. Under a two fish sub-bag limit, mortality is expected to remain within the HG (Table 2). Increasing the sub-bag limit to two fish could also have the benefit of decreased canary discards for anglers who catch more than one canary rockfish on a single fishing trip, and could also allow anglers to fill their bag limits more quickly, therefore reducing time spent on the water and the possibility of encountering overfished species such as yelloweye rockfish. CDFW also notes that a two fish sub-bag limit is being proposed as part of the 2019-2020 SPEX. This inseason action would simply implement the bag limit increase in a shorter timeframe with little risk of exceeding the harvest guideline.

Table 2. Projected impacts for canary rockfish in 2018 under status quo and a two fish bag limit.

	Projected Impacts (mt)	Harvest Guideline (mt)	Percent of Harvest Guideline
Status Quo (1 fish bag limit)	77.4	135	57.3%
Option 1 (2 fish bag limit)	110.4	135	81.8%

Given the most recent information on fishery performance, **CDFW recommends increasing the canary rockfish sub-bag limit to two fish within the overall 10-fish bag limit for rockfish, cabezon, and greenling and implementing it as soon as possible so that it aligns with recreational fishery opening dates north of Point Conception².**

² Central Management Area opens April 1; San Francisco Management Area opens April 15; Northern and Mendocino Management Areas open May 1.