WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PRELIMINARY PREFERRED MANAGEMENT MEASURE ALTERNATIVES FOR 2019-2020 FISHERIES

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) met with stakeholders on January 18 and March 22, 2018 to review and discuss proposed recreational management measures for 2019 and 2020. In this report, we review recreational management measures analyzed for 2019 and 2020 and recommend preliminary preferred management measures for public review. We also discuss options for restructuring the Other Fish Complex.

Recreational Management Measures

Recreational fisheries in Washington are primarily constrained by yelloweye rockfish. Depth restrictions have been an effective tool to minimize encounters and keep catch within state specific harvest guidelines (HG). Largely influenced by the yelloweye rockfish annual catch limit (ACL) alternatives under consideration for 2019-2020, the integrated analysis for Washington recreational fisheries (Agenda Item F.2, Attachment 3) considered several management measure scenarios focused on the timing and need for depth restrictions. Based on stakeholder input, WDFW recommends the following management measures as the preliminary preferred alternatives (PPA) to be considered along with the full range of alternatives for public review.

Bag Limits and Sublimits

Recommendation:

1. Remove the sublimit for canary rockfish in all marine areas (Marine Areas 1 through 4) and;
2. Reduce the cabezon sublimit from two fish per day in Marine Areas 1 – 3 to one fish per day in all marine areas, and remove the minimum size limit of 18” in Marine Area 4.

Discussion:

WDFW took a precautionary approach to allowing canary retention in 2017, initially limiting retention to Marine Areas 1 and 2 with a one fish sublimit. Based on catch in 2017, WDFW recommended, and the Council approved, increasing the canary sublimit to two fish per day in all marine areas for 2018 through inseason action in March 2018. For the 2019-2020 integrated analysis, WDFW staff refreshed the canary sublimit analysis with new information from the 2017 season. Results showed that concerns with increased targeting of canary rockfish after a long period when retention was prohibited were minimal, and angler misidentification of yelloweye rockfish (i.e., retaining yelloweye thinking it was a canary) did not occur. Projected impacts for canary rockfish with no sublimit in 2019 are 6.29 mt, which provides sufficient buffer to the WA recreational HG if angler behavior changes.

Reducing the cabazon sublimit in Marine Areas 1-3 from two fish to one fish per angler per day would align the cabezon sublimit in all marine areas to one fish and would result in a slight reduction in projected mortality based on the bag limit analysis. A minimum size limit of 18” is in

place in Marine Area 4 to align cabezon regulations with those inside Puget Sound. Discussions with our Marine Science staff indicated there was likely no biological need for a minimum size limit and it had a minimal effect as anglers are not catching and releasing undersized cabezon.

Lingcod Season

Recommendation:

1. Align the lingcod season in Marine Area 4 with the recreational groundfish season and the lingcod season in Marine Areas 1-3.

Discussion:
Lingcod is currently open in Marine Area 4 from April 16 to October 15 while the lingcod season in Marine Areas 1 through 3 is open concurrently with the recreational groundfish season (i.e., second Saturday in March through the third Saturday in October).

This proposal would open the lingcod season in Marine Area 4 approximately one month earlier, but would only be slightly different from the status quo closing date. Stakeholders proposed this management measure at the meeting on March 22 and as such, was not included in the integrated analysis. Since then, projected impacts to yelloweye rockfish have been estimated by assuming yelloweye impacts in April would double from No Action and that March yelloweye impacts would be the same as the current yelloweye impacts in April under the No Action alternative where the season is open for two weeks. These estimates are included in the projected yelloweye impacts summarized in Table 1. This change will provide some additional opportunity for recreational anglers to target lingcod but is not expected to have a significant impact on angler effort as coastal weather in early spring can often be limiting.

In addition to the request from stakeholders for this change, as part of a statewide process, WDFW is considering alternatives that would simplify recreational regulations and provide consistency between management areas when possible. The April 16 opening date in Marine Area 4 was originally established to align with the lingcod season in the adjacent state managed area east of the Bonilla-Tatoosh line (Marine Area 4B). Consideration for revising the lingcod season in Marine Area 4B to align with the coastal lingcod season dates will occur as part of WDFW's statewide rule making process for 2020.

North Coast (Marine Areas 3 and 4)

Recommendation:

1. Revise the dates for the 20-fathom depth restriction from, May 9 through Labor Day, to June 1 through Labor Day and;
2. Allow yellowtail and widow rockfish retention seaward of 20 fathoms in July and August on days open to salmon fishing.

Discussion:

Depth restrictions are the most restrictive in the north coast management area where encounters with yelloweye rockfish are the highest. With only minimal modifications, recreational groundfish fishing has been limited to the area shoreward of 20-fathoms from May through September since 2006. While several options for the 20-fathom depth restriction were analyzed under the range of yelloweye ACL alternatives, including completely removing the depth restriction for the duration of the season, stakeholders preferred a more precautionary approach. Stakeholders supported a preference for allowing some opportunity to retain mid-water species in waters deeper than 20-fathoms combined with a modest change to the timing of the 20-fathom depth restriction as an initial step.

In general, the majority of yellowtail discards during the month of July and August are on vessels targeting salmon (60 percent and 74 percent during July and August 2017, respectively). As suggested by the high discard rate, salmon fisheries primarily occur in the mid-water area where yellowtail and widow rockfish are likely to be encountered. This measure would allow the retention of healthy rockfish resources that are already being caught and released and where attainment in 2016 was only 22 percent of the yellowtail rockfish ACL North of 40°10' N. lat and 51 percent for widow rockfish (Somers, et al 2017).

To evaluate the impacts of this measure, we considered whether yelloweye rockfish impacts would increase as a result of allowing yellowtail and widow rockfish retention seaward of 20-fathoms. Since this measure would simply allow the retention of mid-water rockfish species that are currently being caught and discarded, the expectation is that there will be little if any increased mortality of yelloweye rockfish. In July and August 2017, there was 0.011 yelloweye rockfish released per angler trip targeting salmon. Total yelloweye rockfish mortality on all trip types in the north coast subarea is relatively low in July and August with the high amounts over the last three years (2015-2017) at 0.07 mt and 0.06 mt in July and August respectively. Again, while yelloweye mortality is not expected to increase as a result of this measure, total yelloweye rockfish impacts for July and August 2017 were doubled to estimate projected mortality for 2019 and 2020 in the event that angler behavior changes. Projected mortality for yellowtail rockfish was estimated assuming that all of the yellowtail rockfish released on trips targeting salmon in July and August 2017 were retained. These estimates are included in the projected total yelloweye impacts summarized in Table 1.

South Coast (Marine Area 2)

Recommendation:

1. Revise the 30-fathom line to be in place from the second Saturday in March through May 31;
2. Revise the 30-fathom line to restrict lingcod only;
3. Allow lingcod retention seaward of the deepwater lingcod line from June 1 through June 15 and from September 1 through September 15;
4. Allow lingcod retention seaward of 30 fathoms and the deepwater lingcod line area every Sunday in May in the event that the Area 2A halibut quota does not provide sufficient quota to likely accommodate recreational halibut fishing in Marine Area 2 for four days.

Discussion:
Input from south coast (Marine Area 2) stakeholders echoed the input from stakeholders from the north coast (Marine Areas 3 and 4) subarea that indicates a preference for a conservative approach to revising depth restrictions under all yelloweye ACL alternatives under consideration for 2019 and 2020.

WDFW analyzed alternatives for the 30-fathom line, which included revising that the groundfish restriction be for lingcod only, and under several timing alternatives, including completely removing the 30-fathom line under ACL Alternative 2 (Agenda Item F.2, Attachment 3). The integrated analysis did not specifically consider any changes to the deepwater lingcod closure. However, projected mortality estimates for removing the 30-fathom line estimated impacts when there would be no depth restriction in place at all (i.e., neither the deepwater lingcod restriction nor the 30-fathom line). In other words, any yelloweye mortality savings resulting from the deepwater lingcod closure would be an additional reduction to projected yelloweye mortality. As such, the projected impacts based on removing the 30-fathom line was used to estimate projected impacts when allowing lingcod retention in the deepwater closure area during portions of the months of June and September (Table 1).

Revising the start date for the 30-fathom depth restriction from March 15 to the second Saturday in March would align it with the opening of the groundfish season and lingcod season, consistent with our original intent. This change was inadvertently left out of the 2017-2018 harvest specifications process when the lingcod and groundfish season dates were changed. Without this change, the start of 30-fathom line restriction could be later than the season opening.

In addition, WDFW discussed with stakeholders potential recreational groundfish measures that could be implemented in the event that the Area 2A Pacific halibut total allowable catch (TAC) is low enough that the south coast subarea could potentially be open for only one or two halibut days. The preferred approach would allow lingcod retention in both the area seaward of 30 fathoms and in the deepwater lingcod closure on Sundays in May. This would allow some additional fishing opportunities if recreational halibut allocations are severely reduced. Impacts to yelloweye rockfish are expected to be similar to what is already projected for the month of May, as lingcod retention is currently allowed seaward of the 30-fathom line and the deepwater lingcod closure on days open to recreational halibut fishing which typically include Sundays in the south coast subarea. WDFW would like guidance from the National Marine Fisheries Service as to whether or not this measure could be implemented through inseason action on an as needed basis as an alternative to including it as a standalone management measure in the 2019-2020 harvest specification and biennial management measure process.

Columbia River (Marine Area 1)

Discussion:
WDFW does not have a specific recommendation for changes to management measures for the Columbia River subarea (Marine Area 1) at this time. However, stakeholders from the Washington portion of this subarea have requested that consideration be given to allowing rockfish retention with halibut on board. The Council previously considered this measure in the 2015-2016 Groundfish Harvest Specification EIS. Currently, groundfish retention is prohibited with halibut

on board from May through September except, flatfish species, sablefish, and Pacific cod can be retained on days open to the recreational halibut fishery. Lingcod retention is also allowed with halibut on board but only during the month of May north of the Washington – Oregon border. Our preference is to consider this management measure when the Council takes up changes to the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan, but recognize the need to have the analysis included in the groundfish harvest specification process.

Recreational Fisheries Summary

Even with yelloweye ACL alternatives that could result in higher Washington yelloweye HGs than have been in place in many years, Washington groundfish stakeholders prefer a precautionary approach to reducing depth restrictions. The integrated analysis for Washington recreational fisheries was intentionally robust and explored a wide range of options that would provide relief to restrictive management measures. The analytical approach was intended to allow for consideration of management measures in a stepwise fashion similar to the approach taken by WDFW relative to canary rockfish in 2017 and 2018. Projected mortality for the Washington recreational fishery in 2019 and 2020 under the PPA are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Projected Mortality (mt) for the Washington Recreational fishery under the Preferred Alternative.

Stock	**2019-2020**
	Preferred Alternative
Canary Rockfish	6.29
YELLOWEYE ROCKFISH	5.22
Black Rockfish	226.42
Lingcod	149.53
Nearshore Rockfish	4.80
Blue Rockfish	*1.47*
Quillback Rockfish	*1.32*
Copper Rockfish	*0.83*
China Rockfish	*1.18*
Brown Rockfish	-
Grass Rockfish	-
Yellowtail Rockfish	46.05
Vermilion Rockfish	0.82
Cabezon	5.09
Kelp Greenling	1.16

Options for restructuring the Other Fish Complex

WDFW recommends that the Council move forward Option 2 as the PPA for restructuring the Other Fish Complex. This proposal would remove Washington kelp greenling and Washington cabezon from the Other Fish Complex and pair both together to form a new Washington kelp greenling/cabezon complex (Agenda Item F.5, Attachment 2, Sect., C.3.1, Proposal 2, Option 2).