

## CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS FOR THE CALIFORNIA RECREATIONAL GROUND FISH FISHERY

In response to industry requests received last fall to consider inseason increases for the California recreational groundfish fishery in 2019, on January 23, 2019, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) met informally with California representatives of the Council, Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP), and interested members of the public to discuss recreational fishery catch data and trends. New catch information from 2018 not available during the 2019-2020 biennial specification development process was presented and discussed, along with updated projections of catch for 2019 and 2020 for select species. Historic yelloweye rockfish catch was also examined regionally, and against the California limit for each year since 2005, as this species continues to be the most significant constraint in the California recreational groundfish fishery. CDFW provides the following summary of discussions from the meeting and proposes inseason actions below.

### **Yelloweye rockfish**

CDFW provided a review of recreational yelloweye rockfish catch estimates, season structures, Rockfish Conservations Areas (RCAs), and depth constraints by management area since 2005. Statewide yelloweye rockfish mortality estimates in the California recreational groundfish fishery ranged from under 1 mt to over 9 mt during this time period, with both significant overage and underage compared to the harvest guideline (HG). The possibility of increasing fishing opportunities into deeper depths and for longer fishing seasons in each of the geographic areas was discussed.

Several attendees expressed support for maintaining status quo season structures and depths rather than making inseason adjustments early in the year. Adding more fishing opportunities too early in the season could result in higher than expected yelloweye rockfish encounters over the summer and may lead to restrictive inseason action later in the year. Several also reiterated support for the November-December all-depth fishery north of Point Arena (38° 57.5' N. lat). Many expressed support for considering inseason adjustments later in 2019 when inseason catch estimates for some months would be available.

### **Lingcod South of 40° 10' N. lat.**

Stakeholders were interested in the potential for increasing the recreational bag limit south of 40° 10' N. lat. inseason, from one to two fish. During the 2019-2020 specifications process, the recreational one-fish bag limit, and reductions to commercial Open Access trip limits were recommended by the Council to keep catches from exceeding the non-trawl HG for 2019-2020. Meeting attendees expressed interest in exploring the numbers and rationale behind this decision, and the extent to which precautionary buffers were applied. CDFW likewise recommends these efforts.

Following discussion at the meeting, CDFW offers the following information on California catch and harvest limits, and recommends increasing the sub-bag limits for canary and black rockfish for 2019, in response to new information that was not available during the 2019-2020 specifications development process.

### **Canary Rockfish**

Prior to 2017, retention of canary rockfish was prohibited in recreational fisheries off California for more than a decade due to the overfished status of the stock. During the 2017-2018 specifications process, the improved stock status allowed CDFW to evaluate sub-bag limit alternatives ranging from one to five fish. CDFW and the Council supported a precautionary approach when first allowing retention, allowing a one fish sub-bag limit for California in 2017. Last March, in response to 2017 catch totals well below the HG, CDFW and the Council recommended an increase in the sub-bag limit to two fish. That inseason action was implemented by NMFS on April 14, 2018.

Despite the increased sub-bag limit, 2018 catches were less than the 2017 totals and only 43 percent of the HG (Table 1).

Table 1. Estimated recreational catch of canary rockfish and percent of HG, 2017-2018.

Year	Bag Limit (fish)	Catch Estimates	Recreational Harvest Guideline (mt)	Percent Attainment
2017	1	82.1	135	61
2018	2	58.4	135	43

Prior to the meeting, industry representatives requested CDFW evaluate the possibility of an additional increase to the sub-bag limit for 2019. CDFW analyzed projected canary rockfish impacts for 2019 using updated catch information through December 2018 under two fish (status quo), three fish, and four fish sub-bag limits. The analysis was completed using the same methods and tools used in the biennial specifications process, incorporating new catch data from 2017 and 2018. The results of the analysis are compared to the 2019 and 2020 HG values (Table 2).

Table 2. Projected impacts for canary rockfish in 2019 and 2020 under status quo and a three or four fish bag limit compared to the recreational HG. Data from CDFW.

Option	Projected Impacts (mt)	Recreational Harvest Guideline (2019/2020) (mt)	Projected Attainment (2019/2020)
Status quo (2 fish)	103.0	127.3/119.7	81%/86%
Option 1 (3 fish)	117.4	127.3/119.7	92%/98%
Option 2 (4 fish)	120.5	127.3/119.7	95%/101%

Meeting participants discussed the projections in Table 2, and all supported an increase to the bag limit for 2019. CDFW supports continuing with the 'slow up' approach to canary bag limit increases in this biennium, noting that the analysis above suggests an inseason increase can be provided while keeping projected catches within limits.

### **Black Rockfish**

In 2015, state-specific stock assessments were conducted for black rockfish, allowing for individual state harvest limits beginning in the next biennium (Table 3). The California HG is split north and south of 40° 10' N. lat. and informally shared between the recreational and non-trawl commercial sectors in each area.

In the recreational fishery, prior to 2015 there was no sub-bag limit for black rockfish within the 10 fish Rockfish, Cabezon, and Greenling (RCG) daily bag limit. For 2015 and 2016, a sub-bag limit of five fish within the RCG daily bag limit was implemented in response to high catches in 2013 and 2014 (Table 3). The recreational sub-bag limit was reduced further from five fish to three fish within the RCG daily bag limit to keep projected impacts within the reduced California HG in 2017 and 2018. The recreational fishery has performed well under expectations since 2016.

In the commercial sector, black rockfish is part of the deeper nearshore fishery, and bimonthly trip limits are set separately north and south of 40° 10' N. lat. A major change to the state Deeper Nearshore permit structure was implemented in 2018 which allowed the transferability of the permits for the first time since 2003, and an increase in commercial harvest in 2018 or 2019 has been anticipated by some. Overall performance of the commercial sector is driven by multiple issues, including the newly transferable permits and resultant changes in fishery participation levels, the variable nature of markets, and oceanographic and weather conditions. However, like the recreational fishery, commercial catch of black rockfish in California has fallen well short of projections since 2016.

Statewide, total take of black rockfish in 2017 and 2018 fell below 50 percent of the California HG, and recreational interests reliant on this stock would like an increase in the sub-bag limit, particularly those in several far-northern ports of California where black rockfish have always comprised the largest portion of rockfish bag limits.

Table 3. Recreational catch and commercial landings (metric tons) of black rockfish compared to the harvest limit in California from 2011-2018. Data are from CRFS, Marine Landings Data System (MLDS), and WCGOP; commercial data for 2018 are preliminary and incomplete.

Year	Recreational Bag Limit	Recreational Catch Estimate	Commercial Landings <sup>1</sup>	Total	California Harvest Limit <sup>2</sup>	Percent Attainment <sup>2</sup>
2011	10	174.3	27.9	202.3	420	48%
2012	10	210.3	25.5	235.9	420	56%
2013	10	363.0	37.0	400.1	420	95%
2014	10	339.9	41.8	381.6	420	91%
2015	5	227.4	104.5	331.8	420	79%
2016	5	165.8	65.2	231.0	420	55%
2017	3	97.3	57.5	154.8	333	46%
2018	3	93.8	45.9	139.7	331	42%

<sup>1</sup>Includes CA state landings data from MLDS and GMT Nearshore Model impacts to estimate total mortality.

<sup>2</sup>The California harvest limit from 2011-2016 was a share of the ACL south of 46°16. Beginning in 2017, California specific ACLs and HGs were implemented and are shared between the recreational and non-trawl commercial fisheries.

Per those requests, CDFW analyzed projected black rockfish impacts for 2019 using updated catch information for 2018 under three fish (status quo), four fish, and five fish sub-bag limits. The analysis was completed using the same methods and tools used in the biennial specifications process, incorporating new catch data from 2017 and 2018. The results of the analysis are compared to the 2019 and 2020 HG values (Table 4).

Table 4. Projected impacts (metric tons) for black rockfish in 2019 and 2020 under status quo and a four or five fish bag limit, combined with projected commercial take and compared to the California non-trawl HG

	Projected Recreational Impacts	Commercial Projection	Combined Projected Harvest	California Non-Trawl HG (2019/2020)	Non-Trawl HG Projected Attainment (2019/2020)
<b>Status quo (3 fish)</b>	104.3	100	204.3	328/325	62%/63%
<b>Option 1 (4 fish)</b>	165.1	100	265.1	328/325	81%/82%
<b>Option 2 (5 fish)</b>	227.4	100	327.4	328/325	100%/101%

As with canary rockfish, meeting participants discussed the projections in Table 4, and all supported an increase to the bag limit for 2019. CDFW supports continuing with the 'slow up'

approach to black rockfish bag limit increases in this biennium, noting that the analysis above suggests an inseason increase can be provided while keeping projected catches within limits.