

## 2020 HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS FOR COWCOD AND SHORTBELLY ROCKFISH – FINAL ACTION

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) adopted preliminary preferred alternatives at their September meeting to 1) eliminate the 2020 annual catch target (ACT) for cowcod south of 40°10' N. lat. and reduce the research set-aside for cowcod to 1.0 mt; and 2) increase the 2020 annual catch limit (ACL) for shortbelly rockfish to 3,000 mt to avoid negative socioeconomic impacts to the 2020 West Coast groundfish fishery. The Council also adopted a 2020 ACL alternative for shortbelly rockfish of 4,184 mt for analysis, which is the 2021 acceptable biological catch.

The Council received public comment from affected stakeholders at their June and September 2019 meetings requesting relief regarding both these initiatives. Affected trawl participants south of 40°10' N. lat. are requesting a higher annual vessel limit of cowcod given the difficulty avoiding incidental bycatch as the stock rebuilds. They expressed concern the fishery will be disrupted if the annual vessel limit is attained prematurely. The Groundfish Management Team and Groundfish Advisory Subpanel recommended increasing or eliminating the 2020 cowcod ACT to avoid a disruption of the fishery.

The Council also received public comment regarding an unanticipated increase in the bycatch of shortbelly rockfish in the Pacific whiting fishery this year. This was unanticipated since shortbelly rockfish rarely occur north of 40°10' N. lat. and an apparent distributional shift has greatly increased encounters of shortbelly rockfish in northern midwater trawl fisheries. The 2020 shortbelly rockfish ACL of 500 mt was set intentionally low relative to the acceptable biological catch of 5,789 mt in recognition of the stock's importance as a forage species in the California Current Ecosystem. They requested an increase in the 2020 ACL to avoid fishery disruptions should the bycatch be high again next year. A draft Regulatory Impact Review/Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis is provided in Attachment 1 to provide more detail on impacts associated with both proposed regulatory amendments. Attachment 1 also provides the Purpose and Need statements for both initiatives as well as alternatives for analysis decided by the Council in September.

The Council should consider the advice of the National Marine Fisheries Service, Council advisory bodies, and the public in consideration of revising 2020 harvest specifications for shortbelly rockfish and cowcod. If the Council proposes revisions to these harvest specifications, they should specify a purpose and need for any proposed action, decide a range of alternatives for analysis, and preliminary preferred alternatives.

### **Council Action:**

- 1. Adopt a Final Preferred Alternative for Specifying a 2020 Annual Vessel Limit for Cowcod.**
- 2. Adopt a Final Preferred Alternative for a 2020 Shortbelly Rockfish Annual Catch Limit.**

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item H.4, Attachment 1: Draft Regulatory Impact Review/Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis for a Proposed Regulatory Amendment under the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan.

Agenda Order:

- H.4 2020 Harvest Specifications for Cowcod and Shortbelly Rockfish – Final Action John DeVore
- a. Reports and Comments of Management Entities and Advisory Bodies
  - b. Public Comment
  - c. **Council Action:** Adopt Final Preferred Alternatives for 2020 Harvest Specifications for Cowcod and Shortbelly Rockfish

PFMC  
10/22/19