WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON EXEMPTED
FISHING PERMIT FOR YELLOWEYE ROCKFISH

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is submitting an application for an exempted fishing permit (EFP) to collect yelloweye rockfish from the recreational halibut and bottomfish fishery off Washington (Agenda Item H.5, Attachment 6). The EFP would be necessary because WDFW would rely on select anglers to retain and surrender their catch instead of discarding it. Retention of yelloweye rockfish has been prohibited in the Washington recreational fishery since 2002 when the stock was declared overfished. The National Marine Fisheries Service determined that collection by anglers triggered the need for an EFP instead of a research or scientific collection permit.

The need for additional collection of yelloweye arises because the only data that has been collected from the recreational fishery during the rebuilding era is the number of discarded fish, as reported by recreational anglers. This has meant that key information for stock assessment— such as length, age, sex, and fecundity of the catch—has not been available. The lack of data collection has also affected estimates of total mortality. Without fish collected from the fishery, average weight is estimated from fish caught in International Pacific Halibut Commission longline survey, which uses commercial fishing gear and a small number of fish from the WDFW nearshore rockfish survey. As such, the average weight used to estimate mortality is likely not representative of the fish caught in the recreational fishery.

Conservative management during the rebuilding period has improved the status of the yelloweye stock (Gertseva, V. and Cope, J.M. 2017) and the current rebuilding plan (Gertseva, V. and Cope, J.M. 2018) forecasts that the stock will be rebuilt in 2025, much earlier than anticipated in the 2011 rebuilding analysis. An excerpt from the research and data needs section of the 2017 stock assessment highlighted that additional information on yelloweye rockfish is critical for management of the resource:

> it is essential to continue yelloweye data collection, especially in this recent period when commercial and recreational catches are considerably lower than the historical period, to provide a fuller picture of age structure and population dynamics. Further length and age collections will also refine estimate of year class strength in the late 2000s, which will improve estimates of stock status and productivity.

The EFP would address this need by allowing select recreational anglers to retain yelloweye rockfish and provide them to WDFW staff. As described in Council Operating Procedure 19, an EFP is necessary to allow anglers to engage in prohibited activity and can be issued to state

agencies for the purpose of collecting limited experimental data. The objective of this EFP is focused on collecting scientific data rather than testing fishery innovation.

The number of fish that would be collected is uncertain, based on factors like the number of participating anglers, number of trips, encounter rates, etc. however, the target would be between 100 and 200 fish . Collections would be of fish incidentally caught during the normal recreational halibut and bottomfish fisheries but rather than being discarded, they would be retained and forfeited to WDFW staff at the end of each fishing trip. In essence, fish collected as part of this EFP are already being encountered in the fishery and accounted for in estimates of discarded fish. The additional mortality would be that caused by retaining rather than releasing the fish either at the surface or with a descending device.

In sum, this EFP will provide critical fishery data and improve biological information on the yelloweye rockfish stock off Washington. Further, it would give managers some insight on management measures that may allow for a permanent "citizen science" program for collecting yelloweye and others species. Creation of such a program would require a change to federal and state regulations.