

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON 2017-2018
RECREATIONAL MANAGEMENT MEASURES

Following the April 2016 Council meeting, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) continued discussions with stakeholders and solicited further input on potential groundfish regulation changes for the 2017 and 2018 recreational fishery. Based in part on public input, CDFW offers the following recommendations for modifying the Preliminary Preferred Alternative (PPA) and to assist Council consideration in deciding a Final Preferred Alternative (FPA) for recreational season structures and management measures for 2017-2018.

Area Closures (“Hot Spots”)

Area closures were investigated because of the potential need to mitigate overfished species impacts as a result of allowing access to deeper depths which have not been accessed in nearly a decade. These area closures were initially developed over the winter from considering public input received during a series of groundfish workshops conducted by CDFW¹. Discussions with stakeholders continued after the April Council meeting and further input was received. However, after considerable deliberation CDFW does not recommend implementing ‘hot spot’ area closures or the ability to use these closures inseason for 2017-2018.

Although the recreational harvest guideline for yelloweye rockfish was exceeded in 2007 under similar depth restrictions contemplated for 2017-2018, significant management changes were implemented which reduces the risk of an overage in the future.

Since 2007, CDFW implemented an inseason monitoring tool to improve the timeliness of data reporting and ensure catches remain within allowable limits. Data from preliminary California Recreational Fisheries Survey (CRFS) reports are converted into an anticipated catch value in metric tons using catch and effort data from previous years and are combined with available CRFS estimates. This proxy value is then used to approximate catch in the interim until CRFS estimates become available². The method has proven extremely robust and allows for weekly monitoring which offers an interim value until the CRFS estimates becomes available.

In 2009, the Council adopted new depth dependent mortality rates for use in management. Prior to 2009, all rockfish released were assumed to have a 42 percent mortality rate, regardless of depth of capture. The Council has also adopted mortality rates reflecting the use of descending devices, which further reduces mortality of released fish. These devices have become increasingly popular in California, with significant outreach efforts done by both industry and CDFW^{3,4,5}.

¹ Data from The Nature Conservancy was also used to inform some of the area closures.

² <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/Groundfish/Tracking>

³ <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/Groundfish/Barotrauma>

⁴ <http://www.californiasportfishing.org/>; <http://www.descendyourfish.org/>

⁵ <https://coastsidefishingclub.com/>

Along with outreach to spread the awareness of barotrauma and descending device use, CDFW has also made significant efforts to educate anglers on the proper identification of yelloweye rockfish. CDFW also conducts yearly opener outreach, where informational materials and descending devices (when available) are distributed among private boaters and charter boats at the start of each season.

Several Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) were also implemented in management areas north of San Mateo County (San Francisco) to the California/Oregon border between 2010 and 2012⁶; many of the MPAs prohibit the recreational take of groundfish. In development of the MPAs on the North Coast (which encompasses Northern and Mendocino Management Areas), one of the goals was to select areas which would provide protection to species "...and rebuild those that are depleted"⁷ - including yelloweye rockfish. As such many of the areas known to have high encounters of yelloweye rockfish have already been closed through the MPA process.

Given the changes in outreach, inseason tracking and management since 2007 and considering the recreational fishery has effectively minimized impacts to a level of only 50 percent of the harvest guideline in recent years, CDFW does not believe additional area closures are needed at this time.

CDFW's support for not implementing area closures is contingent upon two important items - the new inseason process with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to allow for action to be taken outside a Council meeting and industry involvement/self-regulation. CDFW will be relying heavily on industry to assume responsibility to continue with outreach efforts to educate the public on yelloweye rockfish and other species of concern and to manage fleet behavior to ensure that anglers continue to avoid those areas known to contain yelloweye rockfish and move locations if these species are encountered.

CDFW will continue to closely monitor mortality inseason and, if needed, action can be taken to keep mortality within allowable limits.

California Recreational Fishery

No other modifications to the PPA are being recommended by CDFW for Council consideration of the FPA. However, for simplicity and ease, the CDFW recommended FPA is presented below in its entirety.

Season Structure

In accordance with CDFW's policy to provide a stable fishery and minimize inseason disruptions, seasons are designed to maximize fishing opportunity while keeping harvest within specified harvest limits. Black and yelloweye rockfishes constrain the recreational fishery. These constraints are particularly challenging in the Northern Management Area, where the recreational fishery is highly dependent on black rockfish, and yelloweye rockfish encounters are more frequent than in management areas south of Point Arena.

⁶ <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/MPAs/Network/Northern-California>

⁷ <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=112489&inline>

The California recreational season structure under the CDFW FPA is shown in Figure 1. Compared to the 2016 season structure, the Northern and Mendocino Management Areas would be extended by two and a half months, through December 31. Allowable fishing depths would be increased in the Northern Management Area from 20 fm to 30 fm during May 1 through October 31. In the Mendocino Management Area, the depth restriction will remain at 20 fathoms from May 1 through October 31. In both the Northern and Mendocino Management Areas, fishing will be permitted at any depth from November through December. Allowable fishing depths would also be increased in the San Francisco and Central Management Areas by 10 fathoms to 40 and 50 fathoms, respectively.

CDFW evaluated the possibility of allowing deeper depths (e.g., 75 fm) in the Southern Management Area; unfortunately increasing the depth to 75 fm would result in projected cowcod impacts of 3.6 mt and exceed the non-trawl allocation of 2.6 mt. In order to remain within allowable impacts for cowcod, the season structure in the Southern Management Area would remain the same as in 2016; similarly the California scorpionfish season would remain the same as in 2016 (i.e. closed September through December).

Management Area	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Northern	Closed				May 1 – Oct 31 <30fm							All Depth
Mendocino	Closed				May 1 – Oct 31 <20fm							All Depth
San Francisco	Closed				April 15 – Dec 31 <40fm							
Central	Closed			April 1 – Dec 31 <50fm								
Southern	Closed		Mar 1 – Dec 31 <60 fm									

Figure 1. California recreational groundfish season structure for 2017-2018.

Bag Limits and Size Limits

CDFW supports the size, bag and sub-bag limits similar to those in 2016 except for the modifications described below.

Black rockfish- To keep within allowable limits, CDFW supports reducing the sub-bag limit from five to three fish within the 10 fish aggregate rockfish, cabezon, greenling (RCG) complex bag limit.

Bocaccio- Bocaccio are rebuilding faster than anticipated and are projected to be rebuilt in 2016; as a result, encounters are increasing and anglers are forced to discard any bocaccio in excess of the sub-bag limit they encounter while pursuing other targets. CDFW supports eliminating the sub-bag limit of three fish within the 10 fish aggregate RCG complex bag limit. Anglers would be allowed to retain up to 10 bocaccio within the aggregate RCG complex bag limit.

Canary rockfish- Canary rockfish was recently declared rebuilt; CDFW supports allowing limited retention of canary rockfish with a sub-bag limit of one fish within the 10 fish aggregate RCG complex bag limit. Because of the significant change in stock status resulting from the last assessment, as well as uncertainty in angler behavior, CDFW prefers a precautionary approach in setting the sub-bag limit. Safeguards are available to take action to prohibit retention in the event that catch exceeds projections.

Lingcod- Recreational catch has been increasing in recent years and the non-trawl allocation has been fully attained. Given the proposed extensions to season lengths, a lower bag limit is needed to ensure the additional catches that will come with the increases to time on the water can be accommodated within the limit. Industry requested a reduction to the bag limit from three to two fish and CDFW supports this reduction.

New Management Measures

CDFW supports the following new management measures for 2017-2018, which are described briefly below. More information can be found in Agenda Item G.4, Attachment 5 in the June 2016 briefing book.

Inseason Process Outside of a Council Meeting

After the April Council meeting, CDFW and NMFS discussed the new process during two teleconferences. The new inseason process would be similar to the current inseason process, except that it would allow for routine measures to be implemented outside of a Council meeting. This may be particularly useful during the summer months when mortality accrues more quickly and there are generally several months between Council meetings. Action would be taken based upon attainment or projected attainment of federally specified limits based on CDFW inseason monitoring information for black, canary and yelloweye rockfishes. This new management measure would include a consultative process similar to that of the Pacific halibut and salmon fisheries, and would include CDFW, NMFS and Council staff.

Retention of Petrale Sole and Starry Flounder

CDFW supports allowing retention of petrale sole and starry flounder year round and without depth constraint in the recreational fishery. Petrale sole and starry flounder are commonly encountered while anglers target other species which have different seasons and/or allowable depth (e.g. Pacific halibut) or are open year round without depth constraint (e.g. Pacific sanddab) than the groundfish regulations.

Combined Impacts-Groundfish Mortality

A summary of projected impacts to overfished and non-overfished species is provided in Table 1 and includes projected mortality of the proposed new management measures (i.e. year round retention of petrale sole and starry flounder). All impacts are projected to remain within allowable limits.

Revised Canary Rockfish Projection

At the April 2016 Council meeting, CDFW received input that assumptions about targeting behavior used to model canary rockfish impacts in the recreational fishery may have been misinformed; constituents indicated that targeting was likely to occur, even under a one fish sub-bag limit. CDFW also considered the following factors - discard information from 2015, proposed season length extensions, and the likelihood of encountering a canary rockfish on a trips. As a result, the projection model was updated to reflect this new information which resulted in impacts of 135 mt. The updated assumptions in the model and resulting projected mortality reflect the best available science and information (Table 4).

Errata

An error was identified in Agenda Item G.4, Attachment 2 in the June 2016 briefing book; the No Action mortality of black rockfish listed was for a 10 fish bag limit instead of a five fish sub-bag limit within the aggregate RCG complex bag limit. On page 204 in table 4-134 the correct value for the No Action projected mortality for black rockfish should be 284.4 mt instead of 362.4 mt.

Table 1. Projected mortality in the California recreational fishery under the CDFW preferred season structure, including preferred bag and sub-bag limits. Values in parenthesis indicate preferred sub-bag or bag limits other than those in 2016.

Stock	Projected Recreational Mortality	California Recreational HG 2017/18	Non-Trawl Allocation 2017/18 a/
BOCACCIO (10)	184.9	329.1/308.4	476.5/446.6
CANARY (1)	135.0 b/	135.0	406.5
COWCOD	2.2		2.6
YELLOWEYE	3.2	3.9	12.1
Black Rockfish (3)	217.4		
Blue Rockfish	149.3	305.0/311.0	
Cabazon	33.0		
California Scorpionfish	96.7		
Greenlings	10.2		
Lingcod N. of 40°10' N. lat. (2) c/	68.2		1,342.5/1,557.8
Lingcod S. of 40°10' N. lat. (2)	410.5		683.7/624.8
Widow Rockfish	30.3		169.2/161.2
Nearshore Rockfish N. of 40°10' N. lat.	7.7		
Nearshore Rockfish S. of 40°10' N. lat.	343.7		
Petrable sole d/	6.6		144.8/138.6
Starry flounder d/	7.5		635.9

a/ Includes non-nearshore, nearshore, and recreational.

b/ Projected mortality differs from the amount reported in Agenda Item F.6.a, Supplemental CDFW Report because of updated assumptions based upon input received at the April 2016 Council meeting.

c/ Only includes the area between 42° N lat. and 40° 10' N lat., while the non-trawl allocation is applicable for the entire area North of 40° 10' N lat.

d/ Retention of these species would be allowed year round without depth constraint. In 2016, these species could be retained only during months and depths which were open to groundfish fishing.