

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE INSEASON REPORT ON 2020  
GROUNDFISH HARVEST IN CALIFORNIA

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) provides the following update on recent commercial and recreational fishery activities in California, in an effort to examine possible impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 1. COVID-19

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California Governor Newsom issued statewide [Executive Order N-33-20](#) on March 19, which required “...all individuals living in the State of California to stay home or at their place of residence except as needed to maintain continuity of operations of the Federal critical infrastructure sectors...”. This measure included the practice of maintaining a minimum six feet of physical distance in addition to eliminating or minimizing non-essential activity.

Many local municipalities and harbor districts took action to limit or close launching facilities, which directly affected the recreational private fleet and Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel operations, and temporarily impacted some commercial operations. The Federal, state, county, and local COVID-19 orders are extremely dynamic and are continuing to change as of the writing of this report.

## 2. Commercial Fishery

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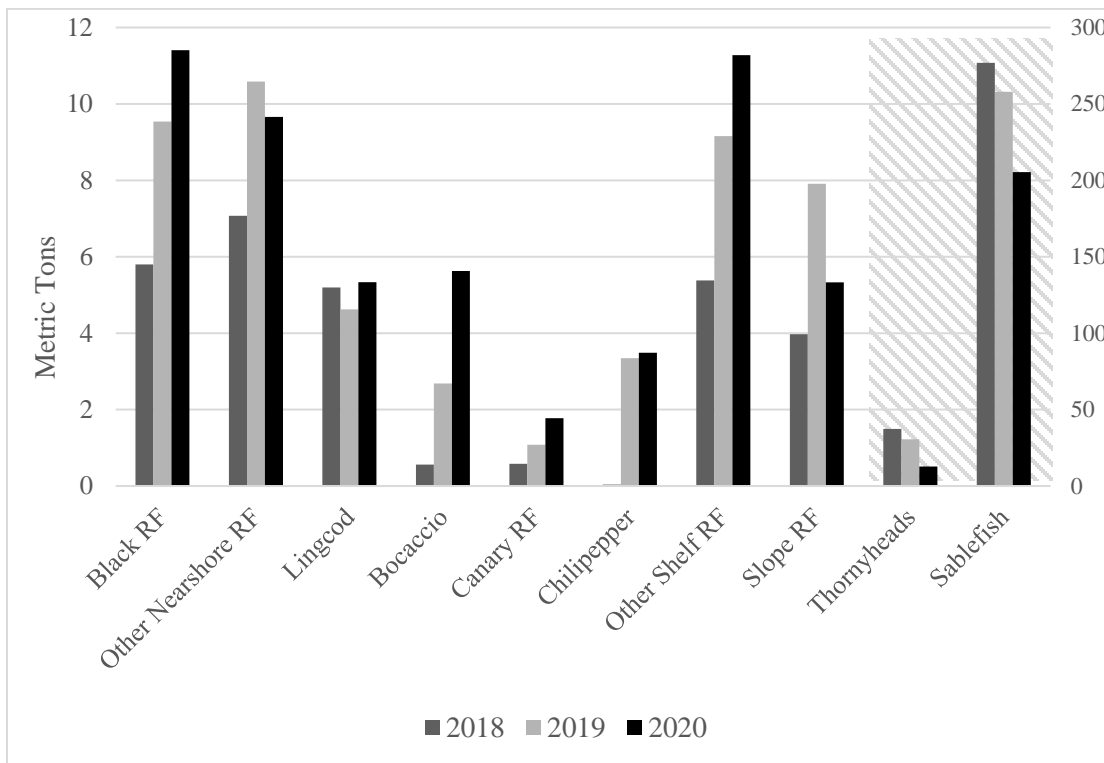
Commercial fishers and processors are considered “Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers” under the statewide stay-at-home order. Between March 19, when the stay-at-home order became effective, and May 31, there were 809 commercial fishing licenses purchased by new entrants, defined as having never been issued a commercial fishing license in prior years. In comparison an average of 262 licenses were purchased by new entrants in the same time period in 2018 and 2019. Additionally, 187 new commercial boat registrations were purchased compared to an average of 41 in 2018 and 2019, and 163 new commercial fisherman retail licenses were purchased compared to an average of 27 in 2018 and 2019.

It is not known which commercial fisheries these new entrants intend to participate in, but the groundfish fishery does not appear to be the focus of their interests at this time. As of May 31, landing records show that nine of the new boats, four of the new commercial fishing licenses, and 12 of the new commercial fisherman retail licenses have been recorded on groundfish landing receipts. CDFW’s review of limited entry (LE) and open access (OA) fixed gear landing records from March 19 to May 31 indicates all but approximately 250 pounds of lingcod; 1,200 pounds

composed of bocaccio, canary rockfish, chilipepper, and other shelf rockfish; and 100 pounds of slope rockfish were landed by previously established vessels and fishers and not by the new entrants described above. In addition, only 1,500 pounds of groundfish were received by the new commercial fisherman’s retail license holders. CDFW will continue to monitor groundfish landings to see if effort by new entrants increases.

### Non-Trawl Fishery Performance

Between March 19 and May 31, non-trawl LE, OA, and individual fishing quota (IFQ) fixed gear landings were relatively stable for most groundfish complexes despite some changes in market dynamics, such as higher than normal demand in some locations for locally caught fish. Landings increased compared to 2018 and 2019 levels for black rockfish, bocaccio, canary rockfish, and other shelf rockfish; remained relatively stable for other nearshore rockfish, lingcod and chilipepper; and declined from 2019 levels for slope rockfish (Figure 1). Meanwhile, sablefish and thornyheads experienced a decrease in LE, OA, and IFQ fixed gear landings (Figure 1) compared to previous years. Average statewide price per pound paid for fixed gear landings increased for black rockfish, decreased for bocaccio, canary, chilipepper, slope rockfish, and sablefish, and was relatively stable for the remaining groundfish (Table 1).



**Figure 1. LE, OA, and IFQ fixed gear statewide landings (mt) of select groundfish between March 19-May 31 in 2018 and 2019, compared to 2020. Note that magnitude of thornyhead and sablefish landings (mt) is indicated on the secondary y-axis on the right. Data are from PacFIN**

**Table 1. Average statewide price per pound for fixed gear landings of select groundfish between March 19-May 31 in 2018 and 2019, compared to 2020 (LE, OA, and IFQ fixed gear). Data are from PacFIN.**

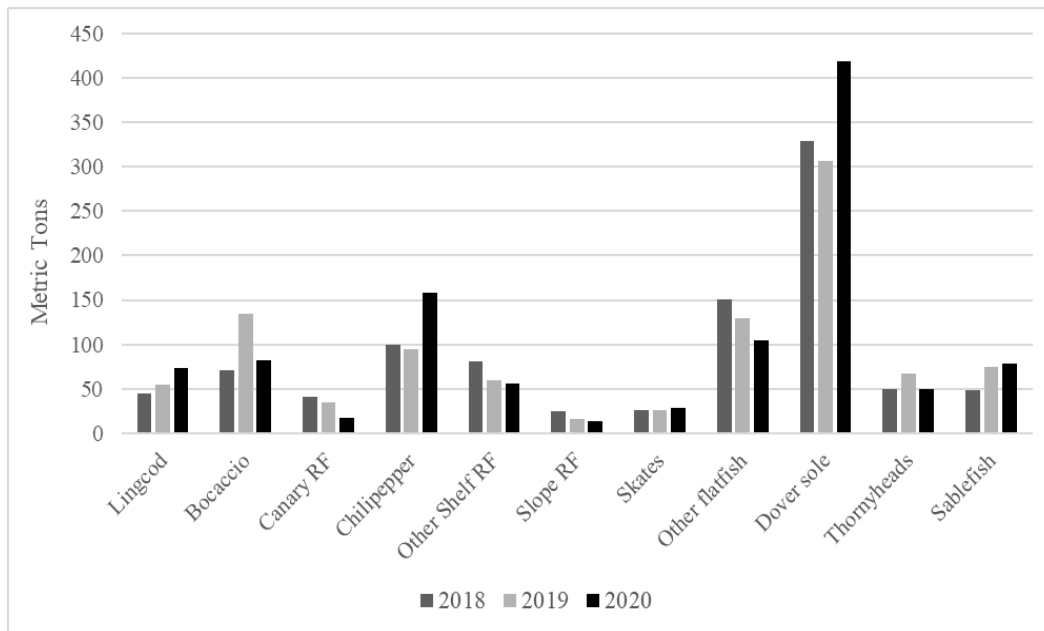
Species	2018 to 2019 Avg Price per Pound	2020 Avg Price per Pound	% Change
Black RF	\$2.14	\$2.71	26%
Other Nearshore RF a/	\$6.81	\$6.52	-4%
Lingcod	\$3.00	\$3.02	1%
Bocaccio	\$2.44	\$1.97	-19%
Canary RF	\$2.58	\$2.05	-21%
Chilipepper	\$2.16	\$1.96	-9%
Other Shelf RF b/	\$2.93	\$2.93	0%
Slope RF	\$1.74	\$1.58	-9%
Thornyheads	\$4.82	\$4.88	1%
Sablefish	\$5.42	\$4.14	-24%

a/ Other nearshore rockfish include the shallow and deeper nearshore rockfish complex.

b/ Other shelf rockfish include the minor shelf rockfish complex, widow rockfish, and yellowtail rockfish.

### Trawl Fishery Performance

Statewide IFQ trawl landings of lingcod, chilipepper, sablefish, and dover sole increased from the period of March 19 to May 31, 2020 compared to the same time period in 2018 and 2019 (Figure 2), while other species declined or held steady. Average price per pound paid for statewide IFQ trawl landings has decreased for all species/complexes except for dover sole and “other flatfish” (Table 2).



**Figure 2. Statewide IFQ trawl landings (mt) of select groundfish between March 19-May 31 in 2018 and 2019, compared to 2020. Data are from PacFIN.**

**Table 2. Statewide average price per pound for IFQ trawl landings for select groundfish between March 19-May 31 in 2018 and 2019, compared to 2020. Data are from PacFIN.**

Species	2018 to 2019 Avg Price per Pound	2020 Avg Price per Pound	% Change
Lingcod	\$1.23	\$0.84	-31%
Bocaccio	\$0.53	\$0.36	-33%
Canary RF	\$0.49	\$0.34	-31%
Chilipepper	\$0.55	\$0.44	-20%
Other Shelf RF a/	\$0.32	\$0.26	-18%
Slope RF	\$0.48	\$0.34	-28%
Skates	\$0.26	\$0.19	-28%
Other flatfish b/	\$0.66	\$0.78	19%
Dover sole	\$0.62	\$0.71	15%
Thornyheads	\$0.79	\$0.46	-42%
Sablefish	\$3.06	\$1.88	-38%

a/ Other shelf rockfish include the shelf rockfish complex, widow rockfish, yellowtail rockfish.

b/ Other flatfish include butter sole, curlfin sole, flathead sole, Pacific sanddab, rex sole, rock sole, and sand sole.

### 3. Recreational Fishery

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Typically, angler effort in the recreational fishery increases considerably from March through June as the boat-based groundfish fisheries open in successive management areas in the state, and access to fishing grounds typically increases with improved weather and ocean conditions. Since mid-March however, the level of access to harbor and launching facilities for recreational fishing has varied widely across the state from the time stay-at-home orders were issued. Standard protocols for California Recreational Fisheries Survey (CRFS) sampling ceased approximately mid-March to protect the health and safety of staff. However, by the end of March, the program adapted and began conducting site effort checks (SECs) (i.e., counts of anglers or boat trailers at sites) at nearly all shore and boat sites. With varied accessibility, the site effort checks have shown that anglers continued to fish in higher than expected numbers in some areas, while others are at normal or lower than expected effort. Inseason catch estimates for 2020 generated through March show all target and non-target groundfish species are within or below typical harvest levels.

CDFW will continue monitoring accessibility in all ports noting that as areas relax restrictions; the overall circumstances are dynamic and may continue to fluctuate on a regional basis. In response, staff are investigating methods to generate catch approximations for April and beyond, or until sampling efforts can safely resume, which includes evaluating the effort data collected in comparison to previous years. CDFW does not have an expected timeline for when or what approximations may be available.