

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES REPORT ON THE NON-TRIBAL DIRECTED
 COMMERCIAL PACIFIC HALIBUT FISHERY BYCATCH OF YELLOWEYE ROCKFISH

At the September Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting, there was a request for the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to provide available information on the incidental catch of yelloweye rockfish in the non-tribal directed commercial Pacific halibut fishery. To the extent possible since the September Council meeting, NMFS West Coast Region, with assistance from the Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC), has examined the available data and provides a summary. The intent of the data below is to provide some context to the unexpected increase in estimates of incidental take of yelloweye rockfish in this fishery in 2019, as reported in the NWFSC annual groundfish mortality report.

Summary of available information through September 2019

Observer coverage began in this fishery in 2017 and has continued into 2020; data are currently available through 2019 and were presented to the Council in September 2020. The 2020 data will be available no earlier than June 2021, and the annual groundfish mortality report will be available at the September 2021 meeting.

Analysis of haul-level observer data did not reveal a clear explanation for the difference in yelloweye rockfish bycatch catch between 2019 and 2017-2018. Unlike 2020, 2017-2019 had similar season structures of three 10 hour openers every other week in late June (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of 2017-2020 non-tribal directed commercial Pacific halibut fisheries.

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Dir. Comm. catch limit (pounds)	225,591	201,845	254,426	254,426
Length of openers	10 hrs	10 hrs	10 hrs	58 hrs
Number of openers	3	3	3	5
Number of participants	86	66	102 ^{a/}	90 ^{a/}
Number of landings	184	130	223 ^{a/}	270 ^{a/}
Percent observer coverage	7	24	13	Avail. Fall 2021
Estimated yelloweye bycatch (mt)	0.67	0.01	7.42	Avail. Fall 2021

^{a/} These numbers are draft and may change in later reports.

Additionally, across all three years, most observed hauls (77 percent) occurred on vessels based out of ports on the Columbia River (Ilwaco/Chinook, Astoria/Warrenton). A greater number were observed hauls on the June 26, 2019, opener, though yelloweye rockfish catch was observed on both the June 26 and July 10, 2019, openers. A greater number of vessels observed in 2019 caught yelloweye rockfish than in 2017 or 2018, though a small number of vessels caught the majority of observed yelloweye rockfish.

The NWFSC provided its annual groundfish mortality report, and the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) updated its scorecard with yelloweye rockfish bycatch information at the September Council meeting.

NMFS recognizes the potential impacts to the fishery of large yelloweye rockfish bycatch in the Pacific halibut fishery. However, given the limited years of bycatch estimations and the relatively low bycatch in 2017 and 2018, NMFS recommends waiting until data from at least 2020 is available before the Council undertakes a detailed discussion of the level of, need for, and types of possible management actions. NMFS will continue to collaborate with the NWFSC observer program to track available data and trends, and keep the Council informed.