

ODFW REPORT ON 2023-2024 PRELIMINARY GROUND FISH HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES

At the September 2021 meeting, as described in [Agenda Item G.6 Supplemental REVISED Attachment 1 June 2021](#), “The Council meets and adopts:

1. Stock assessments endorsed by the SSC
 2. Final preferred alternatives (FPAs) for OFLs recommended by the SSC, where possible.
 3. Alternatives for stocks where there is a desire to explore a departure from default harvest control rules:
 - a. Determine a range of P* values and acceptable biological catches (ABCs), including preliminary preferred alternatives (PPA) for P* values and ABCs.
 - b. A range of ACLs, including PPA ACLs.
- Preliminary range of new management measures. (Those...that have not been analyzed or implemented in a previous cycle)”

This report covers two topics, both limited to Oregon fisheries. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) proposes adoption of an alternative Oregon black rockfish ABC for further exploration and comparison to that resulting from the default HCR. In addition, we provide notice of a potential new management measure relating to recreational groundfish and halibut retention in waters off Oregon.

Black rockfish ABC

Background

Black rockfish is vitally important to Oregon’s recreational and commercial nearshore fisheries, comprising the majority of catch in each sector. As described in [Agenda Item I.3.a. Supplemental ODFW Report November 2015](#), the stability, availability, and accessibility of black rockfish fishing opportunities makes this stock the “bread-and-butter” of nearshore fisheries in Oregon, insulating many coastal small businesses and communities against variability in opportunities for other species such as salmon and albacore. ODFW places a high priority on managing the stock for optimal current fishing opportunities, while first and foremost protecting its future productivity.

The Oregon black rockfish stock was last assessed in 2015, at state boundaries for the first time. The assessment estimated biomass to be at 61 percent of unfished (61 percent depletion) at the start of 2015¹. The assessors and reviewers encountered significant challenges in modeling stock dynamics and estimating scale. In reporting on the mop-up panel in [November 2015](#), the Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) noted several areas of substantial uncertainty and model sensitivity, but concluded by stating that “Assessment results for Oregon indicate that the stock has been relatively stable, and above the B_{MSY} proxy levels throughout the exploitation history of the stock.” The SSC endorsed the assessment as the best scientific information available.

¹ <https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2016/03/assessments-of-california-oregon-and-washington-stocks-of-black-rockfish-sebastes-melanops-in-2015-published-03-31-2016.pdf/>

It was designated a category 2, in part due to the greater overall uncertainty associated with the assessment.

ODFW expressed a number of reservations regarding the 2015 assessment, and the reasons for them, in [Agenda Item I.3.a Supplemental ODFW report, November 2015](#). In particular, the catchability for an ODFW tagging study was considered the most important aspect of uncertainty during reviews of the assessment. ODFW found the catchability value used in the adopted model to be implausibly high, underestimating the scale of Oregon black rockfish biomass. In August and early September 2021, ODFW is conducting a fishery-independent survey of black, blue, and deacon rockfish along the full Oregon coast using a combined hydroacoustic and visual method, which we hope will inform a full assessment in 2023.

[Harvest projections in the 2015 assessment](#) have formed the basis for the overfishing levels (OFLs) for Oregon black rockfish since 2017. Although combined with Oregon blue/deacon rockfish in a complex since 2019 due to difficulty in targeting these species independent of each other and in distinguishing them from each other by the average angler, ODFW continues to successfully manage black rockfish to the stock's component contributions, with harvest guidelines in federal rule and state rule, and intensive state inseason monitoring and management.

In the 2017-2018 and 2019-2020 management cycles, the default harvest control rule (HCR) that uses the sigma-P* framework (with $P^* = 0.45$) was used to determine ABCs and annual catch limits (ACLs). Beginning in 2019, the new higher and time-varying sigma values have increased the precautionary buffer between the OFL and ABC when the default HCR is used.

For 2021-2022, the Council departed from the default HCR on a case-specific basis to adopt an ABC for both years equal to the 2020 value (512 metric tons). The intent was to provide fishery stability, without significantly affecting stock status. A key factor supporting that decision was that long term projections under the default and alternative ABC resulted in nearly identical results for spawning output and depletion ([H.6.a GMT Report 2, November 2019](#), Tables 2 and 3) in 2030 (the end of the projected time period). Those projections assumed a return to the default HCR (category 2 sigma/P*) beginning in 2023.

Proposed alternative ABC for Oregon black rockfish in 2023-2024

Application of the default HCR in 2023 will result in an ABC and ACL that are likely to constrain Oregon fisheries even more than the status quo. The value of black rockfish fishing opportunity to Oregon communities remains as previously described, as does the importance of ensuring the stock's future health. In order to better understand the impacts of the default specifications and an alternative ABC equal to the 2021 value (512 mt) on the stock and on fisheries prior to selection of a final ABC and ACL in November 2021, **ODFW recommends including an alternative Oregon black rockfish ABC of 512 mt for 2023 and 2024 in the range, along with the default that would result from application of sigma for a category 2 stock last assessed in 2015 and $P^* = 0.45$.** ODFW suggests consideration of $ACL = ABC$ under both alternatives.

When the groundfish harvest specifications for 2020-2021 were adopted, the SSC endorsed “the alternative ABCs for use in [that] management cycle, but this practice should be used sparingly in general and is not recommended on a recurring basis for any stock” ([Agenda Item C.6.a Supplemental SSC Report 1 November 2019](#)). ODFW concurs with the principle and the recommendation that the practice not be used on a recurring basis. Current and sustained future fishing opportunity afforded by the black rockfish stock are critically important to ODFW and Oregon stakeholders, and we do not wish to jeopardize the capacity of the stock to support fisheries and fill its ecosystem role in present and future conditions. However, we believe that it is possible the proposed alternative may be able to provide valuable fishery stability without a detrimental impact on future stock status and productivity. Including the proposed alternative in the range at this time will allow further exploration and consideration of any additional information that may become available, and may provide valuable information for the Council, its advisors, and the public prior to final selection of harvest specifications in November.

Request to the NWFSC

To support evaluation of the impacts of the proposed and default ABC alternatives, ODFW requests updated projections of ABC, spawning output, and depletion under each scenario prior to the November Council meeting. ODFW assumes this task would be undertaken by the Northwest Fisheries Science Center, in consultation with the GMT, acknowledges the associated workload, and expresses our appreciation.

Possible new management measure – recreational halibut and groundfish retention

ODFW is engaged in very early discussions with stakeholders on a potential tag for recreational halibut that would allow the holder to fish for halibut at all depths at any time during the overall halibut season. No decision on whether to proceed with developing a potential tag system has been made; however, if pursued, it could involve changes to existing rules regarding concurrent fishing for/retention of groundfish with halibut. If a tag system is still being considered in November, ODFW will provide more information and a proposed new groundfish management measure (if needed) at that time. Implementation of any halibut tag system would be 2023 at the earliest. ODFW will evaluate and propose any potential changes to recreational halibut regulations through the Catch Sharing Plan process at the appropriate time, which would be in 2022 for the 2023 CSP or later.