

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON 2023-2024
MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR THE RECREATIONAL GROUND FISH FISHERY OFF
CALIFORNIA

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) takes this opportunity to brief the Council on a key addition to the range of management measure alternatives proposed for use in the 2023-2024 management cycle. CDFW has included a novel utilization of the existing Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) boundary lines for the California recreational fishery. While further analysis and description will be included in the April 2022 Council meeting Briefing Book, CDFW highlights this option now as it represents somewhat of a departure from previous use of RCA lines in the recreational fishery.

For over two decades recreational RCA boundary lines (which are a set of connecting waypoints which approximate a depth contour) have been used to allow fishing *shoreward* of a specific RCA boundary line off California, meaning that fishing is prohibited *seaward* of that line. Beginning with the 2023-2024 cycle, if, when, and where approved, fishing would be authorized only *seaward* of a specified RCA boundary line (e.g., 30 fm, 40 fm, 50 fm, 60 fm, 75 fm, 100 fm, or 125 fm line) and prohibited *shoreward* of that line.

The RCAs are used to reduce mortality by shifting fishing effort away from depths where constraining or rebuilding stocks are most commonly encountered, and onto healthier groundfish stocks. In the future, it is hoped that by reversing the application of the RCAs in select times and areas, fishing pressure will be shifted away from nearshore stocks, including quillback and copper rockfishes, and onto the shelf and slope habitats, where several desirable target stocks are abundant.

In previous specification cycles, some private sport and commercial passenger fishing vessel representatives have requested access to slope fishery opportunities, specifically for sablefish. At the time, significant constraints on a number of overfished shelf species made it very difficult to develop a suite of measures that would allow for effective enforcement and management of a recreational slope fishery while maintaining shelf closures, and while also concurrently maintaining opportunities in the nearshore. Using RCAs to allow recreational groundfish fishing only seaward of a line in select times and areas would allow development of new offshore slope and shelf recreational fisheries while alleviating pressure in the nearshore.

CDFW envisions this alternative may be among those adopted as part of the final suite of California recreational management measures for the 2023-24 biennium but would also be available for use with other routine inseason adjustments as needed to aid in achieving harvest specifications, especially for rebuilding stocks like yelloweye rockfish, or stocks of concern such as quillback or copper rockfish.