

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON
INITIAL HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR 2025-2026

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) provides the following potential changes to management measures for commercial and recreational fisheries for 2025-26 that are based in part on public input received to date. The measures described below should be considered a preliminary range and may be refined, amended or added to as a result of the public scoping process occurring between now and final action scheduled for June 2024. Additional discussions with other agencies and the public will inform which measures are a priority and will aid with evaluating associated workload.

California Quillback Rockfish Mortality

Draconian changes to California management measures will be needed to achieve the 2025-2026 harvest specifications for the newly-defined California quillback stock, which is expected to be determined as overfished. Recreational and commercial non-trawl fishing activity north of Pt. Conception for the open access and limited entry sectors targeting nearshore and some shelf stocks like lingcod will need to be curtailed or closed using traditional management tools like closed seasons, closed depths, zero trip and bag limits, and gear restrictions.

CDFW wishes to point out the difficulty in reconciling the total estimated 2022 quillback mortality in California with the total estimated California stock biomass. Per the [Status of quillback rockfish \(*Sebastes maliger*\) in U.S. waters off the coast of California in 2021 using catch and length data](#) page 49, Table 12, the total California biomass in 2022 was estimated at 63.18 MT. Meanwhile, now that the Estimated Discard and Catch of Groundfish species for 2022 showing totally mortality is available ([Agenda Item G.1.b NWFSC Report 1, September 2023](#)), quillback mortality in California from all available state and federal sources was estimated at 10.39 (north) +7.72 (south) = 18.11 MT (Note the 10.39 MT mortality was generated with GMT coordination to partition the data to address the area between 40 10' N. lat. and 42 N. lat.). That means 28.66 percent of the total quillback biomass was removed from the California stock as fishery mortality.

For the 2025-2026 biennial cycle, catch, bycatch and mortality estimation, monitoring and management will be exceptionally challenging in order to make effective and meaningful progress toward rebuilding.

CDFW issues state Scientific Collection Permits (SCPs) for research, scientific and educational purposes, including some SCPs which authorize take or mortality of quillback rockfish. SCPs issued are valid for three years and vary in their reporting requirements and terms and conditions. CDFW is presently assessing recent quillback take levels across all SCPs issued for 2022 and 2023. Mortality in these research activities will need to be accounted for in the future California Quillback scorecard, as this is part of the total mortality estimate.

CDFW is considering the potential of modifying and expanding the current Experimental Fishery Permit issued by NMFS to CDFW allowing retention of cowcod by participating EFP vessels for biological data collection. EFP collections of quillback rockfish in directed fisheries where no

retention is otherwise allowed might be a way to attain valuable data. However, it would be important to establish how these mortalities would accrue in the scorecard, as the current cowcod EFP mortality is included as part of the estimated recreational fishery mortality, which may or may not be appropriate for quillback.

Proposed Modifications for California Fisheries

Regulation Clarification

1. Remove incorrect language in Federal Regulations referencing California State law pertaining to a groundfish closure inside 10 fathoms around the Farallon Islands. No such state law currently exists. Specifically:
 - a. 50 CFR 660.330(d)(14) Farallon Islands. Under California law, commercial fishing for all groundfish is prohibited between the shoreline and the 10 fm (18 m) depth contour around the Farallon Islands. An exception to this prohibition is that commercial fishing for “other flatfish” is allowed around the Farallon Islands using hook and line gear only. (See Table 2 (South) of this subpart.) For a definition of the Farallon Islands, see § 660.70, subpart C.
 - b. 50 CFR 660.70(p) Farallon Islands. The Farallon Islands, off San Francisco and San Mateo Counties, include Southeast Farallon Island, Middle Farallon Island, North Farallon Island and Noon Day Rock. Generally, the State of California prohibits fishing for groundfish between the shoreline and the 10–fm (18–m) depth contour around the Farallon Islands.

Catch Controls

Commercial

1. Adjust commercial trip limits for consistency across fishing periods (monthly or bimonthly).
2. Consider gear-specific authorizations or constraints for non-trawl fisheries by depth bin. As one example, groundfish troll gear might minimize bycatch better than other gears in select depths.

Recreational

1. Evaluate or adjust recreational season structures, size limits, gear restrictions and authorizations, bag (and sub-bag) limit changes and/or prohibitions in management areas depending on new stock assessment results and harvest specifications. As one example, CDFW is examining the potential savings that may come from eliminating the 10-fish Rockfish Cabezon Greenling (RCG) aggregate bag limit and replacing it with a rockfish bag limit of 5 fish in the aggregate, except for bocaccio, yellowtail, chilipepper and widow rockfish, which would be subject to the default California bag limit of not more than 10 per any one species and 20 finfish total.

New Management Measures Proposals

Rockfish Conservation Area Modification

The Harvest Specification and Management Measure process has traditionally been utilized to make minor waypoint modifications to Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) boundary lines used for both recreational and commercial non-trawl fishery area management. Approximately 3-4

waypoint modifications between Pt. Arena and Bodega Bay have been identified by industry stakeholders that would result in better alignment of the 50 fathom (300 feet) RCA line with bathymetry data. The current 50 fm RCA line diverges from the corresponding 300 ft bathymetry line by roughly 2 to 3 miles in this area. CDFW would appreciate any additional suggestions that would better align RCA boundary lines with the depth contours, improve enforceability or reduce angler confusion. CDFW requests that any additional proposals to modify waypoints be provided to CDFW by the advanced briefing book deadline for the November meeting.

Descending Device Requirement

CDFW proposes adding regulatory language that requires a descending device capable of returning rockfish to the depth taken be aboard any California recreational fishing vessel that is fishing for or possessing groundfish. CDFW welcomes input from the Enforcement Consultants on desired regulatory language or terminology.