

## OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON 2025-2026 HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES-INITIAL

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) provides the following information for consideration for the 2025-2026 biennial harvest specifications and management measures process.

### **Black Rockfish**

The recently adopted assessment for black rockfish off Oregon indicates that the stock is healthy, estimated to be at 45 percent of unfished biomass, however the scale of the biomass is quite a bit lower than what was estimated in previous assessments. The resulting Overfishing Limit (OFL) for the black rockfish component of the Black/Blue/Deacon Rockfish Complex Oregon in 2025 is projected to be 343 mt, 169 mt (35 percent) less than recent annual catch limit (ACL) contributions of black rockfish to the complex.

**ODFW requests that a new projection for black rockfish off Oregon be run with updated estimates of current projected mortality for 2023 and 2024 of 466 mt each year, rather than full ACL attainment of 512 mt.** The reduced mortality in 2023 and 2024 may not provide much additional yield for the 2025 and beyond ACLs, but any little bit will provide some relief to the Oregon recreational and commercial nearshore fisheries.

Black rockfish is the backbone of the Oregon recreational bottomfish fishery, accounting for 65-80 percent of landings in numbers of fish annually. Black rockfish is also a key component of the Oregon state-managed commercial nearshore fishery. Reducing catches by 40 percent is going to require coordination and communication between ODFW, recreational anglers, charter operators, commercial nearshore fishery participants, and associated businesses. ODFW will be reaching out to those interested parties between the September and November Council meetings to develop potential management measures to stay within the lower ACL. Potential measures may include reduced bi-monthly trip limits for the commercial nearshore fishery, sub-bag limit in the recreational fishery, time and/or area closures in both fisheries, or other measures.

### **Canary Rockfish**

ODFW has been encouraging anglers to participate in the longleader gear (Holloway Gear) fishery, which occurs outside the 40-fathom regulatory line and targets midwater rockfish stocks. This has been done partially to take advantage of the underutilized midwater rockfish species such as widow and yellowtail rockfish, as well as to reduce effort and impacts on the more nearshore stocks such as quillback rockfish. However, with the results of the recent canary rockfish assessment, that option may not be as viable, if the current sector allocation percentages remain in place. Anglers who participate in this fishery have indicated that the schools of rockfish they see on their fish finders and then target are mixed schools, making it difficult to try to avoid canary rockfish, as they are mixed in with the yellowtail and widow rockfish. Due to this mixed stock schools, using

a sub-bag limit for canary rockfish is likely not an effective tool to reduce canary rockfish impacts. Anglers would still catch canary rockfish and would have to discard them by regulation. There are surface and at-depth discard mortality rates for canary rockfish, however their survival even when descended is not that high, compared to other species. Similar to how to manage black rockfish, ODFW will be reaching out to fishery participants between the September and November council meetings to get input and ideas on how to limit canary rockfish mortality from the regular bottomfish fishery and the longleader gear fishery off Oregon.

### **Angler Proposed Management Measures**

Over the last two years, and via ODFW's early August public meetings, anglers have proposed two management measures for the Oregon recreational bottomfish fishery, increase the recreational daily bag limit of sablefish to ten fish per day and allow the use of natural bait in the longleader gear fishery. The second was also added to Appendix 2, Table B, the unprioritized list, for groundfish workload prioritization ([Agenda Item F.8.a., REVISED GMT Report 1, March 2023](#)) by the Council in March 2023.

#### ***Sablefish Bag Limit and Sablefish North Recreational Set-Aside***

Sablefish is part of the general marine bag limit in Oregon, currently ten fish in federal regulations. The state of Oregon has reduced the bag limit through state process and is currently five fish (September 2023). Therefore, having a ten fish limit for sablefish may be part of the actions already analyzed for the Oregon recreational fishery in previous biennial processes. However, to accommodate potential impacts if anglers specifically target up to ten sablefish, **the council may wish to consider increasing the amount of sablefish north set-aside for recreational fisheries.** The current set-aside is 6 mt, the five-year average catch in all recreational fisheries has been 2.4 mt, with a high of 4.0 mt in 2022 (source: RecFIN). With the large increase in the sablefish ACL beginning in 2025, even a doubling of the recreational set-aside should not impact other sectors, even for this very high attainment species.

#### ***Natural Bait in the Longleader Gear Fishery***

The use of natural bait in the longleader gear fishery was prohibited during implementation of the longleader gear fishery due to higher catch rates of canary rockfish during research leading to development of the gear. Given the new assessment of canary rockfish, and the associated much reduced canary rockfish ACLs, and likely sector-specific allocations, any measure that could increase the catch rate of canary rockfish does not seem prudent at this time. Therefore, **ODFW does not recommend this be included in the 2025-2026 management measures.** It should remain in Appendix 2, Table B of the groundfish workload prioritization, should a more favorable canary rockfish assessment happen.

#### **Summary of current ODFW recommendations:**

- 1. a new projection for black rockfish off Oregon be run with updated estimates of current projected mortality for 2023 and 2024 (466 mt annually)**
- 2. consider increasing the amount of sablefish north set-aside for recreational fisheries**
- 3. do not include the use of natural bait in the longleader gear fishery**

Based on input received from public meetings after the September Council meeting, ODFW will likely provide additional recommendations at the November council meeting for consideration as part of the 2025-2026 biennial management measures.