

## OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROJECTIONS FOR OREGON BLACK ROCKFISH

At the September Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) Council designee included in a motion on 2025-2026 harvest specifications that an update to the Oregon black rockfish catch projections for 2025 and beyond be conducted. Rather than assume full annual catch limit (ACL) attainment in 2023 and 2024, ODFW requested an update be run with 466 mt of mortality annually in 2023 and 2024 ([Agenda Item G.6.a, Supplemental ODFW Report 1, September 2023](#)), which has been conducted, see Table 3 in [Agenda Item E.2.a, Attachment 4, November 2023](#). ODFW thanks the National Marine Fisheries Service Northwest Science Center stock assessors, particularly Dr. Jason Cope, for conducting this additional estimate.

ODFW acknowledges that the difference between full ACL attainment (512 mt) and 466 mt (46 mt difference) over two years has resulted in very little difference in the projected ABC for 2025 and 2026 (approximately 5 mt annually). However, when looking at an approximately 35 percent decrease in ACL from 2024 to 2025, any additional poundage available has the potential to be beneficial to Oregon commercial nearshore and recreational fisheries and coastal communities that rely on those fisheries.

The 466 mt value was ODFW's estimate of total end of the year impacts for 2023, based on data through the end of August 2023. Updated data through September 2023, has even lower projected total mortality for 2023 of 452 mt. Therefore, the 466 mt estimate is likely an overestimate of what the realized mortality for the two years will be. The updated harvest specifications projections (Table 3 in [Attachment 4](#)) show that the stock remains above 40 percent of unfished biomass through 2034.

Both the commercial nearshore fishery and the recreational fishery are projected to be under the state-specified harvest guideline (HG) for the sectors, 5% and 15% respectively. Similar to many other commercial fisheries, there are issues with the markets for nearshore rockfish species. Several of the fish buyers for the commercial nearshore fishery put vessels on lower delivery limits than in years past, and some even quit buying fish for periods of time. The market considerations are likely to continue into 2024, and beyond. Therefore, it is unlikely, even with adjusting trip limits, that the entire commercial HG will be attained in 2024 either.

Recreational fishing effort and catches are more difficult to predict than commercial and are dependent on a variety of factors outside of regulations: weather, price of fuel, salmon fishing seasons, albacore tuna opportunities, and other socio-economic factors. In March 2023, in cooperation with the Council and NMFS, the daily bag limit for the longleader gear fishery was increased from 10 to 15 fish per person per day. This bag limit increase was intended to further entice anglers to the longleader gear fishery which targets healthy midwater rockfish stocks such as yellowtail and widow rockfishes, and away from the more nearshore reefs and species, such as

black rockfish. This appears to have been successful in 2023, with the highest number of longleader gear trips since the fishery's inception. ODFW will be recommending a 12 fish bag limit for the longleader gear fishery (in state regulations) to begin 2024, to limit impacts to canary rockfish. The 12 fish limit is still over twice the general marine bag limit, in state regulations, of 5 fish, so should continue to entice some anglers away from the nearshore fishery. Therefore, ODFW staff are anticipating bottomfish and longleader gear fishing effort and landings to be similar to 2023.

Based on all of the above, ODFW believes that 466 mt for 2023 and 2024 is a more accurate estimate of actual total mortality than the full ACL attainment assumption (512 mt) and should be used when calculating ACLs for 2025 and beyond.