

## GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON PRELIMINARY EXEMPTED FISHING PERMIT APPROVAL FOR 2025-2026

At this meeting, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) will need to adopt preliminary off-the-top amounts for estimated exempted fishing permit (EFP) catch, which will be deducted from annual catch limits (ACLs). At the time of this report, two EFP applications were received (summarized below), and neither require off-the-top deductions from ACLs (explained below). The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed the technical merits of the applications contained in the advanced briefing book relative to Council Operating Procedure (COP) 19<sup>1</sup> for EFPs and offers the following comments.

### **Recreational Cowcod, Quillback Rockfish, and Yelloweye Rockfish Sampling in California - California Department of Fish and Wildlife**

The purpose of this EFP application is to collect fishery-dependent biological data for cowcod, quillback rockfish, and yelloweye rockfish for use in future stock assessments ([Agenda Item E.6 Attachment 1](#)). Accordingly, the EFP application requests exemptions from the federal prohibition to retain all three species during the 2025-26 biennium for participating California Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessels (CPFVs).

This EFP application was originally considered by the Council and approved by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for the 2021-22 biennium; the application was renewed for the 2023-24 biennium. The scope of the EFP application has expanded since the prior biennium to include a request for an exemption from the federal prohibition to retain quillback rockfish<sup>2</sup> and yelloweye rockfish<sup>3</sup>. Since quillback and yelloweye rockfishes are more northerly distributed, the application also requests an increase to the maximum number of participating vessels to accommodate the expansion of EFP activities (up to 30 vessels, increased from 20 vessels in prior applications). This EFP renewal is intended to opportunistically collect biological samples for cowcod, quillback rockfish, and yelloweye rockfish, with the expectation that fishing behavior is not likely to change based on the allowance to keep prohibited species for CDFW sampling. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) will solicit CPFVs to participate. Participants will need to abide by reporting and fish handling practices until CDFW staff can collect the specimens. CDFW will also coordinate and conduct the sampling protocols with NMFS stock assessors to ensure that data collected fall within age and growth parameters that meet stock assessment standards.

CDFW did not request a set-aside amount for any of the three species because any mortality that would accrue under EFP activities would be captured as part of the normal recreational mortality

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2020/09/current-operating-procedures.pdf/#page=91>

<sup>2</sup> Quillback rockfish off California is a Council-recommended stock in Amendment 31, which is expected to be approved in November 2023; quillback rockfish is subsequently expected to be declared overfished by NMFS.

<sup>3</sup> Yelloweye rockfish is currently under a rebuilding plan and is projected to be rebuilt by 2029.

estimation process conducted by the California Recreational Fisheries Survey (CRFS). CDFW did indicate expected amounts of take for each species:

- **Cowcod:** 1.4 mt; maximum of 750 fish per year for a total of 1,500 fish during the 2025-26 biennium; no more than 500 fish would be retained south of Point Conception and no more than 250 fish would be retained north of Point Conception annually.
- **Quillback Rockfish:** 0.1 mt; maximum of 100 fish per year for a total of 200 during the 2025-26 biennium; no more than 50 fish would be retained north of 40° 10' N. lat. and no more than 50 fish would be retained south of 40° 10' N. lat. annually.
- **Yelloweye Rockfish:** 0.67 mt; maximum of 500 fish per year for a total of 1,000 fish during the 2025-26 biennium; 500-fish maximum would be distributed equally among each of California's five recreational Groundfish Management Areas.

The application indicates that CPFVs selected to participate will use legal gears, fish within legal depths, and continue with business practices as usual. The application does not include any observer coverage because the vessels participating would not be allowed to keep for personal use any portion of cowcod, quillback rockfish, or yelloweye rockfish taken as part of the EFP. Additionally, this EFP is not requesting to fish inside the rockfish conservation area or closed areas or otherwise alter fishing behavior.

CDFW has provided an interim report ([Agenda Item E.6 Attachment 1](#)) on activities under this EFP thus far in 2023. Ten cowcod specimens have been collected and eight vessels are currently participating. CDFW is processing the specimens and maintaining the otoliths in their repository until arrangements are made with partnering agencies for ageing work to commence.

In consideration that the recreational prohibitions on cowcod, yelloweye rockfish, and quillback rockfish will remain in place in the 2025-26 biennium, and (if approved and executed) this EFP would help fill data gaps for these sensitive and constraining species, **the GMT continues to see technical merit in the application and recommends moving it forward for public review.**

#### **Year-Round Trawl Gear (Midwater Rockfish) EFP: Monitoring and Minimizing Salmon Bycatch When Targeting Rockfish in the Shorebased IFQ Fishery, 2025-2026 – West Coast Seafood Processors Association; Oregon Trawl Commission**

The purpose of this EFP renewal ([Agenda Item E.6 Supplemental Attachment 4](#)) is to collect information on salmon bycatch for vessels using midwater trawl gear to target midwater rockfish species year-round and coastwide. This EFP renewal would also collect information on salmon bycatch impacts of bottom trawl vessels fishing between 40° 10' and 42° N. lat., shoreward of the RCA boundary, using small footrope trawl gear. This EFP renewal helps fulfill the requirements of the Incidental Take Statement (ITS) for salmon in Pacific coast groundfish fisheries. No set-asides are needed for this EFP, as all catch is accounted for using participants' quota.

**The GMT continues to see technical merit in the application and suggests that the application be moved forward for public review.**

#### **Vertical Hook and Line Research Estimate**

An EFP application ([Agenda Item E.6 Attachment 2](#)) was submitted to the advanced briefing book by industry representatives Dan Platt and Dan Yoakum out of Fort Bragg, California. The GMT understands that this EFP application was withdrawn, and therefore did not consider the technical merits of this application. The GMT also understands that this application was subsequently revised and resubmitted as a research proposal ([Agenda Item E.6 Supplemental Attachment 6](#)), however the Council does not have a process for considering research proposals, therefore the GMT did not consider the proposal in this context.

#### **Chinook Salmon Allowance**

In recent prior biennial cycles, the GMT recommended a total allowance of 100 Chinook salmon annually for all non-trawl EFPs to be included in the salmon scorecard and counted against the non-whiting salmon guideline, as defined in the salmon Incidental Take Statement. **The GMT recommends removing this allowance for the 2025-26 biennium, as the commercial non-trawl EFPs (*i.e.*, the Emley-Platt and Real Good Fish EFPs) are not being renewed.**

#### **GMT Recommendations:**

- 1. The GMT sees technical merit in and recommends the following applications be forwarded for public review:**
  - **Recreational Cowcod, Quillback Rockfish, and Yelloweye Rockfish Sampling in California - California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Attachment 1)**
  - **Year-Round Trawl Gear (Midwater Rockfish) EFP: Monitoring and Minimizing Salmon Bycatch When Targeting Rockfish in the Shorebased IFQ Fishery, 2025-2026 – West Coast Seafood Processors Association; Oregon Trawl Commission (Attachment 4)**
- 2. The GMT recommends removing the 100 Chinook salmon allowance for the non-trawl EFPs for the 2025-26 biennium.**

PFMC  
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