

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT
ON INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS FOR 2024

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) provides the following update regarding quillback rockfish and 2024 state inseason actions in the California recreational groundfish fishery. On February 12, 2024 as part of an emergency [CDFW rulemaking](#) regarding commercial groundfish fishing in state waters, new regulations were added that define the [20-fathom boundary line](#) using a series of connected waypoints along the mainland coast and offshore islands in California state waters. This new boundary line will be used in the 2024 season and beyond.

On March 26, 2024, the California Fish and Game Commission (CFGF) approved changes to the 2024 groundfish season opening dates, fishing depths, and bag limits consistent with and complementary to those adopted by the Council at its March meeting. The CFGF also approved a requirement that a descending device be carried aboard any vessel taking or possessing any species of federal groundfish. A [press release summarizing the CFGF decision](#) was issued on 3/27/2024 and is included in Appendix 1.

Appendix 1:

California Fish and Game Commission Adopts 2024 Groundfish Regulations

March 27, 2024



Yesterday, the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) unanimously approved changes to the 2024 groundfish season opening dates, fishing depths and bag limits. In 2023, most groundfish seasons offshore of California were cut due to exceeding federal catch limits on quillback rockfish, a now federally-declared overfished species. The new changes provide additional fishing opportunities compared to 2023, but come with new requirements that anglers need to be aware of. The new regulations are anticipated to be effective in early April.

The measures adopted by the Commission will work in combination with regulations for federal waters and serve to largely avoid quillback rockfish in their primary depth range between 20 fathoms (120 feet) and 50 fathoms (300 feet) off the coast of northern and central California. One key element of the new regulations is the availability of new waypoints that define a [20-fathom boundary line](#), which allows fishing to occur only shoreward of this line. Within several groundfish management areas (GMAs), a 20-fathom or 50-fathom 'Inshore Fishery' will take place during the 2024 season, allowing opportunities to retain [nearshore](#), shelf and slope rockfish, lingcod, cabezon and greenling.

Alternatively, during months when there is an 'offshore only fishery', fishing for groundfish will only be allowed seaward of the 50-fathom boundary line, and only [shelf rockfish](#), [slope rockfish](#) and lingcod may be retained. Take and possession of nearshore rockfish, cabezon and greenling are prohibited during the offshore fishery.

Divers and shore-based anglers will continue to be exempt from boat-based season restrictions affecting rockfish and other federally managed groundfish, which allows for year-round diving and shore-based angling, in line with current regulations.

The Commission also approved a requirement that a descending device be carried aboard and available for immediate use on any vessel taking or possessing any species of federal groundfish. Descending devices are used to send fish back to the depth from which they were taken resulting in considerably higher survival rates for rockfish suffering [barotrauma](#) compared to being released at the water's surface. Members of the public, along with representatives of recreational fishing organizations, have recently advocated for a descending device requirement in order to improve survivorship of released fish.

Another key element of the new regulations is the division of the central GMA at 36° N. latitude (near Point Lopez). This split provides opportunities to anglers in areas south of 36° N. latitude which historically have little to no catch of quillback rockfish.

To protect vermilion rockfish, another species for which catches have exceeded allowable federal harvest limits in recent years, the sub-limit will be reduced to two fish within the Rockfish, Cabezon and Greenling complex 10-fish limit, in the Mendocino, San Francisco, central and southern GMAs. The vermilion rockfish 4-fish sub-limit will remain for the northern GMA.

All recreational GMAs in California are scheduled for six months of all-depth or inshore fishing opportunity in 2024. A summary of the 2024 seasons for each GMA approved by the Commission is provided below.

- Northern, Mendocino, San Francisco and Central GMA North of 36° N. Latitude:
 - Jan. 1- Mar. 31: Closed
 - Apr. 1 – Apr. 30: 50 fathoms offshore only fishery
 - May 1 – Sept. 30: 20 fathoms inshore fishery
 - Oct. 1 – Oct. 31: 50 fathoms offshore only fishery
 - Nov. 1 – Nov. 30: 20 fathoms inshore only fishery
 - Dec. 1 – Dec. 31: 50 fathoms offshore only fishery

- Central GMA South of 36° N. Latitude & Southern Management Area:
 - Jan. 1 – Mar. 31: Closed
 - Apr. 1 – June 30: All depth fishery
 - July 1 – Sept. 30: 50 fathoms inshore fishery
 - Oct. 1 – Dec. 31: 50 fathoms offshore only fishery

The 2024 groundfish seasons are expected to be reviewed and approved by the Office of Administrative Law and take effect in state waters in early April. The Commission and California Department of Fish and Wildlife staff have worked diligently to expedite the adoption of state regulations to allow boat-based anglers to get on the water beginning in April. Until the 2024 regulations are approved, the 2023 regulations remain in effect.

Once the regulations become effective, CDFW's [Summary of Recreational Groundfish Fishing Regulations](#) web page will be updated with 2024 regulations. Before fishing, anglers should refer to this web page for the season openings and other regulatory information.

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Media Contacts:

[Kerri Foote](#), CDFW Marine Region, (916) 899-3921

[Steve Gonzalez](#), CDFW Communications, (916) 804-1714

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Office of Communications, Education and Outreach

P.O. Box 944209, Sacramento, CA 94244-2090

(916) 322-8911