

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON QUILLBACK ROCKFISH
REBUILDING PLAN

California Quillback Rockfish

Alternatives under consideration:

Alternative 2: ABC (Acceptable Biological Catch) Rule

Alternative 4: $F = 0$ (i.e., no fishing mortality)

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) recommends adopting a California Quillback Rockfish Rebuilding Plan using Alternative 2 (ABC Rule) as the Final Preferred Alternative (FPA) rebuilding strategy, with rebuilding parameters of $T_{TARGET} = 2060$ and $T_{MAX} = 2071$. Alternative 2 best meets rebuilding plan requirements under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, as it rebuilds the stock within the mandated rebuilding time frame (i.e., by T_{MAX} of 2071) while still taking into account, as feasible, the needs of fishing communities. Management measures to achieve $F = 0$ (Alternative 4) would shut down all groundfish fisheries in federal waters off California, causing devastating consequences to coastal communities throughout the state of California. To better track mortality against the California quillback rockfish overfishing limit (OFL) and meet the needs of the rebuilding plan, **the GMT recommends removing California quillback rockfish from the nearshore rockfish complexes north and south of $40^{\circ} 10' N$. lat.**

The ABC Rule results in a projected 50 percent probability of rebuilding by 2060 (T_{TARGET}) and a 73.6 percent probability of rebuilding by 2071 (T_{MAX}). While Alternative 2 does not rebuild the stock in the shortest amount of time, it takes into account the needs of fishing communities and the biology of the stock by allowing some fishing under restrictive time/area closures and reduced trip limits for co-occurring species. The anticipated management measures to achieve Alternative 2 are similar to the current management measures adopted for federal waters off California for commercial groundfish fisheries during the November 2023 meeting ([Agenda Item E.9.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, November 2023](#)) and the March 2024 meeting for recreational fisheries ([Agenda Item F.8.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, March 2024](#) and [Agenda Item F.8.a, Supplemental CDFW Report 2, March 2024](#)) which are already resulting in substantial socioeconomic impacts to fisheries and California coastal communities. These measures are replicated for the 2025-26 biennium and were adopted as preliminary preferred alternative ([Agenda Item F.6, Attachment 2, June 2024](#)). Under Alternative 2, fishery participants would not lose all sources of groundfish revenue, as Alternative 2 allows limited commercial and recreational fishing and maintains some level of co-occurring target stock utilization as California quillback rockfish rebuilds. The resulting 2025-26 California quillback rockfish harvest specifications under Alternative 2 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. 2025-26 OFL, ABC, and annual catch limit (ACL) under Alternative 2 for California quillback rockfish.

Year	OFL (mt)	ABC (mt)	ACL (mt)
2025	1.52	1.30	1.30
2026	1.77	1.50	1.50

Rebuilding California quillback rockfish by 2071 will require extreme limitations to California groundfish fishing opportunities under either Alternatives 2 or 4. Alternative 2 imposes severe restrictions on California fisheries and will continue to impose substantial social and economic impacts for decades but reduces the overall impact compared to Alternative 4 by providing some fishing opportunity. Alternative 4 impacts are more detrimental because all commercial and recreational groundfish fishing in federal waters off California would likely be prohibited, including in areas and sectors where California quillback rockfish are rarely encountered. Restrictions may also compound existing social and economic challenges caused by declines or limitations in other fisheries in ways that vary by community. While Alternative 4 is projected to rebuild the stock in the shortest amount of time, managing to $F = 0$ is unrealistic because mortality will still occur in non-groundfish fisheries (e.g., Pacific halibut, salmon, and California halibut) that are not subject to the rebuilding plan. Alternative 4 would likely result in complete economic failure for those businesses heavily integrated and/or businesses primarily dependent on groundfish in California ports.

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) have the authority to implement fishery management regulations in federal waters (3-200 nm) only, and the State of California has the discretion to implement regulations consistent with federal action or other management actions in state waters. The rebuilding plan would be in effect only in federal waters; however, all mortality of California quillback rockfish in federal and state waters would be accounted for against the ACL. Irrespective of the alternative, California fisheries will likely remain under some form of restrictive management measures once the stock is rebuilt, as harvest limits will remain lower than mortality prior to the overfished determination.

Impacts on Communities

Recreational

Historically, California quillback rockfish mortality has been higher in the recreational groundfish sector than in the commercial groundfish sectors, and for anglers, the groundfish fishery, particularly rockfish, has provided consistent fishing opportunities as other stocks, such as salmon, can vary substantially. Opportunity in nearshore waters close to coastal reefs is the primary driver of recreational groundfish effort and the social and economic benefits of recreational groundfish fishing in California. Proposed management measures to achieve the rebuilding plan along with localized variations in bathymetry (see [Agenda Item F.6, Supplemental Revised Attachment 3 - Quillback Rockfish Rebuilding Plan Analysis](#) for details) would likely reduce effort, as many private recreational vessels cannot access or fish the grounds beyond 50 fathoms, aka the “offshore fishery” safely. For example, the offshore-only fishery would likely eliminate effort by kayak anglers, which has increased significantly over the last 20 years, as kayaks are not often able to safely travel long distances from shore.

It is anticipated that reductions in overall fishing effort due to the proposed management measures will likely result in negative social and economic impacts to local communities. Under Alternative 2, some of the smaller communities (e.g., Crescent City, Fort Bragg, Bodega Bay, etc.) may be impacted by the proposed recreational season structure more so than other areas, as economic opportunities outside of fishing are less available compared to larger communities.

Commercial

Within the commercial sectors, California quillback rockfish is predominantly caught in the fixed gear groundfish fishery, though it is occasionally encountered in trawl fisheries. Most encounters with California quillback rockfish in the commercial sector occur north of 37° 07' N. lat. Management changes enacted in the last ~9 months to protect California quillback rockfish directly impact fishing in federal waters shoreward and within the RCA by nearshore, open access, and limited entry groundfish participants. These restrictions have already severely impacted these groundfish fishers, as seen by a reduction in ex-vessel revenue and landings.

Alternative 4 closures would be more draconian and widespread than Alternative 2. Non-groundfish opportunities, such as Chinook/coho salmon and Dungeness crab, are already constrained, are unlikely to accommodate expansion resulting from lost groundfish opportunities for the foreseeable future, and may not provide enough stable income to keep participants fishing. Therefore, under Alternative 4, although it would rebuild California quillback rockfish on a shorter timeline, more participants might leave fisheries compared to Alternative 2. Under both alternatives, once the stock is rebuilt, there will continue to be restrictions to fishing operations. In addition, there will likely be permanent changes to fishing communities; for example, fishery participants who have left may not re-enter the fishery, and infrastructure such as ice houses and processors may be lost.

Impacts of both Alternative 2 and Alternative 4 will vary across communities, though impacts will be more severe and geographically widespread under Alternative 4. Compared to Alternative 2, Alternative 4 would likely impose severe restrictions on the trawl fishery and more restrictions on the fixed gear sector in southern California, both of which rarely encounter California quillback rockfish. Under Alternative 2, restrictions on groundfish fishing are likely to disproportionately impact ports between 40° 10' and 37° 07' N. lat. complexes, notably Fort Bragg, where groundfish is a primary target in the industry's portfolio. If the Council adopts Alternative 4 and California takes consistent action in state waters, the result would be a complete closure of the groundfish fishery in the whole of California – an estimated yearly loss of approximately \$17 million dollars in ex-vessel revenue compared to the ten-year average of groundfish landings. Moreover, the management measures used to reduce California quillback rockfish mortality could come at the potential loss of 1,800 mt of all other rockfish or 6,500 mt of all other groundfish per year. Aside from monetary impacts, the loss of fishing opportunities also signifies a loss of culture and identity for California's coastal communities.

PFMC
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