

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON INSEASON ADJUSTMENTS FOR 2026 AND TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS FOR 2027-28 – FINAL ACTION

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) provides the following informational groundfish fishery updates for the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council), to support several ongoing Council items.

Overall Updates

- Across sectors, there is some concern about what will happen following an El Niño year. For example, if Humboldt squid remain off of California, we anticipate rockfish catch will be down because Humboldt squid have an impact on rockfish populations.
- Compared to West Coast waters, which have been warmer than normal, Alaska fisheries have been reporting unusually cool water, with the ice thickness extended far south this winter and spring.
- Additionally, fuel prices have continued to be incredibly high which impacts all fisheries and processors across all sectors.
- General overhead costs (for repairs, supplies, food, labor, etc.) have also greatly increased this year.

Commercial/Tribal Fisheries

- In Southern California, the commercial hook-and-line fleet is also targeting bonito, yellowtail (jack), and tuna, specifically gigantic bluefin tuna, so there has been a shift in effort away from groundfish.
- Catch rates for sablefish have been excellent in the 2026 fixed gear fishery. The sablefish size has increased, so there has been an improvement in grade.
- There has not been a large change in the bottom trawl fishery this year related to the pre-El Niño conditions. Historically, El Niño years tend to affect pelagic species more prominently. There has been really good fishing this year, with increased catch per unit effort.
- The midwater trawl rockfish fishery has been going well, but for widow rockfish there has been a shift in distribution and schooling patterns in 2026 compared to 2025.
- Tribal whiting fishing has been occurring in the Makah's Usual and Accustomed area in late summer and September, and reported water temperatures steadily increasing with the surface temperature sometimes reaching 59°. The hake have been in the cooler deeper water, where yellowtail rockfish have been abundant too. They've also been seeing a lot of whales in the months of July and August.
- Shoreside whiting boats have seen more fish off of Washington than in past years, with majority of shoreside fishing occurring Newport and north.
- The summer hake mothership fishery has been more northerly than past years, with fishing occurring largely off of Newport. One mothership processor operated from mid-May to

early June; two mothership processors have remained on the grounds through the summer and are still processing as of mid-September.

- Hake catcher processors had a good spring fishery out deep, and one processor remained on the hake grounds into late July due to good summer fishing, which was unusual as most catcher processors aim to be up in Alaska as close to the June 10th B-season pollock start as possible.
- Whiting sectors have seen some unwanted shortbelly rockfish in large aggregations in the midwater on the whiting grounds this spring and summer.
- Darkblotched rockfish and widow rockfish have been widespread on whiting grounds this year, with chronic small incidental catch amounts throughout the season.
- Pink shrimp were smaller at the start of the season, and the eggs came on early. The shrimp size has increased as the season has gone on, but it's now taking vessels longer to achieve their trip limits.

Recreational Fisheries

- The Washington recreational fishery experienced reduced effort, particularly in the period from mid-March to mid-July, due to high fuel prices and rough water conditions. The halibut catch per unit effort and average weight were also down exacerbating the impacts of high fuel prices and rough water once that fishery opened in early May. Rockfish and lingcod catches were strong from the outset of the season in mid-March. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife in-season catch estimates indicate that the seasonal catches will stay well within the Washington recreational harvest guidelines including canary rockfish. Canary rockfish catch can be closely linked to the success of the Pacific halibut fishery, particularly out of Westport. With the effort reduction targeting halibut, it appears to have kept the canary catches below what was observed in 2025.
- In Northern Oregon, Pacific halibut fishing was impacted by wind and rough seas, which prevented a lot of fishing.
- In the Southern Oregon area, it was such a good salmon fishing season (potentially due to the cooler water) that there has been very little Pacific halibut fishing.
- On the Southern Oregon coast, water temperatures have been cooler than normal. Fishermen experienced more wind than normal this summer, which reduced the number of days for bottomfish and rockfish. This may contribute to why rockfish catch is lower than normal.
- The non-select coho season in Oregon was supposed to last until the end of September, but the season ended mid-month since the quota was already caught. This will add more effort to bottom fishing now that the shortened coho season has concluded.
- Fishermen in the San Francisco management area have noticed that there are fish showing up in places that they historically haven't. There are different fish species, as well as fish that are behaving differently in the water column this year – such as striped bass, California halibut, and lingcod. It has also been unseasonably warm, up to 4-5 degrees warmer.
- The local fleet in Southern California have been choosing whether to fish for rockfish or more surface-oriented fish such as bass, dorado, and bonito. There are lots of alternatives to rockfish fishing right now for the fleet, so GAP members expect that rockfish catch will

be lower than expected. However, some GAP members were surprised that vermilion catch for June was a bit higher than 2025 according to the catch data.

- It has been a very unusual year off of Southern California, where fishers are seeing pilot fish, hammerhead sharks, bullet tuna in large amounts, and young-of-year yellowfin tuna (ranging from 1-3 pounds). For the first time that GAP members can remember, two commercial passenger fishing vessels caught deepwater pomfret or Pacific pomfret (monchong) and wahoo out of San Diego on successive days. It seems there has been a warming event along the southern coast of California that is somewhat separated from the El Niño, but does extend down to the El Niño area off of Ecuador.

PPMC

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