CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON FINAL PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES FOR 2027-28 HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) provides the following recommendations for Council consideration as Final Preferred Alternative (FPA) management measures for the 2027-28 biennium. At its April meeting, the Council identified a suite of Preliminary Preferred Alternative (PPA) management measures, which can be found in Agenda Item C.7, Motion In Writing, April 2026.

CDFW continues to support the management measures described in the April CDFW PPA report (Agenda Item C.7.a, Supplemental CDFW Report 1, April 2026) with minor modifications and recommends the following FPA management measures for 2027-28:

- Removal of the yelloweye rockfish and California quillback rockfish rebuilding plans from the Fishery Management Plan;
- Option 2 to remove the 150 fm Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) around Lasuen Knoll, also known as "Fourteen-mile Bank";
- Option 2 to modify regulatory text for Federal non-trawl commercial trip limit tables, with the substitution of "implement" instead of "enforce";
- Option 4 for blackgill rockfish and "other slope rockfish" allocations;
- Implementing three new Annual Catch Targets (ACTs), and two status quo ACTs for the following stocks and sectors:
    - Status quo copper rockfish south of 34° 27' N. lat. (recreational),
    - Status quo shortspine thornyhead north of 34° 27' N. lat. (non-trawl),
    - Option 2 for vermilion/sunset rockfish south of 40° 10' N. lat. (recreational),
    - Option 2 for California quillback rockfish (recreational), and,
    - Option 2 for lingcod south of 40° 10' N. lat. (recreational);

- Decoupling the recreational Rockfish, Cabezon, and Greenling (RCG) regulatory complex as described in the April CDFW report, which would establish a 10 fish bag limit each for cabezon and kelp greenling, as well as a 12-month all depth boat-based season for cabezon and kelp greenling;
- Option 4 for the rockfish and lingcod boat-based recreational season structure (open April – December at all depths, statewide);
- The following rockfish sub-bag limits for the California recreational fishery:
    - Reduction of the vermilion/sunset rockfish sub-bag limit in the Northern Groundfish Management Area (OR/CA border to 40°10' N. lat.) from 4-fish to 2-fish. This will result in a 2-fish vermilion/sunset rockfish sub-bag limit, statewide.
    - Status quo sub-bag limits for copper rockfish (1, statewide), canary rockfish (2, statewide), quillback rockfish (0, statewide), and bronzespotted rockfish (0, statewide).
    - For cowcod, a seasonal sub-bag limit of either 1 fish in April or 1 fish in December, statewide.

- For yelloweye rockfish, a seasonal sub-bag limit of either 1 fish in April or 1 fish in December, statewide.

Cowcod and Yelloweye Rockfish Seasonal Sub-Bag Limits

Prior to the April Council meeting, CDFW expressed support for a 1-fish sub-bag limit in April for cowcod and yelloweye rockfish. During the April Council meeting, the Council identified as PPA a 1-fish sub-bag limit in December as recommended by the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) (Agenda Item C.7.a, Supplemental GAP Report 1, April 2026). CDFW supports the GAP-recommended December option for cowcod and yelloweye rockfish and provides additional considerations below.

Under the season structure Option 4 (Council PPA season structure and CDFW recommended FPA), there could be more benefit to the fishery if cowcod and yelloweye rockfish seasonal retention occurs in April rather than December. Placing the limited retention opportunity earlier in the season allows greater angler access to all groundfish when accrued mortality of co-occurring species (such as vermilion/sunset rockfish and canary rockfish) is expected to be low. 2027-2028 projections for canary rockfish and vermilion/sunset rockfish are at or near sector-specific harvest limits, and it is expected that some inseason sub-bag limit decreases (or other action) may be needed later in the season, resulting in discard morality accruing. Under this scenario, there is potential for higher discard mortality to accrue while pursuing cowcod or yelloweye rockfish targeting under the December option than the April option.

Furthermore, April retention provides more certainty that fishing activities will occur in all depths, which will be valuable information for evaluating catch and effort to inform future expansions for retention. Data collected from a period without depth constraints would provide more complete, and likely more representative information from the fishery. Depth constraints, if needed inseason, are more likely at the end of a calendar year.

One benefit of the December option is that the Council would have more management flexibility for yelloweye rockfish and cowcod. For example, if inseason mortality of yelloweye rockfish were tracking higher than anticipated such that harvest limits were projected to be exceeded, the Council would have the opportunity to cancel the December seasonal sub-bag limit. Under the April option, mortality from limited retention would accrue at the beginning of the season, although the Council would still have several inseason management tools at its disposal (such as depth restrictions or corrective "post-season" action in 2028). Another benefit of the December option is that when the season ends December 31, all boat-based fishing for rockfish and lingcod will close for the season and remain closed until April 1 of the following year, allowing for a 3-month pause and reset period.