

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON INCREASED
FLEXIBILITY IN SHARING OF CANARY ROCKFISH IN PLANNING OF THE
MANAGEMENT MEASURE ACTIONS FOR 2027-2028

In September, we highlighted how the Council's allocation scheme for canary rockfish is not working well.¹ The fundamental problem is that allocations are not weighted by the likelihood that they will be fished each year, neither individually nor collectively. Instead, each sector's share is deducted from the ACL as if the probability that it will be used is 100 percent. Based on experience, this practice is not rational. Yet it continues to be followed. And it causes the Council to restrict fisheries more than necessary.

In September, we also suggested a way to make the allocation scheme more risk-based and flexible. We continue to see this as a win-win for providing additional opportunity to multiple sectors without the need to re-allocate from or further restrict other sectors.

We supported the Council's recommendation to take up fuller consideration of the approach as part of the Harvest Specifications and Management Measures Flexibility discussion. We look forward to the next step in that discussion, scheduled to take place during Agenda Item F.5 at this meeting. At the same time, we continue to urge the Council to look at ways of improving flexibility when planning the 2027-2028 fisheries. In this report, we introduce two proposals for doing so:

1. Replace the recreational harvest guidelines (HG) for canary with "if-then" performance standards centered on catch amounts for each state's fishery that are 25% larger than the status quo HGs.
2. Do the same for the At-Sea set aside with a performance standard amount of 25 mt and provide the status quo set aside amounts for 2027-2028 to the IFQ fishery.

The performance standards would be used to plan seasons in much the same way as has been done. The difference, as explained more below, is that the Council plans the 2027-2028 management measures using the "risk to the ACL" approach that has been used in season in recent years. This involves backing away from the assumption that the performance standard amounts will be fully caught. And it involves considering likely catches across all sectors and whether an ACL surplus or overage is expected at the end of each year.

We offer these proposals to spark discussion and encourage the Council to consider their inclusion into the range of alternatives for 2027-2028 management measure considered for PPA in April and FPA in June.

1 <https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2025/09/g-6-a-supplemental-wdfw-report-1-wdfw-report-on-canary-rockfish-and-the-2027-2028-initial-harvest-specification-and-management-measure-actions-for-2027-2028.pdf>

How the proposals change planning and improve flexibility

Bag limits, season structures, closed areas, etc. remain under the scrutiny of the Council under these proposals for the recreational fisheries with changes based on analysis of possible catch amounts per usual. Likewise, the incentive for the At-Sea sectors to avoid canary would remain in effect. The performance standard would just better reflect that the co-ops avoidance measures are likely to mean that canary catch spikes only in some years and remains low most often.

What changes under the performance standard approach is that the amounts are not deducted from the ACL during planning. Actual catches would of course still be deducted during the seasons. Yet when planning, the Council uses projections of likely catches across all sectors to gauge the risk of catch exceeding the ACL. Under present conditions the trawl, non-trawl, and off-the-top sectors would remain unlikely to reach their full amounts. We expect the analysis would show that the performance standards would maintain an acceptable risk to the ACL.

To use the At-Sea sectors as an example, as shown in Table 2 of [the GMT Report from September](#), the performance standard of 25 mt would not be expected every year. As also shown in that table, the IFQ sector has not attained more than 60 percent of their allocation. At the time of writing, the IFQ fishery has caught 43.8 percent of its 2025 allocation and has 220 mt remaining.² Even with an optimistic view about conditions in the IFQ fishery improving and reaching 80 percent attainment, the amount of IFQ left unharvested would be more than enough to cover the At-Sea catch, either at the most likely or performance standard amounts. A projection model would likely suggest an amount less than 10 mt per year.

For the recreational fisheries, the evaluation of the performance standard would consider the probability that each fishery reaches its amount (i.e. status quo HGs +25% for recreational sectors and 25 mt for the At-Sea sectors combined) in a year and gauge the chance of overages against the likely catches in the commercial non-trawl sector, the trawl sectors, and those accounted for in the off-the-top deductions. Again, the focus would be on the overall risk to the ACL.³

More Rationale

The proposals are not very different from the concept of annual catch targets (ACTs) or harvest guidelines. The intended difference, again, is to establish amounts for planning without deducting them in full from the ACL. The proposals are not intended to lessen the vigilance the Council has long shown in managing fisheries responsibly. As we described in September, canary management poses a complex, joint probability problem and one made more complicated by the dynamics of the IFQ fishery and concerns from the participants over lower frequency but large magnitude catch events. The intent is to make incremental progress toward the goal of attaining more of the ACL. It would be matter for analysis of the range of alternatives, yet we would expect the probability of exceeding the ACL to remain low.

² In 2025, the IFQ fishery also received 27.8 mt in carryover from the 2024 allocation. The amounts are taken from on November 3, 2025.

³ As part of the greater flexibility and risk discussions planned, we also encourage the Council to request development of a multi-year view of ACL. We believe the scientific advice from the SSC has been that a single year overage of the ACL would not compromise harvest objectives if balanced by underages.

In Council discussion on our September report, the National Marine Fisheries Service advised that the numbers put into regulation could not add up to more than the ACL but also expressed willingness to work on solutions. With the Government Shutdown, we have not had the chance to coordinate further. The idea here is that we can make progress toward a solution by removing the amounts from regulation. The performance standards would instead be recorded in the FMP or perhaps Council Operating Procedure 9 and its description of the biennial management cycle.

As part of the Flexibility discussions, ways for the regulations to reflect the reality that catch varies should be looked at further. Logically speaking, the numbers do not add up to more than the ACL when properly weighted by the chance that they are caught. Such risk-based weighting of allocations would be consistent with National Standard 6, which requires the Council's conservation and management measures to "take into account and allow for variations among, and contingencies in, fisheries, fishery resources, and catches." Not coincidentally, the NS6 Guidelines recommend that the Councils prepare for such contingencies "by establishing a flexible management regime".⁴

If-then conditions

The goal of the performance standards would be to provide benefit to the fisheries while serving as part of the overall framework for managing catches to the ACL. The if-then conditions would therefore be designed to identify when circumstances or new information call for reevaluation post-season. To prompt discussion, we propose the following "if" scenarios:

- the sector's amount is exceeded more than once in a four-year period;
- the sector's amount is exceeded by more than 20% in any one year;
- the ACL is exceeded or projections show that it is likely to be exceeded more than once in a four-year period or in a single year if the magnitude of the overage causes concern for optimum yield; or
- the Council chooses to reevaluate for other conservation and management purposes.

To reiterate, the amounts referenced would be the 25 percent increase to the HGs for the recreational fisheries and 25 mt for the At-Sea sectors. The rationale for the four-year period comes from the performance standard suggested by the NS1 Guidelines for accountability measures.⁵ And the 20% is a suggestion for analysis and intended to be sufficiently high to indicate that circumstances during the season were substantially changed from what was considered during the planning phase.

Those are the suggested "Ifs". The suggested "then" would again be reevaluation of the sectors and the overall likelihood that management measures are effective at controlling catch to the desired levels. The reevaluation would entail whatever is appropriate to address the situation like revising the performance standard, whether more formal allocations are needed, etc. Under the conditions expected, inseason action would seem unlikely to be necessary or appropriate given the magnitude of ACL underages. However, the tools for inseason action in the recreational and

⁴ [https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/part-600/section-600.335#p-600.335\(d\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/part-600/section-600.335#p-600.335(d))

⁵ [https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/part-600/section-600.310#p-600.310\(g\)\(7\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/part-600/section-600.310#p-600.310(g)(7))

At-Sea sectors could remain as they are now and be used if necessary or appropriate in light of the goals for which ACLs are established.

Conclusion

As the Council knows, fisheries management often involves three phases:

1. Planning seasons, or “preseason”;
2. Monitoring the fisheries during the season and adjusting if necessary or appropriate to achieve the goals identified during planning, or “inseason”, and
3. Evaluation of events after the season to inform planning for the next season, “post-season”.

In recent years, the Council has made progress by taking a “risk to the ACL” approach when deciding if inseason actions are necessary in situations where a sector exceeds its share. What is needed is to bring this approach more fully to the planning phase. There is little reason not to. Inseason is for achieving the goals set out during preseason.

We again use the Washington recreational fishery to illustrate the problem caused by the business-as-usual approach. With yelloweye rebuilt, the Council will be using this planning phase to consider relaxing restrictions to provide some of the benefits to the fisheries that rebuilding is meant to achieve. However, doing so is likely to increase the catch of canary. Catch of the two species is correlated. Even absent relaxing yelloweye focused restrictions, analysis is likely to show that catch of canary in our recreational fishery would be expected to exceed the HG. The business-as-usual approach would therefore have us restrict the fishery and not relax any of the measures put into place for the purpose of rebuilding. In some circumstances, this would be unfortunate to have to do but rational. In the circumstances that exist, where large ACL canary underages are expected and virtually certain to occur, it is not. Applying the “risk to the ACL” approach during the planning phase would show what has already been shown during the inseason and post-season phases—that it is highly likely there will be a sizeable surplus at the end of the year.