

GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON THE HISTORY OF CANARY
ROCK FISH ALLOCATIONS

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Background

During the 2025-26 harvest specifications and management measures analysis, the Council directed the Groundfish Management Team (GMT) to analyze potential modifications to canary rockfish allocations “holistically”, meaning across all groundfish sectors. Canary rockfish is caught in every directed groundfish sector, so substantial reductions to the ACLs in 2025-26 were expected to constrain all sectors of the fishery. The GMT compiled our holistic analysis into a single section of the full management measures analysis document and presented it to the Council in March 2024 ([Agenda Item F.7.a, Supplemental GMT Report 2, March 2024](#)). In that analysis, we explored alternative allocation apportionments for each of the various sectors. This exploration used the existing allocation structure in which the fishery Harvest Guideline (HG) is divided into the trawl and non-trawl sectors and subsequently further divided into sub-sectors (Figure 1). The Council ultimately adopted the status quo allocations for the 2025-26 biennium.

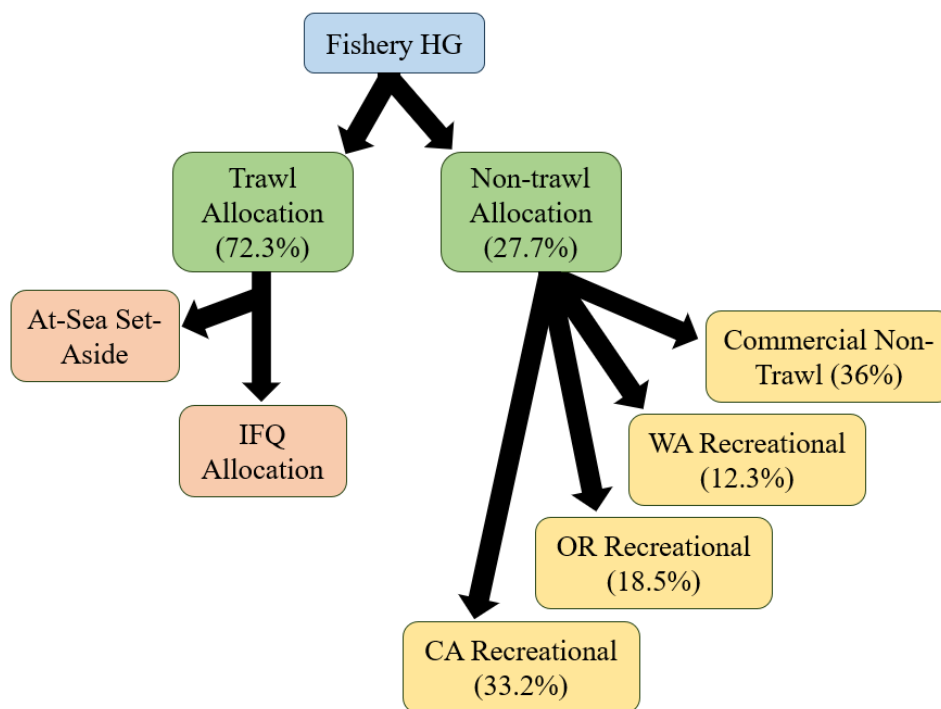


Figure 1. 2025-26 allocation scheme for canary rockfish, under the Fishery Harvest Guideline (HG).

However, Council discussion at the April 2024 Council Meeting indicated a need to think about long-term, in addition to short-term, changes that address the canary rockfish constraints felt across multiple sectors. The discussion also underscored the need for flexibility in the allocation scheme such that if one sector is projected to under-attain their allocation but another sector is constrained, there are processes to redistribute canary rockfish to other sector(s) ([April 2024 Meeting Transcripts](#), starting on page 101). The ability to redistribute across sectors can provide managers with crucial flexibility in the pursuit of OY (National Standard 1), promotes efficient utilization of the resource (National Standard 5), and can encourage the sustained participation of fishing communities (National Standard 8).

Starting in April 2025, the Council has begun exploring management flexibility initiatives across all Fishery Management Plans as well as specifically in the groundfish process. These include initiatives that may reduce some of the canary rockfish constraint across all sectors as opposed to, or in addition to, reallocating the stock. Concurrently, the Council tasked the GMT at the June 2025 meeting with scoping the history of canary rockfish allocations ahead of the September meeting ([ODFW Guidance, June 2025](#)), building off of our March 2024 report. The intent is to provide the Council with a shared understanding of how the canary rockfish allocation scheme has evolved over time, and the goal is for the Council to determine in September whether to further task the GMT with a more in-depth analysis of any alternatives to canary allocations as part of our over-winter 2027-28 management measures analysis.

The Council's guidance in June 2025 tasked the GMT with focusing on sharing and mortality trends in the 2015-16, 2017-18, and 2025-26 biennial periods as a starting point, as those experienced the most substantial changes to canary rockfish allocations. Table 1 of this report shows sector-specific allocations, set-asides, and shares from 2015 to 2026. While percentages are

shown in the table, there are some cases in which the Council adopted fixed values rather than a percentage-based allocation, and those fixed values are italicized in the table. Table 2 shows sector-specific mortality and attainment from 2015 to 2024, the most recent year of data.

Table 1. Canary rockfish allocations, set-asides, and shares from 2015 to 2026, with percentages shown for all sectors except at-sea and IFQ for which a set amount of the trawl allocation is deducted for at-sea and the remainder is allocated to IFQ. Allocations, set-asides, or shares that were set in management as fixed values are italicized, but percentages are still shown for those to compare across years. Trawl and Non-Trawl allocations are shaded to indicate that all other sector allocations, set-asides, and shares fall under those two allocations. “Comm.” = Commercial; “Rec.” = Recreational; “Alloc.” = Allocation

Year	Fishery HG	Trawl Alloc.				Non-Trawl Alloc.		Comm. NT Share ^{b/}		WA Rec. Share		OR Rec. Share		CA Rec. Share	
		%	mt	At-Sea (mt) ^{a/}	IFQ (mt)	%	mt	%	mt	%	mt	%	mt	%	mt
2015	107	53%	57	14	43	47%	50	21%	11	7%	3	23%	12	49%	24
2016	110	53%	59	14	45	47%	51	21%	11	7%	4	23%	12	49%	25
2017	1,467	72%	1,060	46	1,014	28%	407	36%	147	12%	50	18%	75	33%	135
2018	1,467	72%	1,060	46	1,014	28%	407	36%	147	12%	50	18%	75	33%	135
2019	1,383	72%	1,000	46	954	28%	383	36%	138	12%	47	18%	71	33%	127
2020	1,301	72%	940	46	894	28%	361	36%	130	12%	44	18%	67	33%	120
2021	1,269	72%	917	36	881	28%	352	36%	127	12%	43	19%	65	33%	117
2022	1,238	72%	895	36	859	28%	343	36%	124	12%	42	19%	63	33%	114
2023	1,269	72%	918	36	882	28%	352	36%	127	12%	43	19%	65	33%	117
2024	1,227	72%	887	36	851	28%	340	36%	122	12%	42	19%	63	33%	113
2025	508	72%	368	20	348	28%	141	36%	51	12%	17	18%	26	33%	47
2026	510	72%	368	20	348	28%	141	36%	51	12%	17	19%	26	33%	47

a/ Starting in 2021, the Council transitioned from the previous sector-specific allocations for the at-sea Mothership and Catcher-Processor sectors to instead using a combined at-sea set-aside.

b/ Starting in 2021, the Council combined the previously separate non-nearshore and nearshore sector-specific shares into a single combined commercial non-trawl share. In the 2019-20 biennium, the sharing percentages for those two sectors were 31.7% to non-nearshore and 68.3% to nearshore.

Table 2. Sector-specific mortality (mt) and attainment of allocation, set-aside, or share from 2015 to 2024. 2024 values are based on PacFIN landings and the recent 3-year average discard mortality from the GEMM. The 2024 GEMM total mortality are expected to be posted to the September 2025 briefing book but were not available at the time of writing this report. “Comm.” = Commercial; “Mort.” = Mortality; “Attain.” = Attainment; “Rec.” = Recreational

Year	Trawl		At-Sea		IFQ		Non-Trawl		Comm. Non-Trawl		WA Rec.		OR Rec.		CA Rec.	
	Mort. (mt)	Attain. (%)	Mort. (mt)	Attain. (%)	Mort. (mt)	Attain. (%)	Mort. (mt)	Attain. (%)	Mort. (mt)	Attain. (%)	Mort. (mt)	Attain. (%)	Mort. (mt)	Attain. (%)	Mort. (mt)	Attain. (%)
2015	45.1	79%	0.2	1%	44.9	104%	56.4	113%	13.4	128%	1.8	53%	14.3	122%	26.9	111%
2016	20.2	35%	0.5	4%	19.7	44%	47.4	92%	11.8	109%	2.2	63%	9.7	81%	23.7	95%
2017	248.3	23%	6.6	14%	241.7	24%	130.1	32%	13.6	9%	4.9	10%	28.2	38%	83.4	62%
2018	448.8	42%	5.5	12%	443.3	44%	121.9	30%	12.1	8%	4.4	9%	43.6	58%	61.8	46%
2019	426.8	43%	5.0	11%	421.8	44%	138.8	36%	15.3	11%	13.4	28%	38.7	55%	71.4	56%
2020	339.4	36%	0.9	2%	338.5	38%	141.4	39%	26.5	20%	8.0	18%	60.6	91%	46.3	39%
2021	373.9	41%	5.9	16%	368.0	42%	179.8	51%	31.7	25%	38.6	89%	39.9	61%	69.6	60%
2022	498.0	56%	5.8	16%	492.2	57%	187.1	55%	32.2	26%	36.6	87%	55.7	88%	62.6	55%
2023	534.4	58%	20.3	56%	514.1	58%	180.0	51%	28.4	22%	21.4	50%	57.0	88%	73.2	63%
2024	417.3	47%	1.1	3%	416.2	49%	145.2	43%	27.8	23%	27.1	65%	50.3	80%	40.0	35%

2015-2016 Biennium

Canary rockfish was declared overfished in 2000, prompting implementation of a rebuilding plan in 2001. Before 2011, there were no formal trawl and non-trawl allocations. The Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) program began in 2011, and from 2011 to 2014, there was very little change to the canary rockfish ACLs and allocations. During this period, retention was prohibited across all sectors, with small allocations only to accommodate unavoidable bycatch. In addition to prohibitions on canary rockfish retention, the recreational and commercial non-trawl Rockfish Conservation Areas (RCAs) were established to prevent any rockfish fishing where canary rockfish (and other overfished rockfish) are most likely to be encountered. This management structure remained in place through 2014, preceding notable changes in mortality and allocation attainment that began in 2015.

In 2015, those changes became evident as canary rockfish mortality and allocation attainments rose sharply across multiple sectors. For example, IFQ mortality increased from an annual average of 8 mt in 2011-2014 to 45 mt in 2015. Mortality in the non-nearshore sector (i.e., Limited Entry Fixed Gear and Open Access) increased from an annual average of 0.4 mt in 2011-2014 to 3.4 mt in 2015. Yet, sector-specific allocations had not increased more than 2 mt each, so allocation increases could not account for the increase in mortality. Canary rockfish was declared rebuilt based on the 2015 stock assessment, so it is likely that, in combination with the management changes described in the next paragraph, the increased catches in 2015 reflected a rebuilt stock. All three state recreational fisheries experienced attainments in 2015 that were 48-125 percent higher than their original projections, and combined with unexpectedly high catches in the commercial non-trawl (i.e., non-nearshore and nearshore) sectors, the non-trawl allocation was exceeded at 113 percent in 2015.

During the 2015-16 biennium, the trawl and non-trawl canary rockfish allocations were set as fixed values (57 mt to trawl and 50 mt to non-trawl in 2015). A one-fish sub-bag limit for canary rockfish was implemented in the Oregon recreational fishery with the intent to improve data available for future stock assessments without increasing total catch mortality (i.e., incidental catch would simply be retained rather than discarded). Retention was still prohibited in the Washington and California recreational fisheries. The Council also adopted an increase to the commercial lingcod trip limit in the commercial nearshore fishery, which was expected to increase catch of canary rockfish by 0.5-0.7 mt. Additionally, the Council removed the prohibition on lingcod retention during periods 1, 2, and 6 in the nearshore and non-nearshore fisheries. In 2015-16, the commercial nearshore share of the canary rockfish non-trawl allocation was further shared between Oregon (26.7 percent) and California (73.3 percent). That state-specific commercial nearshore sharing arrangement was implemented prior to 2015-16 and, at the time of implementation, was intended to keep both fisheries at harvest levels similar to previous years.

2017-2018 Biennium

In response to the 2015 canary rockfish stock assessment declaring it rebuilt, the ACLs for 2017 and 2018 increased substantially compared to the 2015-16 ACLs (Table 1). As a precautionary measure, the Council chose to set a 188 mt buffer under the canary rockfish ACL for 2017 only, which resulted in a reduction to only the IFQ allocation compared to not implementing the buffer,

since all other allocations and shares were set at fixed values (discussed further below). The IFQ allocation still increased compared to 2016 as a result of the ACL increase and higher percentage allocated.

Once the stock was declared rebuilt, the non-trawl sectors took a precautionary approach to re-establish shelf fisheries. The California recreational sector began with a 1 fish sub-bag limit in 2017 which was increased from 1 to 2 fish via inseason change effective April 14, 2018. Depth restrictions off California were initially relaxed, however, due to high yelloweye rockfish encounters over the summer, in-season action was taken in 2017 and 2018 which reverted depth limits to the 2016 depth limits north of Point Conception. The Oregon recreational sector moved from a 1-fish sub-bag limit in 2016 to removing the sub-bag limit and including canary rockfish as part of the overall marine bag limit, which ranged between a 4-fish daily bag limit and a 7-fish daily bag limit. Additionally, the Oregon recreational fishery had a seasonal depth restriction from April through September which limited marine anglers to fishing shoreward of the 30-fathom regulatory line in 2017 and shoreward of the 40-fathom regulatory line in 2018. In 2017, Washington implemented a 1-fish canary rockfish sub-bag limit only in the southern half of the coastal region (Marine Areas 1 and 2), while retention remained prohibited in the northern coastal areas (Marine Areas 3 and 4 west of the Bonilla-Tatoosh line). In 2018, this allowance was expanded to include all coastal marine areas west of the Bonilla-Tatoosh line, with up to two canary rockfish permitted per angler as part of the 7-rockfish daily limit. However, depth restrictions intended to protect yelloweye rockfish continued to limit access to deeper waters where canary rockfish are more frequently encountered.

The commercial Open Access sector began with a 150 lb. per 2-month trip limit, and Limited Entry Fixed Gear began with a 300 lb. per 2-month trip limit. These trip limit amounts in the commercial non-trawl sectors were set to, “allow retention of the majority of incidental catch,” without inducing additional targeting or effort change in the fishery ([2017-18 Groundfish Harvest Specifications Analysis - Appendix B](#)). Moreover, the commercial non-trawl RCA, designed to protect overfished stocks like canary and yelloweye rockfishes, remained in place. The RCA prohibited fishing for all rockfish where canary rockfish are predominantly encountered.

[Agenda Item F.6, Attachment 2, April 2016](#) outlines the range of options presented to the Council for setting the 2017-18 canary rockfish allocations. In November 2015, the Council expressed interest in exploring allocation scenarios, “based on catch (i.e., mortality) by sector during periods when canary rockfish were targeted (1990-1999) and also avoided (2000-2014),” as well as allocation scenarios, “based on pre-season allocations from 2009-2010 biennium and the 2015-16 cycle (i.e., the September 2015 scorecard).” In March 2016, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) ([Agenda Item F.6.a Supplemental ODFW Report April 2016](#)) and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) ([Agenda Item F.6.a Supplemental WDFW Report April 2016](#)) both submitted reports proposing similar alternative approaches that, per [Agenda Item F.6.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, April 2016](#), “tried to assess how much the non-trawl sectors may need in the 2017-2018 biennium, and provide the remainder to the trawl sectors, with the understanding that these are only two year allocations.”

When issuing canary rockfish to the various sectors in 2017-18, the Council’s motions in April and June indicate an intent that the trawl and non-trawl amounts, as well as the within-non-trawl amounts, would be treated as Annual Catch Target (ACTs). This was intended to provide

flexibility across the sectors and account for uncertainty, but the GMT pointed out in June 2016 that, “the setting of an ACT, instead of calling them allocations, does not allow for any additional flexibility,” because, “there is no ability to move unused allocation between the sectors even under an ACT,” ([Agenda Item G.4.a, Supplemental GMT Report 2, June 2016](#)). Therefore, the Council’s intent from the start was not to set rigid allocations, but the management tools available at the time could not facilitate the level of flexibility that the Council sought.

To set the canary rockfish shares in the non-trawl sectors, the GMT estimated how much canary rockfish each sector would need under the precautionary ramp-up approach. Sharing for the non-trawl sectors was set at these estimated values (mt rather than percentage) for 2017 and 2018, and the remaining share was issued to the trawl sectors. This resulted in an increase to the percentage allocated to the trawl fishery (from 53 percent in 2016 to 72 percent in 2017; Table 1). That percentage between the trawl (72 percent) and non-trawl (28 percent) allocations has remained in place since. Within the trawl share, fixed values based on the anticipated needs of the fishery were allocated to the two at-sea sectors as hard cap allocations, and the remaining balance was issued to the IFQ sector.

2019-2024

Canary rockfish allocations in 2019-2024 declined minimally across all sectors as the overall ACL declined minimally. Percentage attainments increased across several sectors as restrictions intended to protect shelf rockfish species were incrementally relaxed, allowing more access to canary rockfish. Although allocations changed minimally, various management measure changes did occur during this time that impacted canary rockfish catches and attainments across the sectors. The GMT excluded a description of those management changes at this time, because that was not the focus of this report.

2025-2026 Biennium

As described above, the canary rockfish ACL decreased by 55 percent from 2024 to 2025, and that reduction flowed to every sector in the groundfish fishery, with the exception of the at-sea set-aside which is a fixed value. Total canary rockfish mortality—including mortality from incidental, tribal, and research sources—in 2023 was 721 mt (the highest since 2002), and the 2025 ACL is 571 mt. The GMT’s March 2024 report on canary rockfish allocations considered several potential changes to the sharing percentages between sectors ([Agenda Item F.7.a, Supplemental GMT Report 2, March 2024](#)). Ultimately, the Council took action to only reduce the at-sea set-aside by 16 mt and adopted the status quo trawl/non-trawl allocation shares as well as status quo within-non-trawl shares. The March 2024 GMT report also provides detailed analysis of the importance of canary rockfish to each of the various sectors.

As of August 14, 2025, the canary rockfish ACL of 571 mt is at 21 percent attainment (or 119 mt). Preliminary total mortality estimates of canary rockfish in 2024 (pending the final 2025 Groundfish Expanded Mortality Multiyear report) indicate that 44 percent of the 2024 ACL was attained. This attainment was reflected in the catch-only projection for canary rockfish that was conducted in 2025. Based on the current allocation scheme and the recent ACL reductions, each sector has needed to reduce impacts to the resource or had management measure changes implemented to stay within the sector-specific allocation.

In November 2023, in response to the 2023 canary rockfish stock assessment, the commercial Open Access sector and Limited Entry Fixed Gear sectors both took an approximately 25 percent reduction in each respective trip limits to minimize their impact to canary rockfish mortality and stay within the commercial non-trawl allocation ([Agenda Item E.3.a Supplemental GMT Report 1 November 2023](#)). These reductions were carried over for the current 2025-2026 Biennium. In the IFQ fishery, 93 percent of quota share (QS) accounts that held some amount of canary rockfish quota in 2024 saw a 60 percent reduction in their allocated quota pounds in 2025, compared to 2024. The remaining QS accounts either increased or decreased their percentage of canary rockfish QS owned at an average of 0.3 percent in either direction, resulting in a range of 30-80 percent reductions in allocated quota pounds, or did not have a QS account at all in 2025. With a reduced at-sea set-aside, and the risk that a single tow of whiting could encounter a canary rockfish aggregation, the at-sea sectors have taken measures to keep canary rockfish catches within the set-aside, such as avoiding areas of high potential for canary rockfish bycatch ([Agenda Item E.3.a, Supplemental GAP Report 1, June 2025](#)).

In 2025, Washington recreational fisheries reinstated a species-specific sub-bag limit for canary rockfish, setting a maximum of 5-fish per angler per day within the existing seven-rockfish daily limit, while leaving depth restrictions unchanged. Oregon reinstated a 1-canary rockfish sub-bag limit in both the traditional bottomfish fishery (general marine species) as well as the long-leader gear fishery. The traditional bottomfish fishery bag limit is set at 4-fish per angler per day, which was increased to a 5-fish bag limit on July 1, though reduced back down to a 4-fish bag limit on August 18 ([ODFW Press Release, August 15, 2025](#)). The long-leader gear fishery daily bag limit remains at 10-fish per angler. Off California, the adopted changes to recreational seasons and depths, primarily to minimize quillback rockfish impacts, reduced canary rockfish impacts to the point where a sub-bag limit was not initially needed to stay under the California recreational HG for 2025-26. However, after the initial review of the 2025 quillback rockfish stock assessment found quillback rockfish are not overfished, the California Fish and Game Commission instituted all-depth recreational fishing seasons for northern and central California along with a two fish sub-bag limit for canary rockfish to keep catches within the federal California recreational harvest guideline ([CDFW Press release, August 14, 2025](#)).

Additionally, a separate CDFW commercial rulemaking package will remove the California Groundfish Restriction Area (CGRA) designed to protect quillback rockfish in California state waters fisheries and trip limits will be reestablished (except for prohibitions on quillback rockfish retention) in California state waters, allowing commercial non-trawl participants to target and land species like canary rockfish coastwide. Both California state waters rulemaking are anticipated to increase canary rockfish mortality, which will take effect around the start of September and remain in effect through 2025-26 biennium with conforming federal regulations to follow.

PFMC
08/26/25