

2020 HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS FOR COWCOD AND SHORTBELLY ROCKFISH

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) will consider proposals to increase or eliminate the 2020 annual catch target (ACT) for cowcod south of 40°10' N. lat. and to increase the 2020 annual catch limit (ACL) for shortbelly rockfish to avoid negative socioeconomic impacts to the 2020 West Coast groundfish fishery.

The Council received public comment from affected stakeholders at their June 2019 meeting requesting relief regarding both these initiatives. Affected trawl participants south of 40°10' N. lat. are requesting a higher annual vessel limit of cowcod given the difficulty avoiding incidental bycatch as the stock rebuilds. They expressed concern the fishery will be disrupted if the annual vessel limit is attained prematurely. The Groundfish Management Team and Groundfish Advisory Subpanel recommended increasing or eliminating the 2020 cowcod ACT to avoid a disruption of the fishery.

The Council also received public comment regarding an unanticipated increase in the bycatch of shortbelly rockfish in the Pacific whiting fishery this year. This was unanticipated since shortbelly rockfish rarely occur north of 40°10' N. lat. and an apparent distributional shift has greatly increased encounters of shortbelly rockfish in northern midwater trawl fisheries. The 2020 shortbelly rockfish ACL of 500 mt was set intentionally low relative to the acceptable biological catch of 5,789 mt in recognition of the stock's importance as a forage species in the California Current Ecosystem. They requested an increase in the 2020 ACL to avoid fishery disruptions should the bycatch be high again next year. A draft Regulatory Impact Review/Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis is provided in Attachment 1 to provide more detail on impacts associated with both proposed regulatory amendments. Attachment 1 also provides a draft Purpose and Need statement for both initiatives as well as strawman alternatives for consideration.

The Council should consider the advice of the National Marine Fisheries Service, Council advisory bodies, and the public in consideration of revising 2020 harvest specifications for shortbelly rockfish and cowcod. If the Council proposes revisions to these harvest specifications, they should specify a purpose and need for any proposed action, decide a range of alternatives for analysis, and preliminary preferred alternatives.

Council Action:

- 1. Adopt a range of alternatives and a preliminary preferred alternative in consideration for revising the 2020 shortbelly rockfish annual catch limit.**
- 2. Adopt a range of alternatives and a preliminary preferred alternative in consideration for revising the 2020 cowcod annual catch target.**
- 3. Specify a purpose and need for the proposed action(s).**

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item H.6, Attachment 1: Draft Regulatory Impact Review/Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis for a Proposed Regulatory Amendment under the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan.

Agenda Order:

- H.6 2020 Harvest Specifications for Cowcod and Shortbelly Rockfish John DeVore
- a. Reports and Comments of Management Entities and Advisory Bodies
 - b. Public Comment
 - c. **Council Action:** Adopt a Range of Alternatives and Preliminary Preferred Alternatives for 2020 Harvest Specifications for Cowcod and Shortbelly Rockfish

PFMC
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