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PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL ANNOUNCES GOOD NEWS ON REBUILDING OF FISH STOCKS

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) is pleased to announce that the West Coast lingcod stock has been successfully rebuilt after being designated "overfished" by the federal government in 1999. The rebuilding was accomplished while avoiding a complete closure of lingcod or groundfish fisheries. In addition, the status of other key overfished stocks has improved. "At a time when the public often hears negative things about marine fishery management, it is refreshing to see things improving off the West Coast," said Council Chairman Don Hansen.

In addition to meeting the rebuilding target for lingcod, the population threshold was exceeded and rebuilding was accomplished much earlier than expected. Lingcod was scheduled to be rebuilt by 2009, but a new assessment shows that the lingcod population is already 60% greater than the rebuilding target. Lingcod are voracious, non-migratory predators that inhabit rocky areas and reefs. Executive Director Donald McIsaac noted, "Rebuilding so quickly is a great success story that shows how the Council's cutbacks on fishing can work. But even with the increased numbers, fishing for lingcod will still be restricted due to curtailments on fishing to allow rebuilding of canary and yelloweye rockfish, which live in similar habitat."

In November 2005, the Council considered the results of stock assessments for 23 groundfish species conducted by scientists from federal and state government agencies. The assessments were then subjected to a thorough, two-stage peer review process. An initial evaluation by a specialized panel that included reviewers from the Center for Independent Experts was conducted first, followed by a review for scientific validity by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). The Council's SSC is composed of scientists from tribal, state and federal agencies, academic institutions, and other sources. The Council approval of the SSC's recommendations triggers the use of the stock assessments in decision making.

Assessments for other overfished stocks showed good improvement, with a few showing mixed results. Assessments for widow rockfish and darkblotched rockfish showed significant improvements. The widow rockfish stock increased by 25% between 2003 and 2005 and is now at 78% of its rebuilding target. The darkblotched rockfish stock increased by 25% between 2001 and 2005, and is now at 40% of its target;

in addition, three strong year classes of juveniles are soon to recruit to the adult phase. The assessments for cowcod rockfish showed modest improvement, while assessments for Pacific ocean perch, canary, and bocaccio rockfish showed no significant change between 2003 and 2005. An assessment for yelloweye rockfish showed the population in slightly worse shape.

In all, the Council has adopted rebuilding plans for eight overfished species. Lingcod, Pacific ocean perch, and bocaccio were designated overfished in 1999; canary rockfish and cowcod in 2000; darkblotched rockfish and widow rockfish in 2001; and yelloweye rockfish in 2002. Pacific whiting were declared overfished in 2002, but were rebuilt to the target level and removed from the list of overfished species in 2004.

The Council and National Marine Fisheries Service have implemented management policies to reduce the catch of overfished species to a level that will allow their populations to rebuild to a healthy size. Rebuilding strategies limit fishing so that a stock can grow to a legally-mandated target level. To reduce catch of these stocks, the Council has closed large areas to certain types of fishing, enacted regulations that discourage fishing in rocky habitat, curtailed quotas and bag limits, and implemented other measures.

The Council is one of eight regional fishery management councils established by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 for the purpose of managing fisheries 3-200 miles offshore of the United States of America coastline. The Pacific Council is responsible for fisheries off the coasts of California, Oregon, and Washington. Management measures are embodied in fishery management plans (FMPs) for salmon, groundfish, highly migratory species, and coastal pelagic species. The groundfish FMP covers more than 82 species.

For more information on overfishing and rebuilding, please see the Council's collection of fact sheets at <http://www.pccouncil.org/pfmcfacts.html>.