

Frequently Asked Questions About the Vermilion Rockfish Sub-Bag Limit

I caught a red rockfish. Is it a vermilion rockfish?

It could be. There are several species of rockfish with red or reddish coloring, including vermilion rockfish. Anglers are responsible for properly identifying the species they catch to ensure regulations for those species are followed.

There are numerous fish identification resources available to anglers, including several [groundfish identification](#) resources developed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW):

- [Vermilion rockfish profile](#)
- [Vermilion rockfish, canary rockfish, and yelloweye rockfish identification](#)
- [Shelf rockfish species off California](#)

Why do we need a sub-bag limit for vermilion rockfish?

Recreational catch of vermilion rockfish has increased significantly in recent years. While there are some preliminary indications that the population may have increased, the most recent assessment of the vermilion rockfish stock suggests the current levels of catch are unsustainable. Until we have a new stock assessment to provide more current information on sustainable harvest levels, the new five-fish vermilion rockfish sub-bag limit has been implemented as a precautionary measure to slow catches.

When does the new sub-bag limit for vermilion rockfish go into effect?

Beginning January 1, 2021 there is a five-fish sub-bag limit for vermilion rockfish.

How high have catches been compared to recent historical catch?

CDFW tracks recreational catch of all groundfish species each year. Vermilion rockfish catch has been increasing (Figure 1) recently, with significant increases to catch seen during the last five years. Without recent stock assessment information to let us know if the current catch levels are sustainable, fishery managers determined catch should be slowed through use of sub-bag limits as a precautionary measure until we have new stock status information.

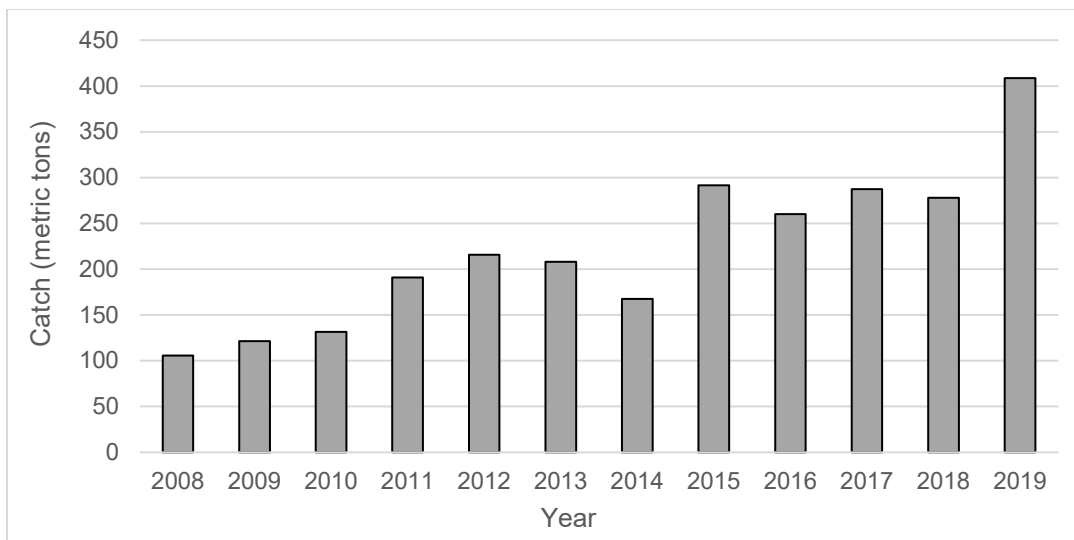


Figure 1. Annual recreational catch (metric tons) of vermilion rockfish in California from 2008-2019. Data are from CDFW.

When will we have new information from a stock assessment about the vermilion rockfish population?

The next stock assessment for vermilion rockfish is planned for 2021. Results will be available in late summer/early fall of that year and will be used to establish harvest limits and regulations for the 2023-24 fishery management cycle. As part of that process, CDFW will be evaluating the five-fish sub-bag limit against the new harvest limits and will recommend modifications as appropriate. If the five-fish sub-bag limit is no longer needed to reduce catches, it could be removed. Alternatively, if further reductions in catch are needed to keep catch within the new limit, the sub-limit could be reduced to fewer than five fish.

What is the RCG complex?

Present regulations establish recreational bag limits which vary by species or species groups and are designed to keep catch within legally allowable harvest limits. The Rockfish, Cabezon, and Greenling (RCG) complex has a 10-fish daily bag limit meaning that each angler's catch can be composed of any combination of rockfish, cabezon, or greenling as long as total catch does not exceed 10-fish. Recreational regulations for the RCG complex, and other groundfish species vary by geographic area. For more detailed information on recreational groundfish regulations and to stay informed of in-season changes, please visit CDFW's [summary of recreational groundfish fishing regulations for 2021](#) or call the Recreational Groundfish Hotline at (831) 649-2801.

What does a five-fish sub-bag limit for vermilion rockfish within the 10-fish RCG complex daily bag limit mean?

Sub-bag limits are implemented when harvest limits can't accommodate the 10-fish RCG complex daily bag limit being comprised of a single species. Beginning in 2021, changes to recreational regulations in California resulted in implementation of a new

five-fish sub-bag limit for vermilion rockfish. That means that anglers are now limited to no more than five vermilion rockfish per day within the 10-fish RCG complex daily bag limit. In past years, there have been sub-bag limits on other RCG complex species including canary, black, gopher and bocaccio rockfish, cabezon and greenling. However, those sub-bag limits are no longer needed to keep catches of those species within allowable levels.

Why are sub-bag limits even needed?

For many groundfish species, a population or stock assessment model is conducted to inform fishery managers how much can be sustainably taken of a single species, or in some cases a combination of species. In some cases, the stock assessment information indicates catch of a particular species needs to be reduced to ensure long-term stability of the population. A sub-bag limit for species within the RCG complex can help achieve that goal without having to reduce the entire 10-fish RCG complex daily bag limit. In the past several years, there have been sub-bag limits on various species such as canary rockfish, black rockfish, bocaccio and cabezon. To stay up to date on groundfish regulations see CDFW's [summary of groundfish regulations webpage](#) or call the Recreational Groundfish Hotline at (831) 649-2801.

What about lingcod?

Lingcod are not part of the RCG complex and have a separate bag limit. If an angler caught their daily bag limits for lingcod and RCG complex species, they would have 12 fish: two lingcod plus 10 RCG complex species.

I caught my five vermilion rockfish but would like to continue fishing because I haven't yet reached the 10-fish RCG complex limit. What do I do if I catch more vermilion rockfish?

If you find yourself catching vermilion rockfish after you've reached your five-fish sub bag limit, the best fishing practice would include relocating to different fishing grounds or switching targets to non-rockfish species to continue your trip. Other options include use of descending devices to return fish exhibiting signs of [barotrauma](#) back to the seafloor safely to minimize mortality.

Why was a sub-bag limit chosen over other possible regulation changes like size limits or changes to seasons?

Regulations for groundfish (which includes all rockfish, lingcod, and some flatfish) are revised biennially through a public federal process. CDFW participates in this federal process and recommends changes to these types of regulations and other management measures for California's fisheries. Regulations for the 2021-2022 fishing seasons were developed between June 2019-June 2020. Several options to reduce vermilion rockfish catch were explored, and the final decision in June 2020 recommended implementation of the five-fish sub-bag limit.

While the addition of a new sub-bag limit does make the already complex regulations more complicated, it was the simplest and likely most effective way to slow catches of vermilion rockfish while minimizing impacts to other target species. Due to bycatch concerns, establishing a shorter season for vermilion rockfish is not desirable if boat-based seasons for other rockfish and bottomfish species remain open. A minimum size limit for vermilion rockfish and other rockfish species is generally not a preferred method to reduce catches, since catch-and-release mortality can be significant.

Does the sub-bag limit for “vermilion rockfish” include the recently discovered sunset rockfish since they are too difficult to tell apart?

Yes, they both count toward the five fish “vermilion rockfish” sub-bag limit. Some of you might have heard of a newly discovered rockfish that is closely related to vermilion rockfish and found predominately in Southern California. Both species are nearly identical in appearance and were thought to be a single species of vermilion rockfish for decades. Recent genetic analysis identified sunset rockfish as a separate species from vermilion rockfish. Despite that, you can keep calling them all vermilion rockfish since it’s very difficult to figure out which is which, and as a result, they are considered the same in terms of management.

How do I voice my opinion or comment on proposals to groundfish regulations?

Visit the [PFMC website](#) to read about ways to get involved, including learning who your representatives are on [stakeholder advisory panels](#) such as the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel.