

State of California
Fish and Game Commission
Initial Statement of Reasons for Regulatory Action
(Certificate of Compliance)

Amend Sections 1.91, 27.25, 27.30, 27.35, 27.40, and 28.55
Title 14, California Code of Regulations
Regarding Recreational Take of Rockfish, Cabezon, Greenling and Lingcod

I. Date of Initial Statement of Reasons: October 14, 2025

II. Dates and Locations of Scheduled Hearings

(a) Notice Hearing:

Date: October 8-9, 2025

Location: Sacramento

(b) Discussion Hearing:

Date: December 10-11, 2025

Location: Sacramento

(c) Adoption Hearing:

Date: February 11-12, 2026

Location: Sacramento

III. Description of Regulatory Action

(a) Statement of Specific Purpose of Regulatory Change and Factual Basis for Determining that Regulation Change is Reasonably Necessary

Unless otherwise specified, all section references in this document are to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR).

Background

Regulatory authority for the rockfish, cabezon, and greenling (RCG) complex and lingcod are shared jointly between state and federal governments. It is important to have complementary state and federal regulations establishing harvest limits, season dates, depth constraints and other management measures. Consistent and complementary rules in adjacent waters allows for uniformity of enforcement, minimizes confusion which promotes compliance, and allows for a comprehensive approach to resource management.

Pursuant to authority under California law (California Fish and Game Code sections 200 and 205), the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) routinely adopts and amends regulations in Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR) for the recreational groundfish fisheries in state waters¹ zero to three miles from shore. Groundfish

¹ The offshore boundary of the state's sovereign lands was established in 2014 by an order entered by the United States Supreme Court in the case of United States of America, Plaintiff v. State of California, 135 S. Ct. 563; 190 L. Ed. 2d 514; 2014 U.S. LEXIS 8436 (2014). This action by the United States Supreme Court permanently fixes the offshore boundary between the United States and California, resolving a dispute that began in 1935 with the discovery of oil in Wilmington, California. There is now a fixed boundary approximately 3 nautical miles off the coast of California extending from Mexico to Oregon, providing certainty to state and federal lessors, regulators, lessees, and operators of federal and state mineral and renewable-energy leasing programs.

refers to bottom-dwelling fish that feed on or near the bottom of the ocean, and include roundfish, rockfish, flatfish, and other ground-dwelling fish.

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) reviews the status of west coast groundfish populations through the use of stock assessments and recommends regulations to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). As part of the PFMC process, NMFS (acting under delegated authority from the U.S. Department of Commerce) manages the fishery in the Exclusive Economic Zone (3 to 200 miles offshore) off Washington, Oregon and California.

Quillback rockfish (*Sebastes maliger*) are a key recreational and commercial species among the RCG complex, and co-inhabit rocky reef habitats in nearshore waters, typically between 20 fathoms (fm) (approximately 120 feet) and 50 fm (approximately 300 feet), but often are found deeper with other recreational and commercially caught groundfish species.

Results of a 2021 federal stock assessment for quillback rockfish in California indicated the stock was in severe decline, with only 14 percent of the unfished population estimated to remain. While the stock assessment was considered “data-moderate,” relying on limited data sources and proxy data incorporated from other states, the results prompted a conservation emergency. Initial emergency action was taken by the Commission in late 2021 which implemented a 1-fish sub-bag limit for quillback rockfish within the 10-fish RCG daily bag limit for the 2022 fishery to reduce catch. Further action was taken in 2022 to modify season structures for the 2023 and 2024 seasons to shift fishing effort away from the primary nearshore waters where quillback rockfish are found, and to continue reducing catch of quillback rockfish. Emergency action by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) was necessary in August 2023 to prohibit retention of quillback rockfish statewide and to limit fishing effort to waters shoreward of 20 fm as the federally established harvest limits had been exceeded. Further action was taken by the Commission in 2024 to continue the prohibited status of quillback rockfish statewide, and revise season structures for the areas north of Point Lopez (36° N. latitude (lat.)) to prohibit fishing between the 20-fm boundary line and 50-fm boundary line.

When recreational anglers fish for RCG species and lingcod in these depths, it is impossible to predict which species will be caught. Quillback rockfish have historically comprised a small proportion of the catch; however, developing depth limits to avoid them also impacts other rockfish species that are highly targeted and attained. In a mixed stock fishery such as groundfish, minimizing catch of one species often requires closing fishing in areas and depths where other RCG species or lingcod are found. In this case, closing state waters to fishing for RCG and lingcod between the 20-fm and 50-fm boundary lines was necessary to minimize catch of quillback rockfish and stay within the restrictive harvest limits. Although fishing for RCG and lingcod has been closed between 20 fm and 50 fm since late 2023, those areas have remained open to fishing for other federal groundfish species (e.g. sablefish and sanddabs) and non-groundfish targets.

On June 9, 2025, the PFMC posted online a draft quillback rockfish stock assessment in waters off California, an assessment that is more robust than the previous one conducted in 2021. The newest assessment considers all available data sources, including newly

available California-specific life history information, and does not rely on proxy data from other states as the 2021 assessment had. Results of the 2025 indicate that the California quillback stock is healthy and not overfished², a major reversal from the 2021 stock assessment.

The 2025 assessment indicates a substantially higher allowable harvest limit than the current allowable harvest limit. For example, the new stock assessment estimates an Overfishing Limit, which is the estimate of the amount that can be caught without risking depletion of the stock, of 13.52 metric tons (mt), a significant increase from the 1.50 mt set in federal regulations based on the 2021 data-moderate assessment. Therefore, the conservation emergency identified in 2021 no longer exists, and the associated depth-based fishery constraints for other co-inhabiting groundfish species are unwarranted.

Despite the improved stock health and scale of the stock, the expected harvest limits are not large enough to allow for quillback rockfish to be retained in the fishery; therefore, retention of quillback rockfish is not warranted.

Following formal review and approval of the 2025 stock assessment for use in federal management, which occurred between July and September 2025, NMFS took an inseason regulatory action to remove the federal fishery depth restrictions in place since October 2023. The federal action, effective September 18, 2025, replaced the depths and season structure for boat-based RCG and lingcod fishing in federal waters (3 to 200 miles from shore) with all-depth fishing from the California/Oregon border (42° N. lat.) to Point Conception (34°27' N. lat.) during the open season in these groundfish management areas (GMA), April 1 through December 31. A second NMFS action, expected in late 2025, would implement a 2-fish sub-bag limit for canary rockfish within the 10-fish RCG daily limit. The canary rockfish sub-bag limit measure aims to keep catches of canary rockfish within the California recreational harvest guideline (HG). Further NMFS actions may be necessary in late 2025 and early 2026 to revise federal harvest limits and recreational management measures.

Current Regulations

Present regulations establish season dates and depth constraints, and recreational bag limits that vary by species or species groups and are designed to keep harvest within federally established allowable limits. Section 1.91 defines the list of federal groundfish species and provides species groupings as appropriate. Sections 27.25, 27.30, 27.35 and 27.40 set forth season dates, and depth constraints for the four GMAs north of Point Conception (34°27' N. lat.). Section 28.55, Rockfish (Genus *Sebastes*), currently sets forth the bag limits, and methods of take for all rockfish species.

² “Overfished” describes any stock or stock complex whose size is sufficiently diminished that a change in management practices is required to achieve an appropriate level and rate of rebuilding. The term generally describes any stock or stock complex determined to be below its overfished/rebuilding threshold. The default proxy is generally 25 percent of its estimated unfished biomass; however, other scientifically valid values are also authorized.

Under regulations that went into effect in 2024, the boat-based RCG and lingcod fishery in the Northern, Mendocino, San Francisco, and Central GMAs is open seaward of the 50-fm boundary line from April 1 through April 30, October 1 through October 31, and December 1 through December 31, and is open shoreward of the 20-fm boundary line from May 1 through September 30, and November 1 through November 30. During the seaward-of-50-fm fishery, additional limitations on species or species groups apply.

Pursuant to subsection 28.55(b), the RCG complex has a daily 10-fish bag and possession aggregate limit, meaning that each angler's catch can be composed of any combination of rockfish, cabezon, or greenling as long as total catch remains at or below 10 fish. Sub-bag limits are implemented when harvest guidelines cannot accommodate the 10-fish bag limit being composed of a single species. The sub-bag limit for copper rockfish is 1 fish statewide, and, under regulations that went into effect in 2024, the sub-bag limit for vermilion rockfish is 4 fish in the Northern GMA and 2 fish in all other GMAs. Bronzespotted rockfish, cowcod, quillback rockfish and yelloweye rockfish have bag limits of zero fish.

Emergency Regulations Adopted

The Commission adopted emergency regulations on August 14, 2025. The emergency regulations implemented the following changes:

- Amended subsection 1.91(a)(3) to add sunset rockfish (*S. crocotulus*) to the list of shelf rockfish;
- Amended subsection 27.25(b)(2) and repealed subsection 27.25(b)(3) to repeal the shoreward-of-20-fm and seaward-of-50-fm times of the year in the Northern GMA and replace them with a season that is open April 1 through December 31 in all depths;
- Amended subsection 27.30(b)(2) and repealed subsection 27.30(b)(3) to repeal the shoreward-of-20-fm and seaward-of-50-fm times of the year in the Mendocino GMA and replace them with a season that is open April 1 through December 31 in all depths;
- Amended subsection 27.35(b)(2) and repealed subsection 27.35(b)(3) to repeal the shoreward-of-20-fm and seaward-of-50-fm times of the year in the San Francisco GMA and replace them with a season that is open April 1 through December 31 in all depths;
- Amended subsection 27.40(b)(2) and repealed subsection 27.40(b)(3) to repeal the shoreward-of-20-fm and seaward-of-50-fm times of the year in the Central GMA and replace them with a season that is open April 1 through December 31 in all depths;
- Amended subsections 27.40(a) and 27.40(b) to remove references to areas north and south of 36° N. lat.;
- Repealed subsection 27.40(c) related to seasons and depth constraints in the Central GMA south of 36° N. lat.;

- Amended subsections 28.55(b)(2) and 28.55(b)(2)(B) to add the cryptic-species sunset rockfish; and,
- Added new subsection 28.55(b)(4) to include a sub-bag limit for canary rockfish of two fish within the daily 10-fish RCG bag and possession limit.

Proposed Regulations

The Department is recommending the Commission establish the emergency regulations for the long-term via the regular rulemaking process:

- ***Amend Section 1.91***

- Amend subsection 1.91(a)(3) to add sunset rockfish (*S. crocotulus*) to the list of shelf rockfish.

This change is necessary for consistency with federal regulations which manage “vermillion/sunset rockfish” as a single species-unit.

- ***Amend sections 27.25, 27.30, 27.35, and 27.40***

- Amend subsection 27.25(b)(2) and repeal subsection 27.25(b)(3) to repeal the shoreward-of-20-fm and seaward-of-50-fm times of the year in the Northern GMA and replace them with a season that is open April 1 through December 31 in all depths;
- Amend subsection 27.30(b)(2) and repeal subsection 27.30(b)(3) to repeal the shoreward-of-20-fm and seaward-of-50-fm times of the year in the Mendocino GMA and replace them with a season that is open April 1 through December 31 in all depths;
- Amend subsection 27.35(b)(2) and repeal subsection 27.35(b)(3) to repeal the shoreward-of-20-fm and seaward-of-50-fm times of the year in the San Francisco GMA and replace them with a season that is open April 1 through December 31 in all depths; and
- Amend subsection 27.40(b)(2) and repeal subsection 27.40(b)(3) to repeal the shoreward-of-20-fm and seaward-of-50-fm times of the year in the Central GMA and replace them with a season that is open April 1 through December 31 in all depths.

“Times of the year” refers to different depth constraints within certain months of the open season. These changes are necessary as new science indicates the significant conservation risk to quillback rockfish no longer exists and restricting the fishery to only shoreward of the 20-fm boundary line or only seaward of the 50-fm boundary line is not necessary in each of these GMAs.

- ***Amend Section 27.40***

- Amend subsections 27.40(a) and 27.40(b) to remove references to areas north and south of 36° N. lat.

- Repeal subsection 27.40(c) related to seasons and depth constraints in the Central GMA south of 36° N. lat.

The line at 36° N. lat. was implemented to provide additional fishery access to the Morro Bay port area where quillback rockfish are not found. New science indicates the significant conservation risk to quillback rockfish no longer exists and restricting the fishery is not necessary; therefore, separate regulations for the Central GMA north and south of 36° N. lat. are not necessary.

- ***Amend Section 28.55***

- Amend subsections 28.55(b)(2) and 28.55(b)(2)(B) to add the cryptic-species sunset rockfish.

These changes are necessary for consistency with federal regulations, to address enforcement concerns about anglers attempting to “double-up” on sub-bag limits and to help prevent excessive catches of vermilion/sunset rockfish which would pose an immediate conservation risk.

- Add new subsection 28.55(b)(4) to include a sub-bag limit for canary rockfish of two fish within the daily 10-fish RCG bag and possession limit.

This change is necessary to keep catches within the federally established California recreational HG.

Implementing these regulatory changes as a package will also provide administrative efficiencies.

(b) Goals and Benefits of the Regulation

The benefits of the proposed regulations are sustainable management of RCG and lingcod resources and promotion of businesses that rely on recreational groundfish fishing.

Fishing is an outdoor activity that can provide several health and welfare benefits to California residents. Anglers and their families benefit from fresh fish to eat and from the benefits of outdoor recreation, including exercise. People who fish have a special connection with the outdoors and an awareness of the relationships between wildlife, habitat, and humans, and fishing can be a family tradition and a bonding activity.

It is the policy of this state to encourage the conservation, maintenance, and utilization of the living resources of the ocean and other waters under the jurisdiction and influence of the state for the benefit of all the citizens of the state and to promote the development of local and distant water fisheries based in California. The objectives of this policy include, but are not limited to, the maintenance of sufficient populations of all species of aquatic organisms to ensure their continued existence and the maintenance of a sufficient resource to support a reasonable sport use, taking into consideration the necessity of regulating individual sport fishery bag limits to the quantity that is sufficient to provide a satisfying sport. Adoption of scientifically-based RCG and lingcod seasons, depth constraints, and bag and possession limits provides for the maintenance of sufficient populations of RCG and lingcod species to ensure their continued existence.

(c) Authority and Reference Sections from Fish and Game Code for Regulation

Authority: Sections 200, 205, 265, 702, 7071 and 8587.1, Fish and Game Code.

Reference: Sections 200, 205, 265, 1802, 7071 and 8585.5, Fish and Game Code; 50 CFR Part 660, Subpart G, Sections 660.350, 660.351, 660.352 and 660.360.

(d) Specific Technology or Equipment Required by Regulatory Change: None

(e) Identification of Reports or Documents Supporting Regulation Change

- Langseth, B.J., M.H. Monk, J.H. Coates, 2025. Status of the Quillback rockfish stock in U.S. waters off the coast of California in 2025. Pacific Fishery Management Council, Portland, OR. https://pam.pcouncil.org/documents/quillback_rockfish_sar_2025-pdf/
- June 2025, Pacific Fishery Management Council, Decision Summary Document. <https://www.pcouncil.org/june-2025-decision-summary-document/>
- Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan for California, Oregon, and Washington Groundfish Fishery. June 2025. Pacific Fishery Management Council. <https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2022/08/pacific-coast-groundfish-fishery-management-plan.pdf/>
- Amendment 33 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan, 2025-26 Harvest Specifications, and Management Measures. October 2024. National Marine Fisheries Service West Coast Region and Pacific Fishery Management Council. <https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2025/05/2025-26-groundfish-harvest-specifications-and-management-measure-environmental-assessment.pdf/>

(f) Public Discussions of Proposed Regulations Prior to Notice Publication

- June 2025 - The PFMC process includes the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel, which is an advisory fishing group and includes fishery representatives and non-governmental organizations. This group was notified during the June 2025 PFMC meeting in Rohnert Park, California, of upcoming proposed changes in conjunction with planned federal actions. At the PFMC meeting, support was heard amongst recreational fishery representatives and participants for restoring access to currently prohibited fishing depths.
- August 14, 2025 – Commission emergency regulation hearing with 8 public comments received, all in support of the emergency action.
- September 2025 – PFMC meeting in Spokane, WA, and remote participation. Standing agenda item “Inseason Adjustments.” PFMC will receive reports from the Department summarizing changes to regulations through Commission emergency regulatory action. In addition, PFMC is expected to consider a canary rockfish 2-fish sub-bag limit for consistency in state and federal regulations. Opportunities at this meeting exist for advisory fishing groups and interested members of public to participate and comment.

IV. Description of Reasonable Alternatives to Regulatory Action

(a) Alternatives to Regulation Change

No alternatives were identified by or brought to the attention of the Commission staff that would have the same desired regulatory effect.

(b) No Change Alternative

Without the proposed changes, the outstanding issues concerning the regulations currently governing RCG and lingcod would remain unaddressed.

Under the No Change Alternative, the emergency regulations adopted by the Commission in August 2025 would expire during the summer of 2026, reverting to the original regulations in place at the beginning of 2025 and would:

- Continue unwarranted constraining regulations on the fishery, causing continued harm to the fishing industry while not addressing any specific conservation benefit, and,
- Be inconsistent with federal regulations. Inconsistency in regulations would create confusion among the public and may result in laws that are difficult to enforce.

V. Mitigation Measures Required by Regulatory Action

The proposed regulatory action will have no negative impact on the environment; therefore, no mitigation measures are needed.

VI. Impact of Regulatory Action

The potential for significant statewide adverse economic impacts that might result from the proposed regulatory action has been assessed, and the following initial determinations relative to the required statutory categories have been made:

(a) Significant Statewide Adverse Economic Impact Directly Affecting Businesses, Including the Ability of California Businesses to Compete with Businesses in Other States

The proposed action will not have a significant statewide adverse economic impact directly affecting business, including the ability of California businesses to compete with businesses in other states. The proposal to modify the recreational RCG and lingcod season structure regulations to restore access to all depths in state waters north of Point Conception will expand fishing opportunities for anglers and sport fishing businesses (e.g., commercial passenger fishing vessel businesses) targeting groundfish. No new fees are imposed as a result of the proposed regulations, nor are any indirect costs imposed on anglers or sport fishing businesses. No adverse economic impacts are anticipated as a result of implementing a 2-fish sub-bag limit for canary rockfish and adding sunset rockfish to cryptic-species vermilion/sunset rockfish management unit.

(b) Impact on the Creation or Elimination of Jobs Within the State, the Creation of New Businesses or the Elimination of Existing Businesses, or the Expansion of Businesses in California; Benefits of the Regulation to the Health and Welfare of California Residents, Worker Safety, and the State's Environment

The Commission does not anticipate any impacts on the creation or elimination of jobs, the creation of new businesses, the elimination of existing businesses or the expansion of businesses in California. The proposal to modify the recreational RCG and lingcod season structure regulations to restore access to all depths in state waters north of Point Conception will expand fishing opportunities for anglers and sport fishing businesses (e.g., commercial passenger fishing vessel businesses) targeting groundfish similar to those in effect prior to October 2023, but it is expected that the time out on the water will remain largely the same, which would not create a significant increase in economic activity that would warrant the need for additional labor for commercial passenger fishing vessels. No new fees are imposed as a result of these regulations, nor are any indirect costs imposed on anglers or sport fishing businesses. No impacts to jobs or businesses are anticipated as a result of implementing a 2-fish sub-bag limit for canary rockfish and adding sunset rockfish to cryptic-species vermilion/sunset rockfish management unit. The proposed regulations do not bring any additional benefits to worker safety. Fishing is an outdoor activity that can provide several health and welfare benefits to California residents. Anglers and their families benefit from fresh fish to eat and from the benefits of outdoor recreation, including exercise. People who fish have a special connection with the outdoors and an awareness of the relationships between wildlife, habitat, and humans, and fishing can be a family tradition and a bonding activity. The Commission anticipates benefits to the state's environment by adopting scientifically-based RCG and lingcod seasons, depth constraints, and bag and possession limits to provide for the maintenance of sufficient populations of RCG and lingcod species to ensure their continued existence.

(c) Cost Impacts on a Representative Private Person or Business

The Commission is not aware of any cost impacts that a representative private person or business would necessarily incur in reasonable compliance with the proposed action. The proposal to modify the recreational RCG and lingcod season structure regulations to restore access to all depths in state waters north of Point Conception will restore fishing opportunities for anglers targeting groundfish similar to those in effect prior October 2023. No new fees are imposed as a result of these regulations, nor are any indirect costs imposed on anglers. No cost impacts are anticipated as a result of implementing a 2-fish sub-bag limit for canary rockfish and adding sunset rockfish to cryptic-species vermilion/sunset rockfish management unit.

(d) Costs or Savings to State Agencies or Costs/Savings in Federal Funding to the State:

The Commission anticipates no direct effect on the cost or savings to state agencies or the cost or savings in federal funding to the state in terms of implementation, monitoring, and enforcement activities for the Department; however, they could potentially affect annual license revenue if anglers previously stopped purchasing licenses as a result of depth restrictions enacted in October 2023 and decide to purchase licenses after the proposed amendments become effective.

Estimating effort is difficult, as there is no groundfish-specific report card. A general California fishing license covers multiple species and is valid for 365 days regardless of when the license is purchased. It's unclear whether anglers ceased fishing altogether or shifted to other available species as a result of groundfish depth restrictions enacted in October 2023, since the groundfish depth restrictions coincided with closures to the recreational salmon fishery and new limitations in other fisheries, further complicating an impact analysis. Overall, any effect on license sales will likely be neutral or positive – if license sales go up by 0.1% as a result of these regulations, then the anticipated revenue increase would be approximately \$81,000, see the addendum to the economic and fiscal impact statement (STD 399).

(e) Nondiscretionary Costs/Savings to Local Agencies: None

(f) Programs Mandated on Local Agencies or School Districts: None

(g) Costs Imposed on Any Local Agency or School District that is Required to be Reimbursed Under Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4, Government Code: None

(h) Effect on Housing Costs: None

VII. Economic Impact Assessment

(a) Effects of the Regulation on the Creation or Elimination of Jobs Within the State

The Commission is not aware of any adverse economic impacts on the creation or elimination of jobs as a result of the proposed regulations. The proposal to modify the recreational RCG and lingcod season structure regulations to restore access to all depths in state waters north of Point Conception will expand fishing opportunities for anglers and sport fishing businesses (e.g., commercial passenger fishing vessel businesses) targeting groundfish, though time out on the water is expected to remain at a similar level and should not necessitate the need for additional positions, such as deckhands on private chartered vessels. No new fees are imposed as a result of these regulations, nor are any indirect costs (such as the transportation costs that would arise from forcing anglers to target groundfish in specific zones or costs associated with new reporting requirements) imposed on sport fishing businesses.

(b) Effects of the Regulation on the Creation of New Businesses or the Elimination of Existing Businesses Within the State

The Commission is not aware of any adverse economic impacts on the creation or elimination of businesses as a result of the proposed regulations. The proposal to modify the recreational RCG and lingcod season structure regulations to restore access to all depths in state waters north of Point Conception will expand fishing opportunities for anglers and sport fishing businesses targeting groundfish; however, the expanded opportunities are not expected to be sufficient to create new businesses because time spent by anglers out on the water is expected to remain largely the same. No new fees are imposed as a result of these regulations, nor are any indirect costs (such as the transportation costs that would arise from forcing anglers to target groundfish in specific

zones or costs associated with new reporting requirements) imposed on sport fishing businesses.

(c) Effects of the Regulation on the Expansion of Businesses Currently Doing Business Within the State

The Commission is not aware of any adverse economic impacts on the expansion of businesses as a result of the proposed regulations. The proposal to modify the recreational RCG and lingcod season structure regulations to restore access to all depths in state waters north of Point Conception will expand fishing opportunities for anglers and sport fishing businesses targeting groundfish, but the expanded opportunities are not expected to result in the expansion of businesses because it is expected that angler time on the water will remain largely the same. No new fees are imposed as a result of these regulations, nor are any indirect costs (such as the transportation costs that would arise from forcing anglers to target groundfish in specific zones or costs associated with new reporting requirements) imposed on sport fishing businesses.

(d) Benefits of the Regulation to the Health and Welfare of California Residents

Fishing is an outdoor activity that can provide several health and welfare benefits to California residents. Anglers and their families benefit from fresh fish to eat and from the benefits of outdoor recreation, including exercise. People who fish have a special connection with the outdoors and an awareness of the relationships between wildlife, habitat, and humans, and fishing can be a family tradition and a bonding activity.

(e) Benefits of the Regulation to Worker Safety

The Commission does not anticipate impacts to worker safety as the regulations do not affect working conditions.

(f) Benefits of the Regulation to the State's Environment

The Commission anticipates benefits to the state's environment by adopting scientifically-based RCG and lingcod seasons, depth constraints, and bag and possession limits to provide for the maintenance of sufficient populations of RCG and lingcod species to ensure their continued existence.

(g) Other Benefits of the Regulation

None.

Informative Digest/Policy Statement Overview

Unless otherwise specified, all section references in this document are to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR).

Current regulations establish season dates and depth constraints, and recreational bag limits for federal groundfish species that vary by species or species groups and are designed to keep harvest within federally established allowable limits. Section 1.91 defines the species considered federal groundfish. Sections 27.25, 27.30, 27.35 and 27.40 currently set forth season dates, and depth constraints for the four groundfish management areas (GMA) north of Point Conception (34°27' N. lat.). Section 28.55, Rockfish (Genus *Sebastes*), currently sets forth the bag limits, and methods of take for all rockfish species.

Proposed Changes

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) recommends that the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) use regular rulemaking authority to incorporate emergency regulations it adopted in August 2025 to amend the recreational rockfish, cabezon, and greenling (RCG) and lingcod season structure regulations. The amendments restored fishing access to all depths in state waters north of Point Conception from April 1 to December 31, implemented a 2-fish sub-bag limit for canary rockfish, and added sunset rockfish to cryptic-species vermilion/sunset rockfish management unit. The proposed regulations would amend sections 1.91, 27.25, 27.30, 27.35, 27.40, and 28.55, through a “certificate of compliance” action. The proposal is necessary for regulations in state waters (0 to 3 miles from shore) to be consistent and complementary with regulations in federal waters (3 to 200 miles from shore), to keep catches of canary rockfish and vermilion/sunset rockfish within federally established harvest limits, and for the benefit of the public’s general welfare.

On June 9, 2025, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) posted online a draft quillback rockfish stock assessment in waters off California, an assessment that is more robust than the previous one conducted in 2021. The newest assessment considers all available data sources, including newly available California-specific life history information. Results of the assessment indicate the California stock is healthy and not overfished as was indicated by the 2021 quillback rockfish stock assessment that was data-moderate. Therefore, the previous conservation emergency identified in 2021 no longer exists and the associated depth-based fishery constraints are unwarranted.

Following formal review and approval of the 2025 stock assessment for use in federal management, which occurred between July and September 2025, the National Marine Fisheries Service took an inseason federal regulatory action to remove the federal fishery depth restrictions in place since October 2023. The federal action, effective September 18, 2025, replaced the depths and season structure for boat-based RCG and lingcod fishing in federal waters (3 to 200 miles from shore) with all-depth fishing from the California/Oregon border (42° N. lat.) to Point Conception (34°27' N. lat.) during the open season in these GMAs, April 1 to December 31. Adopting through a regular rulemaking the regulatory amendments in the August 2025 emergency rulemaking will continue to restore recreational fishing opportunities to distribute recreational fishing efforts, consistent with the September 18, 2025 federal regulations.

It is important to have consistent and complementary state and federal regulations establishing harvest limits, season dates, depth constraints and other management measures. Inconsistency in state and federal rules hinders enforcement, increases angler confusion, and precludes a comprehensive approach to resource management.

Benefits of the Proposed Regulations

The benefits of the proposed regulations are sustainable management of RCG and lingcod resources and promotion of businesses that rely on recreational groundfish fishing.

Fishing is an outdoor activity that can provide several health and welfare benefits to California residents. Anglers and their families benefit from fresh fish to eat and from the benefits of outdoor recreation, including exercise. People who fish have a special connection with the outdoors and an awareness of the relationships between wildlife, habitat, and humans, and fishing can be a family tradition and a bonding activity.

Consistency and Compatibility with Existing Regulations

The proposed regulations are neither inconsistent nor incompatible with existing state regulations. The California Legislature has delegated authority to the Commission to adopt recreational fishing regulations (California Fish and Game Code, sections 200 and 205). The proposed regulations are consistent with the Commission's regulations in Title 14, CCR. Commission staff has searched the California Code of Regulations and has found no other state regulations related to the recreational take of groundfish.