

Committee Staff Summary for March 12, 2026 MRC

4. White Seabass Fishery Management Review**Today's Item****Information** **Action**

Receive and discuss Department overview of plans and proposed process for reviewing management of the white seabass fishery.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions

- Commission adopted White Seabass Fishery Management Plan (FMP) 2002
- Received annual review reports from the Department 2003-2022
- Received the Department overview of the White Seabass FMP and 2021-2022 annual review report August 22-23, 2023
- Commission referred white seabass fishery management review to the Marine Resources Committee (MRC) October 8-9, 2025
- **Today, receive and discuss Department overview of plans and proposed process for reviewing management of the white seabass fishery** **March 12, 2026; MRC**

Background

White seabass is managed under a fishery management plan (FMP), adopted by the Commission in 2002. The FMP requires annual monitoring and review of the commercial and recreational fisheries and fish stocks to prevent overfishing or other resource damage. The annual review includes fishery-dependent and fishery-independent data where available, documented changes within the social and economic structure of industries that utilize white seabass within California, information on the harvest of white seabass in Mexican waters, and other relevant data. The data are used to evaluate the status of white seabass relative to six "points of concern" criteria adopted by the Commission through the FMP, to help determine when management measures are needed to address resource conservation issues.

The White Seabass Scientific and Constituent Advisory Panel (WSSCAP) was established to assist the Department and Commission as needed by reviewing annual fishery assessments, management recommendations, and FMP amendments. Each year, WSSCAP meets to consider if current management measures provide adequate protection for white seabass. Annual reviews are conducted so that any changes in management, or to the White Seabass FMP, can be considered by the Commission in accordance with the requirements of the Marine Life Management Act (MLMA). WSSCAP meets with the Department each spring and the Department provides the Commission with updates in the annual review report.

At the August 2023 Commission meeting, the Department presented an overview of the white seabass fishery and the annual fishery review report (Exhibit 1). While the Department and WSSCAP concluded that the "points of concern" criteria were not met, the Department shared preliminary sampling data suggesting that white seabass may mature at a larger size than previously understood.

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Beyond biological data, the Department addressed long-standing stakeholder concerns regarding bycatch in the fishery, acknowledging that the White Seabass FMP was adopted well before the 2018 Marine Life Management Act Master Plan for Fisheries (Master Plan), which established the current framework for evaluating bycatch acceptability. For these reasons, and in light of the fishery having been identified as a priority for review under the Master Plan implementation plan, the Department proposed to commence a formal, Department-led process that would include bycatch evaluations of the fishery to align with the Master Plan bycatch framework and address biological and management concerns.

In October 2025, the Commission referred the white seabass FMP review to MRC to begin engaging with the Department and stakeholders on the review and evaluative process.

Today's Meeting

The Department will provide an overview of plans and the proposed process for reviewing management of the white seabass fishery (Exhibit 2).

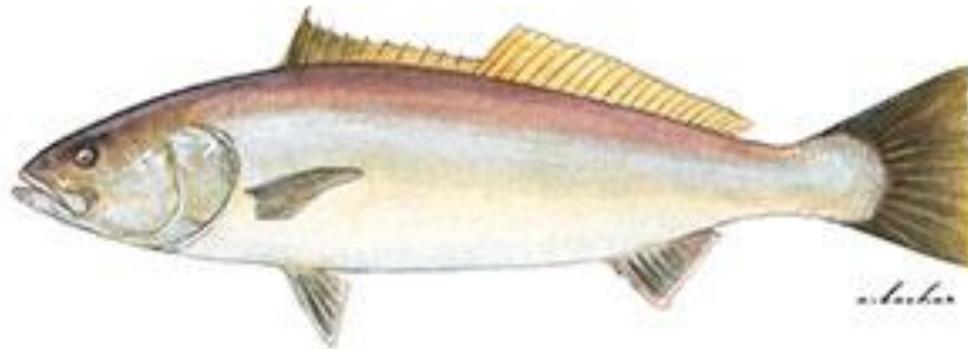
Significant Public Comments (N/A)**Recommendation (N/A)****Exhibits**

1. Staff summary and exhibits for Agenda Item 20 from the August 22-23, 2023 FGC meeting (*for background purposes only*), available online at <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=214913&inline>
2. [Department presentation](#)

Committee Direction/Recommendation (N/A)



White Seabass Fishery Management



12 March 2026

Presented to:

**Marine Resources Committee
California Fish and Game Commission**

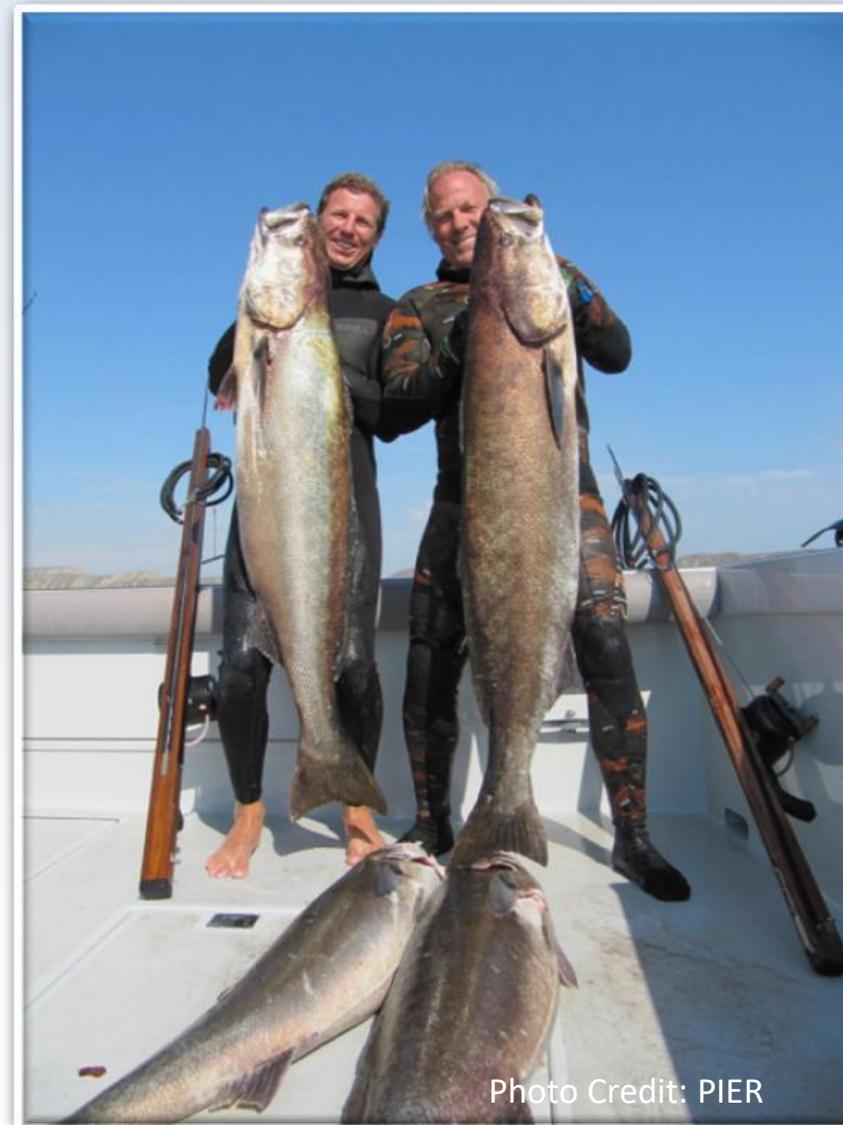
Presented by:

**Miranda Haggerty
Environmental Scientist
Marine Region**



Outline

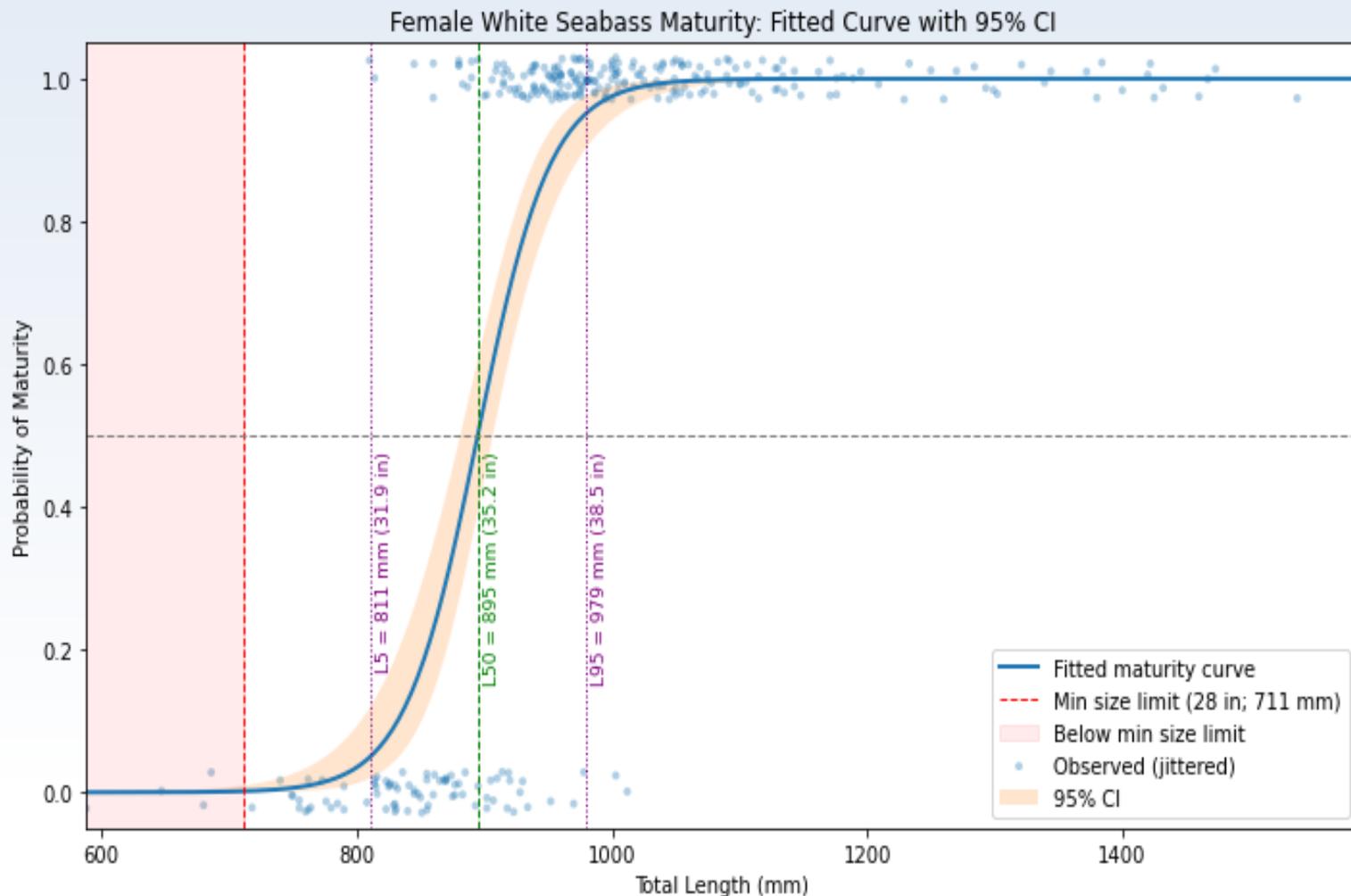
- Results from maturity assessment
- White seabass Fishery Management Plan (WSFMP) stakeholder meeting
 - FMP triggers
 - Stakeholder concerns
- WSB landings
 - Length composition
- Updating stock assessment
- Next steps





Updated Size at Maturity Results

- Submitted for publication in CDFW Journal
- WSFMP Point of Concern
 - New biological information is discovered
 - Capturing immature females





Stakeholder Engagement

- Stakeholder Engagement Webinar, November 2025
 - 2023-24 Annual FMP Review
 - Maturity Study
 - Management Options

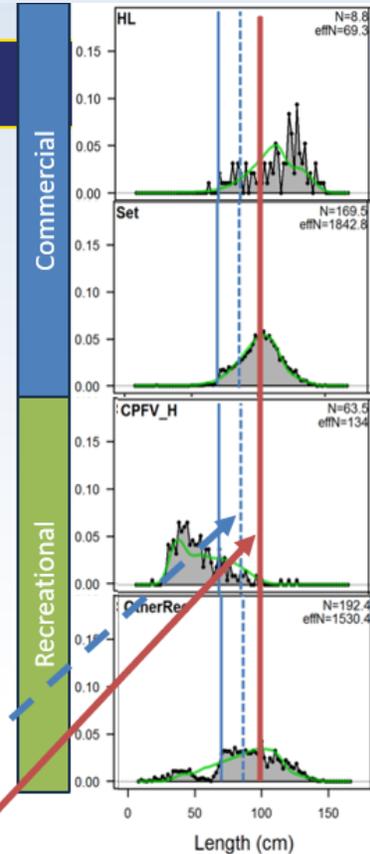


Discussion Questions

1. What are your perceptions of the minimum size limits under consideration (50%, 90%, 95% maturity)?
2. What concerns or questions do you have about the recommended process?
3. What aspects should the Department take into consideration when planning the FMP review?
4. Length change will impact the recreational fishery more than the commercial fishery. What recommendations do you have as the Department considers increasing the minimum size limit?

50% Maturity

90% Maturity





Stakeholder Feedback

- Stakeholder Questions and Comments
 - Updating FMP Points of Concerns
 - Accounting for effort in WSB landings
 - Is catching immature fish impacting overall population
 - Is there data to show natural spawning success?
 - How size of WSB caught varies between fishing sectors
 - Difficulty of catching WSB accounted for in regulations



Photo Credit: PIER

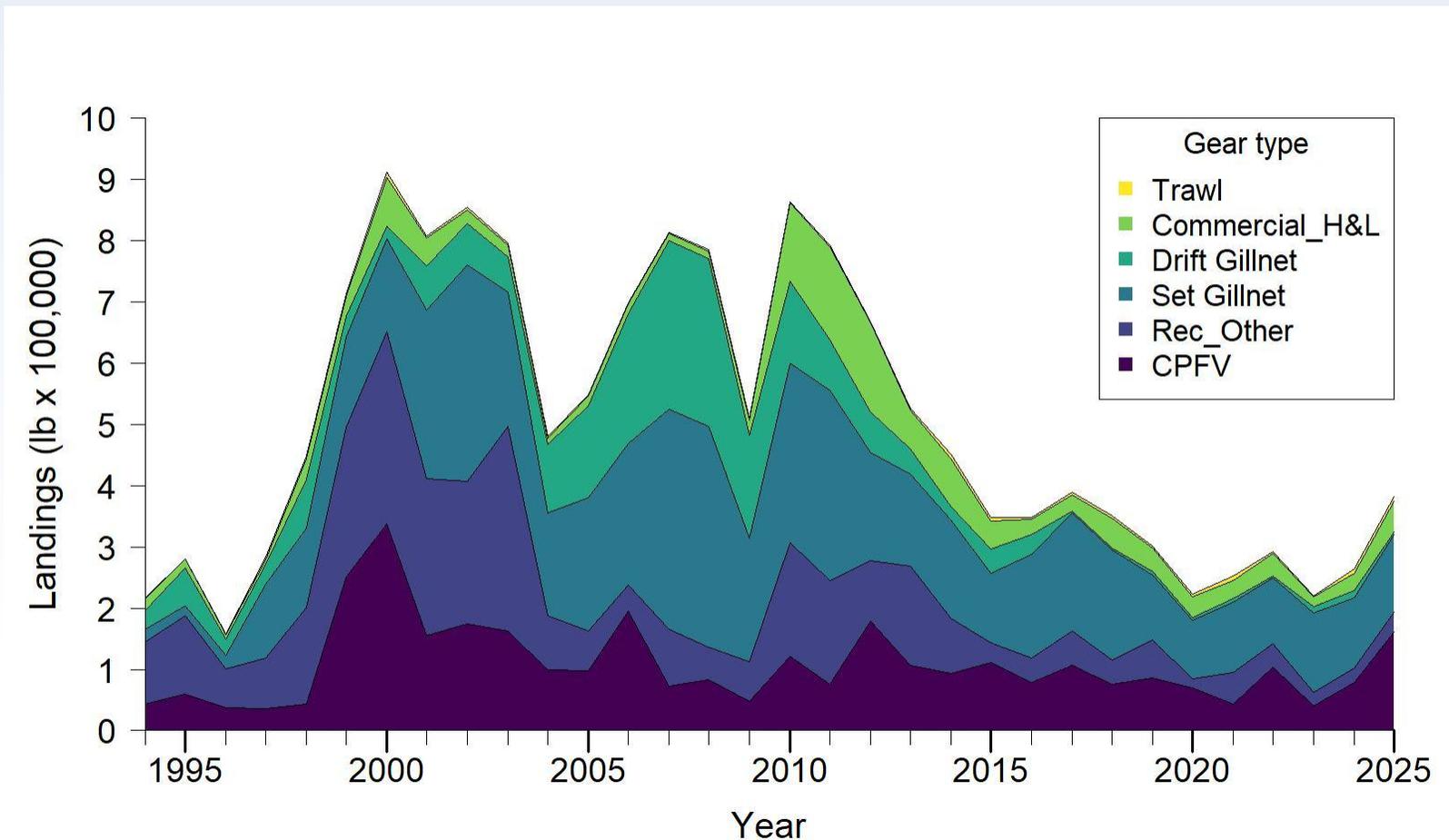


Photo Credit: PIER



White Seabass Landings

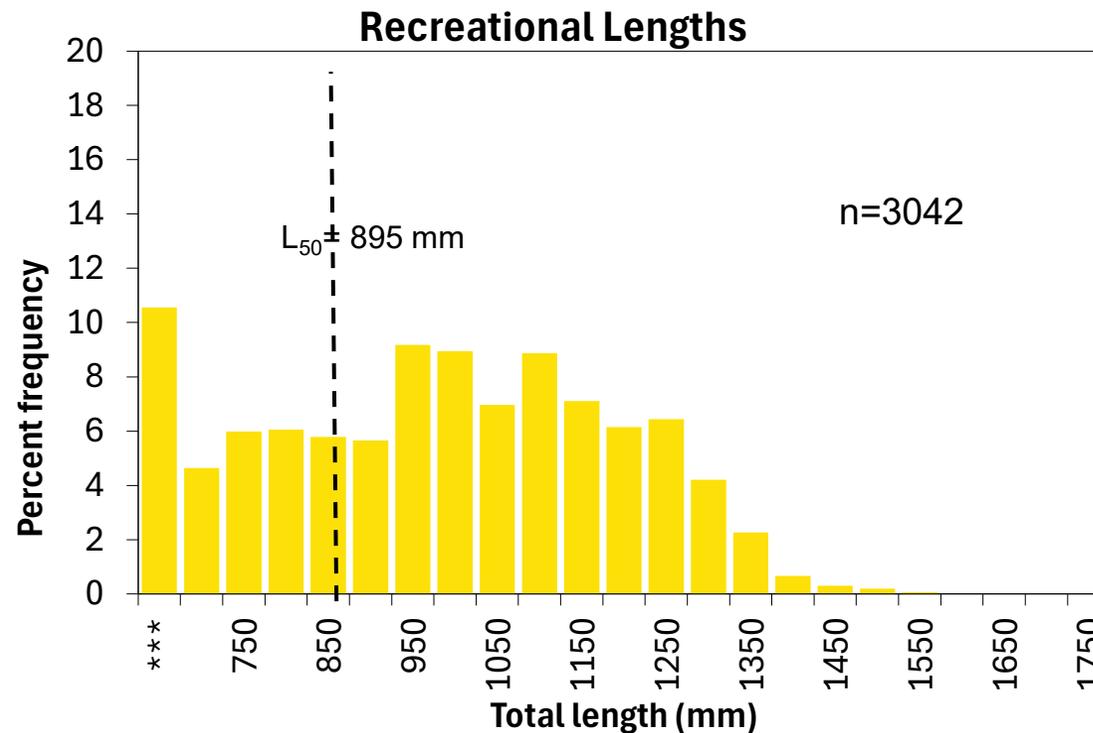
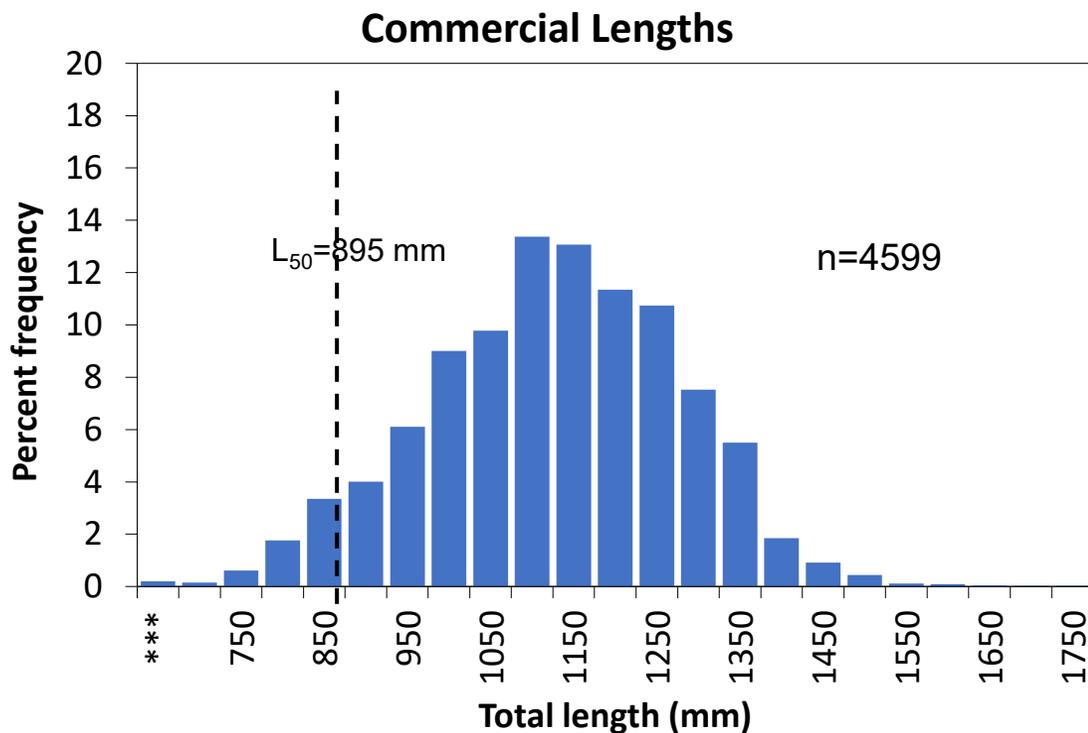
- WSB Landings 1994-2025
 - Optimum Yield – 1.2 million pounds





White Seabass Landings Length Composition

- Department dockside sampling 2008-2025
 - 6% of commercially sampled fish <895 mm
 - 32% of recreationally sampled fish <895 mm



***Fish under current 28-inch (711 mm) minimum size limit



Catch and Release Mortality

- Post release mortality assessed (MacNamara et al. 2025)
- Hooking location and WSB size main variables impacting survival

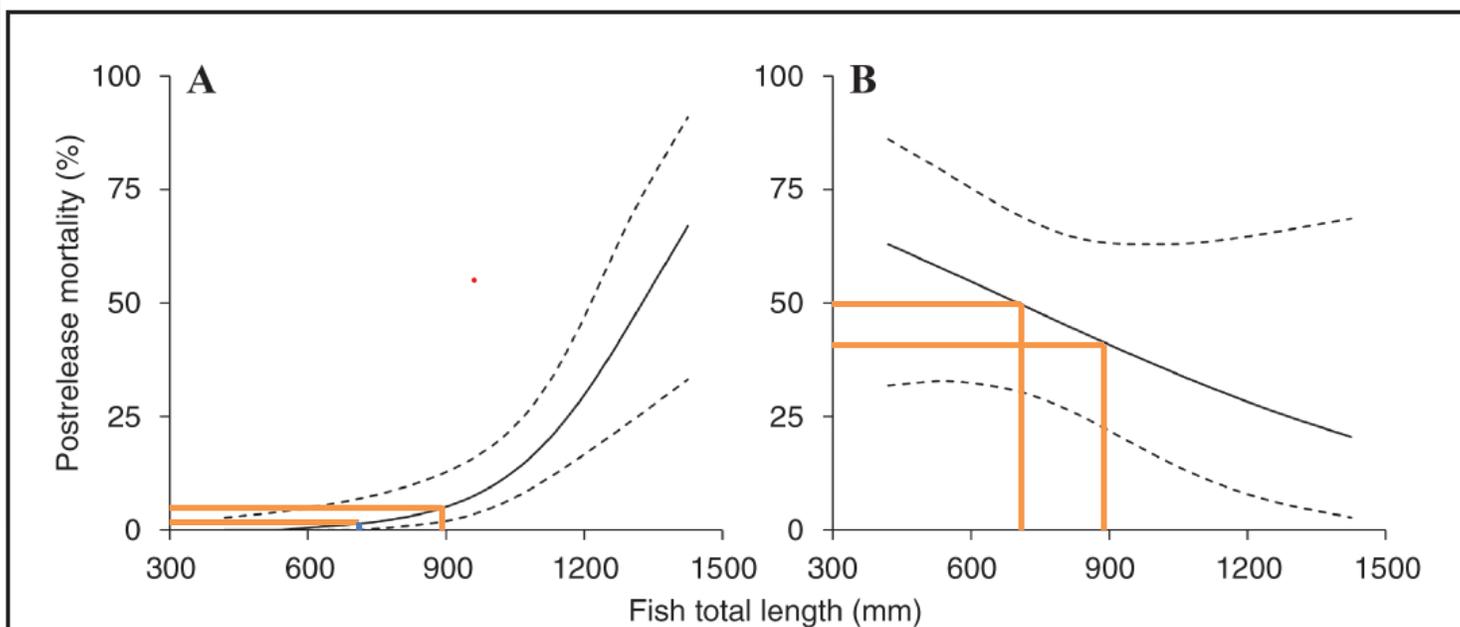


Figure 3

Model response curves showing the relationship between short-term postrelease mortality (within 24 h) and fish total length (**A**) when lip hooked or (**B**) when internally hooked for white seabass (*Atractoscion nobilis*) captured by hook and line during 2021–2024 in the Southern California Bight. Dashed lines indicate 95% confidence intervals.

MacNamara, R., Shane, M., Bach Muñoz, V., & Drawbridge, M. 2025. Assessing postrelease mortality in hook-and-line fishing of a large coastal sciaenid, the white seabass (*Atractoscion nobilis*). *Fishery Bulletin*, 123(2).



Next Steps

- Ongoing stakeholder engagement
- Recommendations
 - Propose a change in the minimum size limit to protect sexually immature fish
 - Update the 2016 stock assessment
 - Initiate a review of the 2002 WSFMP



Photo Credit: CDFW

Thank You

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[https://marinespecies.wildlife.ca.gov/
white-seabass/true/](https://marinespecies.wildlife.ca.gov/white-seabass/true/)