

Committee Staff Summary for July 16, 2026 MRC

2. White Seabass Fishery Management Review**Today's Item**Information ☐Action ☒

Receive and discuss Department options for interim changes to recreational white seabass fishing regulations within the broader management review, consider the timeline, and potentially develop a committee recommendation.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions

- Commission adopted White Seabass Fishery Management Plan (White Seabass FMP) 2002
- Received annual review reports from the Department 2003-2022
- Received a Department overview of the White Seabass FMP and 2021-2022 annual review report August 2023
- Commission referred white seabass fishery management review to the Marine Resources Committee (MRC) October 8-9, 2025
- Received and discussed Department overview of plans and proposed process for reviewing management of the white seabass fishery March 12, 2026; MRC
- Commission approved the MRC recommendation to request that the Department develop a proposed interim white seabass size limit for potential MRC recommendation in July April 15-16, 2026
- **Today, consider interim changes to recreational white seabass size limit, consider timing, and develop an MRC recommendation** **July 16, 2026; MRC**

Background

White seabass is managed under an FMP adopted by the Commission in 2002, with annual reviews conducted to identify any needed management or FMP changes, in accordance with Marine Life Management Act requirements. At the August 2023 Commission meeting, the Department presented the 2021-22 annual review report and recommended initiating a comprehensive white seabass fishery management review, consistent with established priorities.

As part of its review, the Department also identified a near-term management concern in the recreational fishery based on preliminary sampling data. The data indicated that female white seabass may mature at a larger size than previously understood, raising questions about whether the current recreational size limit adequately protects immature fish. The Commission supported initiating the management review.

The recreational white seabass fishery is open year-round with a daily bag limit of three fish, except that only one fish may be taken in waters south of Point Conception between March 15 and June 15, a period that overlaps with the species' spawning season in the region. The current minimum size limit is 28 inches total length, with a 20.5-inch alternate length as

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specified in Section 28.35, Title 14, California Code of Regulations. The regulations were last amended over 40 years ago, in 1984.

In October 2025, the Commission formally referred the White Seabass FMP review to MRC to begin engaging with the Department and stakeholders, including addressing the maturity concern in the recreational fishery. Additional background on the white seabass fishery management review can be found in Exhibit 1.

March 2026 MRC Discussion

At the March 2026 MRC meeting — the first meeting to include the formal management review — the Department outlined its plan to review the 2002 White Seabass FMP and conduct a new stock assessment to replace the one now ten years old. The Department presented updated maturity data, summarized stakeholder outreach efforts, and recommended that the Commission support an interim regulatory action to increase the minimum size limit informed by the updated maturity data as a near-term measure, while a more comprehensive review is underway.

Meeting participants, and other stakeholders since then, raised a range of concerns about the potential impacts of a size limit increase — including effects on recreational charter boat operations, lack of larger fish available to shore-based anglers, and discard mortality — as well as interest in alternative bag limit structures, the need for updated scientific information, and questions about future stock assessment capacity. MRC developed a recommendation, approved by the Commission in April 2026, requesting the Department develop an interim size limit change for discussion and potential MRC recommendation at the July 2026 meeting.

Today's Meeting

Today's meeting focuses on the near-term management response needed to address new maturity-at-length information for white seabass — specifically, to consider an immediate size-limit increase or other interim regulatory measure(s) before the full white seabass fishery management review is completed. The Department's presentation (Exhibit 2) will provide additional details from the recent maturity assessment, trends in fish length observed in commercial and recreational landings, and the Department's rationale for proposing a specific minimum size limit change. The Department will also share perspectives from three public stakeholder meetings held in November 2025, March 2026, and May 2026.

In response to stakeholder concerns related to a size limit increase, the Department also evaluated other interim management options, including modifying the daily bag limit or a combined bag and size limit approach. The Department will describe how such options may address the maturity-at-size concerns for the fishery, limitations, and enforcement considerations for these options. The Department maintains that increasing the minimum size limit to 35 inches is the most effective and enforcement-friendly strategy to address concerns raised by the updated maturity data. The current 28-inch minimum size regulation was originally set to allow individual white seabass to spawn at least once before being taken by the fishery ([White Seabass FMP](#), Chapter 7.4.1); however, the FMP acknowledged that this standard was based on very limited maturity data.

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A stated goal of the White Seabass FMP was to re-evaluate age and length at first maturity as new information became available, and to update the regulation if warranted. The recent maturity findings indicate that the minimum size limit should be adjusted to align with current understanding of the fishery and maintain the original intent of protecting spawning opportunities. Based on best available information, a minimum size of 35 inches would allow approximately 50 percent of white seabass to spawn at least once prior to harvest, helping to ensure that a sufficient portion of the population contributes to spawning stock biomass. The Department seeks an MRC recommendation to the Commission, including the timeline for a rulemaking.

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

Commission staff: Receive public input and discuss the Department-proposed size limit and supporting rationale. Consider the potential effectiveness of alternative or complementary measures for protecting sexually immature female white seabass. Recommend that the Commission advance to rulemaking the Department's proposed increase in the recreational minimum size limit to 35 inches, or to advance other measures discussed today that would meet the objective of allowing more females to reach sexual maturity before they are subject to harvest.

Department: Increase the minimum size limit to 35 inches for the recreational white seabass fishery to protect sexually immature fish and support the spawning stock, and schedule a rulemaking to commence with notice in October, discussion in December, and adoption in February.

Exhibits

1. [Staff Summary for Agenda Item 4, March 12, 2026 MRC meeting](#) (*for background purposes only*)
2. [Department presentation](#)

Committee Direction/Recommendation

The Marine Resources Committee recommends that the Commission advance to rulemaking the proposed increase in the recreational white seabass fishery minimum size limit to 35 inches, as recommended by the Department and discussed today, and schedule notice for October 2026.

OR

The Marine Resources Committee recommends that the Commission advance to rulemaking the following proposed changes to recreational white seabass fishing regulations:

Committee Staff Summary for March 12, 2026 MRC

For background purposes only

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.

Committee Staff Summary for March 12, 2026 MRC*For background purposes only*

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).

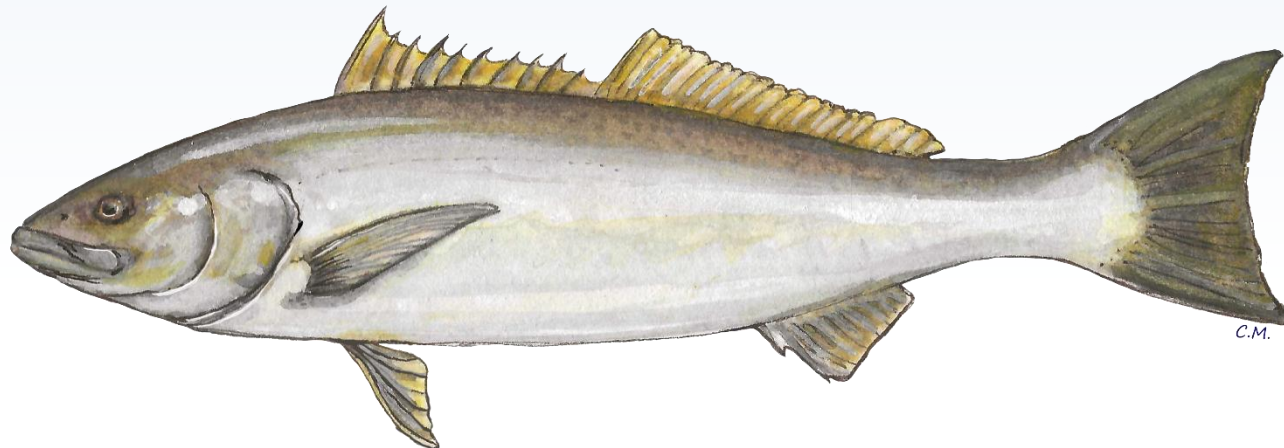
Significant Public Comments (N/A)**Recommendation (N/A)****Exhibits**

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



July 16, 2026

Presented to:

Marine Resources Committee

CA Fish and Game Commission

Presented by:

Miranda Haggerty

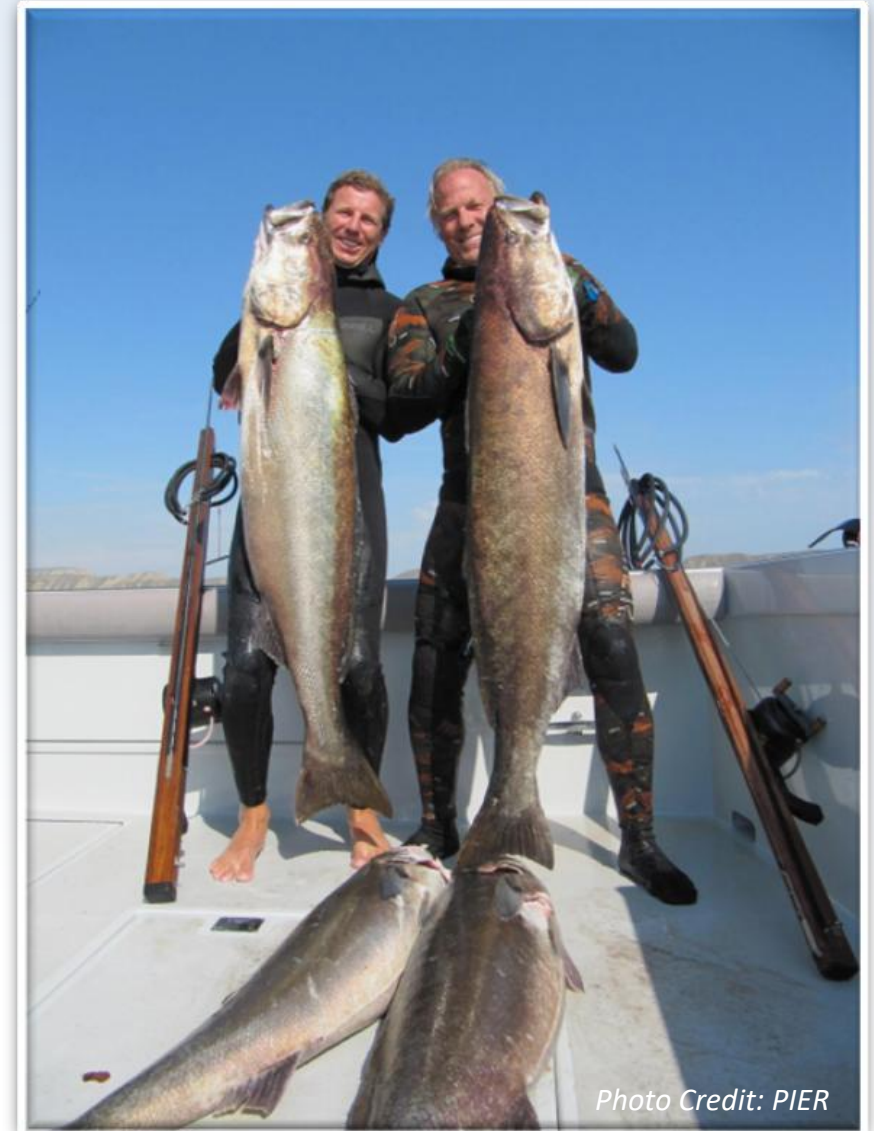
Environmental Scientist

Marine Region



Outline

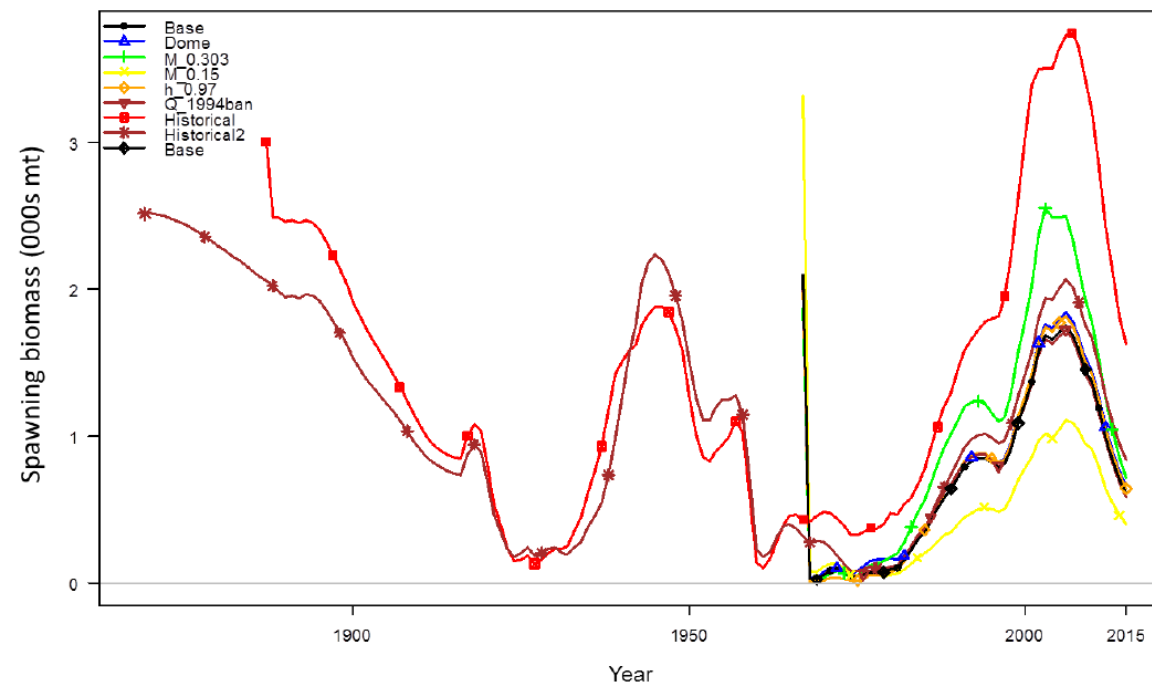
- Updated maturity assessment results
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Landings and Length Composition
- Potential Regulation Change Options
- Timeline/Next Steps





Stock Assessment

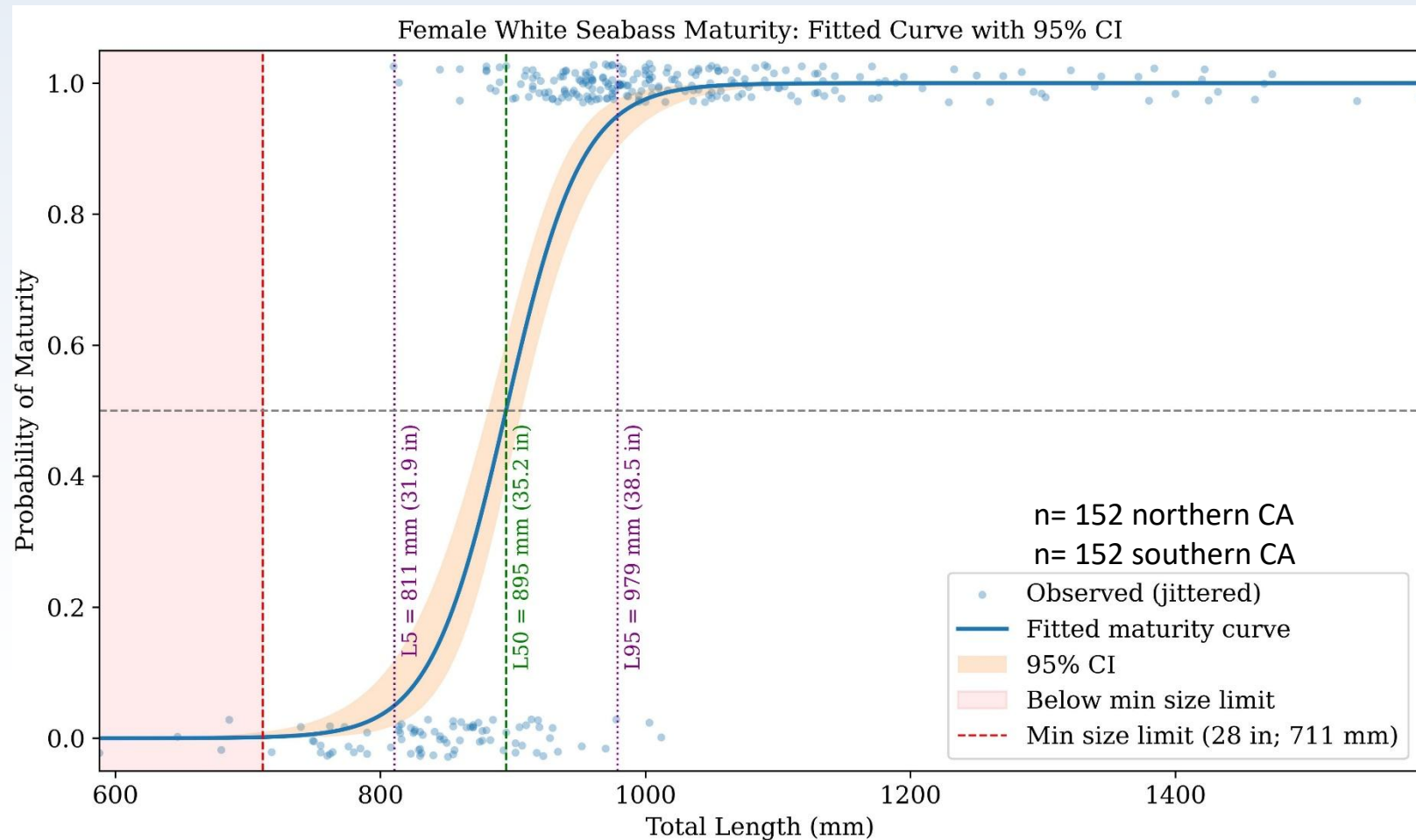
- Stock Assessment last conducted in 2016 (Valero and Waterhouse 2016)
 - Estimated stock at ~27% unfished biomass
 - Spawning stock biomass declining between 2006-2015
 - Importance of updating size at maturity estimates





Updated Size at Maturity Results

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





Size at Maturity and Fishery Regulations

- Standard practice – consistent, scientifically-founded management



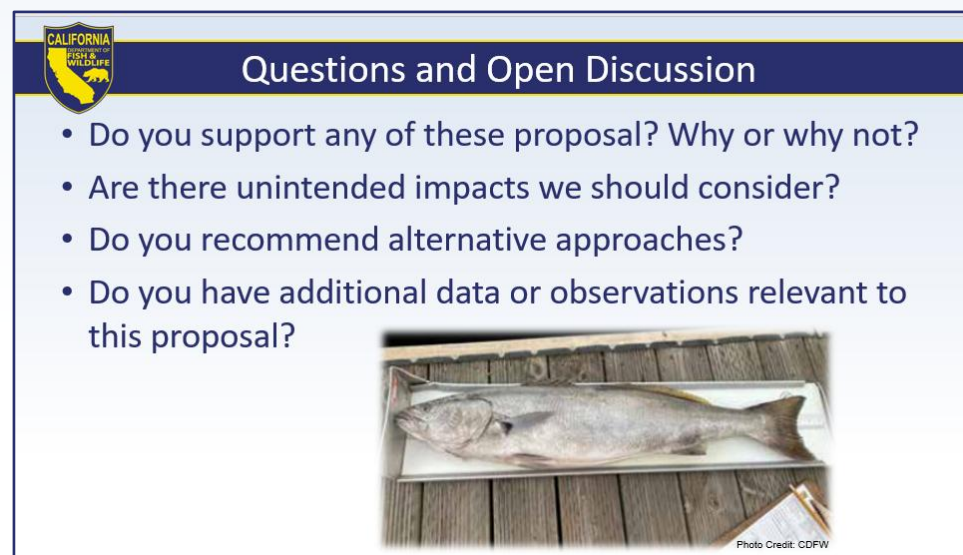
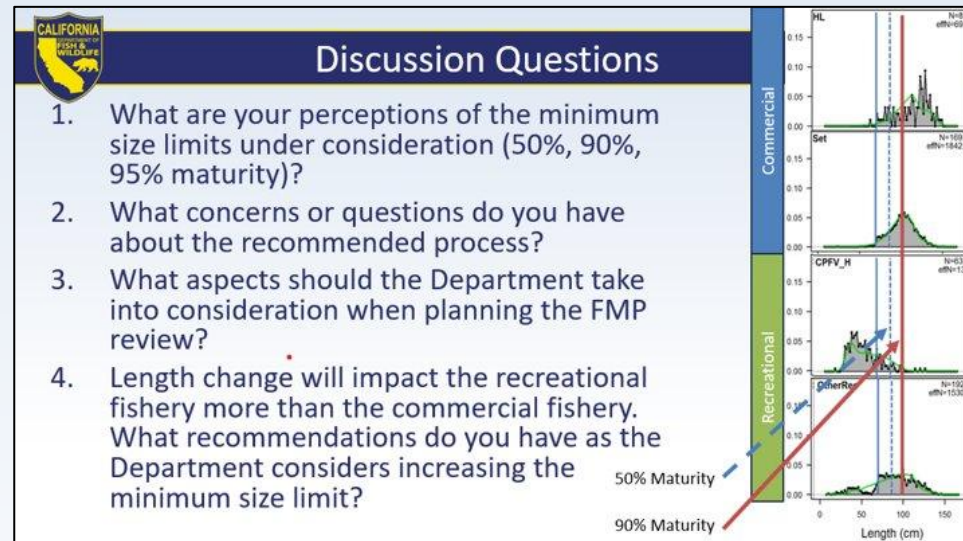
Photo Credit: iNaturalist

- Allows females to reproduce at least once before harvest
- State, federal, and intergovernmental bodies regularly use 50% as a minimum benchmark
- Basis in the Marine Life Management Act



Stakeholder Engagement

- Maturity results presentations
 - FGC -December 2025
 - MRC- March 2026
- Stakeholder Engagement Meetings/Webinars
 - November 18, 2025
 - March 4, 2026
 - May 12, 2026





Yield Optimization – Spawning Potential Ratio

Yield optimization – WSB is likely being fished at rates that exceed maximum yield

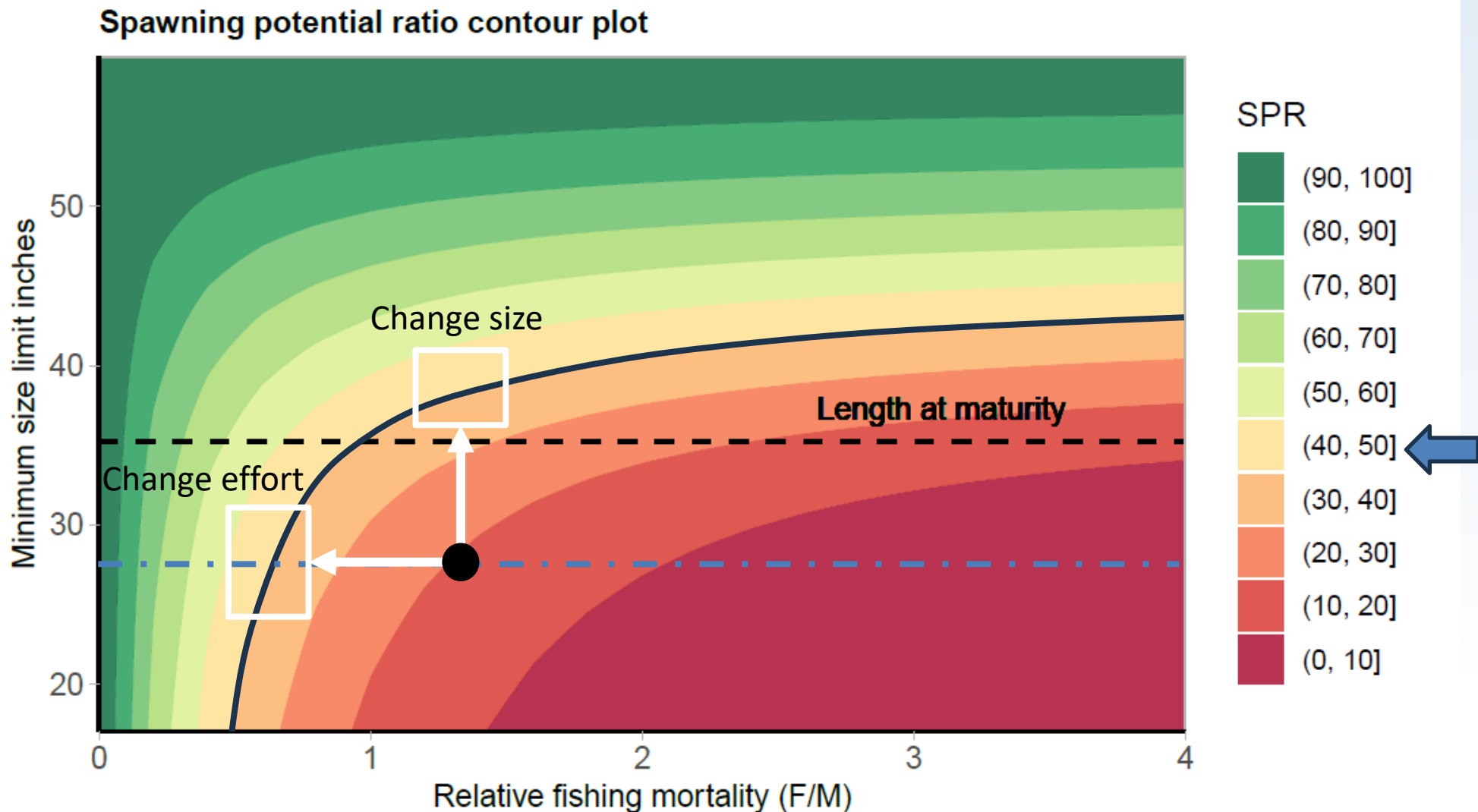
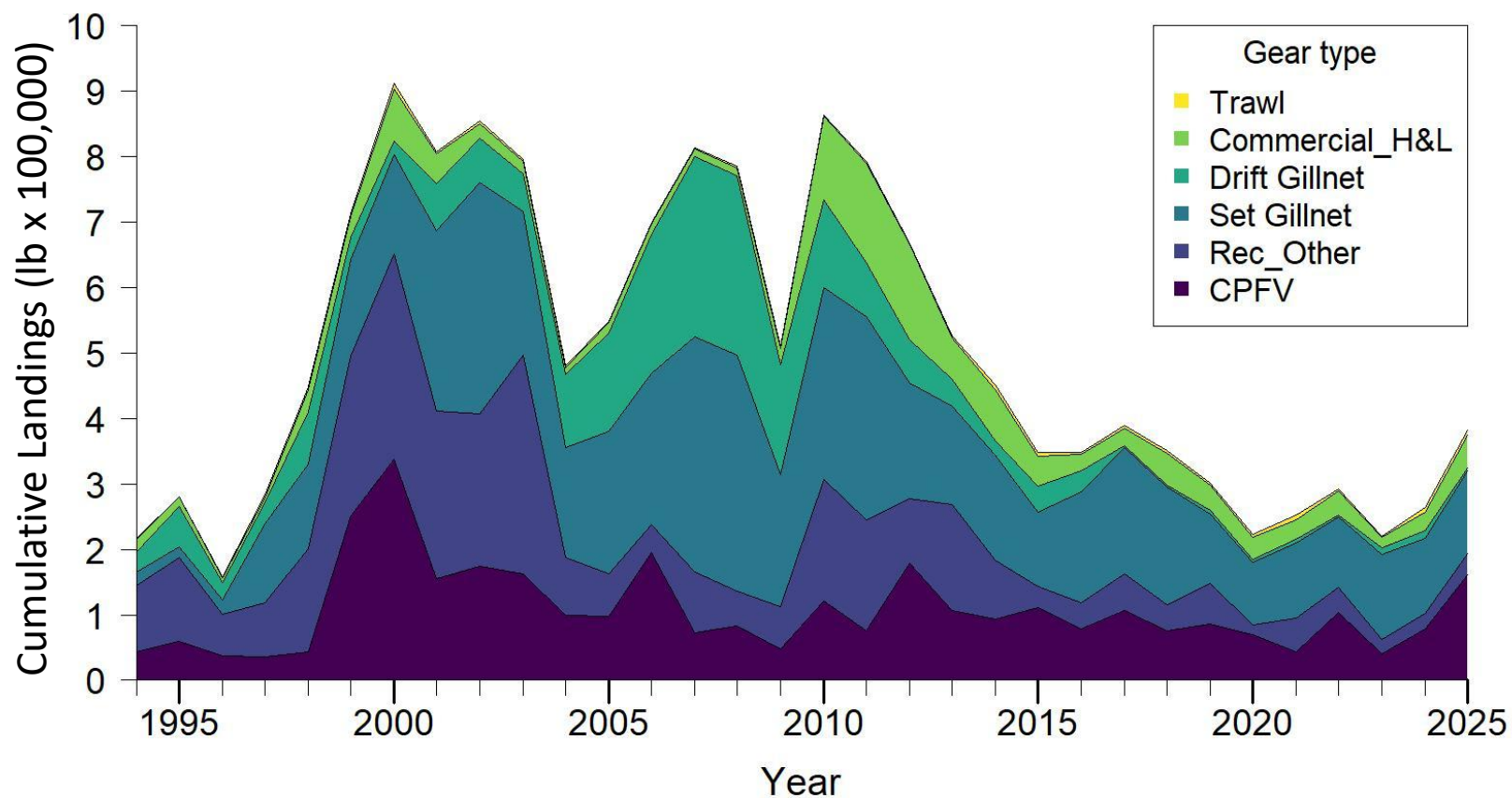


Figure from The Nature Conservancy's FishKit tool



White Seabass Landings

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





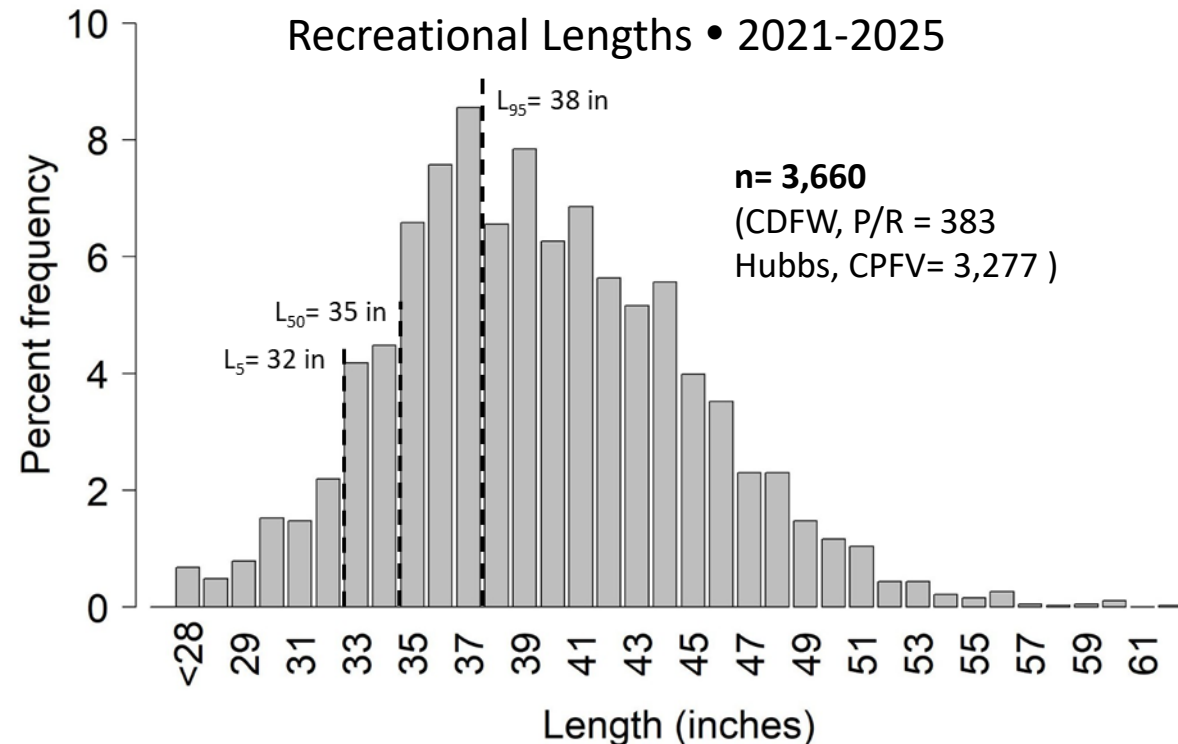
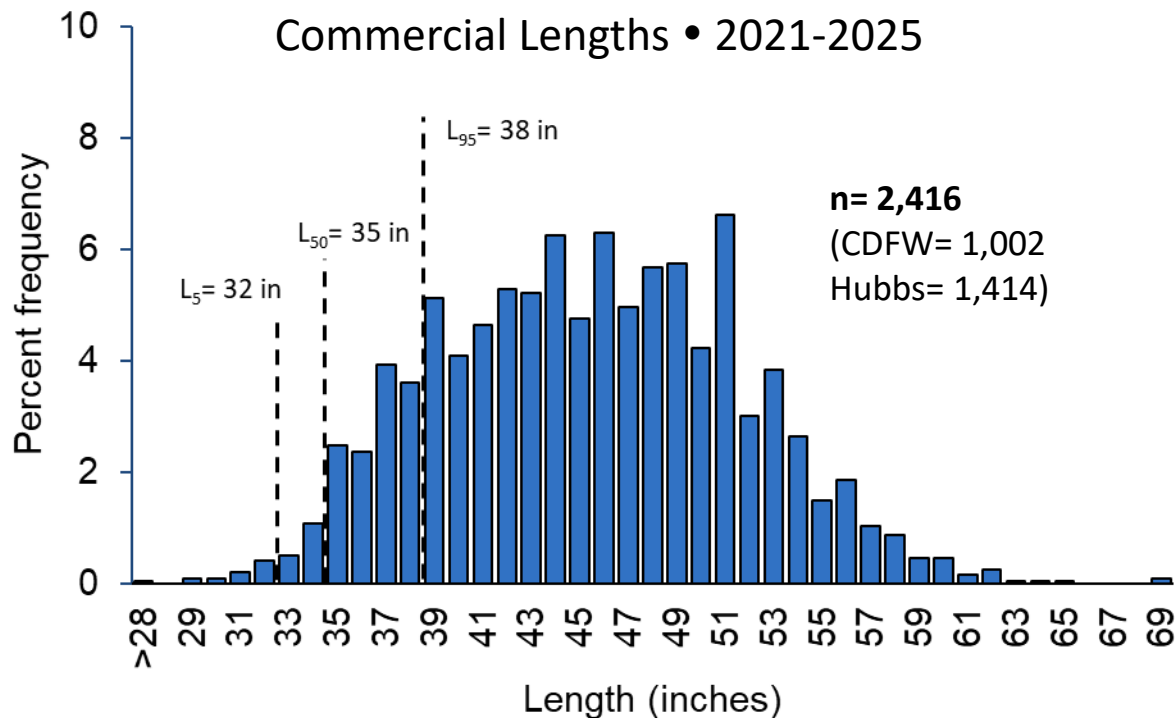
White Seabass Landings Length Composition

Commercial catch • 2021-2025

- 11% of current catch <38 in TL
- 2.5% of current catch <35 in TL
- 0.5% of current catch <32 in TL

Recreational catch • 2021-2025

- 37% of current catch <38 in TL
- 16% of current catch <35 in TL
- 5% of current catch <32 in TL





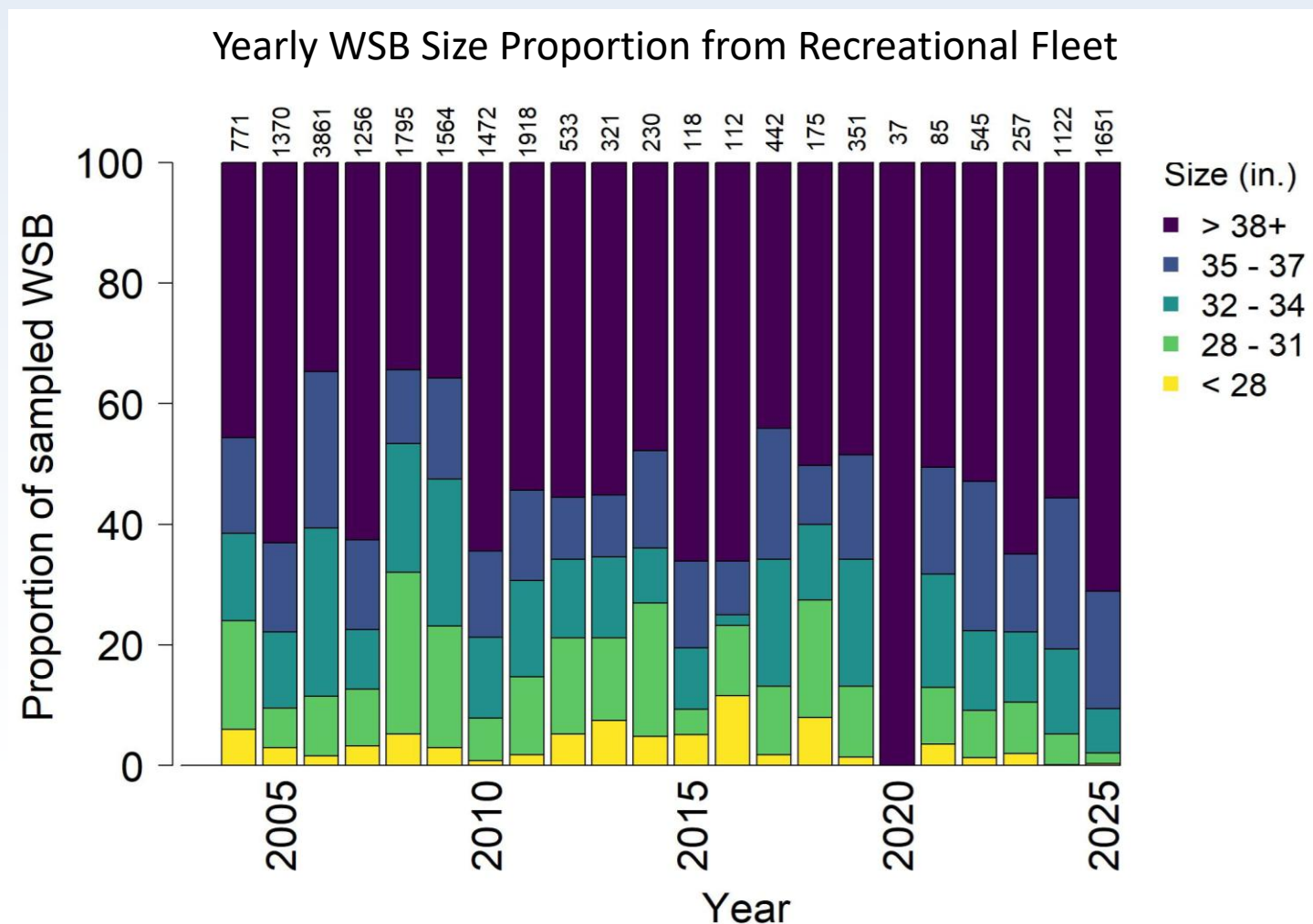
Minimum Size Limit Impacts - Recreational

Private Boats (2021 – 2025)

- 39% for <38 in TL (Range 27 – 70%)
- 27% for <35 in TL (Range 14 – 54%)
- 15% for <32 in TL (Range 8 – 28%)

CPFVs (2021 – 2025)

- 37% for <38 in TL (Range 27 – 52%)
- 15% for <35 in TL (Range 9 – 29%)
- 4% for <32 in TL (Range 1 – 10%)





Catch and Release Mortality

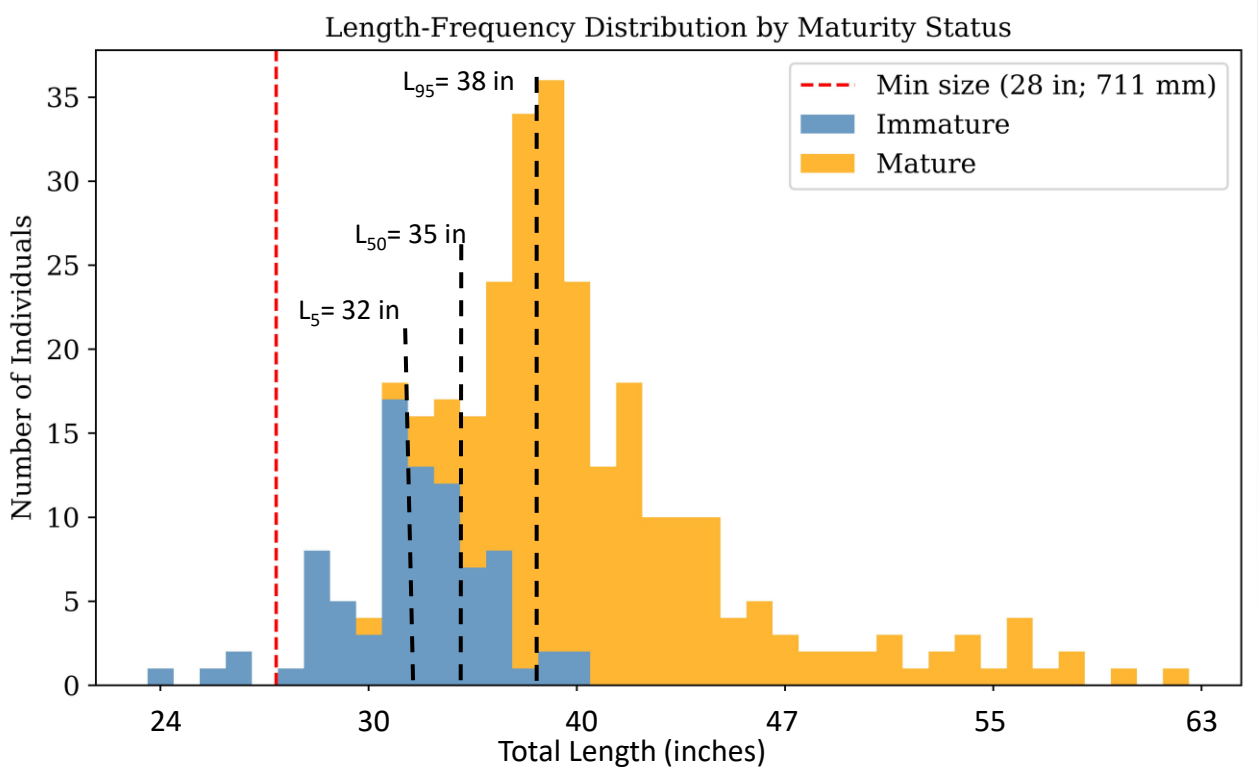
- Post release mortality assessments (MacNamara et al. 2025, Aalbers et al. 2004) suggest WSB are unlikely to experience discard mortality changes with increased size limit
 - Not realistic CPFV conditions
 - Post release predation
- Potential collaborations to re-assess discard mortality onboard CPFVs?





Regulation Proposal Options

1. Minimum Size Limit: 32-38 inches



2. Bag Limit

- 1 or 2 fish annually

	Percent Savings (28 in.)	
Year	Bag Limit- 1	Bag Limit - 2
2021	33%	14%
2022	31%	11%
2023	26%	11%
2024	28%	10%
2025	28%	10%

OR 3. Combined Minimum Size/Bag Limit



Regulation Proposal Options – Fillet Length

Minimum Size Limit: 32-38 inches

Total Length (inches)	Fillet Length Conversion (inches)
28	19
32	21.5
35	23.5
38	25.5



Photo credit: Channel Islands Sportfishing



Photo credit: iNaturalist



Photo credit: Surf Fishing In So Cal

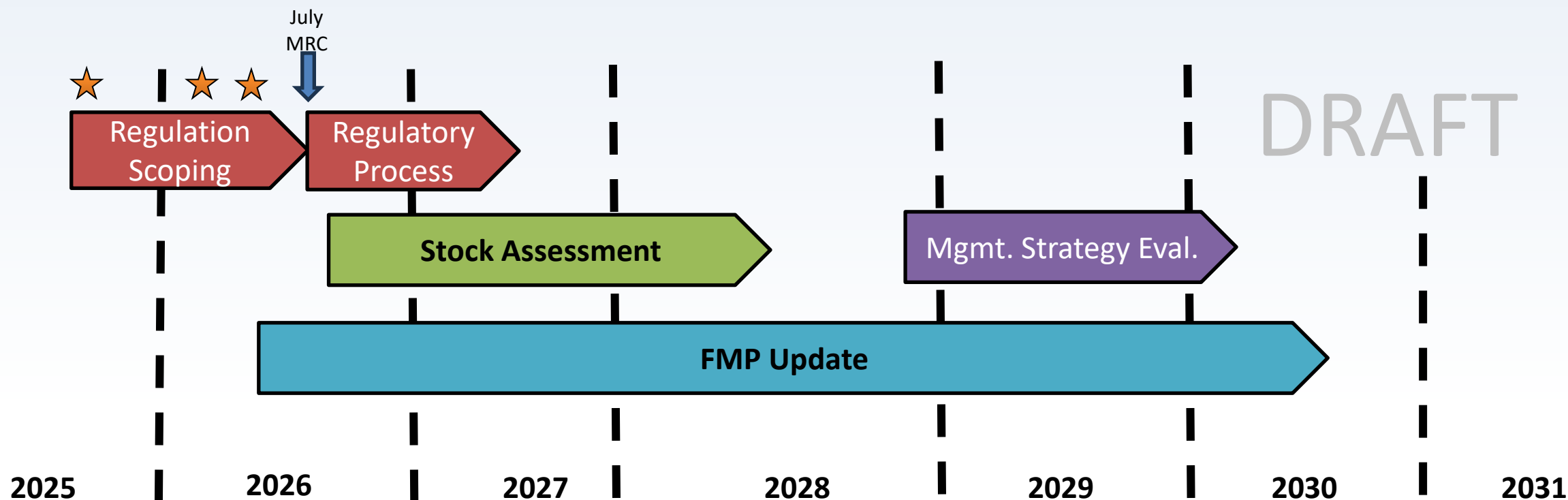


Photo Credit: Seafood Sherpa



Recommendation and Next Steps

- Increase the minimum size limit to 35 inches for the recreational fishery to protect sexually immature fish



Stars indicate stakeholder engagement meetings related to regulation change process.



Proposed Rulemaking Timeline

- Ongoing stakeholder and tribal engagement
- Notice Hearing: October 14, 2026
- Discussion Hearing: December 15, 2026
- Adoption Hearing: February 11, 2027
- Effective Date: by June 15, 2027



Thank You

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

