Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Oct 1, 2007 Recreational In-Season Groundfish Closure of the Northern and North-Central Management Areas

California's recreational groundfish fishery is given a harvest limit for each species or species group by the Pacific Fishery Management Council. The estimated recreational catch for January through July 2007, when combined with the projected catch for the remainder of the year, exceeded the 2.1 metric ton harvest limit for yelloweye and 9 metric ton harvest limit for canary rockfish. The Oct. 1 closure of the Northern Management Area (NMA) and North-Central Management Areas (NCMA) for boat-based anglers was necessary to prevent the harvest limits for these species from being exceeded. The data used in making catch estimates and projections were collected by the California Recreational Fishery Survey (CRFS), an effort implemented in 2004 that replaced the previous Marine Recreational Fishery Statistical Survey (MRFSS). CRFS uses improved estimation methods, and samples more anglers than previous surveys. Due to past concerns over fishery data used to implement closures, a thorough review of the available information was undertaken before moving to close the fishery to boat-based anglers.

Q: Why were the projected catch estimates for yelloweye and canary rockfish so much higher than expected?

A: A number of factors contributed to the increased catch projections in 2007:

- In 2006 and 2007, anglers were allowed to fish in deeper water in the NCMA. Yelloweye and canary rockfish are both more common in deeper waters (the depth limit for 2006 and 2007 was 180 ft. as opposed to 120 ft. in 2005).
- Catch projections for 2007 were developed in 2006 using catch information from 2004 and 2005. It was later determined that catches from 2004 and 2005 were actually lower than in 2006 and also probably lower than the 2007 projected catch. Using the increased catch data from 2006 to estimate the yelloweye and canary rockfish catch for the remainder of 2007, it became clear that the harvest limits for these species would be exceeded if action were not taken to close the fishery early.
- The NCMA opened a month early in 2007, in June rather than in July, allowing anglers to start catching rockfish during this prime summer fishing month. In 2005 and 2006, the season opened in July.
- In May and June of 2007, there was an increase in the number of anglers targeting "bottomfish" in the NMA and NCMA. There was also an increase in the number of anglers who targeted salmon but also kept rockfish, according to CRFS data - indicating that more salmon anglers switched over to rockfish after targeting salmon.
- In 2007, there was a 50 percent increase in the number of anglers fishing in the NMA where yelloweye rockfish are most common, compared to 2006 and 2005. Also, in 2007 anglers fishing for salmon in the NMA caught three times more yelloweye rockfish than in 2006, indicating that many also fished for rockfish.

Q: Why is there so much concern for yelloweye and canary rockfish?
A: Both yelloweye and canary rockfish stocks are considered "overfished" stocks (less than 25 percent of their estimated pre-fishery population now exists). Their take is currently very restricted to allow stocks to rebuild in the shortest time possible. These species are late-maturing, slow-growing and long-lived, thus their populations grow at a measured rate and recovery will take many years. The yelloweye rockfish matures at 22 years of age and lives to at least 118 years old. The canary rockfish matures at 8 years of age and lives to at least 60 years old. Yelloweye and canary rockfish stocks are not expected to be rebuilt until 2074 and 2017, respectively.

Q: How can the 2007 recreational catch for yelloweye and canary rockfish exceed the harvest limits if anglers are not allowed to keep them?
A: Fishery managers are required to account for total mortality for all catch, including kept and discarded fish. Some anglers choose to keep these species or are unaware that they cannot be retained. While most anglers do not keep yelloweye or canary rockfish, some of those that are thrown back do not survive and are counted toward the catch for these species.

Q: How many boat anglers were sampled in the NMA and NCMA to produce the catch estimates for May, June, and July, 2007?
A: During the open months of the rockfish season, 6,030 boat anglers were sampled in the NMR (in May, June, and July) and 5,801 boat anglers were sampled in the NCMA (in June and July).

Q: Are the high catches of yelloweye and canary rockfish coming from private boat anglers, party and charter vessels, shore anglers, or divers?
A: In 2007 the majority of the yelloweye and canary rockfish catch was landed by private and rental boat anglers. Anglers fishing from the shore and divers contribute negligible numbers of these species to the total catch and are not subject to the closure. The catch of these species south of Pigeon Pt. is much lower than to the north and closure of those areas was not necessary. Of the yelloweye and canary rockfish estimated to have been caught from January to July in 2007 in the entire state of California, the following percentages were taken by the indicated fishing mode and region (the balance coming from the remainder of the state):

Yelloweye and Canary Rockfish - Percentages of Statewide Catch Jan. - July 2007				
	Northern Area		North-Central Area	
	PR	CPFV	PR	CPFV
Canary Rockfish	19.66%	5.03%	**34.08%**	1.02%
Yelloweye Rockfish	**78.09%**	4.58%	11.27%	5.18%

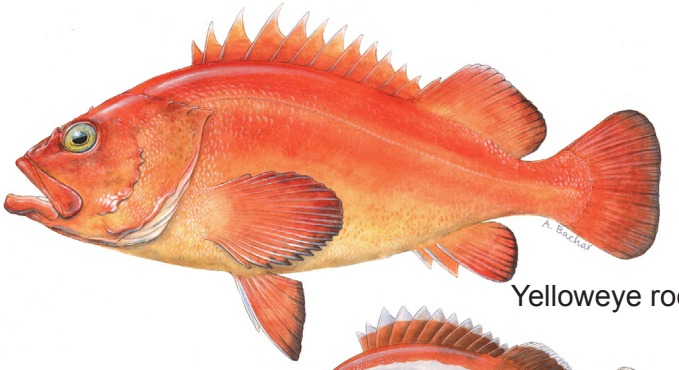
PR=Private/Rental Boat-based anglers
CPFV=Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessels, a.k.a. 'party boats'

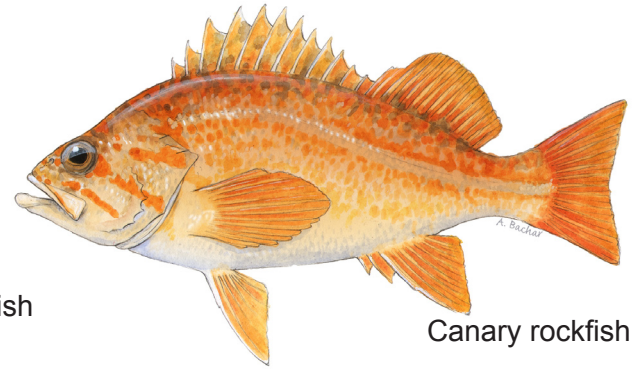
Q: What might this year's high catch of yelloweye and canary rockfish mean for future fishing regulations?
A: The Pacific Fisheries Management Council may request that more restrictive management actions be taken in future seasons to prevent the California recreational fishery from exceeding the harvest limits for these species. This may include shallower fishing depth restrictions, reduced bag limits or shorter seasons to prevent such overages. Management options will be developed to minimize the impact on the fishing opportunities available to recreational fishermen while ensuring that the harvest limits will not be exceeded.

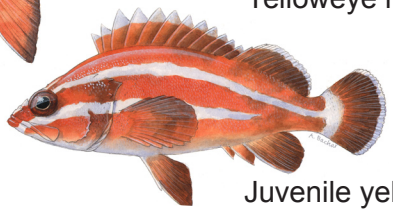
Q: What can anglers do to contribute to the recovery of these species?
A: Anglers can do the following to help conserve overfished rockfish species:

- If overfished species are encountered, move to a different fishing spot to reduce the number of fish that are caught.
- Many anglers now use an inverted, weighted plastic crate with a rope attached to the bottom, or weighted, inverted barbless hooks or commercially available fish descending devices to help fish get back down to depth to reduce mortality due to gas expansion injuries. Do not use knives or needles to deflate fish as this can cause infections or damage to internal organs.
- Know your rockfish and report all catch of these species to CRFS samplers. Please report exactly what you caught to the best of your abilities and ask the CRFS sampler to show you an ID guide if you are unsure.

For more information on proper release of fish please go to:
www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/releasing.pdf or
http://seagrant.oregonstate.edu/sgpubs/onlinepubs/g05001.pdf


Yelloweye rockfish


Canary rockfish


Juvenile yelloweye rockfish

Illustrations by Amadeo Bachar