

New recreational Groundfish fishing regulations coming in the New Year

December 29, 2022



Changes to recreational fishing seasons, depth limits and bag limits for a variety of groundfish species will be implemented in 2023.

The new regulations were adopted by the Pacific Fishery Management Council in June 2022 and the California Fish and Game Commission in November 2022 and are expected to take effect on or around Jan. 1, 2023. As in previous years, the boat-based fishery for most groundfish species will be closed statewide beginning Jan. 1, while spear divers and shore-based anglers will continue to have year-round fishing opportunities for groundfish.

For groundfish including Rockfish, Cabezon and Greenling (RCG) as well as lingcod, the boat-based seasons will bring a mix of increased and reduced fishing opportunities, depending on the species. Unlike prior years, all Groundfish Management Areas will have a portion of the season when 'all-depth' fishing is allowed and anglers are not subject to the Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) depth constraints. This allows new fishing

opportunities for deeper-water shelf and slope rockfish, which are most abundant in areas that have been previously closed to recreational groundfish fishing. The following is a summary of the new boat-based regulations for RCG species and lingcod in each management area:

Southern Management Area between 34°27' N. latitude (Point Conception) and the U.S./Mexico border:

- For nearshore rockfish, cabezon and greenlings: closed Jan. 1 through March 31, open at all depths April 1 through Sept. 15, closed Sept. 16 through Dec. 31.
- For all other rockfish (shelf and slope species) and lingcod: closed Jan. 1 through March 31, open at all depths April 1 through Sept. 15. From Sept. 16 through Dec. 31, take of shelf and slope rockfish and lingcod is open seaward of the 50 fathom RCA line. Take is prohibited shoreward of the 50 fathom RCA line.
- Additional regulations still apply within the Cowcod Conservation Areas.

Central Management Area between 37°11' N. latitude (Pigeon Point) and 34°27' N. latitude (Point Conception):

- For nearshore rockfish, cabezon and greenlings: closed Jan. 1 through April 30, open at all depths May 1 through Sept. 30, closed Oct. 1 through Dec. 31.
- For all other rockfish (shelf and slope species) and lingcod: closed Jan. 1 through April 30, open at all depths May 1 through Sept. 30. From Oct. 1 through Dec. 31, take of shelf and slope rockfish and lingcod is open seaward of the 50 fathom RCA line. Take is prohibited shoreward of the 50 fathom RCA line.

San Francisco Management Area between 38°57.5' N. latitude (Point Arena) and 37°11' N. latitude (Pigeon Point):

- For nearshore rockfish, cabezon and greenlings: closed Jan. 1 through July 15, open at all depths July 16 through Dec. 31.
- For all other rockfish (shelf and slope species) and lingcod: closed Jan. 1 through May 14. From May 15 through July 15, take of shelf and slope rockfish and lingcod is open seaward of the 50 fathom RCA line. Take is prohibited shoreward of the 50 fathom RCA line. From July 16 through Dec. 31, open at all depths.

Mendocino Management Area between 40°10' N. latitude (near Cape Mendocino) and 38°57.5' N. latitude (Point Arena):

- For nearshore rockfish, cabezon and greenlings: closed Jan. 1 through July 15, open at all depths July 16 through Dec. 31.
- For all other rockfish (shelf and slope species) and lingcod: closed Jan. 1 through May 14. From May 15 through July 15, take of shelf and slope rockfish and lingcod is open seaward of the 50 fathom RCA line. Take is prohibited shoreward of the 50 fathom RCA line. From July 16 through Dec. 31, open at all depths.

Northern Management Area between the California/Oregon state line and 40°10' N. latitude (near Cape Mendocino):

- For rockfish, cabezon, greenlings and lingcod: closed Jan. 1 through May 14, open at all depths May 15 through Oct. 15, closed Oct. 16 through Dec. 31.

Anglers will need to identify rockfish species they catch, and beginning in 2023, be able to determine if the fish is categorized as a nearshore, shelf or slope rockfish species, as different seasons and depths apply to each category depending on the Groundfish Management Area and month. The RCG bag limit will remain at 10 fish in combination of rockfish, cabezon and greenlings, with sub-bag limits of not more than four vermilion rockfish, one copper rockfish and one quillback rockfish. Take and possession of cowcod, yelloweye and bronzespotted rockfish will remain prohibited.

The new groundfish regulations are a significant departure from the fishing seasons and depth limits that anglers are accustomed to and are necessary due to scientific information suggesting that copper rockfish and quillback rockfish populations are in severe decline. The season structures for each management area were developed in consultation with fishing industry representatives, non-governmental organizations and state, federal and tribal governments, and were designed to provide the greatest amount of groundfish fishing time and opportunity to anglers throughout the year.

“While recognizing there are concerns with copper and quillback rockfish that will reduce nearshore fishing time in the near-term, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife is excited to offer recreational anglers new deeper-water and offshore bank and reef opportunities for groundfish that have been closed for more than two decades,” said CDFW Environmental Program Manager Marci Yaremko.

“We look forward to seeing the diversity of healthy species come across the docks in the coming years as significant new fishing grounds will now be available to recreational angling.”

There are also changes for several species that have been subject to boat-based closures in the past, which may offer new alternatives for boat-based anglers as early as January. They include:

- New year-round opportunities: ocean whitefish, California scorpion-fish, leopard shark, soupfin shark, Dover sole, English sole, arrowtooth flounder, spiny dogfish, skates, ratfish, grenadiers, finescale codling, Pacific cod, Pacific whiting, sablefish and thornyheads will now be open year-round in all depths, statewide.
- Boat-based fishing for California sheephead, will be open from March 1 through Dec. 31, statewide. The bag limit, regardless of fishing mode, will decrease from five fish to two fish.

To meet harvest goals, the recreational groundfish fishery is subject to in-season regulatory changes. Please stay informed by visiting CDFW’s summary of recreational groundfish fishing regulations webpage before fishing.