

Changes to the ABCs and Harvest Guidelines

The 1995 final ABCs are changed from the 1994 levels for the following species: lingcod, Pacific whiting (whiting), sablefish, widow rockfish, shortspine thornyheads, longspine thornyheads, bocaccio, canary rockfish and Dover sole. These changes are based on the best available scientific information. The ABCs represent the total catch—amounts that are discarded as well as that are retained. Information considered in determining the ABCs is available from the Council and was made available to the public, before the Council's October 1994 meeting, in the Council's stock assessment and fishery evaluation (SAFE) document (see ADDRESSES).

Those species or species groups with harvest guidelines in 1994 will continue to be managed with harvest guidelines in 1995. As in 1994, no quotas are established. The 1995 harvest guidelines differ from those in 1994 for: lingcod, whiting, sablefish, *Sebastes* complex—north and south of 43°00'00" N. lat. (the Columbia/Eureka subarea boundary), bocaccio, and Dover sole. Harvest guidelines are established for the first time for canary rockfish and individually for shortspine thornyheads and longspine thornyheads; the harvest guideline for thornyheads combined is no longer needed. In 1995, most of the species harvest guidelines represent only that portion of the catch that is landed. Where information is available, a discard factor is subtracted from the ABC to determine the harvest guideline. More detailed information is found in the Council's SAFE document.

The changes to the ABCs and harvest guidelines are described briefly below. All other ABC and annual harvest guideline specifications announced for 1994 (Table 1 at 59 FR 685, January 6, 1994) will apply again in 1995 and are included in Table 1. More detailed information appears in the Council's SAFE document, the "Groundfish Management Team (GMT) Final Recommendations for 1995 Acceptable Biological Catches (ABC) and Harvest Guidelines" (GMT Report F.3.) from the October 1994 Council meeting, and the Council's newsletters for its August and October 1994 meetings (see ADDRESSES).

Lingcod. A new stock assessment for lingcod resulted in severe reductions to its ABC, from 7,000 mt in 1994 to 2,400 mt in 1995, based on reductions in each subarea: From 1,000 mt (Vancouver) and 4,000 mt (Columbia) in 1994 to 1,300 mt for both subareas combined in 1995; from 500 mt in 1994 to 300 mt in 1995 in the Eureka subarea; from 1,100 mt in

1994 to 700 mt in 1995 in the Monterey subarea; and from 400 mt in 1994 to 100 mt in 1995 in the Conception subarea. These reductions result from a comprehensive assessment based on fishery and survey data between Cape Falcon, OR, and 49°00'00" N. lat. off Vancouver Island, Canada, between 1979–93. The average yield of 2,736 mt in this area during 1989–1993 is just below the overfishing level. South of Cape Falcon, there is concern that the young average age in the catch indicates a substantial level of fishing mortality. The ABCs are set at 63 percent of the average catch during 1989–93, proportional to the reduction of catch recommended north of Cape Falcon, to reduce catch until a full stock assessment can be conducted. The harvest guideline is equal to the coastwide ABC; there is no estimate for discards at this time. Reductions in catch are expected to occur through imposition of a cumulative trip limit and a size limit in 1995. Lingcod management is complicated by harvest in Canadian waters and by recreational fisheries. Coordination with Canada on assessment and management of this species is necessary.

Whiting. The ABC for whiting in 1994 (325,000 mt for the United States and Canada combined) was substantially higher than in previous years, predominantly because the 1992 hydroacoustic survey utilized new, more sensitive equipment, and extended farther offshore and farther north to encompass the species' range. To provide for cautious exploitation until the survey results can be confirmed (in 1995–96), a conservative harvest rate policy was adopted to minimize the risk to the resource if the ABC were later found to be too high. The Council also felt it prudent to acknowledge the possibility that the total U.S. and Canadian harvest in 1994 might exceed the U.S.-Canada ABC, as occurred in 1992 and 1993.

The U.S.-Canada ABC for whiting in 1995 is much lower, 223,000 mt, due to the anticipated decline in stock level following the very large 1980 and 1984 year classes, which for the most part, are no longer available to the fishery. The Council recommended that the U.S. harvest guideline be set at 80 percent of the U.S.-Canada ABC, unless agreement for a different share were reached at the U.S.-Canada discussions to be held after the Council meeting. Agreement was not reached between the two countries. Therefore, the 80-percent share is used again in 1995, resulting in the U.S. harvest guideline of 178,400 mt.

If Canada continues to calculate its share in the same manner as in 1992–

94, the U.S. and Canadian total harvest will be 14 percent above the coastwide ABC in 1995. These overages have not caused a biological problem, particularly given the large increase in the ABC in 1994 and use of a conservative exploitation rate. The total harvest in 1995 would be lower than the overfishing level, and lower than the amount that would have been taken if the Council had chosen to use a moderate harvest rate level, as in 1993, in determining the ABC. Bilateral discussions with Canada are expected to continue.

The regulations at 50 CFR 663.23(b)(4) set aside 40 percent of the U.S. harvest guideline for priority use by vessels delivering shoreside. In 1995, this reserve is 71,400 mt.

Sablefish. The 1995 ABC in the Conception area remains at 425 mt. The ABC for sablefish north of the Conception subarea (36°00'00" N. lat.) is increased from 7,000 mt in 1994 to 8,700 mt in 1995, based on the results of a new stock assessment and by including expected discards in the ABC. However, the 1995 harvest guideline (north of 36°00'00" N. lat.) is 7,100 mt (considerably lower than the combined ABC), only 100 mt higher than the harvest guideline in 1994. An estimate of discards (900 mt) is subtracted from the ABC for the area north of Conception to derive a harvest guideline that represents only landed catch. A further reduction of 780 mt is made for treaty tribes. The harvest guideline for 1995 was reduced further to compensate for 700 mt the Council expected to be taken above the harvest guideline in 1994. After the October meeting, it was discovered that landings were projected to be 700 mt over the limited entry gear allocations, rather than the species' harvest guideline. Therefore, because the open-access allocation would not be reached, the harvest guideline would be exceeded by only about 328 mt (5 percent). The Council is expected to address this error at its March 1995 meeting and may recommend an increase to the sablefish harvest guideline in 1995.

Widow rockfish. No new stock assessment was prepared for widow rockfish, but the ABC is increased from 6,500 mt in 1994 to 7,700 mt in 1995 to include an estimate of discards in the fishery. The harvest guideline remains the same as in 1994, 6,500 mt, representing only the landed catch.

Shortspine and longspine thornyheads. Based on new stock assessments, the ABCs for shortspine and longspine thornyheads are reduced in 1995: from 1,900 mt to 1,000 mt for shortspine thornyheads and from 10,100