



Pacific Fishery Management Council *NEWS RELEASE*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Wednesday, April 11, 2018

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PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL ADOPTS MAJOR CHANGES TO WEST COAST GROUND FISH FISHERY

Portland, OR—On Monday the Pacific Fishery Management Council added new protections for deep sea coral areas, modified areas that protect priority bottom habitat areas for groundfish, and reopened fishing in some areas that have been closed to groundfish fishing.

The Council is required by Federal law to identify and protect important fish habitat, while balancing the needs of coastal communities and the fishing industry.

The actions span the Federal waters off the U.S. West Coast. They establish protection for over 136,000 square miles of corals, rocky reefs and undersea canyons important to over 100 groundfish species such as rockfish, flatfish, and sablefish. The new protections include 135,000 square miles of deep water habitat to protect corals off the coast of California, in depths too great for most bottom fishing activities. The actions also reopen over 3,000 square miles of historical fishing grounds that were established to reduce harvest on overfished rockfish stocks. Nearly all of those stocks have subsequently been rebuilt to sustainable population levels, and the remaining stocks are rebuilding quickly. The combination of new closures and reopenings ensures important habitat protections while allowing added fishing opportunity for the bottom trawl fleet.

“This decision demonstrates the Council’s commitment to protecting important fish habitats including rocky reefs, corals, and sponges. The decision was informed by sound science and further informed by the fishing industry and environmental community who are to be commended for their important contribution to the Council’s decision. The result provides an increase in habitat protection while providing greater opportunity for our trawl fleet to more efficiently harvest target stocks,” said Council Chair Phil Anderson. “The West Coast trawl fishery has been reduced in size and transformed into a sustainable fishery including full accountability that provides the public with high quality fish products.”

The changes were made as part of a review which the Council and NOAA Fisheries initiated seven years ago. Many of the selected changes originated in a unique collaboration of fishing industry members and environmental advocates working together.

Seth Atkinson, a collaborative group member representing the Natural Resources Defense Council, said, “By listening to each other and building trust, we worked together to improve fishing opportunity and increase protection for sensitive habitat areas. We built on fishermen’s deep knowledge of the seafloor, cross-referencing it with the latest scientific data, and pulled together a package of changes that would achieve both goals. This was possible only because of fishermen’s willingness to sit down and share their knowledge.”

The decision also considered input from Federal, Tribal and State agencies, and the general public. It included extensive analysis of the biological, social, and economic effects of the actions.

Bottom trawling is the practice of using a vessel to drag a net through the water, close to the seafloor, in order to catch fish. Most groundfish trawlers off the West Coast are relatively small, family-owned vessels. Trawling differs from trolling, which uses hooks and lines and is typically used to target salmon and tuna on the West Coast.

Next Steps

The Council’s recommended actions and amendments to its Groundfish Fishery Management Plan will be transmitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service for development of enacting regulations.

Council Role

The Pacific Fishery Management Council recommends management measures to the National Marine Fisheries Service for fisheries off the coasts of California, Oregon, and Washington under its fishery management plans for groundfish, salmon, highly migratory species (such as tunas), and coastal pelagic species (such as sardines and anchovies). The Council is one of eight regional fishery management councils established by the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 to manage fisheries 3-200 miles offshore of the U.S. coastline.

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On the Web

- Pacific Fishery Management Council: <http://www.pcouncil.org>
- Management action details: <https://www.pcouncil.org/groundfish/fishery-management-plan/groundfish-amendments-in-development/#a28>
- Fact Sheet: Groundfish: <http://www.pcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/13-Groundfish-August-2017.pdf>