

BRINGING BACK THE FISH: Spotlight on the Pacific Region

In the rocky depths off the Pacific coast live a family of fish, many colored bright orange or yellow and which can live a century or more. These “rockfish” have long been a bread and butter catch for California sport fishermen and became an alternative for Northwest fishermen when salmon harvests were reduced.

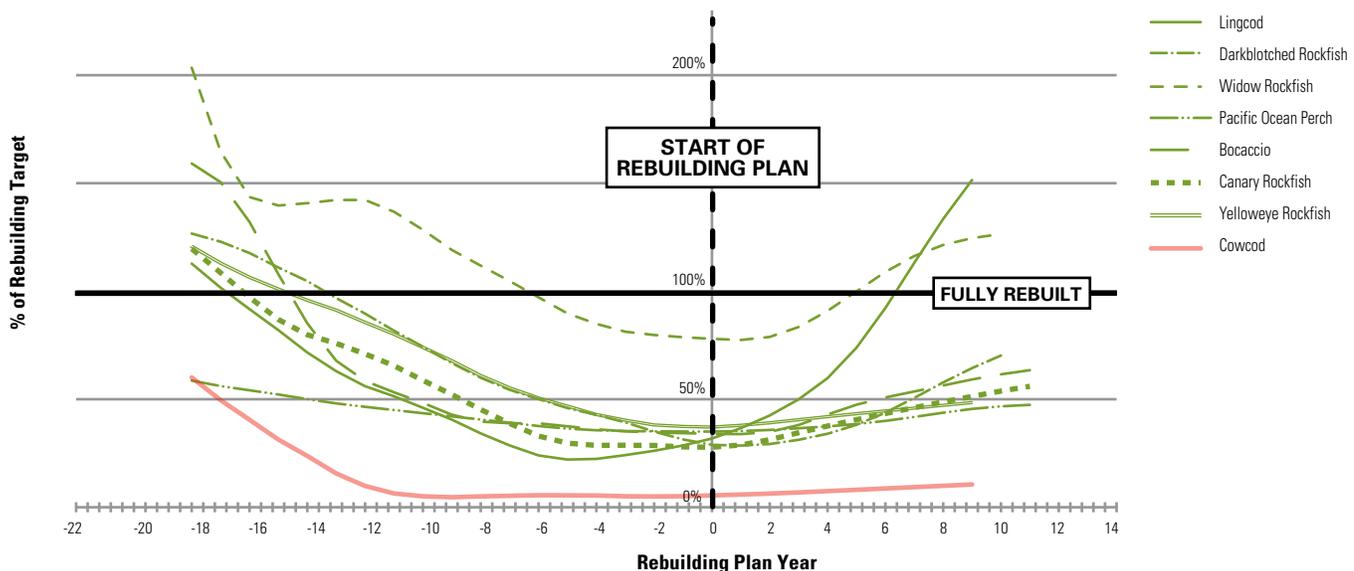
Catch of rockfish increased significantly through the 1970s and 1980s, as fishermen began using nets designed to trawl in the rugged habitats where these fish are found. The dramatic increase in catch, along with the late maturation of rockfish, proved their downfall. By the late 1990s, populations of several once abundant species of rockfish, as well as Pacific lingcod, crashed.

But thanks to rebuilding plans under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, seven of these depleted groundfish species off the Pacific Coast are making significant rebuilding progress or have been fully rebuilt. The law’s requirement to rebuild fish populations as soon as possible has resulted in careful management and avoidance of the depleted species by fishermen, giving the fish a chance to bounce back.

FISHERIES RECOVERY PROGRESS IN THE PACIFIC COAST REGION: **VERY GOOD**

Two stocks, Pacific lingcod and widow rockfish, have been successfully rebuilt. Five stocks—darkblotched rockfish, canary rockfish, yelloweye rockfish, Pacific Ocean perch, and Southern Pacific Coast bocaccio—have made significant rebuilding progress. These five stocks have achieved at least 50 percent of their rebuilding targets and increased at least

25 percent in biomass since the start of rebuilding. Because rockfish generally reproduce relatively late in life, restoring populations to healthy levels has required—and will continue to require—time and commitment. The rebuilding of one rockfish stock, cowcod, continues to proceed very slowly, with a 2068 completion target.



Population trends (3-year moving average). For rebuilt stocks, time series is extended to date of last assessment.
Source: NRDC, *Bringing Back the Fish: An Evaluation of U.S. Fisheries Rebuilding Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act* (February 2013). www.nrdc.org/oceans/rebuilding-fisheries.asp.



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In *Bringing Back the Fish: An Evaluation of U.S. Fisheries Rebuilding Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act*, NRDC evaluated all U.S. ocean fish stocks put in rebuilding plans under Section 304(e) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act with sufficient information to evaluate progress (44 stocks). For results from all regions and a national perspective on the rebuilding of all 44 evaluated stocks, please see the full report at www.nrdc.org/oceans/rebuilding-fisheries.asp.

TWO FISHERMEN'S PERSPECTIVES:



When Dan Wolford pilots his boat out of Half Moon Bay, the recreational fisherman isn't going after species like canary or yelloweye rockfish which are under strict rebuilding management.

But he's starting to encounter them more often while fishing for other rockfish—a good sign that those stocks are coming back.

"We are seeing more and more ...

and it's obvious to the guy out on the water that things are improving, and that's good. Because as my father used to tell me, 'I'd hate to be the guy who caught the very last of these fish,'" he said.

But the 66-year-old also understands that the biology of these slow growing, late-maturing fish requires a long-term commitment to rebuilding.

"We're just going to have to have the fortitude and will to stick with it," Wolford said. "I'll probably not live long enough to see these fishes truly recover, but when they do, what a fishery it will be."

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Bob Eder has been catching sablefish off the Oregon coast since the 1970s. In recent years, he has watched a transformation take place in the West Coast groundfish fishery, as the fishery has adopted a model of individual accountability and exchangeable quotas.

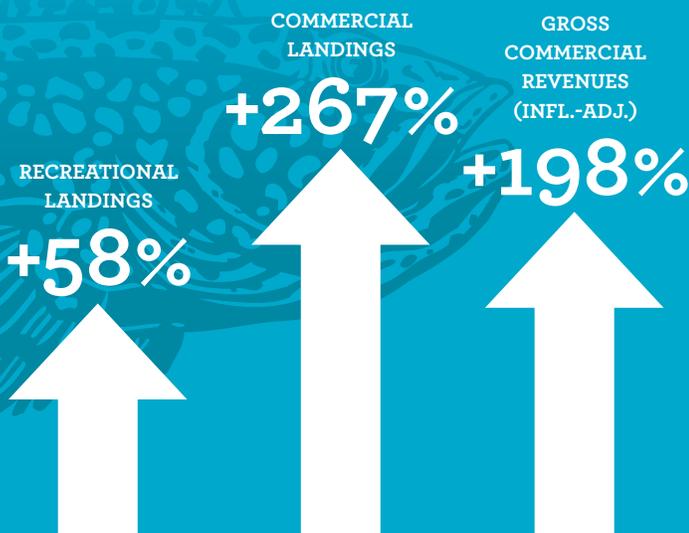
"It's the beginning of a new era," Eder said. "I feel that the elevated level of personal accountability, and the

flexibility in trading quotas, can do nothing but help recovery of any depleted stocks."

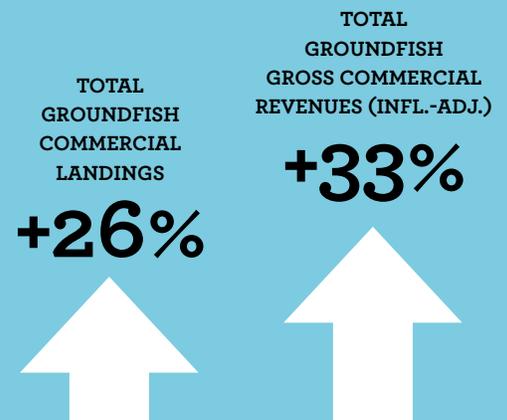
Under the new rules, harvesters are adapting to tight bycatch limits. "Fishermen are learning more about fish behavior, and being driven by the need for increased selectivity," Eder noted. "Marked innovation in both gear and strategy is taking place. The reduction in bycatch has been enormous. That's something that benefits the resource and therefore the public," Bob said.

REAPING THE BENEFITS OF REBUILDING STOCKS

PACIFIC LINGCOD^a



As overfished rockfish species recover and restrictions that can affect catch of other groundfish are eased, total groundfish commercial landings and revenues are increasing.^b



^a Showing comparison between 2000 (start of rebuilding plan) and 2011; adjusted with Consumer Price Index. Sources: NOAA Fisheries, Annual Commercial Landing Statistics, available at http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/pls/webpls/MF_ANNUAL_LANDINGS.RESULTS; O. Hamel, et al., "Status and Future Prospects for Lingcod in Waters off Washington, Oregon, and California as Assessed in 2009," Lingcod Assessment 2009-Final-SAFE Version (Nov. 6, 2009); M. Bellman, et al., "Estimated discard and catch of groundfish species in the 2011 U.S. west coast fisheries," West Coast Groundfish Observer Program, National Marine Fisheries Service (2012); NRDC, *Bringing Back the Fish: An Evaluation of U.S. Fisheries Rebuilding Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act* (February 2013).

^b Showing comparison between 2002 (start date of several rebuilding plans and lowest catch limits) and 2010. Sources: Pacific Fishery Management Council, "Agenda Item E.4.a, Attachment 6: Landings and Revenue Tables," November 2011 Briefing Book, available at <http://www.pcouncil.org/resources/archives/briefing-books/november-2011-briefing-book/#groundfish>; NRDC, *Bringing Back the Fish: An Evaluation of U.S. Fisheries Rebuilding Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act* (February 2013); NOAA Fisheries, Annual Commercial Landing Statistics, available at http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/pls/webpls/MF_ANNUAL_LANDINGS.RESULTS.