

RE: Harvest Specifications Technical Corrections and Inseason Adjustments – Final Action

Subject: Urgent Objection to CDFW Regulatory Changes Affecting Nearshore Groundfish in the Northern Management Area

As Commissioners serving on the Crescent City Harbor District Board of Harbor Commissioners, we are writing to express our strongest objections and deep concerns regarding the recent regulatory changes implemented by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) relating to quillback rockfish in the Northern Groundfish Management Area (GMA). The CDFW has placed onerous restrictions on recreational boat-based fishing of most species of groundfish. Within the GMA, only areas seaward of a 50-fathom boundary line remain open (effective 12:01 a.m., Monday, August 21, 2023). We believe this regulatory change will have serious negative repercussions on our local economy across a broad range of individuals and businesses. As explained more fully below, we are calling for CDFW to rescind these regulations for a period of 60-days, or in the alternative, to adjust the conservation area boundary line to permit fishing up to 10 fathoms. While we recognize the importance of conservation and the need to protect quillback rockfish, the sudden imposition of the “offshore only” fishery in the Northern GMA has sent shockwaves through our local economy, leading to serious concerns about the viability of several industries that depend on this fishery either directly or indirectly. The Conservation Boundary Should Be Modified CDFW established a Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) with a current boundary of 50 fathoms. We propose a modification to start the RCA offshore at a 10-fathom depth. This adjustment is based on ecological data indicating that quillback rockfish, the species of concern to CDFW, are rarely found in waters shallower than 10-fathoms. Such an adjustment would align with the CDFW's conservation goals while addressing critical concerns within our sportfishing community. Forcing our sportfishermen to venture beyond the 50-fathom boundary places them in precarious and dangerous waters. A significant number of our local sportfishermen operate smaller boats, which are not designed or equipped to handle the conditions so far offshore. This situation becomes all the more dire when considering the recent decommissioning of the local Coast Guard station. Without this vital resource, the potential response time in emergencies has increased dramatically, exacerbating the risk factor for our fishermen. The ripple effects of these regulatory changes are twofold. On the one hand, many sportfishermen may altogether abstain from fishing due to the dangers of fishing far offshore, thereby drastically reducing the economic inflow into our region. On the other hand, those who choose to brave the risks and venture out will be placing their lives in considerable jeopardy. Neither scenario is acceptable. Economic Domino Effect The sportfishing industry is not simply a recreational pastime but an essential part of our local economy, generating revenue, creating jobs, and supporting countless ancillary businesses. An economic domino effect is already cascading to other businesses, such as hotels and Airbnbs, which were booked by fishing enthusiasts and their families months in advance, and which now face a surge in cancellations. Furthermore, local restaurants now stand to lose the patronage of sportfishing tourists who will be staying home. Meanwhile, local tourist attractions that rely on the influx of visitors drawn initially by our renowned fishing opportunities will see a sharp decline in visitation. The economic viability of the Harbor itself is imperiled. The fishing industry is the cornerstone of the Harbor's revenue, and the industry sustains numerous businesses that have revenue sharing agreements with the Harbor. ... (letter continues, please see attachment)