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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 660****[Docket No. 241022–0278; RIN 0648–BO14]****Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; Fisheries Off West Coast States; Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery; 2025–2026 Biennial Specifications and Management Measures; Inseason Adjustments**

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Final rule; inseason adjustments to biennial groundfish management measures.

SUMMARY: This final rule announces routine inseason adjustments to management measures in commercial groundfish fisheries. These inseason adjustments will increase sablefish trip limits in the limited entry (LE) and open access (OA) sectors north and south of 36° North latitude (N lat.), and reduce vermilion/sunset rockfish sub-trip limits within the shelf rockfish complex in the LE and OA sectors south of 34°27' N lat. This action is intended to allow commercial fishing vessels to access more abundant groundfish stocks while protecting overfished and depleted stocks.

DATES: This final rule is effective August 20, 2026.

ADDRESSES: This final rule is accessible at the Office of the Federal Register website at <https://www.federalregister.gov>. Background information and documents are available at the Pacific Fishery Management Council's website at <http://www.pcouncil.org/>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Megan Mackey, Fishery Management Specialist, at 206–526–6140 or megan.mackey@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Background**

The Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (Groundfish FMP) and its implementing regulations at title 50 in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), part 660, subparts C through G, regulate fishing for groundfish seaward of Washington, Oregon, and California.

Pacific Coast groundfish fisheries are managed using harvest specifications or limits (e.g., overfishing limits, acceptable biological catch, annual catch limits (ACL), and harvest guidelines) recommended by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) and based on the best scientific information available at that time (50 CFR 660.60(b)).

During development of the harvest specifications, the Council recommends management measures (e.g., trip limits, area closures, and bag limits) that are meant to help achieve but not to exceed the harvest specifications. Based on recommendations from the Council, NMFS develops and implements groundfish harvest specifications and management measures for 2-year periods (i.e., a biennium). Throughout the biennium, the Council, in coordination with Pacific Coast Treaty Indian Tribes and the States of Washington, Oregon, and California, recommends adjustments to the management measures to achieve this goal.

NMFS published the final rule to implement harvest specifications and management measures for the 2025–2026 biennium for most species managed under the Groundfish FMP on December 16, 2024 (89 FR 101514). That final rule was effective on January 1, 2025. Since January 2025, the Council has recommended, and NMFS has implemented, several adjustments to management measures. The inseason adjustments implemented in this action, discussed below, were recommended by the Council at its June 2026 meeting in Spokane, Washington.

This action includes two inseason adjustments: (1) an increase in sablefish trip limits in the LE and OA sectors north and south of 36° N lat., and (2) a reduction in vermilion/sunset rockfish sub-trip limits within the shelf rockfish complex in the LE and OA sectors south of 34°27' N lat. The harvest specifications and mitigation measures developed for the 2025–2026 biennium used the best available data, which included information on the fishery through the 2023 fishing year. The adjustments to mitigation measures provided in this inseason action are based on updated information that was unavailable when the analysis for the current harvest specifications was completed. As new fisheries data becomes available, adjustments to mitigation measures are necessary to help harvesters achieve, but not exceed, annual allocations.

Commercial Sablefish Trip Limit Adjustment

Sablefish is an important commercial species on the U.S. West Coast with vessels targeting sablefish with both trawl and fixed gear (including longline and pots/traps). Sablefish is managed with a coast-wide ACL that is apportioned north and south of 36° N lat. Management measures established during the 2025–26 harvest specifications were based on catch projections using catch data through 2023. Based on updated landings data through April 30, 2026 and model projections for the remainder of 2026, sablefish landings targets for the LE and OA sectors north and south of 36° N lat. (i.e., LE North (LEN), OA North (OAN), LE South (LES), and OA South (OAS)) continue to be relatively high compared to landings, and industry members have indicated that there is some optimism for market expansion (see Groundfish Advisory Subpanel Report on Agenda Item E.2.a from June 2026 Council meeting). Therefore, at its June 2026 meeting, the Council reviewed the analytical documents drafted by its Groundfish Management Team (GMT) and its Groundfish Advisory Subpanel and recommended inseason adjustments to increase the LE and OA sablefish trip limits north and south of 36° N lat. to allow for more attainment of sablefish within the sector allocations.

Under the trip limits established for sablefish through the 2025–26 harvest specifications, the GMT projects 845 metric tons (mt), or 10.8 percent of the combined 2026 landing target of 7,773 mt, of sablefish would be landed by all four sectors. The GMT modeled an increase of approximately 30 percent (between 25 to 35 percent depending on the sector) to all four sectors' trip limits for the remainder of the year. This range helped avoid complicated trip limits; for example, an exact 30 percent increase to the current LEN trip limit of 11,000 pounds (lb) (4,989.5 kilograms (kg)) bimonthly is 14,300 lb (6,486 kg), but the GMT proposed an increase to 14,000 lb (6,350 kg). Under the proposed trip limit increases (Option 2), the GMT projected an additional 183 mt, or about 4 percent of the combined 2026 landing target, of sablefish would be caught across all four sectors. Given that sablefish attainments are projected to be low in 2026, and some vessels would benefit from higher trip limits, the Council recommended the trip limit increases for LE and OA sablefish north and south of 36° N lat. as shown in table 1.

NMFS is approving and implementing this recommendation through this inseason action.

TABLE 1—NEW LE AND OA SABLEFISH TRIP LIMITS FOR NORTH AND SOUTH OF 36° N LAT.

Fishery	Area	New trip limits
LE	North of 36° N lat	7,000 lb (3,175 kg)/week not to exceed 14,000 lb (6,350 kg)/2 months.
	South of 36° N lat	4,000 lb (1,814 kg)/week.
OA	North of 36° N lat	5,000 lb (2,268 kg)/week not to exceed 10,000 lb (4,536 kg)/2 months.
	South of 36° N lat	3,200 lb (1,451.5 kg)/week not to exceed 9,600 lb (4,354.5 kg)/2 months.

Vermilion/Sunset Rockfish Sub-Trip Limit Adjustments South of 34°27' N Lat.

Within the shelf rockfish complex, vermilion/sunset rockfish landings in commercial non-trawl fisheries south of 40°10' N lat. have increased and are estimated to be 10.4 mt higher than at the same time last year. This increase in landings is due to a greater number of participants and a higher proportion of vessels attaining 90 percent or more of their monthly trip limits (see GMT Report on Agenda Item E.2.a from June 2026 Council meeting). Based on current catch trends, the informal commercial/recreational sharing agreement of 100 mt to commercial non-trawl is projected to be exceeded by around 13 percent. As a result, the GMT analyzed potential sub-trip limit reductions for vermilion/sunset rockfish in commercial non-trawl fisheries south of 40°10' N lat.

To reduce the likelihood of exceeding the vermilion/sunset rockfish ACL contribution south of 40°10' N lat., the GMT recommended reducing OAS and LES sub-trip limits. The proposed sub-trip limit reductions south of 34°27' N lat. are expected to reduce vermilion/sunset rockfish mortality within these sectors in 2026 to 98.3 mt, or 98.3 percent of the 100 mt allocation, and better align harvest levels with the ACL contribution for the shelf rockfish complex. NMFS is therefore implementing the following reduced trip limits for the remainder of 2026 as shown in table 2.

TABLE 2—NEW VERMILION/SUNSET ROCKFISH SUB-TRIP LIMITS SOUTH OF 34°27' N LAT.

Area	New sub-trip limits
LES	2,500 lb (1,134 kg)/2 months.
OAS	750 lb (340 kg)/2 months.

Classification

This final rule makes routine inseason adjustments to groundfish fishery management measures, based on the best scientific information available, consistent with the Groundfish FMP and its implementing regulations.

This action is taken under the authority of 50 CFR 660.60(c) and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

The aggregate data upon which these actions are based are available for public inspection by contacting Megan Mackey in NMFS West Coast Region (see **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** section above), or view at the NMFS West Coast Groundfish website: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/west-coast-groundfish>.

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), NMFS finds good cause to waive prior public notice and an opportunity for public comment on this action, as notice and comment would be impracticable and contrary to the public interest. The routine adjustments to management measures implemented through this action modify trip limits for sablefish and sub-trip limits for vermilion/sunset rockfish while keeping catch within allocations established by the 2025–2026 harvest specifications. Changes of this nature were anticipated in the final rule for the 2025–2026 harvest specifications and management measures, which was published on December 16, 2024 (89 FR 101514). Rapid implementation of inseason adjustments to routine management measures is also specifically contemplated in the regulations at 50 CFR 660.60(c). Finally, the sablefish trip limit increases and vermilion/sunset rockfish sub-trip limit reductions implemented through this action were discussed at the Council’s June 2026 meeting, which included an opportunity for public comment.

Delaying implementation to allow for additional public comment would likely reduce the economic benefits this action

is intended to provide to the commercial fishing industry and the businesses that rely on that industry, because it would be unlikely that the new regulations would be implemented in time to realize the projected benefits of the increased sablefish trip limits to fishery participants and fishing communities, or the decreased vermilion/sunset rockfish sub-trip limits to the resource during the 2026 fishing year. A delay in implementation could also contribute to unnecessarily discarded and largely wasted fish for any sablefish fishermen who are attaining the lower trip limit. These fish could otherwise be landed to provide food and revenue, and thus timely implementation of this action promotes responsible use of the resource. In sum, providing a comment period for this action could significantly limit economic benefits to the fishery, and could hamper the potential to achieve optimum yield from the affected fisheries. Accordingly, there is good cause to waive notice and comment rulemaking under 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B).

For the same reasons, NMFS has determined that the 30-day delay in the date of effectiveness required by 5 U.S.C. 553(d) does not apply to this inseason action because there is good cause to waive the requirement under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). NMFS therefore finds that this final rule may become effective upon publication in the **Federal Register**. The adjustments to management measures implemented in this action would affect sablefish commercial fisheries by increasing opportunity and allowing greater economic benefit; thus helping harvesters achieve, but not exceed, annual allocations. The adjustments would also help commercial non-trawl fishermen avoid exceeding the 2026 vermilion/sunset rockfish ACL contribution south of 40°10' N lat. Finally, these adjustments were requested by the Council’s advisory bodies, as well as members of industry,

during the Council's June 2026 meeting, and were recommended by the Council, following the opportunity for public comment at the June 2026 meeting. Routine changes of this nature were anticipated in the 2025–2026 biennial harvest specifications and management measures, which were established through a notice and comment rulemaking for (December 16, 2024 (89 FR 101514)).

List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 660

Fisheries, Fishing, Indian fisheries.

Dated: August 17, 2026.

Shannon Bettridge,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

For the reasons set out in the preamble, NMFS amends 50 CFR part 660 as follows:

PART 660—FISHERIES OFF WEST COAST STATES

■ 1. The authority citation for part 660 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*, 16 U.S.C. 773 *et seq.*, and 16 U.S.C. 7001 *et seq.*

■ 2. Amend table 2b (North) to part 660, subpart E by revising the entry for “Sablefish” to read as follows:

TABLE 2b (NORTH) TO PART 660, SUBPART E—TRIP LIMITS FOR LIMITED ENTRY NON-TRAWL NORTH OF 40°10' N LAT.

Species	Trip limit
Sablefish	7,000 lb/week not to exceed 14,000 lb/2 months.

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■ 3. Amend table 2b (South) to part 660, subpart E by revising the entries for “Sablefish (south of 36° N lat.)” and

“Shelf rockfish complex (south of 34° 27' N lat.); excludes bronzespotted rockfish” to read as follows:

TABLE 2b (SOUTH) TO PART 660, SUBPART E—TRIP LIMITS FOR LIMITED ENTRY NON-TRAWL SOUTH OF 40°10' N LAT.

Species	Trip limit
Sablefish (south of 36° N lat.)	4,000 lb/week.
Shelf rockfish complex (south of 34°27' N lat.); excludes bronzespotted rockfish.	5,000 lb per 2 months, of which no more than 2,500 lb may be vermillion/sunset rockfish.

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■ 4. Amend table 3b (North) to part 660, subpart F by revising the entry for “Sablefish” to read as follows:

TABLE 3b (NORTH) TO PART 660, SUBPART F—TRIP LIMITS FOR OPEN ACCESS NORTH OF 40°10' N LAT.

Species	Trip limit
Sablefish	5,000 lb/week not to exceed 10,000 lb/2 months.

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■ 5. Amend table 3b (South) to part 660, subpart F by revising the entries for

“Sablefish (south of 36° N lat.)” and “Shelf rockfish complex (south of 34°27' N lat.); excludes bronzespotted rockfish” to read as follows:

TABLE 3b (SOUTH) TO PART 660, SUBPART F—TRIP LIMITS FOR OPEN ACCESS SOUTH OF 40°10' N LAT.

Species	Trip limit
* * * * *	* * * * *
Sablefish (south of 36° N lat.)	3,200 lb/week not to exceed 9,600 lb/2 months.
* * * * *	* * * * *
Shelf rockfish complex (south of 34°27' N lat.); excludes bronzespotted rockfish.	3,000 lb per 2 months, of which no more than 750 lb may be vermilion/sunset rockfish.
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