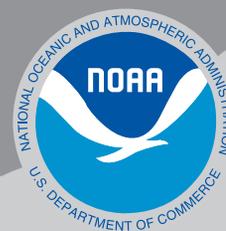


The West Coast Groundfish IFQ Fishery

September 2013

RESULTS FROM 2012 THE SECOND YEAR OF CATCH SHARES

The West Coast Groundfish Catch Shares Program is actively rebuilding several overfished groundfish stocks. One of the initial outcomes of this new program is the substantial reduction in the amount of bycatch of overfished species, due to the flexibility these fishermen have to be more selective in the areas they target. Catch of rebuilding species remains lower two years after catch shares, compared with the two previous years under trip limit management.



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What are Catch Shares?

Catch shares are a tool used to sustainably manage fish stocks and support fishing communities, important goals identified in the Magnuson-Stevens Act. A market-based mechanism, catch shares provide conservation benefits to ensure our fisheries are healthy, while placing business decisions in the hands of fishermen to maximize economic benefits. Under the program, the total allowable catch, or quota, in a fishery is divided into shares controlled by fishermen. The fish can be caught at the fishermen's discretion, more efficiently and at more profitable marketing times, instead of according to trip limits or derbies which lead to chronic overfishing. This allows for greater flexibility. Fishermen can plan ahead for their season, be more selective in the areas they target, and fish during safer weather conditions.

Photos: NOAA



For the West Coast groundfish fishery, 2012 yielded notable results that continue to provide important benefits to the fish, the fisherman and their communities. Since the transition to a catch shares program in 2011, NOAA Fisheries, the fishermen, the Pacific Fishery Management Council, the west coast states and others have worked together to design and implement the catch shares program. This collaboration fostered positive outcomes in 2012, such as fishermen catching more of their targeted species, and less of species that should be avoided. This strong partnership will carry the West Coast Groundfish Catch Shares Program toward the common goal of healthy, sustainable fisheries and fishing communities.

The West Coast Groundfish Catch Shares Program consists of an individual fishing quota (IFQ) system for the shorebased trawl fleet, and cooperative programs for the at-sea mothership and catcher-processor fleets.

Results from 2012 indicate a substantial reduction in the amount of bycatch, which occurs when fishermen are fishing for one species, but unintentionally catch other creatures that live near that species. Because fishermen have more flexibility under a catch shares program, they can be more selective in the areas they target. Two years into the catch shares program, catch of unwanted species, or bycatch, remains lower than the two prior years structured under trip limit management. This is good news for certain

species that need rebuilding and for fishermen who can focus on their target species.

At the same time, results show that the groundfish fleet was able to catch a greater percentage, 29%, of their target species (other than whiting), which is up from 24% in 2011. This result highlights the increased diversity of the landings and the fishermen's ability to target new areas and markets.

Another trend seen in the program's first two years is the increased use of fixed gear for sablefish, the most valuable species in the fishery. Fixed gear is allowed under IFQ, a formerly trawl-only fishery, and it enables fish to be harvested in better condition and thus receive better market prices. In the second year of the IFQ fishery, the proportion of revenue from fixed gear sablefish in the non-whiting portion of the fishery increased by just over two percent. As a result, 47% of sablefish revenue in the IFQ program was from fixed gear in 2012.

Commerce-related quota pound transfers, (transfers between vessel accounts for cash, barter, or a combination)

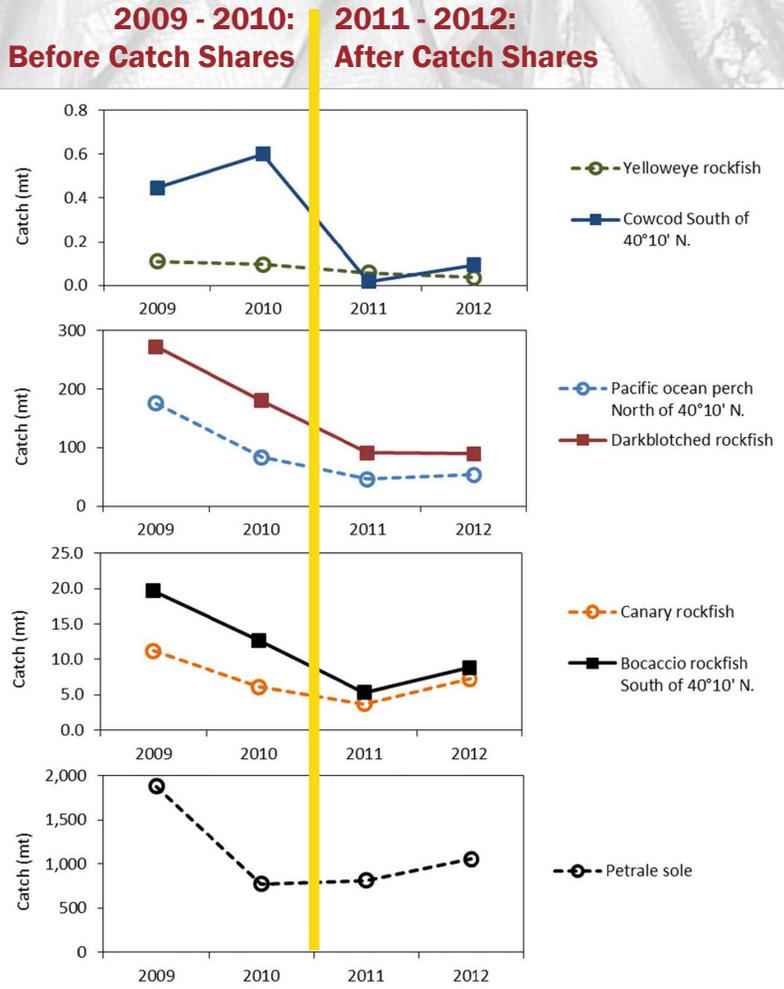
were much more evenly distributed in 2012 than in 2011. Transfers began immediately in January, 2012, and transfer activity was more constant than during the 2011 season. This trend suggests a greater knowledge of the IFQ management system and earlier planning by participants.

Revenue distribution among species in 2012 was also more evenly distributed than in 2011. Factors contributing to this flatter distribution include: lower ex-vessel sablefish prices, lower sablefish catch during 2012, especially south of 36° North latitude, as well as increases in catch and revenue of other species such as petrale sole, yellowtail rockfish, Pacific cod, lingcod and slope rockfish.

Overall, the progress achieved in 2011 continued in 2012 – agency estimates of landings, revenue, effort and catch per unit effort were very similar between 2011 and 2012. In addition, fishermen are still retaining more of their catch and these retention rates remain high.



TOTAL ANNUAL CATCH OF REBUILDING SPECIES BEFORE & AFTER CATCH SHARES



In 2011 and 2012, due to catch shares fishermen caught less depleted species.

This chart shows in metric tons the total annual catch of rebuilding species from 2009 to 2010 in the limited entry trawl and shoreside whiting fisheries, as well as 2011 and 2012, in the Shorebased IFQ Program.

Source = West Coast Groundfish Observer Program's Groundfish Mortality Report (2009-2010) and the Shorebased IFQ Vessel Accounts System (2011-2012).

Looking to the Future: Electronic Monitoring

NOAA Fisheries, Pacific Fishery Management Council, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, and the industry are now working together on various projects that determine if electronic monitoring (EM) can serve as a suitable lower cost alternative to observer coverage. Projects concerning types of equipment, camera placement, logbooks, comparisons of observer data to camera data, and identification of individual species are currently underway. Such projects will help NOAA Fisheries and the Council move forward with consideration of the possible use of EM and to achieve the most cost-effective and sustainable approach that ensures alignment of management goals, data needs, industry/government cost sharing, and regulations.



Catch Shares Facts

The West Coast Groundfish Fisheries include over 90 different species, such as petrale and dover sole, sablefish, Pacific whiting, and many flatfish and rockfish species.

Under catch shares, fishermen are able to trade their allotted pounds of fish among each other. A fisherman who has a small share of one species, or who doesn't want to harvest a particular species, can trade or sell quota pounds to another fishermen. The total pounds of such vessel-to-vessel transfers in 2012 was 25% above 2011. The number of transfers - a good indicator of how fishermen want to refine their catches - was double that of 2011.

To catch fish in better condition and sell them at a higher price, fishermen are shifting their tactics. For example, trawl fishermen increased their use of fixed gear - fish pots that rest on the sea floor or baited hooks on miles-long lines - in the first 2 years of the program. In 2012, 58% of sablefish revenue in the catch shares program was from fixed gear. This is up from 48% in 2011.

Diversification of catch increased substantially in 2012. Now, species like chillipepper and yellowtail rockfishes comprise a larger portion of total landings and revenues. These species were difficult to target under the fleetwide trip limit regime that existed prior to catch shares.

To learn more:

www.nwr.noaa.gov/fisheries/groundfish_trawl_catch_share/groundfish_trawl_catch_share_program.html

Questions?

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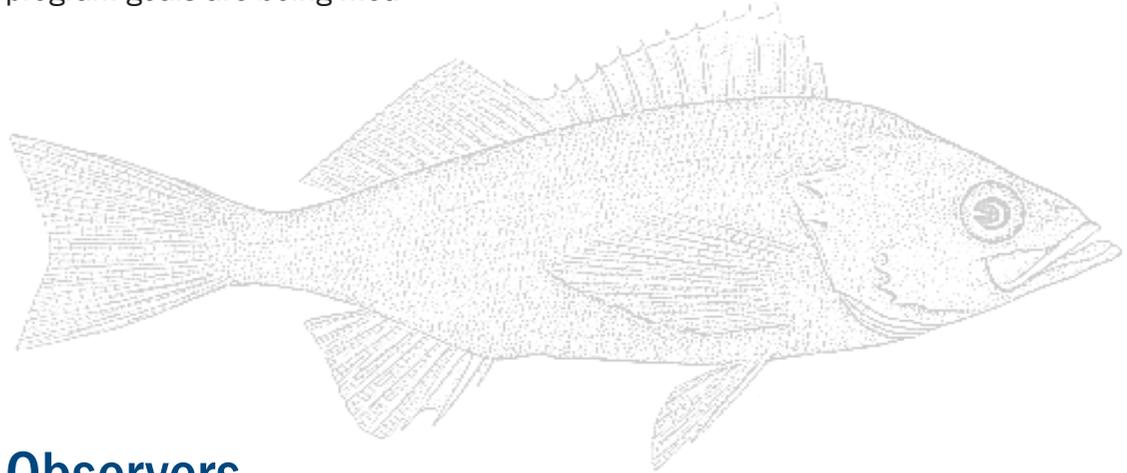
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Economic Data Collection

In order to monitor the economic aspects of the catch shares program, NOAA Fisheries reviews economic data from fishermen. Under the Economic Data Collection Program, catch shares participants first submitted baseline, pre-catch share data in 2011. In 2012, participants submitted data from the 2011 season. NOAA Fisheries will update the economic report annually to evaluate how well program goals are being met.



Observers

The West Coast Groundfish Observer Program continued with 100% observer coverage in the 2012 season. The observer program observed over 10,500 sea days, including about 8,500 days in the IFQ. Observers collect a suite of valuable fisheries data, such as fishing effort and location, retained and discarded catch estimates, species compositions, biological data and age structures, protected species interactions, and sighting information. The data informs fisheries managers and stock assessment scientists, as well as other fisheries researchers. Catch data also feeds the vessel accounting system to assist fishermen with quota management. Improvements to the database systems in 2012 allow a more rigorous review of the data and enhance data delivery to the vessel account system.



Left: WCGOP observer, photo supplied by Sean Sullivan

Cover: Pacific Ocean Perch, courtesy the Creative Commons