

AFS Policy Statement #31d:  
Management of Pacific Rockfish  
(Abbreviated)

**POLICY**

The American Fisheries Society (AFS) recognizes the need for conservative and robust management of Pacific rockfishes because of naturally low population growth, the overfished state of many of the stocks, and complex nature of the mixed-stock fisheries (60-plus species). The AFS recommends that catch information be collected on a species specific basis, and that management targets also be established on a species-specific basis including species taken as bycatch. Such management will require accurate studies of discards at sea. Reduction in rockfish discards should be a management priority in all fisheries which capture significant numbers of rockfish. The AFS further recommends establishment of adequate fishery independent surveys to more accurately assess and monitor rockfish stocks. The AFS supports the establishment of systems of Marine Protected Areas to protect the habitat of Pacific rockfish and to promote recovery of stocks. Such areas should be established along with traditional management measures to control fishing mortality. Regardless of the management strategy used, substantial decreases in fishing mortality must be achieved soon to avoid stock collapses. The AFS encourages its members to become involved by providing technical information needed for protection of rockfish to international, federal, state, and provincial policy makers so decisions are made on a scientific, rather than emotional or political, basis.

**A. Issue definition**

The Pacific rockfishes (genus *Sebastes*) comprise the core of the U.S. Pacific Coast bottom fish fishery. The genus consists of more than 100 species worldwide, with more than 60 found off the California, Oregon, and Washington coasts, more than 30 found further north in Canada and Alaska, and 28 in the Northwest Pacific. A closely related and commercially important genus, also commonly referred to as rockfish, is *Sebastes*, the thornyheads, containing three Pacific Coast species. The rockfish are an extremely successful group and are represented in every habitat from Mexico to the Aleutian Islands and from intertidal waters to depths greater than 1,500 m. Despite this diversity, the attributes they share make them extremely vulnerable to fishing pressure. Using AFS productivity criteria, rockfishes are classified in the very low productivity category. Species in this category cannot sustain high fishing mortality because their reproductive strategies limit them to relatively low intrinsic rates of increase. As part of the Society's objective to promote the conservation, development, and wise use of fisheries, this paper describes the interaction between the life history patterns of rockfish and fishing mortality, and recommends management actions to ensure stable rockfish populations for the future.