

Staff Summary for October 13-16, 2026

19. White Seabass Recreational Minimum Size Limit**Today's Item****Information** ☐**Action** ☒

Consider authorizing publication of notice of intent to amend regulations related to white seabass caught in the recreational fishery.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions

- Received Department overview of the White Seabass Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and 2021-2022 annual review report August 2023
- Commission referred white seabass fishery management review to the Marine Resources Committee (MRC) October 8-9, 2025
- Commission approved the MRC recommendation to request that the Department develop a proposed interim white seabass size limit for potential MRC recommendation in July April 15-16, 2026
- MRC vetting and recommendation March 12, 2026 and July 16, 2026; MRC
- **Today's notice hearing** **October 13-16, 2026**
- Discussion hearing December 15-16, 2026
- Adoption hearing February 10-11, 2027

Background

The Commission adopted an amended White seabass Fishery Management Plan (FMP) in 2002, which was developed by the Department. The FMP directs the management of White seabass with annual reviews conducted to identify any needed management or FMP changes, in accordance with Marine Life Management Act requirements. The Commission supported initiating a fishery management review for white seabass at the August 2023 Commission meeting, consistent with established priorities.

As part of the review, preliminary sampling data demonstrated to the Department that female white seabass may mature at a larger size than previously understood. This near-term management concern, along with the Department's white seabass fishery management review, was referred by the Commission to MRC in October 2025 to begin engagement with the Department and stakeholders. Further background on the recent review of the fishery, stakeholder outreach and dialogue, and MRC discussion can be found in Exhibit 6.

The recreational white seabass fishery is open year-round with a daily bag limit of three fish, except that only one fish may be taken in waters south of Point Conception between March 15 and June 15, a period that overlaps with the species' spawning season in the region. The current minimum size limit is 28 inches total length. The regulation setting the minimum size for white seabass (Section 28.35, Title 14, CCR) was last amended over 40 years ago, in 1984 based on limited maturity data and was intended to allow individual white seabass to spawn at least once before being taken.

Staff Summary for October 13-16, 2026

At its July 2026 meeting, MRC recommended that the Commission advance a rulemaking to increase the recreational white seabass fishery size limit to 35 inches with a corresponding increase in required fillet length. This 35-inch number is based on Department data indicating that 50% of female white seabass reach maturity at that length, meaning an increase of the minimum size to 35 inches would allow a larger proportion of the population to spawn before being potentially removed. Further background on the proposal and the white seabass fishery can be found in Exhibit 2 and the Department's presentation (Exhibit 5).

Today, the Commission may authorize publication of a notice of its intent to amend regulations regarding recreational white seabass to:

- Increase the minimum size limit from 28 inches to 35 inches total length (Section 28.35, Title 14, CCR)
- Increase the minimum fillet length from 19 to 23.5 inches (maintaining the current limit's 68% conversion factor relative to the minimum size limit) (Section 27.65, Title 14, CCR)

Significant Public Comments (N/A)

Recommendation

Commission staff: Authorize publication of a notice of intent to amend recreational white seabass size limit and fillet length regulations as recommended by MRC and the Department and identified in exhibits 2 and 3.

Committee: Authorize publication of a notice of intent to amend regulations as discussed at the July 2026 MRC and recommended by the Department.

Department: Authorize publication of a notice of intent to amend regulations as detailed in the initial statement of reasons (Exhibit 2).

Exhibits

1. [Department memo](#), received September 22, 2026
2. [Draft initial statement of reasons](#), dated August 24, 2026
3. [Draft proposed regulatory language](#)
4. [Draft economic and fiscal impact statement](#) (STD. 399)
5. [Department presentation](#)
6. [Staff summary and exhibits for Agenda Item 2](#), July 16, 2026 MRC meeting, related to white seabass management review (*for background purposes only*)

Motion

Moved by _____ and seconded by _____ that the Commission authorizes publication of a notice of its intent to amend sections 27.65 and 28.35, related to recreational white seabass size limits and fillet lengths.

MEMORANDUM

Date: September 15, 2026

To: Melissa Miller-Henson
Executive Director
California Fish and Game Commission

From: Meghan Hertel, Director

Subject: Submission of Initial Statement of Reasons for the October 13-16, 2026 California Fish and Game Commission Meeting, Amend Sections 27.65 and 28.35, Title 14, California Code of Regulations, Re: White Seabass Recreational Minimum Size Limit

Please find attached the Initial Statement of Reasons to amend sections 27.65 and 28.35, Title 14, California Code of Regulations. The proposed amendments increase the minimum size limit of recreationally caught white seabass from twenty-eight inches to thirty-five inches in total length. The amendments concurrently increase the minimum fillet length of white seabass from nineteen inches to twenty-three and one half inches in length. These amendments are necessary to provide white seabass the opportunity to spawn prior to harvest for the recreational fishery. Ensuring that approximately 50% of white seabass have reached maturity and had at least one spawning opportunity prior to capture will help to maintain recruitment, protect spawning stock biomass, support long-term population stability, and reduce the risk of overfishing.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Dr. Craig Shuman, Marine Regional Manager at R7RegionalMgr@wildlife.ca.gov. The Department of Fish and Wildlife point of contact for this rulemaking is Environmental Scientist, Miranda



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Haggerty, who can be contacted via email at
Miranda.Haggerty@wildlife.ca.gov.

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State of California
Fish and Game Commission
Initial Statement of Reasons for Regulatory Action

Amend Sections 27.65 and 28.35
Title 14, California Code of Regulations
Re: White Seabass Recreational Minimum Size Limit

I. Date of Initial Statement of Reasons: August 24, 2026

II. Dates and Locations of Scheduled Hearings

(a) Notice Hearing:

Date: October 13-16, 2026

Location: Sacramento

(b) Discussion Hearing:

Date: December 15-16, 2026

Location: Sacramento

(b) Adoption Hearing:

Date: February 10-11, 2027

Location: Sacramento

III. Description of Regulatory Action

(a) Statement of Specific Purpose of Regulatory Change and Factual Basis for Determining that Regulation Change is Reasonably Necessary

Unless otherwise specified, all section references in this document are to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR), “Department” refers to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and “Commission” refers to the California Fish and Game Commission.

The proposal amends subsections 27.65(a)(4) and 28.35(a) to increase the minimum size limit of white seabass and the corresponding fillet length.

Background

White seabass are large, highly prized members of the croaker family, found in waters off the west coasts of California and Mexico. White seabass are managed by the state under the White Seabass Fishery Management Plan (WSFMP), adopted by the Commission in 2002. The WSFMP requires annual monitoring and review of commercial and recreational sectors and the white seabass stock to prevent overfishing or other resource damage. The annual review includes fishery-dependent and fishery-independent data where available, documented changes within the social and economic structure of industries that utilize white seabass within California, information on the harvest of white seabass in Mexican waters, and other relevant data. The data are used to evaluate the status of white seabass relative to six “Points Of Concern” (POC) criteria adopted by the Commission through the WSFMP, to help determine when management measures are needed to address resource conservation issues. The most recent white seabass stock assessment, conducted in 2016, estimated the stock at ~27% of the unfished biomass (627 tons, optimum yield 600 tons) (Valero and Waterhouse 2016). It showed the spawning stock biomass declining after a

peak in the early 2000s and estimated that the population recovered in the mid-2000s from historic lows but subsequently declined in the 2010s (Figure 1). These population trends can be seen corresponding with steadily diminishing landings (Figure 2). It is important to note that this is after Proposition 132 that went into effect in 1994, which banned gill netting in all nearshore waters which is possible explanation for rebound in population and rapid rise in the 2000s. Peer review of the stock assessment identified the importance of updating the size at maturity estimates from the very small sample size of 33 female white seabass conducted by Frances Clark in 1930. In response, beginning in 2016, the Department, in collaboration with Pflieger Institute of Environmental Research (PIER) conducted a white seabass maturity study using histology and a greatly increased sample size ($n = 304$). Results of this study found the size at maturity for female white seabass is substantially larger than the current 28-inch minimum size limit for the commercial and recreational fisheries, with female white seabass reaching 50% maturity at 35 inches (in total length (TL) and 95% maturity at 38 in (Figure 3). These results confirm that the current minimum size limit is allowing for immature females to be harvested prior to having the opportunity to spawn, which could have negative implications for the long-term sustainability of the stock. New biological information is a POC trigger in the WSFMP, as it is now known that white seabass mature seven inches larger than the minimum size limit of 28 in. The WSFMP, developed under the Marine Life Management Act (MLMA), does not require a fixed minimum size limit at the size where 50% of the population is mature (L_{50}). However, the WSFMP recommends and expects the use of maturity data, including L_{50} or similar thresholds, as part of science-based, sustainable fisheries management.

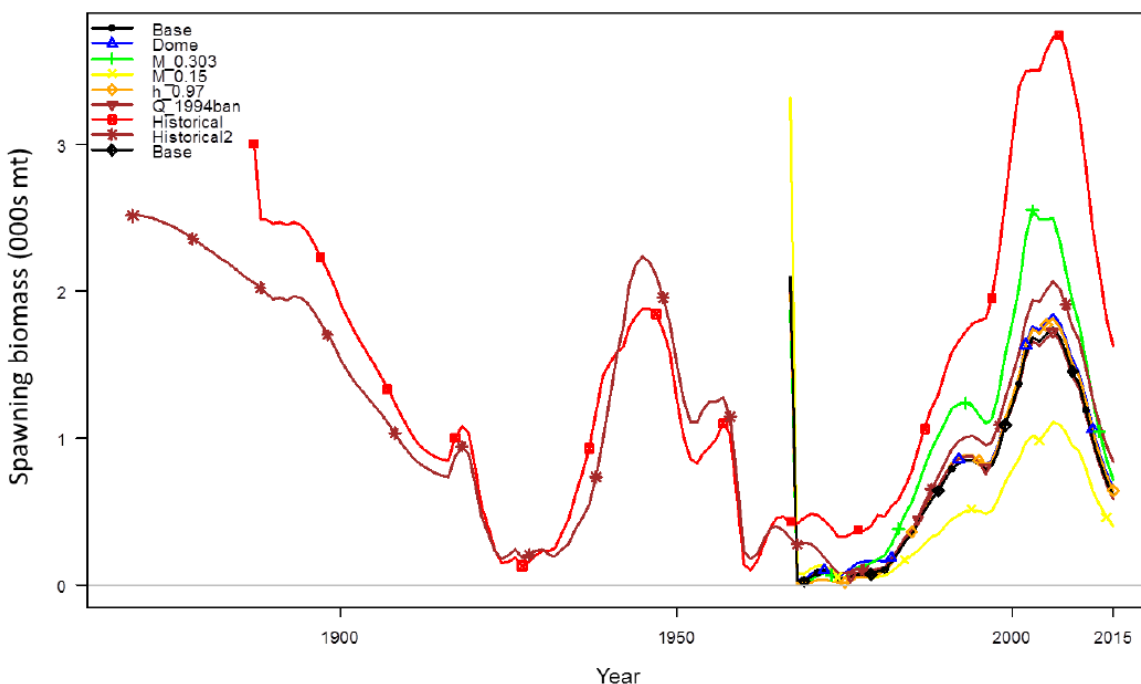


Figure 1. White seabass spawning stock biomass from 2016 stock assessment (Valero and Waterhouse 2016)

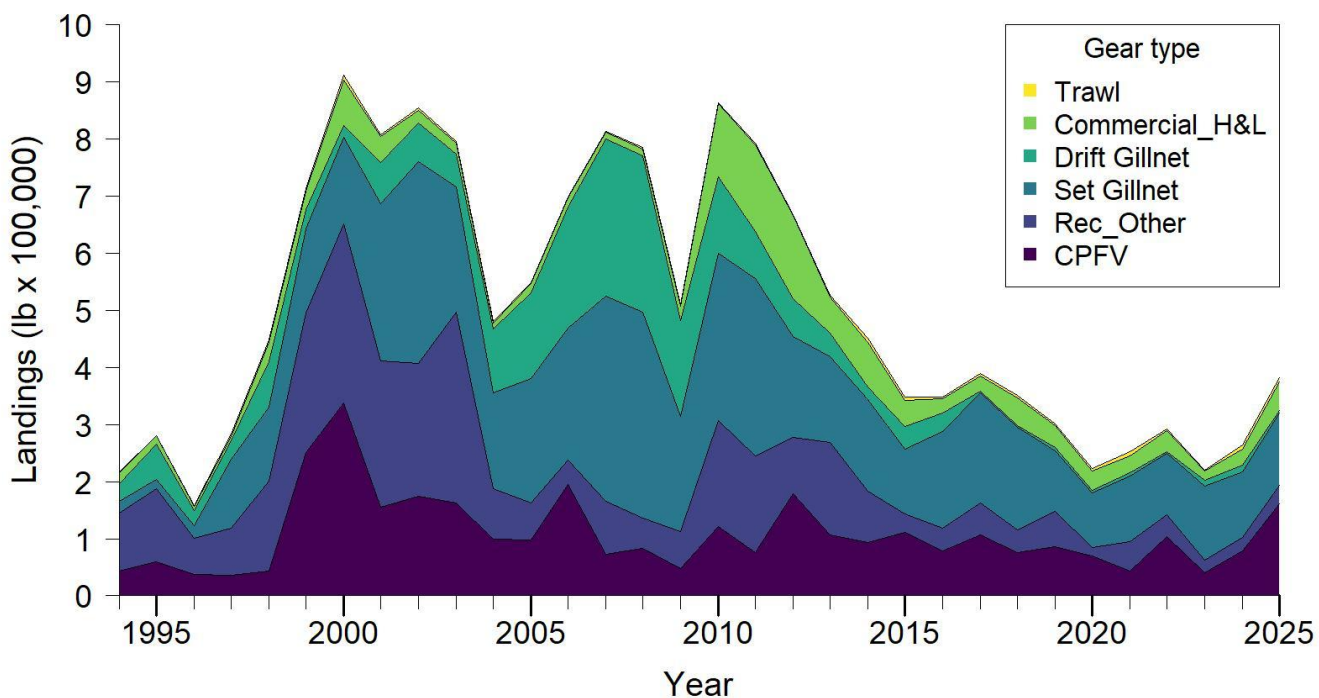


Figure 2. White seabass landings in pounds from 1994-2025 by gear type. It is important to note that this is after Proposition 132 that went into effect in 1994, which banned gill netting in all nearshore waters, which is a possible explanation for the rebound seen in the population and rapid rise in landings in the 2000s.

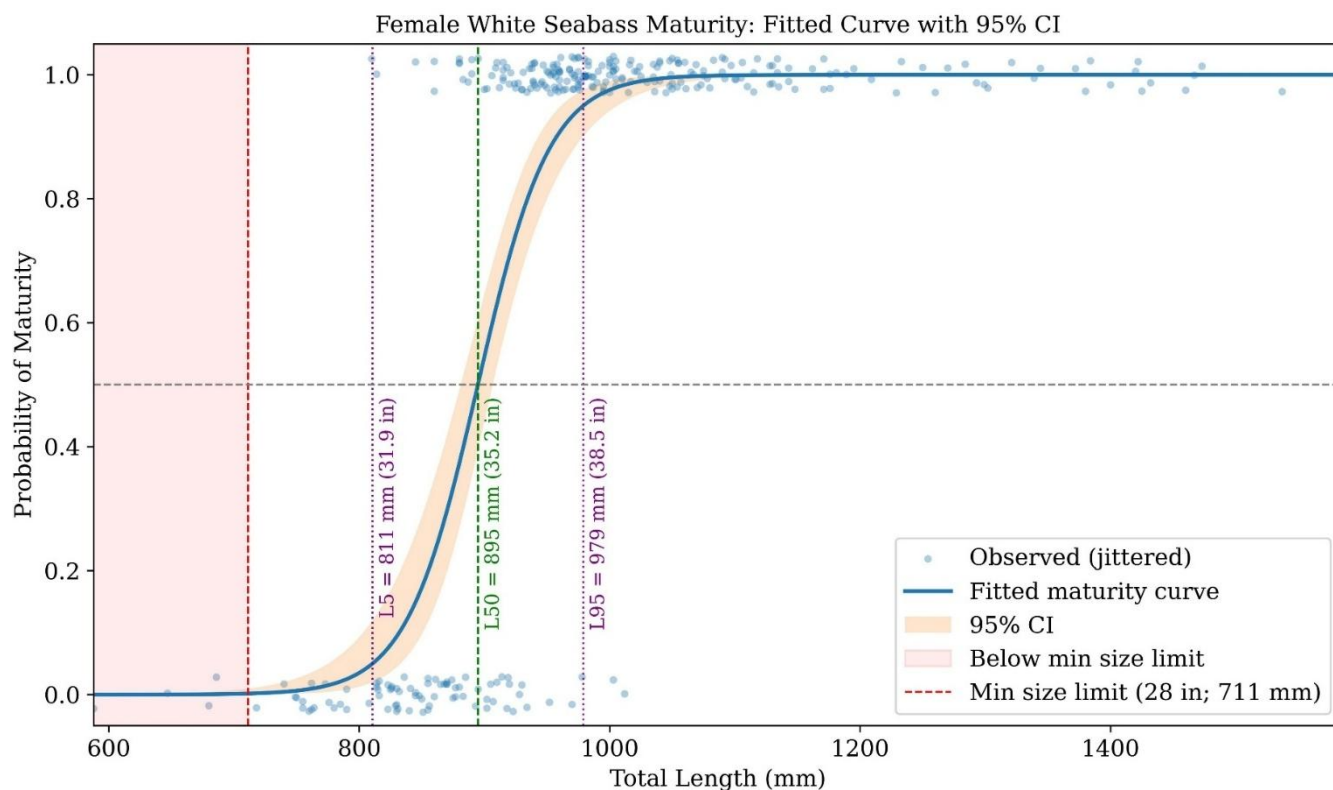


Figure 3. Logistic maturity ogive (blue line) with 95% confidence band (shaded) for female white seabass. Blue points show observed maturity status (jittered for visibility). The vertical green dashed line marks $L_{50} = 895 \text{ mm (35.2 in)}$ TL (95% CI: 883-907 mm). The vertical red dashed line denotes the current minimum size limit (711 mm) (28 in), and the red shaded region indicates fish below that limit. Purple dotted lines indicate $L_5 = 811 \text{ mm (31.9 in)}$ TL and $L_{95} = 979 \text{ mm (38.5 in)}$ TL. The horizontal dashed line marks 50% probability of maturity.

The proportion of immature white seabass varies greatly between the recreational and commercial fishing sectors, with the recreational fleet catching a much larger proportion of white seabass before the opportunity to spawn. Measured recreational catch from the past five years is comprised of approximately 37% under 38 in TL or 95% maturity, 16% less than 35 in and 5% of the catch under 32 in or 5% maturity (Figure 4). Whereas the measured commercial catch from the past five years is approximately 11% under 38 in TL or 95% maturity, 2.5% of the catch is less than 35 in and .5% of the catch is under 32 in or 5% maturity (Figure 5). These length distributions indicate the commercial white seabass fishery is primarily targeting larger, sexually mature individuals and an increased minimum size limit for the recreational sector is warranted to give white seabass increased spawning opportunity. The commercial size limit is described in Fish and Game Code Section 8383.5 and cannot be changed immediately, but will be addressed when the WSFMP is amended to bring the commercial and recreational sectors consistent with each other.

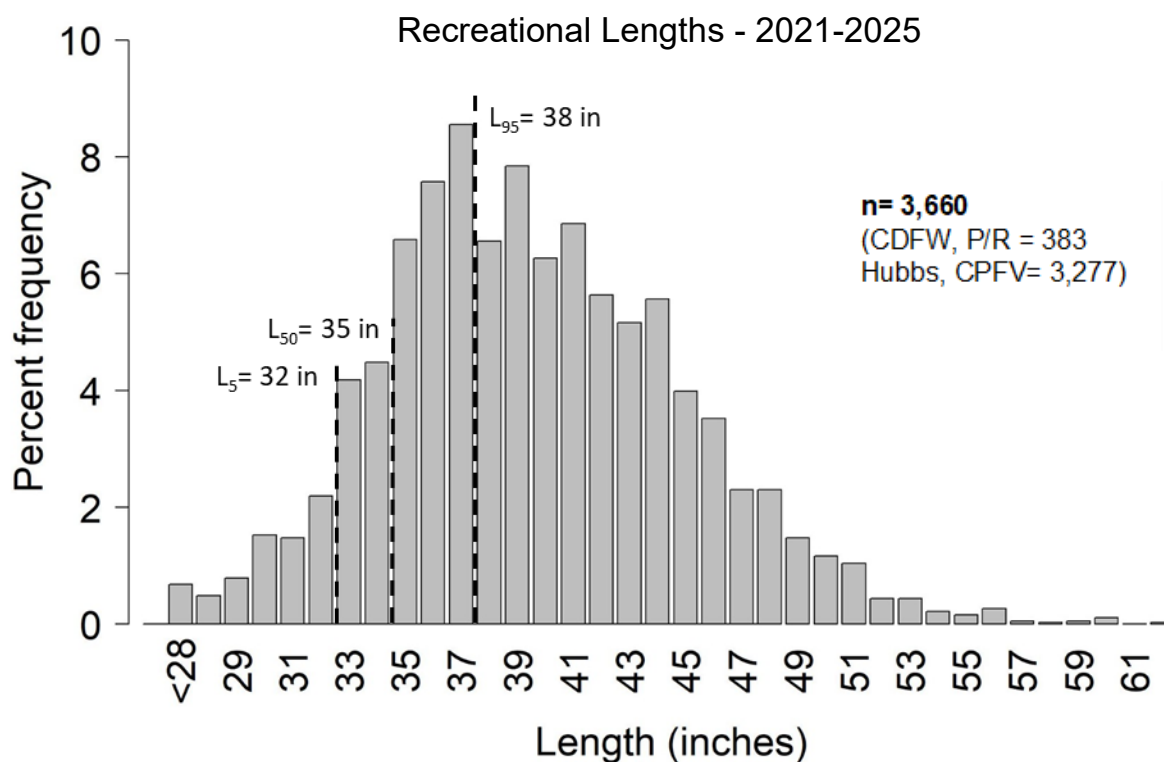


Figure 4. Size frequency of measured white seabass from recreational catch 2021-2025. The dashed lines at L5, L50 and L95 illustrate the proportion of the catch at each corresponding size limit (5% maturity= 32 in, 50% maturity = 35 in, 95% maturity = 38 in).

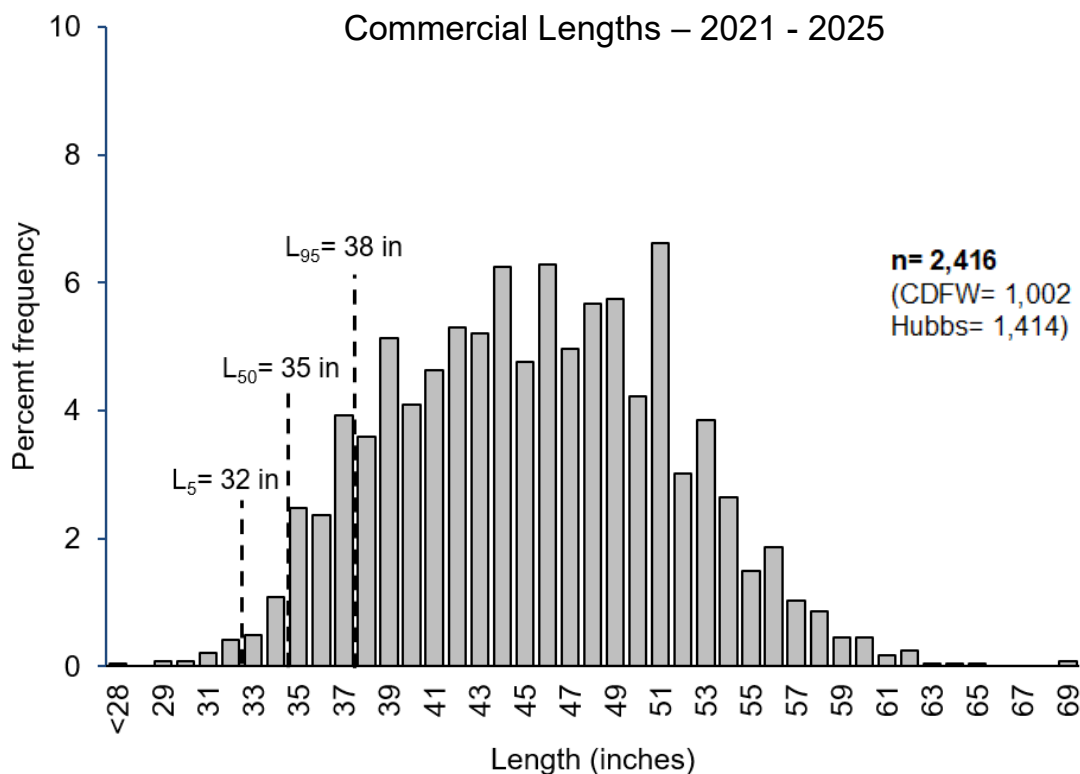


Figure 5. Size frequency of measured white seabass from commercial catch 2021-2025. The dashed lines at L5, L50 and L95 illustrate the proportion of the catch at each corresponding size limit (5% maturity= 32 in, 50% maturity = 35 in, 95% maturity = 38 in.).

Current Regulations

Current recreational laws governing white seabass are as follows:

Section 28.35 defines a minimum size limit, season and bag limit for white seabass. Current laws specify that the minimum size limit is 28 in total length or 20.5 in alternate length. The season specifies it is open all year and the bag limit is three, except that only one fish may be taken in waters south of Pt. Conception between March 15 and June 15.

Section 27.65 (a)(4) defines white seabass fillets must be a minimum of 19 in in length. Each fillet shall bear intact a one-inch square patch of silver skin.

Proposed Regulations

The proposed changes to sections 27.65 and 28.35 have been developed to increase the minimum size limit to allow a proportion of the white seabass stock the opportunity to spawn before being caught in the recreational fishery.

Subsection 27.65(a)(4) is proposed to update the corresponding fillet length with the increased minimum size limit. Subsection 28.35 (a) is proposed to increase the minimum size limit from 28 in total length to 35 in total length, the size at which white seabass reach 50% maturity.

No changes are proposed for subsection 28.35(b) or 28.35(c) describing the fishing season and bag limits for white seabass.

Amend subsection 27.65(b)(4)

The proposed regulation increases the minimum fillet length of white seabass from 19 in to 23.5 in in length. This is updated using a conversion factor from the current minimum size and fillet length regulation ($TL=0.68$). This change is necessary to reflect the amendments to minimum size in subsection 28.35(a).

Amend subsection 28.35(a)

The proposed regulation increases the minimum size of white seabass from 28 in to 35 in in total length. This change is necessary to allow a proportion of the white seabass stock the opportunity to spawn before being removed from the population, as results from the updated size at maturity study found white seabass reach 50% maturity at 35 in. The “or twenty and one-half inches alternate length” language is proposed to be removed through a separate rulemaking package titled “Sport Fishing 2026 (Inland and Marine)”, OAL Filing ID # 2026-0917-06S. This removal of the regulatory language is consistent with the goals of these amendments.

(b) Goals and Benefits of the Regulation

The policy of this state is “to ensure the conservation, sustainable use, and, where feasible, restoration of California’s marine living resources for the benefit of all the citizens of the State” (Fish and Game Code Section 7050(b)). Additionally, the MLMA is intended to ensure the conservation, sustainable use, and restoration of California’s marine living resources. The revised regulations would provide white seabass the opportunity to spawn prior to harvest for the recreational fishery. A minimum size limit of 35 in total length ensures that approximately 50% of white seabass will have reached maturity and had at least one spawning opportunity prior to capture. Ensuring that a large fraction of the population has at least one spawning opportunity will help to maintain recruitment, protect spawning stock biomass, support long-term population stability, and reduce the potential risk of overfishing. These efforts are intended to strengthen management, improve resilience of the stock, and ensure transparent, science-based decision making.

(c) Authority and Reference Sections from Fish and Game Code for Regulation

27.65

Authority cited: Sections 200, 205, 265, 313, 5508 and 5509, Fish and Game Code.

Reference: Sections 200, 205, 265, 313, 399, 5508 and 5509, Fish and Game Code.

28.25

Authority cited: Sections 200, 255, and 265, Fish and Game Code.

Reference: Sections 200, 205, 255, and 265, Fish and Game Code.

(d) Specific Technology or Equipment Required by Regulatory Change: None

(e) Identification of Reports or Documents Supporting Regulation Change

In Prep at California Fish and Wildlife Journal – Lesyna, K., Haggerty, M., Sepulveda, C., Chow, B., Lescht-Smith, S., Barilotti, A., Kileen, H., Aalbers, S. 2026. Maturity of White Seabass in California Waters.

California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2018. California Marine Life Management Act Master Plan.

California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG). 2002. Final White Seabass Fishery Management Plan.

Valero J and L Waterhouse. 2016. Stock assessment of White Seabass in 2016.

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). 2020. White Seabass, Atractoscion nobilis, Enhanced Status Report.

WSSCAP Report California Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2024. White Seabass Fishery Management Plan 2022-2023 Annual Review.

(f) Public Discussions of Proposed Regulations Prior to Notice Publication

- Three public stakeholder meetings (November 18, 2025, March 4, 2026, May 12, 2026)

- March 12, 2026, Fish and Game Commission, Marine Resources Committee meeting, Sacramento
- July 16, 2026, Fish and Game Commission, Marine Resources Committee meeting, Sacramento

IV. Description of Reasonable Alternatives to Regulatory Action

(a) Alternatives to Regulation Change

No alternatives to changes to sections 27.65 and 28.35 were identified. An alternative to the minimum size included a bag limit reduction which was presented to the Commission during the July 16, 2026, Marine Resources Committee meeting. However, based on the knowledge that white seabass are immature at the current minimum size limit, this alternative was determined to be ineffective as reducing the number of fish caught does not increase spawning.

(b) No Change Alternative

Without the proposed changes, the outstanding issue concerning the regulations allowing immature white seabass to be captured prior any spawning opportunity would remain unaddressed.

V. Mitigation Measures Required by Regulatory Action

The proposed regulatory action will have no negative impact on the environment; therefore, no mitigation measures are needed.

VI. Impact of Regulatory Action

The potential for significant statewide economic impacts that might result from the proposed regulatory action has been assessed, and the following initial determinations relative to the required statutory categories have been made:

(a) Significant Statewide Adverse Economic Impact Directly Affecting Businesses, Including the Ability of California Businesses to Compete with Businesses in Other States

The Commission does not anticipate statewide adverse economic impacts that would affect businesses and impair their ability to compete with businesses in other states. While the Commission anticipates that some Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessels (CPFVs) may face direct impacts from anglers shifting their effort to other species as a result of the proposed minimum length for white seabass, the majority of offshore CPFV trips result in kept fish that are generally above the proposed 35-inch minimum, as shown in Figure 4, which shows the percent frequency of recreational landings of white seabass by length.

(b) Impact on the Creation or Elimination of Jobs Within the State, the Creation of New Businesses or the Elimination of Existing Businesses, or the Expansion of Businesses in California; Benefits of the Regulation to the Health and Welfare of California Residents, Worker Safety, and the State's Environment

The Commission does not anticipate any impacts related to the creation or elimination of

jobs within the state, the creation or elimination of new businesses within the state, the expansion of businesses within the state, the health and welfare of the state's residents, or worker safety. The proposed regulation will benefit the state's environment by ensuring that approximately 50% of white seabass have at least one spawning opportunity, which will help to maintain recruitment, protect spawning stock biomass, support long-term population stability, and reduce the potential risk of overfishing. Additionally, the regulation would allow the population to recover, maintain and enhance the marine environment generally by assuring marine biodiversity, and maintain an essential part of the marine ecosystem.

(c) Cost Impacts on a Representative Private Person or Business:

It is anticipated that the primary economic impact of the regulation will be on CPFV businesses that target white seabass. As calculated in answer 1 of Section A of the Economic Impact Statement in the STD 399 Addendum, applying the 150.7 lost trip days to the IOPAC multipliers yields an estimated loss of \$136,039.97 in economic output in the CPFV industry, an estimated loss of \$60,730.15 in employee wages and proprietor earnings, and what is essentially no losses in employment (0.81781 lost jobs). This results in losses of approximately \$1,203.89 in economic output and \$537.43 in lost income per vessel when divided among the 113 CPFV vessels that target white seabass.

It must be noted that the results from the IOPAC model do not account for anglers being able to target other high value species, such as California halibut and yellowtail, while aboard a CPFV on a fishing trip, and so should be considered an overestimation of the potential economic impacts.

(d) Costs or Savings to State Agencies or Costs/Savings in Federal Funding to the State:

The Commission does not anticipate any costs or savings to State Agencies or to Federal Funding to the State as a result of the proposed regulations. Enforcement of the proposed minimum size for white seabass will fold into the existing duties and budget for the Department.

(e) Nondiscretionary Costs/Savings to Local Agencies: None

(f) Programs Mandated on Local Agencies or School Districts: None

(g) Costs Imposed on Any Local Agency or School District that is Required to be Reimbursed Under Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4, Government Code: None

(h) Effect on Housing Costs: None

VII. Economic Impact Assessment

(a) Effects of the Regulation on the Creation or Elimination of Jobs Within the State

The Commission does not anticipate any effects from the proposed regulation on the creation or elimination of jobs within the state, as the proposed size limit for white seabass is not expected to significantly reduce effort based on the historical recreational catch (see Figure 4). Additionally, the ability of recreational anglers to target other species, such as

California halibut or yellowtail, should ensure that the level of economic activity in this sector remains relatively stable if the proposed regulations are enacted.

(b) Effects of the Regulation on the Creation of New Businesses or the Elimination of Existing Businesses Within the State

The Commission does not anticipate any effects from the proposed regulation on the creation of new businesses or the elimination of existing businesses within the state, as the proposed size limit for white seabass is not expected to significantly reduce effort based on the historical recreational catch (see Figure 4). Additionally, the ability of recreational anglers to target other species, such as California halibut or yellowtail, should ensure that the level of economic activity in this sector remains relatively stable if the proposed regulations are enacted.

(c) Effects of the Regulation on the Expansion of Businesses Currently Doing Business Within the State

The Commission does not anticipate any effects from the proposed regulation on the expansion of existing businesses within the state, as the proposed size limit for white seabass is not expected to significantly reduce effort based on the historical recreational catch (see Figure 4). Additionally, the ability of recreational anglers to target other species, such as California halibut or yellowtail, should ensure that the level of economic activity in this sector remains relatively stable if the proposed regulations are enacted.

(d) Benefits of the Regulation to the Health and Welfare of California Residents

The Commission does not anticipate impacts on the health and welfare of California residents.

(e) Benefits of the Regulation to Worker Safety

None.

(f) Benefits of the Regulation to the State's Environment

White seabass supports active commercial and recreational fisheries in southern and central California as well as non-consumptive ocean uses such as recreational diving. The proposed regulation will ensure that approximately 50% of white seabass will have at least one spawning opportunity and will help to maintain recruitment, protect spawning stock biomass, support long-term population stability, and reduce the potential risk of overfishing. Additionally, the regulation would allow the population to recover, and help maintain an essential part of the marine ecosystem; thereby enhancing the marine environment generally by assuring marine biodiversity.

Informative Digest/Policy Statement Overview

Unless otherwise specified, all section references in this document are to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR), “Department” refers to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and “Commission” refers to the California Fish and Game Commission.

Current Regulations

White seabass are large, highly prized members of the croaker family, found in waters off the west coasts of California and Mexico. The species supports active commercial and recreational fisheries in southern and central California, as well as non-consumptive ocean uses such as recreational diving. White seabass are managed under the White Seabass Fishery Management Plan (WSFMP), adopted by the Commission in 2002. The WSFMP requires annual monitoring and review of the commercial and recreational fisheries and white seabass stock to prevent overfishing or other resource damage. The annual review includes fishery-dependent and fishery-independent data where available, documented changes within the social and economic structure of industries that utilize white seabass within California, information on the harvest of white seabass in Mexican waters, and other relevant data. The most recent white seabass stock assessment showed a decline in spawning stock biomass, and this data corresponds with steadily diminishing landings. Subsequent studies, in collaboration with the Department, found that the size at maturity for female white seabass is substantially larger than the current 28-inch minimum size limit for the commercial and recreational fisheries, with female white seabass reaching 50% maturity at 35 inches total length. These results confirm that the current minimum size limit is allowing for immature females to be harvested prior to the opportunity to spawn, which could have negative implications for the long-term sustainability of the stock. New biological information is a Point of Concern trigger in the WSFMP, as it is now known that white seabass mature seven inches larger than the minimum size limit of 28 inches.

The proposed project would amend sections 27.65 and 28.35 to increase the minimum size limit to allow a proportion of white seabass stock the opportunity to spawn before being caught in the recreational fishery, and update the corresponding fillet length with the increased minimum size limit. The increase in the minimum size limit to 35 inches total length ensures that approximately 50% of white seabass will have reached maturity and had at least one spawning opportunity prior to capture. Ensuring that a large fraction of the population has at least one spawning opportunity will help to maintain recruitment, protect spawning stock biomass, support long-term population stability, and reduce the risk of overfishing. These efforts are intended to strengthen management, improve resilience of the stock, and ensure transparent, science-based decision making.

Current laws governing white seabass are as follows:

- Section 27.65 (a)(4) defines white seabass fillets must be a minimum of 19 inches in length. Each fillet shall bear intact a one-inch square patch of silver skin.
- Section 28.35 defines a minimum size limit, season and bag limit for white seabass. Current laws specify that the minimum size limit is 28 inches total length or 20.5 inches alternate length. The season specifies it is open all year and the bag limit is three,

except that only one fish may be taken in waters south of Pt. Conception between March 15 and June 15

Proposed Changes

The Department recommends that the Commission amend subsections 27.65(a)(4) and 28.35(a) to increase the minimum size limit of white seabass and the corresponding fillet length.

Specifically, the proposed changes are as follows:

- Subsection 27.65(b)(4) is proposed to be amended to increase the minimum fillet length from 19 to 23.5 inches.
- Subsection 28.35(a) is proposed to be amended to increase the minimum size limit from 28 to 35 inches.

Benefit of the Regulations:

The policy of this state is “to ensure the conservation, sustainable use, and, where feasible, restoration of California’s marine living resources for the benefit of all the citizens of the State” (Fish and Game Code Section 7050(b)). Additionally, the Marine Life Management Act is intended to ensure the conservation, sustainable use, and restoration of California’s marine living resources. The revised regulations would provide white seabass the opportunity to spawn prior to harvest for the recreational fishery. A minimum size limit of 35 inches total length ensures that approximately 50% of white seabass will have reached maturity and have at least one spawning opportunity prior to capture. Ensuring that a large fraction of the population has at least one spawning opportunity will help to maintain recruitment, protect spawning stock biomass, support long-term population stability, and reduce the risk of overfishing.

Consistency and Compatibility with Existing Regulations:

The proposed regulations are neither inconsistent nor incompatible with existing state regulations. Section 20, Article IV, of the state Constitution specifies that the California State Legislature (Legislature) may delegate to the Commission such powers relating to the protection and propagation of fish and game as the Legislature sees fit. The Legislature has delegated to the Commission to promulgate recreational fishing regulations (California Fish and Game Code sections 200 and 205). Commission staff has searched the CCR and has found no other state regulations that address the recreational take of white seabass. The Commission has reviewed its own regulations and finds that the proposed regulations are neither inconsistent nor incompatible with existing state regulations. The Commission has reviewed its own regulations and finds that the proposed regulations are consistent with other recreational fishing regulations in Title 14, CCR, and therefore finds that the proposed regulations are neither inconsistent nor incompatible with existing state regulations. The Commission has searched the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) and, pursuant to California Government Code Section 11346.2(b)(6), has determined that the proposed regulations avoid unnecessary duplication and do not conflict with federal regulations contained in the CFR.

Proposed Regulatory Text

Section 27.65, Title 14, CCR is amended as follows:

§ 27.65. Filleting of Fish on Vessels.

(a) Definition of Fillet: For the purpose of this section a fillet is the flesh from one side of a fish extending from the head to the tail which has been removed from the body (head, tail and backbone) in a single continuous piece.

(b) Fish That May be Filleted: No person shall fillet on any boat or bring ashore as fillets any fish, except in accordance with the following requirements:

(1) Kelp bass, barred sand bass, and spotted sand bass: All fillets shall be a minimum of seven and one half inches in length. Each fillet shall bear intact a one-inch square patch of skin.

(2) Barracuda: Fillets must be a minimum of 17 inches in length. Each fillet shall bear intact a one-inch square patch of silver skin.

(3) Lingcod. Lingcod fillets must be a minimum of 14 inches in length. Fillets must have the entire skin attached. The minimum size and minimum fillet size for lingcod may be changed during the year or in-season by the department under the authority of subsection 27.20(e). See subsection 27.20(f) for additional information.

(4) White sea bass: Fillets must be a minimum of ~~19~~23.5 inches in length. Each fillet shall bear intact a one-inch square patch of silver skin.

(5) Pacific bonito: No more than 10 fillets of any length may be possessed. All bonito fillets possessed shall be considered a part of the allowable undersized tolerance of five bonito per day less than 24 inches fork length or weighing less than five pounds as provided in Section 28.32 of these regulations. All fillets shall bear intact a one-inch square patch of skin.

(6) California halibut taken from or possessed aboard a vessel south of Point Arena (Mendocino County): Fillets must be a minimum of 16 and three-quarter inches in length and shall bear the entire skin intact. A fillet from a California halibut (flesh from one entire side of the fish with the entire skin intact) may not be cut in half fillets. However, a fillet may be cut lengthwise in a straight line along the midline of the fillet where the fillet was attached to the vertebra (backbone) of the fish only if the two pieces of a fillet remain joined along their midline for a length of at least two inches at one end of the fillet.

(7) Yellowtail: Fillets must be a minimum of 17 inches in length, except not more than 10 fillets may be less than 17 inches. Each fillet shall bear intact a one-inch square patch of skin.

(8) Rockfish, cabezon, and greenlings of the genus *Hexagrammos*: Fillets must have the entire skin attached. The minimum size and minimum fillet size for rockfish,

cabazon, and greenlings of the genus *Hexagrammos* may be changed during the year or in-season by the department under the authority of subsection 27.20(e). See subsection 27.20(f) for additional information.

(9) California scorpionfish (commonly termed “sculpin”): Fillets must have the entire skin attached. The minimum size and minimum fillet size for California scorpionfish may be changed during the year or in-season by the department under the authority of subsection 27.20(e). See subsection 27.20(f) for additional information.

(10) Ocean whitefish: Fillets must be a minimum of 6 and one half inches in length and shall bear the entire skin intact.

(11) For all species of tuna filleted on any boat or brought ashore as fillets south of a line running due west true from Point Conception, Santa Barbara County (34° 27' N. lat.) each fish must be individually bagged as follows:

(A) The bag must be marked with the species' common name.

(B) The fish must be cut into six pieces with all skin attached. These pieces are the four loins, the collar removed as one piece with both pectoral fins attached and intact, and the belly fillet cut to include the vent and with both pelvic fins attached and intact.

(12) California sheephead: Fillets must be a minimum of 6 and three-quarter inches in length and shall bear the entire skin intact.

(13) All other species except those listed in subsection (c) of this section: Each fillet shall bear intact a one-inch square patch of skin. The fillets may be of any size.

(c) Fish That May Not be Filleted, Steaked or Chunked: No person shall fillet, steak or cut into chunks on any boat or bring ashore as fillets, steaks or chunks the following: any species with a size limit unless a fillet size is otherwise specified in these regulations. California halibut may be filleted or brought ashore as fillets south of Point Arena (Mendocino County).

NOTE: Authority cited: Sections 200, 205, 265, 313, 5508 and 5509, Fish and Game Code.

Reference: Sections 200, 205, 265, 313, 399, 5508 and 5509, Fish and Game Code.

Proposed Regulatory Text

Section 28.35, Title 14, CCR is amended as follows:

§ 28.35. White Seabass.

(a) Minimum size: ~~Twenty-eight~~ Thirty-five inches total length ~~or twenty and one-half inches alternate length.*~~

(b) Season: Open all year.

(c) Limit: Three, except that only one fish may be taken in waters south of Pt. Conception between March 15 and June 15.

NOTE: Authority cited: Sections 200, 255 and 265, Fish and Game Code.

Reference: Sections 200, 205, 255 and 265, Fish and Game Code.

*Language to be removed as part of the Sport Fishing 2026 (Inland and Marine) rulemaking package [OAL #2026-0917-06S], submitted 9/17/2026, effective January 1, 2027.

**ECONOMIC AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT
(REGULATIONS AND ORDERS)**

STD. 399 (Rev. 10/2019)

DRAFT DOCUMENT

ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

DEPARTMENT NAME California Fish and Game Commission	CONTACT PERSON Gabe Lopez	EMAIL ADDRESS fgc@fgc.ca.gov	TELEPHONE NUMBER 916-737-4862
DESCRIPTIVE TITLE FROM NOTICE REGISTER OR FORM 400 Amnd. Sec. 27.65, 28.35, T14, CCR re: White Seabass Recreational Minimum Size Limit (WSB)			NOTICE FILE NUMBER Z

A. ESTIMATED PRIVATE SECTOR COST IMPACTS *Include calculations and assumptions in the rulemaking record.*

1. Check the appropriate box(es) below to indicate whether this regulation:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☒ a. Impacts business and/or employees | ☐ e. Imposes reporting requirements |
| ☒ b. Impacts small businesses | ☐ f. Imposes prescriptive instead of performance |
| ☐ c. Impacts jobs or occupations | ☒ g. Impacts individuals |
| ☐ d. Impacts California competitiveness | ☐ h. None of the above (Explain below): |

*If any box in Items 1 a through g is checked, complete this Economic Impact Statement.**If box in Item 1.h. is checked, complete the Fiscal Impact Statement as appropriate.*

2. The **California Fish and Game Commission** estimates that the economic impact of this regulation (which includes the fiscal impact) is:
(Agency/Department)

- ☐ Below \$10 million
- ☐ Between \$10 and \$25 million
- ☐ Between \$25 and \$50 million
- ☐ Over \$50 million *[If the economic impact is over \$50 million, agencies are required to submit a [Standardized Regulatory Impact Assessment](#) as specified in Government Code Section 11346.3(c)]*

3. Enter the total number of businesses impacted: ~113Describe the types of businesses (Include nonprofits): Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessels (CPFVs)Enter the number or percentage of total businesses impacted that are small businesses: 100%4. Enter the number of businesses that will be created: 0 eliminated: 0Explain: Anglers are unlikely to significantly shift targeting behavior, as the majority of caught WSB are >35 in. See addend.

5. Indicate the geographic extent of impacts: ☒ Statewide

☒ Local or regional (List areas): Statewide but most fishing is in Southern CA.

6. Enter the number of jobs created: 0 and eliminated: 0

Describe the types of jobs or occupations impacted: Unlikely to impact those who own or work as deckhands on CPFVs,
as recreational anglers will likely shift effort to other species such as halibut, if they shift at all given that most caught white seabass are > 35 in. See addend.

7. Will the regulation affect the ability of California businesses to compete with other states by making it more costly to produce goods or services here? ☐ YES ☒ NO

If YES, explain briefly:

**ECONOMIC AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT
(REGULATIONS AND ORDERS)**

STD. 399 (Rev. 10/2019)

DRAFT DOCUMENT

ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT (CONTINUED)**B. ESTIMATED COSTS** *Include calculations and assumptions in the rulemaking record.*

1. What are the total statewide dollar costs that businesses and individuals may incur to comply with this regulation over its lifetime? \$ 136,040/year
- a. Initial costs for a small business: \$ 1,203.89 Annual ongoing costs: \$ 1,203.89 Years: 3
- b. Initial costs for a typical business: \$ 1,203.89 Annual ongoing costs: \$ 1,203.89 Years: 3
- c. Initial costs for an individual: \$ 0 Annual ongoing costs: \$ 0 Years: 3
- d. Describe other economic costs that may occur: Total cumulative losses over three years is approximately \$408,120; however, the NOAA model that measures the economic effects for recreational fishing doesn't account for substitution of species, such as halibut or yellowtail. See addendum.
2. If multiple industries are impacted, enter the share of total costs for each industry: Only CPFV industry is impacted by the proposed regulations.
3. If the regulation imposes reporting requirements, enter the annual costs a typical business may incur to comply with these requirements. Include the dollar costs to do programming, record keeping, reporting, and other paperwork, whether or not the paperwork must be submitted. \$ 0
4. Will this regulation directly impact housing costs? ☐ YES ☒ NO
If YES, enter the annual dollar cost per housing unit: \$ _____
Number of units: _____
5. Are there comparable Federal regulations? ☐ YES ☒ NO

Explain the need for State regulation given the existence or absence of Federal regulations: White seabass is a state managed species managed under the White Seabass Fishery Management Plan and there are no federal regulations.

Enter any additional costs to businesses and/or individuals that may be due to State - Federal differences: \$ 0

C. ESTIMATED BENEFITS *Estimation of the dollar value of benefits is not specifically required by rulemaking law, but encouraged.*

1. Briefly summarize the benefits of the regulation, which may include among others, the health and welfare of California residents, worker safety and the State's environment: Fish and Game Code Section 1700 establishes the State's policy to encourage the conservation, maintenance, and utilization of fish resources for the benefit of the state's citizens. Objectives of this policy include, but are not limited to, maintenance of populations of sport fish to ensure their continued existence and supporting recreational opportunity. If successful, these regulations could increase fishing opportunity by allowing white seabass to increase likelihood of spawning.
2. Are the benefits the result of: ☐ specific statutory requirements, or ☒ goals developed by the agency based on broad statutory authority?
Explain: Fish and Game Code Section 1700 encourages the conservation of fish and wildlife resources for the state.
3. What are the total statewide benefits from this regulation over its lifetime? \$ N/A
4. Briefly describe any expansion of businesses currently doing business within the State of California that would result from this regulation: None. The goals of the regulation are to encourage white seabass spawning through an increase in the minimum length of take, which should ensure a greater spawning chance. This will take time, and in the immediate future will not produce an increase in fishing opportunity that would subsequently allow CPFV businesses to expand.

D. ALTERNATIVES TO THE REGULATION *Include calculations and assumptions in the rulemaking record. Estimation of the dollar value of benefits is not specifically required by rulemaking law, but encouraged.*

1. List alternatives considered and describe them below. If no alternatives were considered, explain why not: No alternatives were identified to be considered. An alternative to the minimum size that included a bag reduction was presented to the Commission but was determined to not meet the goal of increased spawning.

**ECONOMIC AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT
(REGULATIONS AND ORDERS)**

STD. 399 (Rev. 10/2019)

DRAFT DOCUMENT

ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT (CONTINUED)

2. Summarize the total statewide costs and benefits from this regulation and each alternative considered:

Regulation: Benefit: \$ N/A Cost: \$ 136,040/yearAlternative 1: Benefit: \$ NA Cost: \$ NAAlternative 2: Benefit: \$ NA Cost: \$ NA

3. Briefly discuss any quantification issues that are relevant to a comparison of estimated costs and benefits for this regulation or alternatives:

No alternatives were identified to be considered. The no change alternative would not address concerns relating to immature white seabass being caught prior to spawning would be unaddressed.

4. Rulemaking law requires agencies to consider performance standards as an alternative, if a regulation mandates the use of specific technologies or equipment, or prescribes specific actions or procedures. Were performance standards considered to lower compliance costs?

☐ YES☒ NOExplain: Performance standards were not considered as they are not applicable to the white seabass fishery or the conservation of the species.**E. MAJOR REGULATIONS** *Include calculations and assumptions in the rulemaking record.****California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal/EPA) boards, offices and departments are required to submit the following (per Health and Safety Code section 57005). Otherwise, skip to E4.***1. Will the estimated costs of this regulation to California business enterprises exceed \$10 million? ☐ YES ☐ NO***If YES, complete E2. and E3******If NO, skip to E4***

2. Briefly describe each alternative, or combination of alternatives, for which a cost-effectiveness analysis was performed:

Alternative 1: _____

Alternative 2: _____

(Attach additional pages for other alternatives)

3. For the regulation, and each alternative just described, enter the estimated total cost and overall cost-effectiveness ratio:

Regulation: Total Cost \$ _____ Cost-effectiveness ratio: \$ _____

Alternative 1: Total Cost \$ _____ Cost-effectiveness ratio: \$ _____

Alternative 2: Total Cost \$ _____ Cost-effectiveness ratio: \$ _____

4. Will the regulation subject to OAL review have an estimated economic impact to business enterprises and individuals located in or doing business in California exceeding \$50 million in any 12-month period between the date the major regulation is estimated to be filed with the Secretary of State through 12 months after the major regulation is estimated to be fully implemented?

☐ YES☒ NO*If YES, agencies are required to submit a Standardized Regulatory Impact Assessment (SRIA) as specified in Government Code Section 11346.3(c) and to include the SRIA in the Initial Statement of Reasons.*

5. Briefly describe the following:

The increase or decrease of investment in the State: None. The proposed minimum size for white seabass will not create economic conditions that are significant enough for out of state businesses to increase or decrease their investment levels in the CPFV industry.The incentive for innovation in products, materials or processes: None. The proposed minimum size for white seabass will not create economic conditions that are significant enough to induce innovation in products, materials, or processes.The benefits of the regulations, including, but not limited to, benefits to the health, safety, and welfare of California residents, worker safety, and the state's environment and quality of life, among any other benefits identified by the agency: No benefits to the health, safety, and welfare of CA residents or worker safety. May help state's environment by encouraging white seabass spawning conditions.

**ECONOMIC AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT
(REGULATIONS AND ORDERS)**

STD. 399 (Rev. 10/2019)

DRAFT DOCUMENT

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**A. FISCAL EFFECT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT** *Indicate appropriate boxes 1 through 6 and attach calculations and assumptions of fiscal impact for the current year and two subsequent Fiscal Years.*

- ☐ 1. Additional expenditures in the current State Fiscal Year which are reimbursable by the State. (Approximate)
(Pursuant to Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution and Sections 17500 et seq. of the Government Code).

\$ _____

- ☐ a. Funding provided in _____
Budget Act of _____ or Chapter _____, Statutes of _____

- ☐ b. Funding will be requested in the Governor's Budget Act of _____
Fiscal Year: _____

- ☐ 2. Additional expenditures in the current State Fiscal Year which are NOT reimbursable by the State. (Approximate)
(Pursuant to Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution and Sections 17500 et seq. of the Government Code).

\$ _____

Check reason(s) this regulation is not reimbursable and provide the appropriate information:

- ☐ a. Implements the Federal mandate contained in _____
- ☐ b. Implements the court mandate set forth by the _____ Court.

Case of: _____ vs. _____

- ☐ c. Implements a mandate of the people of this State expressed in their approval of Proposition No. _____

Date of Election: _____

- ☐ d. Issued only in response to a specific request from affected local entity(s).

Local entity(s) affected: _____

- ☐ e. Will be fully financed from the fees, revenue, etc. from: _____

Authorized by Section: _____ of the _____ Code;

- ☐ f. Provides for savings to each affected unit of local government which will, at a minimum, offset any additional costs to each;

- ☐ g. Creates, eliminates, or changes the penalty for a new crime or infraction contained in _____

- ☐ 3. Annual Savings. (approximate)

\$ _____

- ☐ 4. No additional costs or savings. This regulation makes only technical, non-substantive or clarifying changes to current law regulations.

- ☒ 5. No fiscal impact exists. This regulation does not affect any local entity or program.

- ☐ 6. Other. Explain _____

**ECONOMIC AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT
(REGULATIONS AND ORDERS)**

STD. 399 (Rev. 10/2019)

DRAFT DOCUMENT

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT (CONTINUED)**B. FISCAL EFFECT ON STATE GOVERNMENT** *Indicate appropriate boxes 1 through 4 and attach calculations and assumptions of fiscal impact for the current year and two subsequent Fiscal Years.*☐ 1. Additional expenditures in the current State Fiscal Year. (Approximate)

\$ _____

It is anticipated that State agencies will:☐ a. Absorb these additional costs within their existing budgets and resources.☐ b. Increase the currently authorized budget level for the _____ Fiscal Year☐ 2. Savings in the current State Fiscal Year. (Approximate)

\$ _____

☒ 3. No fiscal impact exists. This regulation does not affect any State agency or program.☐ 4. Other. Explain _____
_____**C. FISCAL EFFECT ON FEDERAL FUNDING OF STATE PROGRAMS** *Indicate appropriate boxes 1 through 4 and attach calculations and assumptions of fiscal impact for the current year and two subsequent Fiscal Years.*☐ 1. Additional expenditures in the current State Fiscal Year. (Approximate)

\$ _____

☐ 2. Savings in the current State Fiscal Year. (Approximate)

\$ _____

☒ 3. No fiscal impact exists. This regulation does not affect any federally funded State agency or program.☐ 4. Other. Explain _____

FISCAL OFFICER SIGNATURE

DATE

*The signature attests that the agency has completed the STD. 399 according to the instructions in SAM sections 6601-6616, and understands the impacts of the proposed rulemaking. State boards, offices, or departments not under an Agency Secretary must have the form signed by the highest ranking official in the organization.*

AGENCY SECRETARY

DATE

*Finance approval and signature is required when SAM sections 6601-6616 require completion of Fiscal Impact Statement in the STD. 399.*

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE PROGRAM BUDGET MANAGER

DATE



STD. 399 Addendum

Amend Sections 27.65 and 28.35 Title 14, California Code of Regulations Re: White Seabass Recreational Minimum Size Limit

Background

White seabass are large, highly prized members of the croaker family, found in waters off the west coasts of California and Mexico. The species supports active commercial and recreational fisheries in southern and central California, as well as non-consumptive ocean uses such as recreational diving. White seabass are managed under the White Seabass Fishery Management Plan (WSFMP), adopted by the Fish and Game Commission (Commission) in 2002. The WSFMP requires annual monitoring and review of the commercial and recreational fisheries and fish stocks to prevent overfishing or other resource damage. The annual review includes fishery-dependent and fishery-independent data where available, documented changes within the social and economic structure of industries that utilize white seabass within California, information on the harvest of white seabass in Mexican waters, and other relevant data. The most recent white seabass stock assessment showed a decline in spawning stock biomass, and this data corresponds with steadily diminishing landings. Subsequent studies, in collaboration with the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department), found that the size at maturity for female white seabass is substantially larger than the current 28-inch minimum size limit for the commercial and recreational fisheries, with female white seabass reaching 50% maturity at 35 inches (in) total length. These results confirm that the current minimum size limit is allowing for immature females to be harvested prior to the opportunity to spawn, which could have negative implications for the long-term sustainability of the stock. New biological information is a Point of Concern trigger in the WSFMP, as it is now known that white seabass mature seven inches larger than the minimum size limit of 28 in.

The proposed project would amend sections 27.65 and 28.35 to increase the minimum size limit to allow a proportion of white seabass stock the opportunity to spawn before being caught in the recreational fishery, and update the corresponding fillet length with the increased minimum size limit. The increase in the minimum size limit to 35 in total length ensures that approximately 50% of white seabass will have reached maturity and had at least one spawning opportunity prior to capture. Ensuring that a large fraction of the population has at least one spawning opportunity will help to maintain recruitment, protect spawning stock biomass, support long-term population stability, and reduce the risk of overfishing. These efforts are intended to strengthen management, improve resilience of the stock, and ensure transparent, science-based decision making.

Current laws governing white seabass are as follows:

- Section 27.65 (a)(4) defines white seabass fillets must be a minimum of 19 in in length. Each fillet shall bear intact a one-inch square patch of silver skin.
- Section 28.35 defines a minimum size limit, season and bag limit for white seabass. Current laws specify that the minimum size limit is 28 in total length or 20.5 in alternate length. The season specifies it is open all year and the bag limit is three, except that

only one fish may be taken in waters south of Pt. Conception between March 15 and June 15.

The Department recommends that the Commission amend subsections 27.65(a)(4) and 28.35(a) to increase the minimum size limit of white seabass and the corresponding fillet length.

Specifically, the proposed changes are as follows:

- Subsection 27.65(b)(4) is proposed to be amended to increase the minimum fillet length from 19 to 23.5 in.
- Subsection 28.35(a) is proposed to be amended to increase the minimum size limit from 28 to 35 in.

Economic Impact Statement

Section A. Estimated Private Sector Cost Impacts

Question 1. Answer: a. Impacts business and/or employees, b. Impacts small businesses, g. Impacts individuals

The proposed regulations for the take of white seabass for recreational purposes are expected to have some impact on businesses, small businesses, and individuals. Specifically, Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessels (CPFVs), which are all small businesses, are expected to see some shifts in effort as individuals targeting white seabass shift their efforts to other species, such as California halibut (halibut) or yellowtail due to the locations where the fish are found, similarity in bait, and similarity in challenge provided from the catch. However, it is unclear what the size of that shift may look like, as the majority of offshore CPFV trips result in fish retained that are generally above the proposed 35-inch minimum, as shown in Figure 1, which shows the percent frequency of recreational landings of white seabass by length.

Measured recreational catch from the past five years is comprised of approximately 37% under 38 in TL or 95% maturity, 16% less than 35 in and 5% of the catch under 32 in or 5% maturity. The dashed lines at L5, L50 and L95 illustrate the proportion of the catch at each corresponding size at maturity (5% maturity = 32 in, 50% maturity = 35 in, 95% maturity = 38 in.). Approximately 84% of the historical recreational white seabass catch appears to be over the proposed 35-inch minimum length, suggesting that shifting the minimum length from 28 in to 35 in won't necessarily reduce opportunity of catching a fish but may reduce likelihood of keeping one. This in turn may not drastically shift anglers away from fishing by CPFV as the opportunity to catch a white seabass that is above the size limit remains high, and the chance to catch the other aforementioned high-value species such as yellowtail and halibut means that anglers may not feel that their fishing effort is wasted and will continue to fish via CPFV.

In comparison, the measured commercial catch from the past five years is approximately 11% under 38 in TL or 95% maturity, 2.5% of the catch is less than 35 in and .5% of the catch is under 32 in or 5% maturity (Figure 2). These length distributions indicate the commercial white seabass fishery is primarily targeting larger, sexually mature individuals and an increased minimum size limit for the recreational sector is warranted to give white seabass increased spawning opportunity.

Figure 1: Size frequency of measured white seabass from recreational catch, 2021-2025

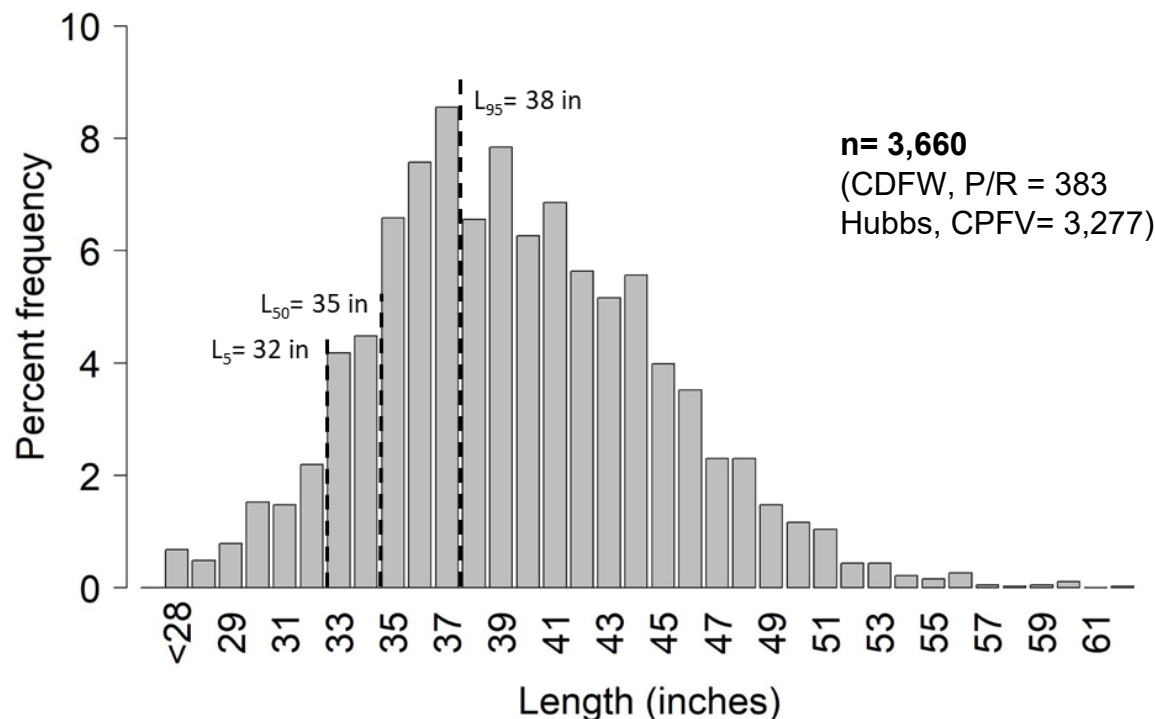
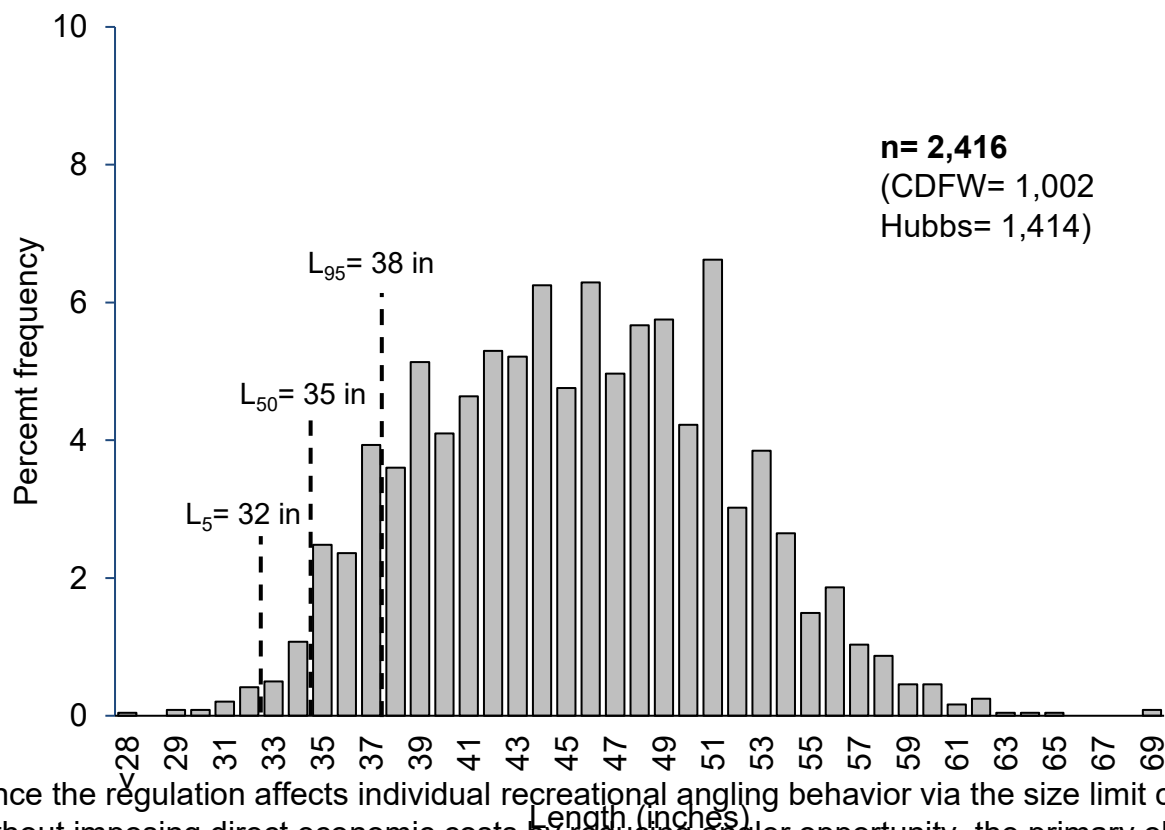


Figure 2: Size frequency of measured white seabass from commercial catch, 2021-2025



Since the regulation affects individual recreational angling behavior via the size limit change without imposing direct economic costs by reducing angler opportunity, the primary observable direct effect will be to CPFVs reacting to angler trip adjustments. The Department's data for

CPFV trips targeting white seabass are shown in Table 1, with multi-day trips constituting two days on average. If we assume that the change may be associated with a 16% decrease in catch rate based upon the frequency and size of landed white seabass that are above 35 in (Figure 1), then we can estimate the potential loss of trip days as 43.5 multi-day trips (or 87 trip days) and 63.7 single day trips (63.7 trip days), and apply the lost trip days to the recreational fishing spending multipliers created by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for the Input-Output model for Pacific Coast Fisheries (IOPAC), which are seen in Table 2¹. Multipliers for “For Hire” (FH) vessels, or CPFVs, for Southern California are used since the entirety of the affected CPFV fleet operate from that region.

These multipliers measure the following economic effects based upon the direct impact of a change in trip days: “Output” is the total value of an industry’s production, “Income” (Labor Income) is the sum of employee wages and proprietor earnings, and “Employment” is a count of annual average full-time, part-time, and seasonal jobs. It should be noted that the IOPAC model does not include the ability for recreational anglers to substitute other species on their trips, as some anglers do with white seabass, halibut, and yellowtail; consequently, the change in economic output from the model is likely to be an overestimation of the economic impact.

Table 1: Annual Counts of White Seabass CPFV Trips

Year	Multi-Day	Single Day	Total
2021	265	334	599
2022	247	389	636
2023	148	281	429
2024	232	402	634
2025	467	585	1052
Average	271.8	398.2	670
16%	43.5 (86.98 single days)	63.7	150.7

Table 2: IOPAC Economic Multipliers for Recreational Fishing

Region	State	Trip Type	Output	Income	Employment
South Coast	CA	FH	902.7923488	403.0191663	0.005427159

Applying the 150.7 lost trip days to the IOPAC multipliers yields an estimated loss of \$136,039.97 in economic output in the CPFV industry, an estimated loss of \$60,730.15 in

¹ Description of the input-output model for Pacific Coast fisheries
<https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/8718>

employee wages and proprietor earnings, and what is essentially no losses in employment (0.81781 lost jobs). This results in losses of approximately \$1,203.89 in economic output and \$537.43 in lost income per vessel when divided among the 113 CPFV vessels that target white seabass (see Table 3 for how the number of vessels was determined).

Again, these results do not account for anglers being able to target other high value species, such as halibut and yellowtail, while aboard a CPFV on a fishing trip, and so should be considered an overestimation of the potential economic impacts.

Question 4. Number of businesses that will be created or eliminated.

There are approximately 113 distinct CPFV vessels that target white seabass, per Department records (Table 3). While it is expected that all CPFVs targeting the species may be impacted from anglers shifting their effort to other species as a result of the proposed minimum length for white seabass, the majority of offshore CPFV trips result in kept fish that are generally above the proposed 35-inch minimum size limit, as shown in Figure 1.

Table 3: Annual Number of Distinct Vessels Catching WSB

Year	Number of vessels that caught WSB
2021	101
2022	104
2023	92
2024	124
2025	145
Mean Avg	113.2

Using the IOPAC economic multipliers for recreational fishing (Table 2) yields expected losses of approximately \$1,203.89 in economic output and \$537.43 in lost income per vessel. Which is unlikely to cause a CPFV operation enough of a loss that they would shrink their operation or be eliminated. Additionally, the ability of recreational anglers to target other species, such as halibut or yellowtail, is not captured by the IOPAC model, and the ability to substitute species should ensure that the level of economic activity in this sector remains relatively stable if the proposed regulations are enacted.

Question 6. Number of jobs that will be created or eliminated.

The Commission does not anticipate any effects from the proposed regulation on the creation or elimination of jobs within the state, as the proposed size limits for white seabass are not expected to significantly reduce effort based on the historical recreational catch (see Figure 1) and based on the results of applying the lost trip days to the IOPAC economic multipliers for recreational fishing seen in Table 2 (0.81781 lost jobs). Additionally, the results of the IOPAC multipliers do not capture the ability of recreational anglers to target other species, such as halibut or yellowtail, which should ensure that the level of economic activity in this sector remains relatively stable if the proposed regulations are enacted, preventing the elimination of any jobs as a result of these regulations. The effects of the changes are not expected to be

observed in the white seabass population for several years, and as such makes it difficult to predict or quantify the potential economic effects on the CPFV industry.

Section B. Estimated Costs

Question 1. What are the total statewide dollar costs that businesses and individuals may incur to comply with this regulation over its lifetime?

Approximately \$136,040 lost annually in statewide economic output (\$408,120 over three years).

It is anticipated that the primary economic impact of the regulation will be on CPFV businesses that target white seabass. As calculated in answer 1 of Section A of the Economic Impact Statement, applying the 150.7 lost trip days to the IOPAC multipliers yields an estimated loss of \$136,039.97 in economic output in the CPFV industry, an estimated loss of \$60,730.15 in employee wages and proprietor earnings, and what is essentially no losses in employment (0.81781 lost jobs). This results in losses of approximately \$1,203.89 in economic output and \$537.43 in lost income per vessel when divided among the 113 CPFV vessels that target white seabass (see Table 3 for how the number of vessels was determined).

It must be noted that the results from the IOPAC model do not account for anglers being able to target other high value species, such as halibut and yellowtail, while aboard a CPFV on a fishing trip, and so should be considered an overestimation of the potential economic impacts.

Section C. Estimated Benefits

Question 1. Briefly summarize the benefits of the regulation.

The policy of this state is “to ensure the conservation, sustainable use, and, where feasible, restoration of California’s marine living resources for the benefit of all the citizens of the State” (Fish and Game Code Section 7050(b)). Additionally, the Marine Life Management Act is intended to ensure the conservation, sustainable use, and restoration of California’s marine living resources. The revised regulations would provide white seabass the opportunity to spawn prior to harvest for the recreational fishery. A minimum size limit of 35 in total length ensures that approximately 50% of white seabass will have reached maturity and had at least one spawning opportunity prior to capture. Ensuring that a large fraction of the population has at least one spawning opportunity will help to maintain recruitment, protect spawning stock biomass, support long-term population stability, and reduce the risk of overfishing.

Question 3. What are the total statewide benefits from this regulation over its lifetime?

It is difficult to determine the monetary benefits of ensuring that a large fraction of the white seabass population has at least one spawning opportunity to maintain recruitment, protect spawning stock biomass, support long-term population stability, and reduce the risk of overfishing.

Section D. Alternatives to the Regulation

Question 1. List all alternatives considered and describe them below. If no alternatives were considered, explain why not:

No alternatives to changes to sections 27.65 and 28.35 were identified. An alternative to the minimum size included a bag limit reduction which was presented to the Commission during the July 16, 2026, Marine Resources Committee meeting. However, based on the knowledge that white seabass are immature at the current minimum size limit, this alternative was determined to be ineffective as reducing the number of fish caught does not increase spawning.

Without the proposed changes, the outstanding issue concerning the regulations allowing immature white seabass to be captured prior any spawning opportunity would remain unaddressed.

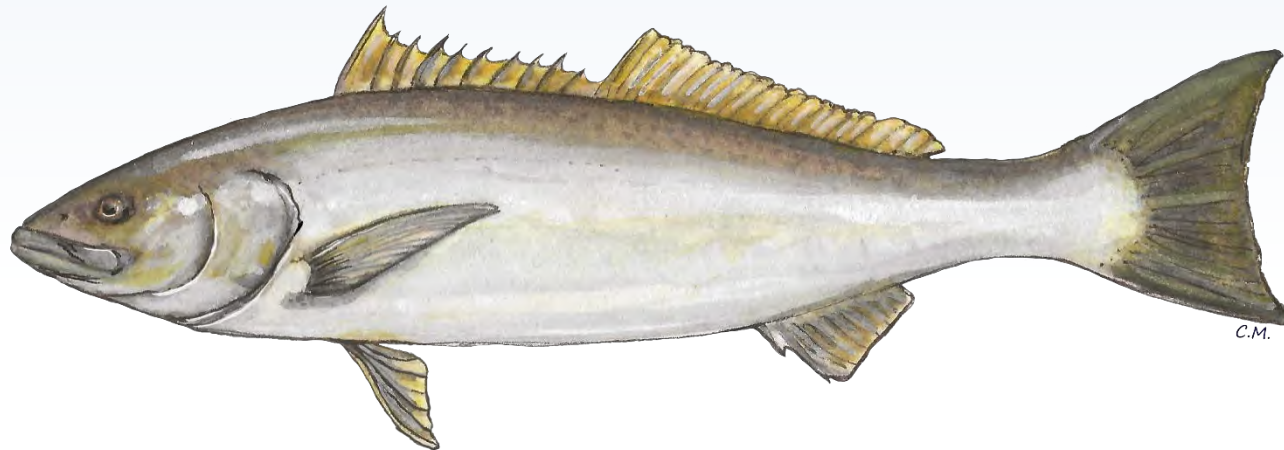
Fiscal Impact Statement**Section B. Fiscal Effect on State Government**

Answer: 3. No fiscal impact exists. This regulation does not affect State agency or program.

The Commission does not anticipate any costs or savings to state agencies as a result of the proposed regulations. Enforcement of the proposed minimum size for white seabass will fold into the existing duties and budget for the Department.



Notice: Regulation Change for Recreational White Seabass Fishery



C.M.

October 14, 2026

Presented to:

CA Fish and Game Commission

Presented by:

Miranda Haggerty

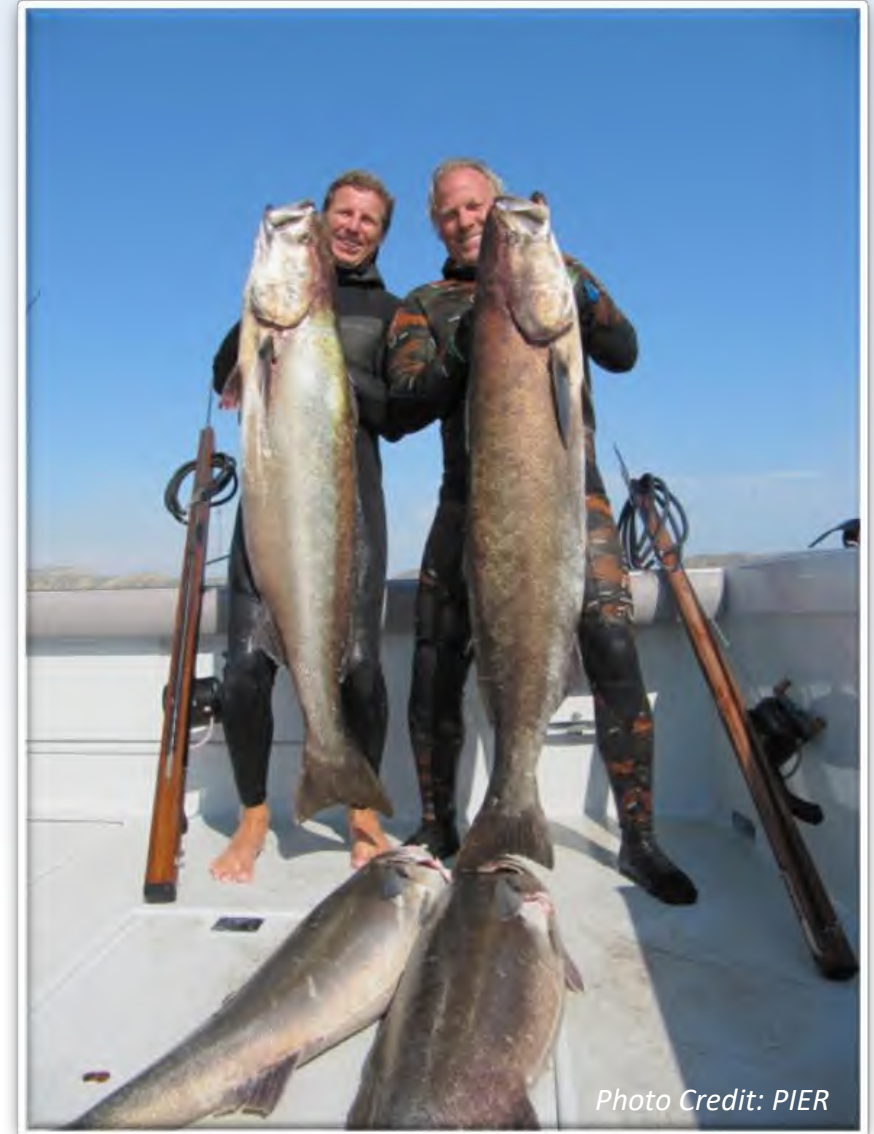
Environmental Scientist

Marine Region



Outline

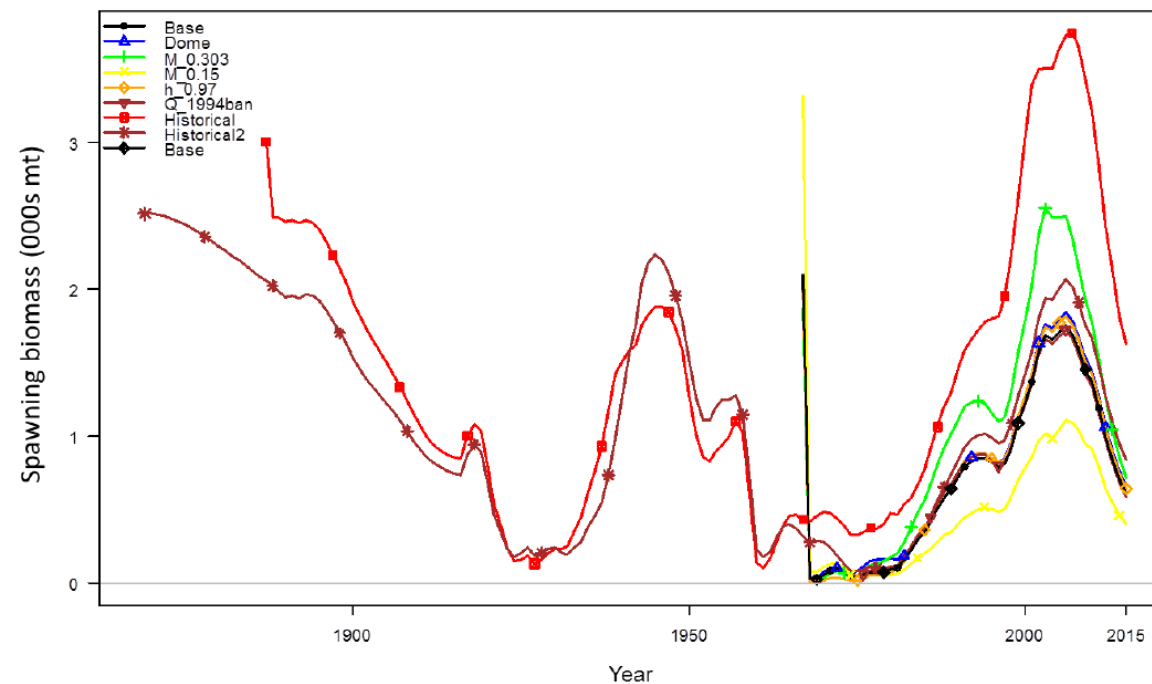
- Maturity Assessment
- Landings Length Composition
- Assessing Post Release Survival
- Proposed Regulation Change
- Timelines





Stock Assessment

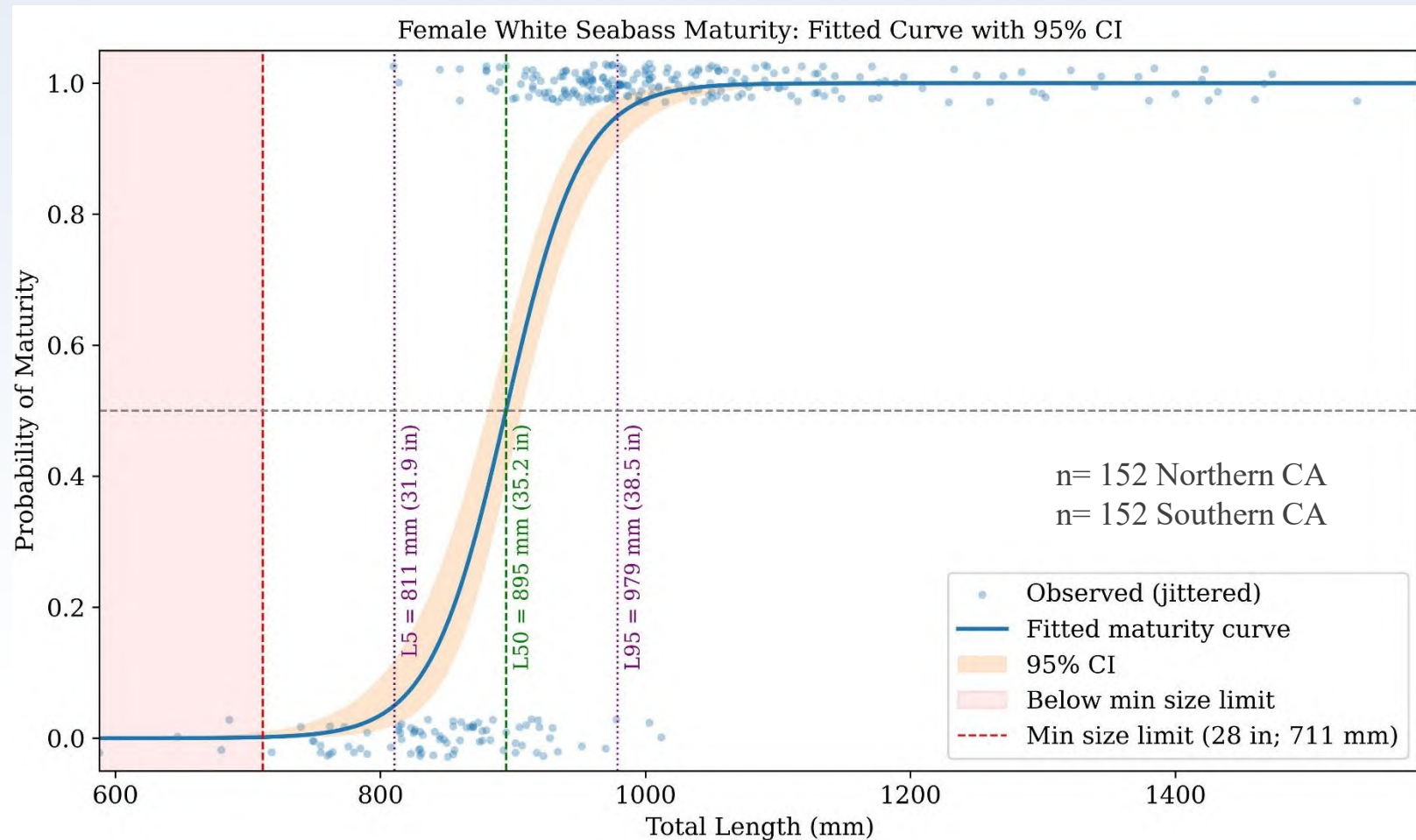
- Stock Assessment last conducted in 2016 (Valero and Waterhouse 2016)
 - Estimated stock at ~27% unfished biomass
 - Spawning stock biomass declining between 2006-2015
 - Importance of updating size at maturity estimates





Updated Size at Maturity Results

- Accepted for publication in CDFW Journal
- WSFMP Point of Concern
 - New biological information is discovered
 - Capturing immature females





Size at Maturity and Fishery Regulations



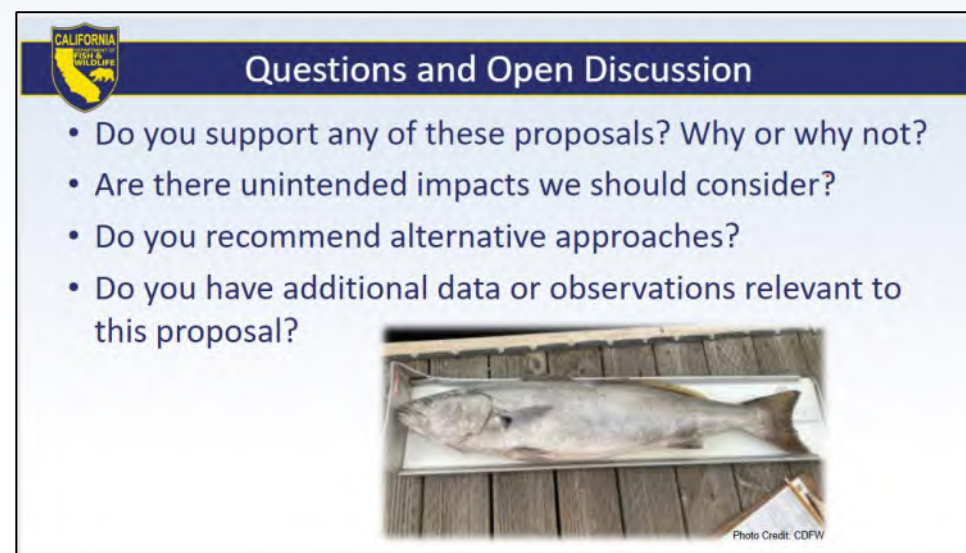
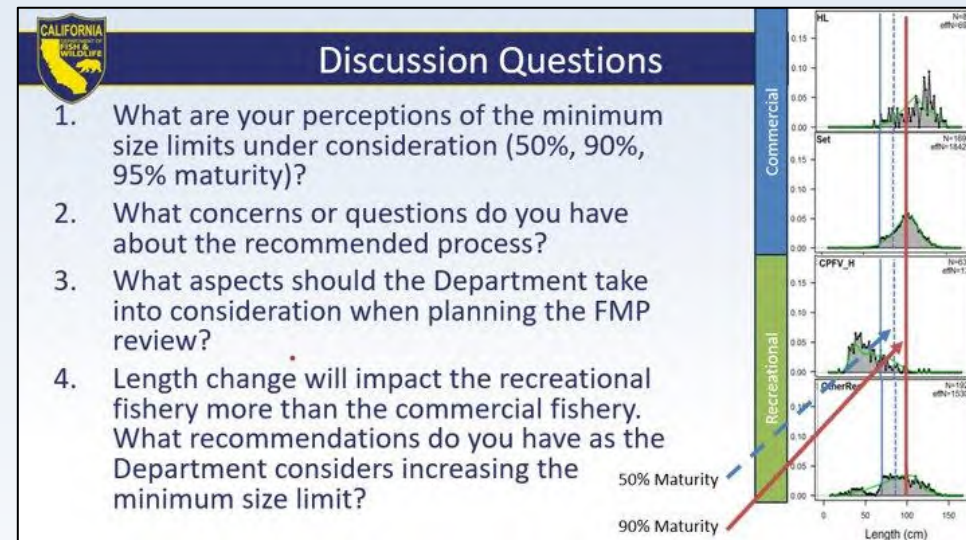
Photo Credit: iNaturalist

- White Seabass FMP - protective measures and flexible framework
- Allow females to reproduce at least once before harvest
- Size at first maturity and at 50% maturity (L_{50})



Stakeholder Engagement

- Maturity results presentations
 - FGC - December 2024
 - MRC - March 2026
 - MRC - July 2026
- Stakeholder Engagement Meetings/Webinars
 - November 18, 2025
 - March 4, 2026
 - May 12, 2026





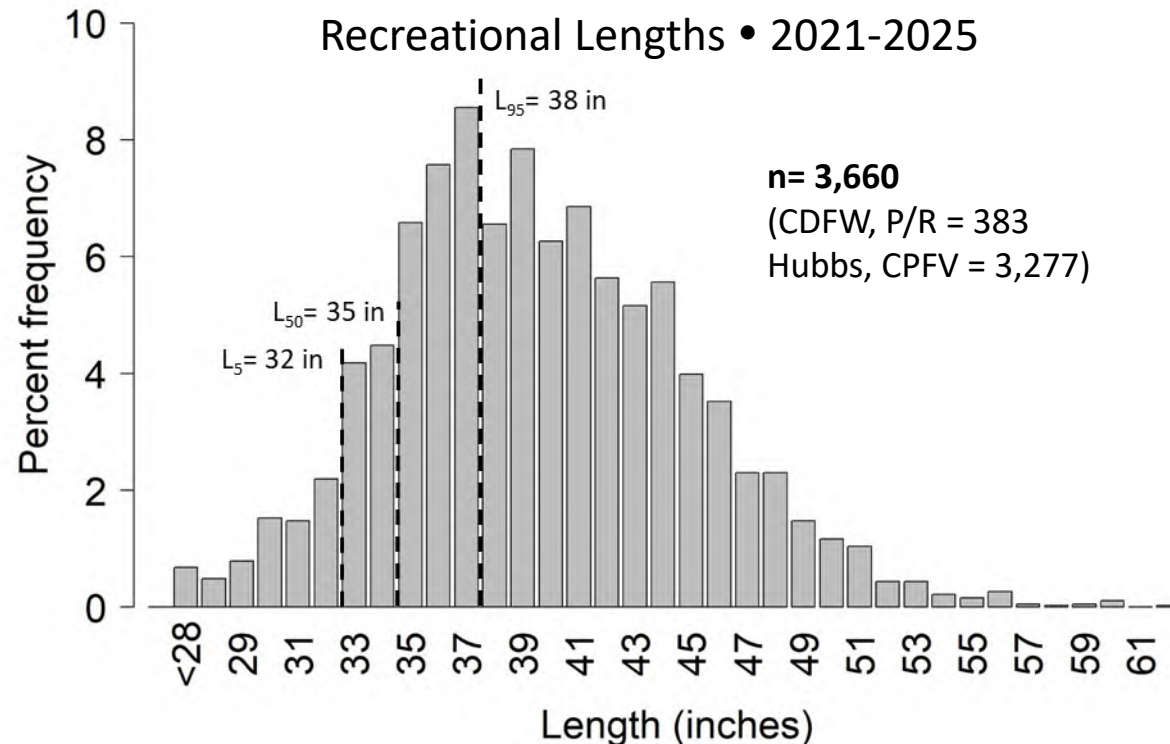
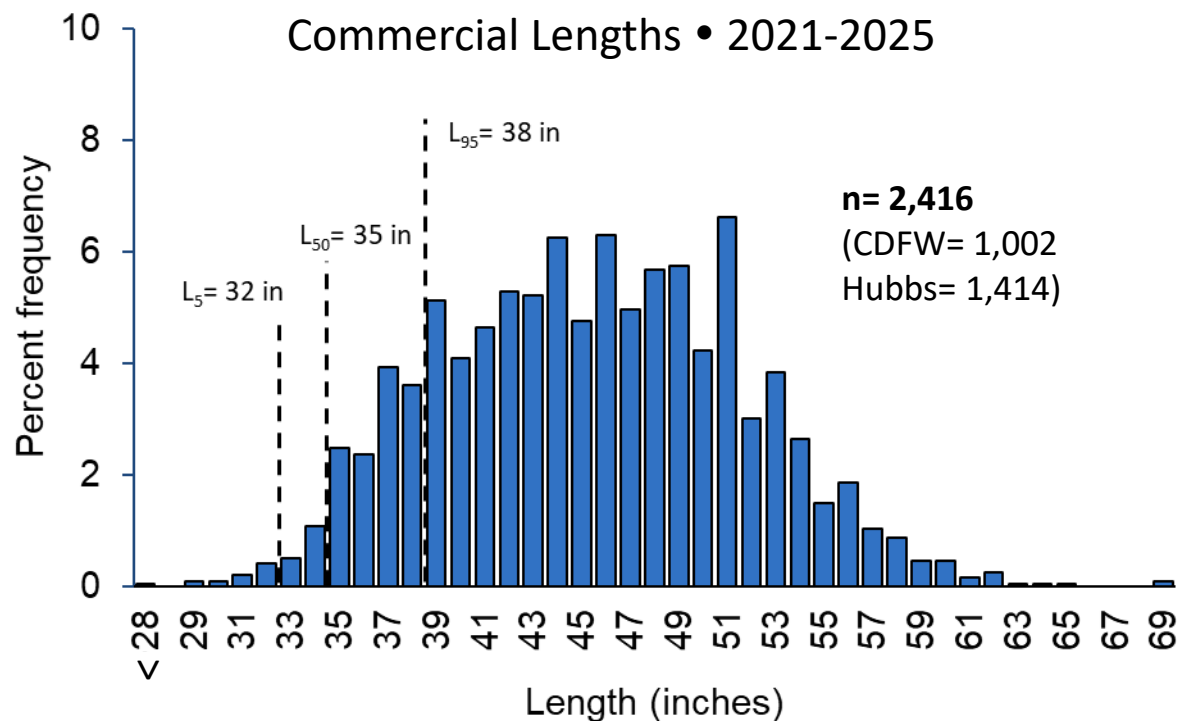
White Seabass Landings Length Composition

Commercial catch • 2021-2025

- 11% of current catch <38 in TL
- 2.5% of current catch <35 in TL
- 0.5% of current catch <32 in TL

Recreational catch • 2021-2025

- 37% of current catch <38 in TL
- 16% of current catch <35 in TL
- 5% of current catch <32 in TL





Catch and Release Mortality

- Post release mortality assessments (MacNamara et al. 2025, Aalbers et al. 2004) suggest WSB are unlikely to experience discard mortality changes with increased size limit
 - Not realistic of all fishing behavior
 - Post release predation
- Collaborations to re-assess survivability



Photo Credit: PIER



Photo Credit: PIER



Proposed Regulatory Text

§ 28.35. White Seabass.

- (a) Minimum size: Thirty-five inches total length
- (b) Season: Open all year.
- (c) Limit: Three, except that only one fish may be taken in waters south of Pt. Conception between March 15 and June 15.

§ 27.65. Filleting of Fish on Vessels.

- (4) White sea bass: Fillets must be a minimum of 23.5 inches in length. Each fillet shall bear intact a one-inch square patch of silver skin.

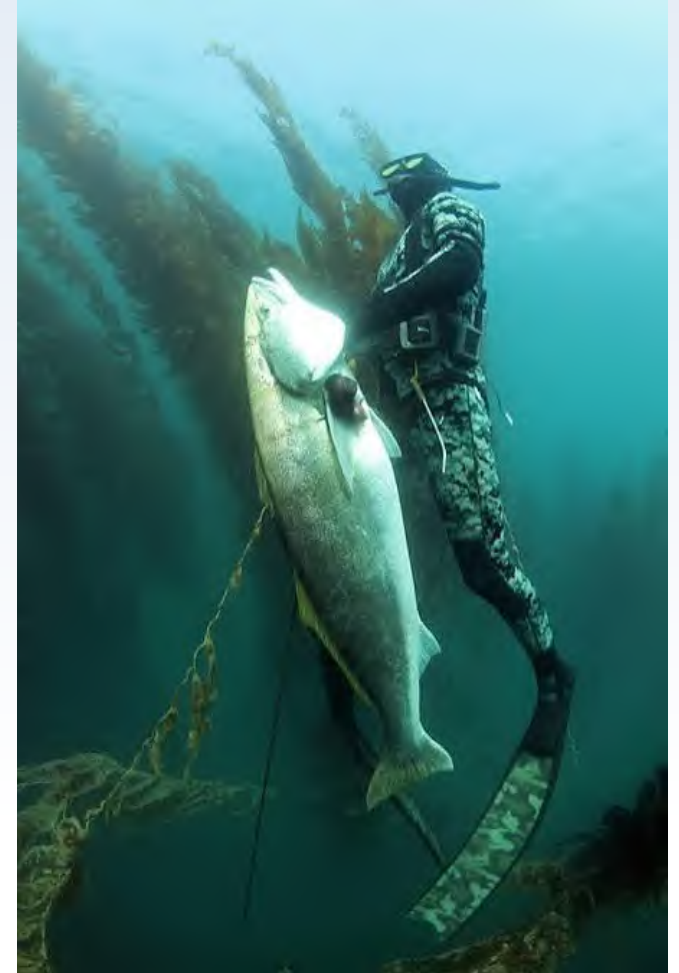


Photo credit: Oakpower, Mr. Okamoto



Rulemaking Timeline

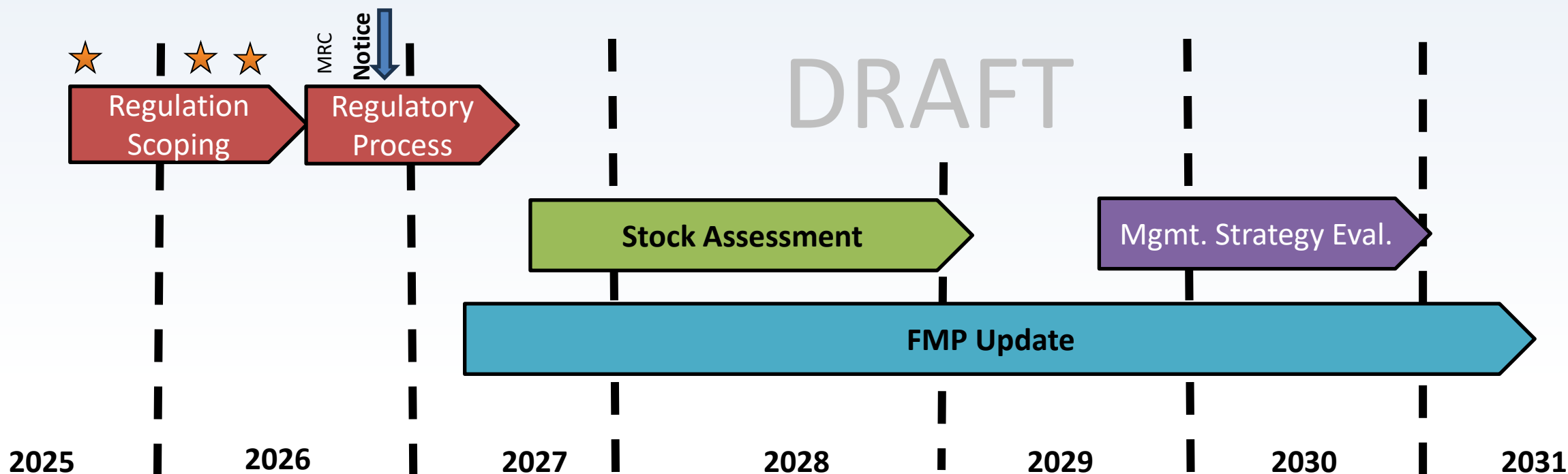
- **Tribal Notification:** August 7, 2026
- **Notice:** October 14, 2026
- **Discussion:** December 15, 2026
- **Adoption:** February 11, 2027
- **Proposed Effective Date:** by June 15, 2027





Next Steps Timeline

- Form an Advisory Body for an updated stock assessment, MSE, and review of the FMP management framework
- Develop 'Best Practices' with recreational stakeholders



Stars indicate stakeholder engagement meetings related to regulation change process.

Thank You

mlmafiseriesmgmt@wildlife.ca.gov

[https://marinespecies.wildlife.ca.gov/
white-seabasstrue/](https://marinespecies.wildlife.ca.gov/white-seabasstrue/)

Committee Staff Summary for July 16, 2026 MRC
(...for background purposes only...)

2. White Seabass Fishery Management Review

Today's Item

Information ☐

Action ☒

Receive and discuss Department options for interim changes to recreational white seabass fishing regulations within the broader management review, consider the timeline, and potentially develop a committee recommendation.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| • Commission adopted White Seabass Fishery Management Plan (White Seabass FMP) | 2002 |
| • Received annual review reports from the Department | 2003-2022 |
| • Received a Department overview of the White Seabass FMP and 2021-2022 annual review report | August 2023 |
| • Commission referred white seabass fishery management review to the Marine Resources Committee (MRC) | October 8-9, 2025 |
| • Received and discussed Department overview of plans and proposed process for reviewing management of the white seabass fishery | March 12, 2026; MRC |
| • Commission approved the MRC recommendation to request that the Department develop a proposed interim white seabass size limit for potential MRC recommendation in July | April 15-16, 2026 |
| • Today, consider interim changes to recreational white seabass size limit, consider timing, and develop an MRC recommendation | July 16, 2026; MRC |

Background

White seabass is managed under an FMP adopted by the Commission in 2002, with annual reviews conducted to identify any needed management or FMP changes, in accordance with Marine Life Management Act requirements. At the August 2023 Commission meeting, the Department presented the 2021-22 annual review report and recommended initiating a comprehensive white seabass fishery management review, consistent with established priorities.

As part of its review, the Department also identified a near-term management concern in the recreational fishery based on preliminary sampling data. The data indicated that female white seabass may mature at a larger size than previously understood, raising questions about whether the current recreational size limit adequately protects immature fish. The Commission supported initiating the management review.

The recreational white seabass fishery is open year-round with a daily bag limit of three fish, except that only one fish may be taken in waters south of Point Conception between March 15 and June 15, a period that overlaps with the species' spawning season in the region. The current minimum size limit is 28 inches total length, with a 20.5-inch alternate length as

Committee Staff Summary for July 16, 2026 MRC
(...for background purposes only...)

specified in Section 28.35, Title 14, California Code of Regulations. The regulations were last amended over 40 years ago, in 1984.

In October 2025, the Commission formally referred the White Seabass FMP review to MRC to begin engaging with the Department and stakeholders, including addressing the maturity concern in the recreational fishery. Additional background on the white seabass fishery management review can be found in Exhibit 1.

March 2026 MRC Discussion

At the March 2026 MRC meeting — the first meeting to include the formal management review — the Department outlined its plan to review the 2002 White Seabass FMP and conduct a new stock assessment to replace the one now ten years old. The Department presented updated maturity data, summarized stakeholder outreach efforts, and recommended that the Commission support an interim regulatory action to increase the minimum size limit informed by the updated maturity data as a near-term measure, while a more comprehensive review is underway.

Meeting participants, and other stakeholders since then, raised a range of concerns about the potential impacts of a size limit increase — including effects on recreational charter boat operations, lack of larger fish available to shore-based anglers, and discard mortality — as well as interest in alternative bag limit structures, the need for updated scientific information, and questions about future stock assessment capacity. MRC developed a recommendation, approved by the Commission in April 2026, requesting the Department develop an interim size limit change for discussion and potential MRC recommendation at the July 2026 meeting.

Today's Meeting

Today's meeting focuses on the near-term management response needed to address new maturity-at-length information for white seabass — specifically, to consider an immediate size-limit increase or other interim regulatory measure(s) before the full white seabass fishery management review is completed. The Department's presentation (Exhibit 2) will provide additional details from the recent maturity assessment, trends in fish length observed in commercial and recreational landings, and the Department's rationale for proposing a specific minimum size limit change. The Department will also share perspectives from three public stakeholder meetings held in November 2025, March 2026, and May 2026.

In response to stakeholder concerns related to a size limit increase, the Department also evaluated other interim management options, including modifying the daily bag limit or a combined bag and size limit approach. The Department will describe how such options may address the maturity-at-size concerns for the fishery, limitations, and enforcement considerations for these options. The Department maintains that increasing the minimum size limit to 35 inches is the most effective and enforcement-friendly strategy to address concerns raised by the updated maturity data. The current 28-inch minimum size regulation was originally set to allow individual white seabass to spawn at least once before being taken by the fishery ([White Seabass FMP](#), Chapter 7.4.1); however, the FMP acknowledged that this standard was based on very limited maturity data.

Committee Staff Summary for July 16, 2026 MRC
(...for background purposes only...)

A stated goal of the White Seabass FMP was to re-evaluate age and length at first maturity as new information became available, and to update the regulation if warranted. The recent maturity findings indicate that the minimum size limit should be adjusted to align with current understanding of the fishery and maintain the original intent of protecting spawning opportunities. Based on best available information, a minimum size of 35 inches would allow approximately 50 percent of white seabass to spawn at least once prior to harvest, helping to ensure that a sufficient portion of the population contributes to spawning stock biomass. The Department seeks an MRC recommendation to the Commission, including the timeline for a rulemaking.

Significant Public Comments (N/A)

Recommendation

Commission staff: Receive public input and discuss the Department-proposed size limit and supporting rationale. Consider the potential effectiveness of alternative or complementary measures for protecting sexually immature female white seabass. Recommend that the Commission advance to rulemaking the Department's proposed increase in the recreational minimum size limit to 35 inches, or to advance other measures discussed today that would meet the objective of allowing more females to reach sexual maturity before they are subject to harvest.

Department: Increase the minimum size limit to 35 inches for the recreational white seabass fishery to protect sexually immature fish and support the spawning stock, and schedule a rulemaking to commence with notice in October, discussion in December, and adoption in February.

Exhibits

1. [Staff Summary for Agenda Item 4, March 12, 2026 MRC meeting](#) *(for background purposes only)*
2. [Department presentation](#)

Committee Direction/Recommendation

The Marine Resources Committee recommends that the Commission advance to rulemaking the proposed increase in the recreational white seabass fishery minimum size limit to 35 inches, as recommended by the Department and discussed today, and schedule notice for October 2026.

OR

The Marine Resources Committee recommends that the Commission advance to rulemaking the following proposed changes to recreational white seabass fishing regulations:

_____ ,