



September 4, 2025

Chairman Pete Hassemer  
Pacific Fishery Management Council  
7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101  
Portland, Oregon 97220-1384

RE: B.1. Open Public Comment – Support for Emergency Rule to Increase 2026 ACLs for  
Canary Rockfish, Shortspine Thornyheads, and Petrale Sole

Dear Chairman Hassemer and Council Members,

On behalf of United Catcher Boats (UCB) and our members that fish for Pacific whiting, I write in strong support of the Council recommending to NMFS an Emergency Rule to increase the 2026 Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) for canary rockfish, shortspine thornyheads, and petrale sole.

The recent catch-only updates clearly show there is capacity to responsibly increase the ACLs for these species in 2026 without jeopardizing their populations. At the same time, these adjustments would provide urgently needed relief to harvesters, processors, and fishing communities who are already experiencing the severe impacts of the 2025–2026 specification reductions.

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) has documented these impacts in detail. In the shorebased IFQ sector, vessels are paralyzed by the reductions, with some tied up at the dock and others shifting to non-groundfish fisheries just to keep crew employed. Buyers want fish, but vessels are constrained by fear of canary “lightning strikes” and lack of access to sufficient shortspine quota to operate with confidence. Quota markets have seized up, with lease prices for these species skyrocketing.

For whiting vessels, these constraints translate into real operational and economic losses. Members have described forgoing whiting opportunities off Washington to avoid canary encounters, delaying participation in the fishery, or shifting fishing plans entirely. The mothership sector has been forced to bypass whiting aggregations due to bycatch concerns, raising costs and reducing participation. Even catcher-processors have frontloaded fishing to avoid fall shortspine constraints, decisions that increase risk and reduce flexibility.

Processors are equally affected. They report difficulty maintaining year-round supply for customers, jeopardizing markets that depend on consistency, including emerging sales on the East Coast. Reduced allocations and supply instability not only threaten revenue but also undermine investment in markets and infrastructure.

The combination of reduced ACLs, quota scarcity, and escalating lease prices is putting our groundfish fleet and communities at risk. As the GAP observed, vessels are facing a stark choice: pay unsustainable lease prices or remain at the dock. If we lose vessels and processors under these conditions, we risk losing history, independent family operations, port infrastructure, and the identity of the groundfish fishery.

In summary, the drastic 2025 cuts have caused significant harm across all sectors, and additional amounts in 2026 would provide much-needed stability. The proposed increases are justified by the best available science and essential to sustaining the fleet and communities while the harvest specifications flexibility process is developed for 2027 and beyond.

For these reasons, UCB strongly urges the Council to recommend that NMFS pursue Emergency Rulemaking to increase the 2026 ACLs for canary rockfish, shortspine thornyheads, and petrale sole.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Andrea Keikkala  
Executive Director  
United Catcher Boats