



NMFS Final Rule: West Coast Groundfish Pot and Longline Gear Must Carry New Markings to Trace Whale Entanglements, With Most Requirements Effective January 11, 2027

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NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service has issued a final rule (FR Doc. 2026-20873, scheduled for the October 13, 2026 Federal Register) requiring gear marking and adding entanglement risk reduction measures for bottom longline and pot gear in the Pacific Coast groundfish fishery off Washington, Oregon and California.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), part of NOAA, has issued a final rule setting gear marking requirements and entanglement risk reduction measures for portions of the Pacific Coast groundfish fishery. The rule (FR Doc. 2026-20873, Docket No. 260925-0005, RIN 0648-BN00) is on public inspection and scheduled for publication in the Federal Register on October 13, 2026 at 91 FR 64791.

The fishery operates in the U.S. exclusive economic zone seaward of Washington, Oregon and California and is managed under the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan under the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

Why NMFS says it is acting

NMFS says the rulemaking is, in part, a response to increased rates of entanglement of humpback whales with Pacific coast fishing gear since 2014. The gear marking is intended to "increase the likelihood of attributing entanglements to a specific fishery and gear type," and the risk reduction measures are intended to reduce bycatch by decreasing the likelihood that marine animals become entangled in fishing line.

Who is covered

The marking requirements apply to vessels fishing in the limited entry or directed open access groundfish fisheries with bottom longline or pot gear. NMFS notes most open access longline and pot vessels target sablefish in deeper water.

What changes

- Gear marking for buoys and portions of vertical lines, mandatory under the rule. NMFS is allowing temporary marking methods such as paint (sprayed or dipped) or colored tape, as the Pacific Fishery Management Council recommended, in addition to manufactured marked line.
- Voluntary entanglement risk reduction measures.
- Escape panel clarification on pot gear so the panel is not on the bottom of the pot, aligning West Coast and Alaska federal groundfish pot rules.
- Bottom longline regulation clarifications throughout 50 CFR part 660.

Key dates

- October 13, 2026: sections 660.219(a)(1) and 660.319(a)(1) take effect.
- January 11, 2027: the rest of the rule takes effect.
- January 11, 2030: compliance date for sections 660.219(b)(2) and 660.319(b)(2).

Background

The Council recommended these measures at its June 2024 meeting in San Diego. NMFS published the proposed rule on February 2, 2026 (91 FR 5408) and took comments through March 9, 2026. A plain-language summary is posted in docket NOAA-NMFS-2024-0045 on [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov).

Source

- Federal Register, FR Doc. 2026-20873 (NMFS, final rule, Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery; Fixed Gear Marking and Entanglement Risk Reduction). Contact: Gretchen Hanshaw, NMFS West Coast Region, 206-526-6147.

Notes

- Author: Ryan Standley / Record of Sale, LLC / Notice Nearby.
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