



NMFS Sets 2026–2027 Pacific Sardine Rules: Primary Directed Fishery Stays Closed With a 2,200-Metric-Ton Catch Limit

Public paper · October 5, 2026 · Ocean desk · Ryan Standley / Record of Sale, LLC / Notice Nearby

NOAA Fisheries final rule, effective October 2, 2026, keeps most directed commercial Pacific sardine fishing closed off Washington, Oregon, and California for July 2026–June 2027. ACL 2,200 mt; ACT 2,100 mt; 20% incidental limit with other CPS; 2 mt per trip with non-CPS.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), part of NOAA, published a final rule in the Federal Register on October 2, 2026 setting the 2026–2027 annual harvest specifications and management measures for the northern subpopulation of Pacific sardine. The rule is effective October 2, 2026 and covers the fishing year from July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027.

The rule prohibits most directed commercial fishing for Pacific sardine off Washington, Oregon, and California. Sardine may still be harvested as live bait, in minor directed fisheries, as incidental catch in other fisheries, or under exempted fishing permits (EFPs).

The numbers in the rule

| Reference point | 2026–2027 (metric tons) |

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| Biomass estimate (age 1+) | 30,158 |

| Overfishing limit (OFL) | 4,645 |

| Acceptable biological catch (ABC) | 3,613 |

| Harvest guideline (HG) | 0 |

| Annual catch limit (ACL) | 2,200 |

| Annual catch target (ACT) | 2,100 |

The Coastal Pelagic Species Fishery Management Plan prohibits the primary directed sardine fishery when biomass is at or below 150,000 mt. With the 2025 stock assessment putting age 1+ biomass at 30,158 mt, the primary directed fishery remains closed.

Trip and incidental limits

- 20 percent by weight incidental per-landing limit when sardine is caught in other CPS primary directed fisheries such as Pacific mackerel.
- If the ACT of 2,100 mt is reached, a 1 mt per-trip limit applies to all CPS fisheries.
- 2 mt per landing incidental allowance in non-CPS fisheries until the ACL is reached.
- Minor directed fishery remains limited to 1 mt per trip per day and one trip per day per vessel (50 CFR 660.511(d)(2)).
- Sardine caught between July 1, 2026 and the effective date counts toward the 2026–2027 ACT and ACL.

Rebuilding plan and the EFP set-aside

The ACL follows the Pacific sardine rebuilding plan approved May 29, 2025 as Amendment 23 to the CPS FMP. At its April 2026 meeting the Pacific Fishery Management Council recommended apportioning 520 mt of the ACL to an exempted fishing permit proposal supporting sardine stock assessments; NMFS says it will decide whether to issue that EFP after the specifications take effect.

NMFS adopted the specifications without changes from its June 29, 2026 proposed rule (91 FR 39054). The West Coast Regional Administrator will publish further notice if catch reaches incidental limits.

Who this touches

West Coast harbor communities that land coastal pelagic species, live-bait operators serving recreational fleets, and processors from Puget Sound to San Diego. Questions go to the NMFS West Coast Region contact listed in the rule.

Sources

1. Federal Register (Oct. 2, 2026), Document 2026-20234, 91 FR 62677: Fisheries Off West Coast States; Coastal Pelagic Species Fisheries; 2026–2027 Annual Specifications and Management Measures for Pacific Sardine (final rule). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/10/02/2026-20234/fisheries-off-west-coast-states-coastal-pelagic-species-fisheries-annual-specifications-2026-2027>

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