

**RCW 77.12.702 Rockfish research and stock assessment program—
Report to the legislature—Rockfish research account.** (1) The department is directed to develop and implement a rockfish research and stock assessment program. Using funds from the rockfish research account created in subsection (2) of this section, the department must conduct Puget Sound basin and coastal surveys with new and existing technology to estimate the current abundance and future recovery of rockfish populations and other groundfish species. The stock assessment must include an evaluation of the potential for marine fish enhancement. Beginning December 2008, and every two years thereafter, the department shall report to the appropriate committees of the legislature on the status of the stock assessment program.

(2) The rockfish research account is created in the custody of the state treasurer. All receipts from surcharges assessed on commercial and recreational fishing licenses for the purposes of rockfish research must be deposited into the account. Expenditures from the account may be used only for rockfish research, including stock assessments. Only the director of the department or the director's designee may authorize expenditures from the account. The account is subject to allotment procedures under chapter 43.88 RCW, but an appropriation is not required for expenditures. [2007 c 442 § 2.]

Findings—Intent—2007 c 442: "(1) The legislature finds that:

(a) Seven rockfish stocks, including canary and yelloweye rockfish, have been designated under federal law by the national marine fisheries services as overfished on the west coast.

(b) The department of fish and wildlife has classified certain rockfish species within Puget Sound as critically depressed. These common species of rockfish have undergone dramatic declines in Puget Sound and the coast during the past three decades.

(c) The Pacific fishery management council and the department of fish and wildlife have eliminated the directed commercial fisheries and greatly reduced the recreational fishing opportunity for these species.

(d) Due to the interactions of these depleted stocks with the healthier ones, commercial and recreational fisheries have been severely constrained in recent years in order to rebuild the populations of these overfished rockfish. For many of these stocks there have been no recent stock assessments, or the current assessments are based on poor data. Improved survey information is essential for assessing abundance and to monitor progress toward rebuilding efforts on the coast and in Puget Sound.

(e) Department of fish and wildlife staff have been developing underwater robot technology or remote operated vehicles to scientifically estimate the abundance of rockfish populations in both the nearshore and in deep waters. These new assessment techniques, coupled with existing bottom trawl surveys, will be used to estimate current abundance and future recovery of rockfish populations along the coast of Washington and in Puget Sound.

(2) Therefore, the legislature intends to implement a targeted surcharge on commercial licenses issued by the department of fish and wildlife that provides for the retention or landing of ground fish, and a targeted surcharge on recreational saltwater fishing licenses. Funds derived from the surcharge will be used by the department of

fish and wildlife solely for the purpose of conducting rockfish research and stock assessments." [2007 c 442 § 1.]

Effective date—2007 c 442: "This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect immediately [May 11, 2007]." [2007 c 442 § 6.]