



Unit 1 Redfish: Harvest Control Rules (HCRs)

Fisheries and Oceans Canada

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What are Harvest Control Rules?



In simple terms:

Harvest Control Rules (HCRs) are pre-agreed rules that guide how fishing levels (e.g., TACs or removal rates) change depending on the status of the stock.

They are a key part of DFO's Precautionary Approach (PA) policy and are widely used across Canadian fisheries.

The goal is to provide:

- Predictability,
- Transparency, and
- Timely conservation action when stock status changes.

Precautionary Approach (PA) Framework



Under the PA framework, stocks are classified into three zones:

- **Healthy Zone** = removals can occur within sustainable limits.
- **Cautious Zone** = removals must be progressively reduced.
- **Critical Zone** = removals kept to the lowest possible level.

HCRs describe how removals change across these zones, rather than relying on individualized decisions.

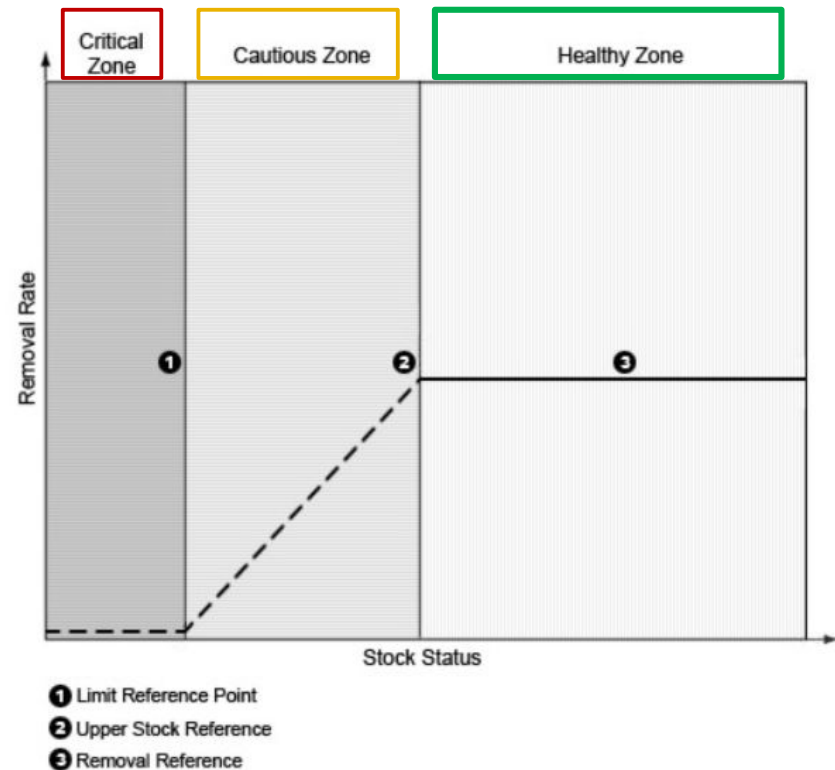


Figure 2: A general representation of a Precautionary Approach (PA) framework showing the stock status zones, reference points, and the removal or harvest rate.

Current Approach for Unit 1 Redfish



Unit 1 redfish is currently managed using an interim science-based approach.

Science provides advice on removals based largely on:

- Stock biomass,
- Natural mortality estimates, and
- Historical productivity.

This approach works only while the stock remains firmly in the Healthy Zone.

There are no formal HCRs currently in place for Unit 1 (or Unit 2) redfish.

Why HCRs now?



Unit 1 (and Unit 2) redfish are made up of two species:

- *Sebastes mentella*
- *Sebastes fasciatus*

Key point:

While both species are currently in the Healthy Zone, *S. fasciatus* is much closer to entering the Cautious Zone than *S. mentella*, possibly as early as the 2027 stock assessment.

If that happens:

The current interim method cannot guide removals. TACs are currently set for both species combined, even though their stock trajectories may differ. Without HCRs, there would be no clear rules indicating how fishing levels should adjust.

Risks of Not Having HCRs in Place



Without HCRs:

- TAC-setting becomes more reactive and less predictable.
- Decisions would need to be made under time pressure, with greater uncertainty.

This increases:

- Management risk,
- Stakeholder uncertainty, and
- External scrutiny (including certification pressures).

Process and Proposed Timeline



Current status

- Limit Reference Points (LRPs): completed
- Upper Stock Reference points (USRs): proposed by Science, pending endorsement
- **HCRs: not yet developed**

Proposed path forward (high-level)

2026:

- Engage stakeholders through the creation of a Precautionary Approach Working Group (late summer/early fall)
- Develop HCR options with Science input.

2026-2027:

- Science peer review of HCR scenarios (CSAS) before the 2027 assessment, when *S. fasciatus* may approach the Cautious Zone.
- Advisory committee discussions and endorsement.

Target: HCRs implemented during the 2027-2028 season.