

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED
CHANGES TO CATCH SHARING PLAN AND 2007 ANNUAL REGULATIONS

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) held two recreational halibut meetings to develop and consider proposed changes to the Pacific Fishery Management Council's catch sharing plan for 2007, in Montesano, on August 3 and September 6.

Based on the public input we received, we would support the proposed changes listed in Agenda Item G.1.b, WDFW Report, and the following changes to the 2007 Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan for Area 2A, section (f) SPORT FISHERIES, Subsection (1)(ii), be approved for public review. A description of how the Catch Sharing Plan language could be changed is provided in Supplemental WDFW Attachment 1.

North Coast

- 1. For the June fishery, implement the following changes: 1) constrain the second opening to two specific areas: a) within WDFW's marine catch area 4B; and b) shoreward of a modified line approximating 30 fms along the outer coast; 2) specify the opening date as Friday, June 15; and 3) schedule the June season for three consecutive days—Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.**

Rationale – 1) For the past few years, as the amount of effort in this fishery has increased, the number of days that the season has been open has decreased. In addition, the amount of subarea quota remaining at the end of the season has increased as it takes more quota to reopen the fishery for another fishing day. WDFW would like to explore designating a nearshore area that could reopen if sufficient quota is not available to reopen the entire offshore area (similar to what is typically done in the South Coast). However, WDFW does not have halibut catch data to estimate the amount of quota needed for a fishery only in the nearshore area. Therefore, we are proposing to collect this data by constraining the June fishery to the nearshore area. The intent is to slow the catch rate down by closing some of the more favored offshore areas, while still allowing access to halibut grounds off La Push (i.e., at the “rockpile”) through a modified 30-fm line and halibut areas out of Neah Bay at the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. While these areas do offer some halibut fishing opportunity, we believe that the catch rate will be much lower than it is when the offshore fishery is open. To help enforce these area restrictions, during the days that halibut fishing is open in June, all recreational fishing would be constrained to the area shoreward of the 30-fm line and within WDFW's marine catch area 4B.

2) Because the recreational fishery would be subject to the area restrictions described above, it would be beneficial if the halibut season did not overlap with the salmon season, which typically begins around July 1 in this area. We do not know what amount of harvest will result from these area restrictions—the June quota may be taken, or the catch rate could dramatically decrease. If the latter occurs, then the halibut season (if the opening day remained as the first Thursday following June 17) could potentially extend beyond June 30, which could conflict with the salmon season.

3) One purpose of scheduling a fishery in late June is to provide a fishing opportunity after school has ended for the year; however, by opening the fishery for three consecutive days, and including a weekend, this would provide an opportunity for school-aged anglers to participate prior to the end of the school year. This would also allow us to collect information during days that have typically produced higher catches.

South Coast

2. **Set aside 5% of the South Coast quota, which would be used to provide a northern nearshore fishery after the offshore fishery has closed; the nearshore fishery would reopen three days per week—Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.**

Rationale – For the past two years (2005 and 2006), the South Coast fishery has exceeded its quota during the offshore season thereby precluding the northern nearshore area from reopening. In the past, the northern nearshore area has either remained open or reopened following the offshore closure; this allows anglers to keep halibut incidentally caught while targeting bottomfish or salmon in the nearshore area. The northern nearshore area does not contain any known halibut “hot spots,” so the catch rate in this area is low. This allows us to monitor catches against fairly small amounts of remaining quota. If this provision had been in place in 2006, 5% of the South Coast quota would have been 2,698 lbs.