

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED
CHANGES TO CATCH SHARING PLAN AND 2009 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 2009 on August 19 and October 14, 2008, in Montesano.

A considerable amount of input regarding the need for adequate notice of openings and closings of the halibut fishery was received during the public meetings and throughout the 2008 season. As most of the Washington recreational halibut fishing occurs in fairly remote areas, providing advance notice of season changes allows anglers to revise travel plans, as needed. To help facilitate this, WDFW has worked with recreational representatives to identify specific weeks that would be closed to halibut fishing; these closures are intended to provide time to tally the catch and provide notice for additional openings or closures depending on the amount of quota remaining.

Based on the public input we received, we recommend the Council adopt the following changes to the 2009 Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan for Area 2A, section (f) SPORT FISHERIES.

North Coast Subarea

1. Remove the provision to divide the subarea quota between May and June, and restructure the season from three staggered days per week (Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday) to two staggered days per week (Thursday and Saturday).

Rationale – Removing the quota split between May and June is intended to provide stability and reduce the number of inseason actions (i.e., closures and reopeners). The effort in the North Coast recreational halibut fishery has grown to the point that it takes a significant amount of halibut quota remaining to reopen the fishery for one offshore fishing day. The May season is managed to ensure that there is adequate quota set aside for June; as such, when there is not sufficient quota to reopen in May, any remaining quota is then rolled over in June. For the past couple of years, this has resulted in a higher allocation for the June fishery than what was specified in the Catch Sharing Plan (e.g., 43% in 2007 and 35% in 2008, rather than 28%). In the future, if the Area 2A quota is reduced and, subsequently, the North Coast quota is reduced, then this problem could be exacerbated.

Reducing the number of days open from three to two is intended to stretch out the season so that the intent of providing fishing days in the latter part of June is preserved. The selection of Thursday and Saturday is intended to continue to provide one weekend day of fishing per week. By having only one closed day in between open days, this also provides an opportunity for anglers to remain in port and continue fishing for halibut, if they so desire. If this change had been in effect in 2008, it would have resulted in an additional offshore weekday in exchange for a nearshore weekday (see Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of season structure with a split quota between May and June open three days per week (status quo) with one quota open two days per week (proposed change).

	2008 (split quota)				2009 (one quota)			
	Offshore		Nearshore		Offshore		Nearshore	
	Wkday	Wkend	Wkday	Wkend	Wkday	Wkend	Wkday	Wkend
May	4	2	0	0	2	2	0	0
June	0	3	2	0	3	3	0	0
Post-June	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
Total	4	5	2	1	5	5	1	1

2. Change the re-opening date in June from the first Tuesday after June 16 to the first Thursday in June.

Rationale – Reopening in early June will allow a more continuous flow of the season and maximize the time available prior to the opening of the salmon season, which typically occurs around July 1. This is anticipated to provide economic benefits to the community overall by having a halibut/bottomfish season separate from a salmon season.

In 2009, provided there is sufficient quota, the North Coast halibut fishery would be open on: May 14, 16, 21, and 23, and June 4, 6, 18, 20, 25, and 27 (Note: June 20, 25, and 27 could likely be nearshore-only days).

The original intent of the nearshore-only fishery was to provide an opportunity to “mop-up” the remaining quota when there was not sufficient quota to reopen the fishery for an offshore day. We anticipate continuing to offer the nearshore-only fishery toward the end of the season to preserve this intent while maximizing offshore opportunity as a primary objective.

South Coast Subarea

1. Specify that the nearshore set-aside would be 10% of the subquota, or 2,000 pounds, whichever is less.

Rationale – Setting a cap on the nearshore set aside ensures that the majority of the quota is reserved for the primary offshore fishery, which remains a priority; this cap is especially important in years with higher subarea quotas. On the other hand, by keeping the 10% specified, if the Area 2A quota is reduced and, subsequently, the South Coast quota is reduced, then the set aside would be proportionately reduced as well. It is anticipated that a set aside of 2,000 pounds will accommodate incidental catches, while a larger set aside is unlikely to be utilized by the fishery.

2. Open the first Sunday in May and continue to be open on Sundays and Tuesdays in May, except open on Sunday only beginning the third week in May until the quota for the primary season is reached.

Rationale – The Sunday-only opening beginning the third week in May provides a catch accounting opportunity after the initial, typically high effort days at the beginning of the season and the ability to provide sufficient notice of additional openings at the end of

May. In addition, reducing the number of days open from two to one is intended to stretch out the season while continuing to provide one weekend day of fishing per week.

In 2009, provided there is sufficient quota, the South Coast offshore halibut fishery would be open on: May 3, 5, 10, 12, 17, 24, and 31, and June 7, 14, 21, and 28.

3. Specify that the season will be open in the nearshore areas on Thursday through Saturday during the primary season (in addition to the offshore days) and Thursday through Sunday after the primary season.

Rationale – Increasing the number of days that the nearshore fishery is open during the primary season and after the offshore quota is reached will allow better access to the set aside quota and reduce the amount of incidentally caught halibut that would otherwise be discarded.

4. Specify that, in addition to the South Coast YRCA, recreational fishing for groundfish and halibut be prohibited in the Westport Offshore YRCA.

Rationale – The Council's approved Management Measures for 2009-2010 include a new YRCA in the South Coast subarea that will be closed to recreational halibut fishing effective January 1, 2009.

Columbia River Subarea

We reviewed and discussed the Columbia River subarea proposals submitted by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in September, which included reducing the primary season from seven days per week to three days per week, and allowing the retention of lingcod. In general, it was difficult to see how the reduction in the days per week could benefit Washington-based anglers, given that the primary season currently lasts through the end of May and all of the Washington-based charter boats in Ilwaco switch to sturgeon fishing beginning in June. However, based on discussions with Columbia River representatives, we would not oppose changing the season structure, especially as the overall quota for Area 2A may be reduced.

Relative to lingcod retention, while the availability of areas to target lingcod within the Columbia River subarea are limited and occasional incidental catches occur, it is our understanding that there are targetable areas off Tillamook Head in the southern portion of the Columbia River subarea and targetable lingcod areas off central Oregon. Therefore, WDFW is concerned about the potential yelloweye rockfish catch that could result from targeting lingcod in those areas.

Further, it is our understanding that such yelloweye rockfish catch would be in addition to what was projected in the 2009-2010 specifications analysis. As Washington continues to share a harvest guideline with Oregon in 2009 and 2010 and our fisheries are already constrained to meet our respective targets, any additional yelloweye catch could jeopardize recreational fishing opportunity in both Washington and Oregon. Therefore, WDFW does not support allowing lingcod retention in the Columbia River and central Oregon halibut fisheries.