

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON
2014 PACIFIC HALIBUT REGULATIONS

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) heard presentations from Ms. Heather Reed, Ms. Lynn Mattes and Ms. Deb Wilson-Vandenberg about potential changes to the halibut catch-sharing plan for Area 2A.

In general, the GAP agrees with the recommendations from the Departments of Fish and Wildlife from Washington and Oregon but is concerned about recommendations for California. Specifically:

Washington and Oregon: The GAP supports the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) proposed changes, which address concerns brought forward previously about the Columbia River Subarea and northern Washington..

Central Oregon: The GAP requests a change to the start date for the nearshore fishery to a standard July 1 opening. This would alleviate some of the uncertainty of when the nearshore fishery opens.

South of Humbug Mountain, Oregon: The GAP supports separate management for this area, with the understanding it will be allocated 2 percent of the Oregon quota and close completely when the quota is achieved.

California: The GAP understands this is a particularly tough situation, with no clear consensus among the stakeholders at public meetings about whether to use a days-of-the-week option or a complete closure in August.

GAP members discussed this in September as well and urged the Council to consider a days-of-the-week option that would lessen the socio-economic impact to the ports of Shelter Cove and Trinidad. We believe this is the best option. These kinds of management measures have worked in other states; it should work in California as well.

August is critical to these small ports, which have invested in public launch facilities and require use to make the ports break even. The highest halibut landings are in August (see page 14, [Agenda Item D.2.b., South of Humbug Workgroup report from September 2013](#)). Halibut has become so prevalent that sport fishermen visit the northern California coast specifically to target them. This is a significant change; in the past, most recreational fishermen targeted salmon.

To reach the target savings in California without closing August, the GAP references alternatives that were analyzed in September (see: [Agenda Item D.2.b., Supplemental South of Humbug Workgroup PowerPoint](#)), changing the combinations of Alternatives 1, 3 and 4 to achieve the 40 percent target. These recommendations are:

- Use the no salmon retention from Alternative 1, which would provide a 19 percent reduction;
- Close June instead of August, from Alternative 3, which results in a savings of 18.5 percent; and
- Take the 2.98 percent reduction from Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Alternative 4.

Mathematically, these savings add up to equal the reductions that would be achieved by an August block closure. However, these would support the small ports, tribes and related businesses that depend on halibut sport fishing.

The GAP notes these are not easy decisions, and we look forward to the survey information to better inform future halibut management issues, particularly in California. Until we have the survey data in hand, it's difficult to come up with a biological reason to justify the August block closure and that this will be a multi-year process.

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