

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES
TO THE 2015 PACIFIC HALIBUT CATCH SHARING PLAN

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) held one public meeting and one teleconference to discuss Pacific halibut management and possible changes to the 2015 Catch Sharing Plan (CSP). The attendees represented a variety of interests and shared their concerns regarding the future of management. After consideration of those discussions, CDFW is not proposing any changes to the 2015 recreational management measures for the California subarea (as outlined in the Catch Sharing Plan (CSP)) beyond the proposed alternatives presented in the Tri-State Report (Agenda Item K.1.b, September 2015).

On June 2, 2014, CDFW conducted a public meeting in Eureka, California to inform interested parties of the 2014 2A Total Allowable Catch determined at the International Pacific Halibut Commission's (IPHC) Annual Meeting and to discuss possible management alternatives to the August closure for the 2015 recreational fishery in the California subarea. More than thirty constituents attended the meeting representing recreational private skiff anglers, recreational charter vessel owners/operators, the commercial fishery, researchers, a state legislative officer and other interested members of the public. The greatest areas of interest were the continuation and expansion of the IPHC research survey off California with additional stations, and a more equitable allocation for the California Subarea.

The greatest area of concern expressed by the public was the potential need to maintain the reduced fishing season for Pacific halibut in 2015 (i.e., the August closure) despite the 2013 IPHC research survey results demonstrating a measurable increase in the apportionment for Area 2A with the inclusion of California stations into the stock assessment. Anglers expressed frustration with the idea that opportunities might be reduced further even without a more fair allocation to the state and in light of the survey results. Stakeholders expressed their expectations that the 2013 survey results would be used in crafting the 2015 CSP. Stakeholders also reiterated their position that the California portion of the Pacific halibut stock was thriving given the recent increases in catch, including catch of large fish, off the California coast, which is supported by the research survey results. The public felt strongly that there should not be any additional constraints off California until Council members have a rigorous science-based discussion to formally allocate California a fair and equitable portion of Pacific halibut. They also expressed significant concern that the August closure would have a substantial impact on the North Coast economy, and any additional actions would further impact the economy. They expressed concern that to do so without any information demonstrating a conservation need was not acceptable. If in the event

further reduction was needed, there was no agreement on whether expanding the August block closure or choosing an alternative action (i.e., closed days of the week) was preferable.

On September 2, 2014 CDFW held a teleconference with more than fifteen constituents participating. The purpose was to receive input on the impacts of the August closure, discuss proposed management measures for 2015, and specifically, to discuss the Tri-State Report (Agenda item K.1.b, September 2014). Stakeholders reported measurable lost opportunities and revenues from the 2014 August closure. Specifically, they noted fewer anglers coming from outside the immediate coastal areas, suggesting that out-of-town fishermen chose not to visit the area in August at all rather than shift fishing effort to species other than Pacific halibut.. The August closure also impacted bait/tackle business and charter operations. The port of Trinidad was severely impacted—the Trinidad Rancheria reported an overall 43 percent decrease in revenue from August 2013 to August 2014.

Call participants reiterated their lack of support for continuing the August closure, or any additional management measures to restrict the fishery for 2015. Their concerns were partly based on the impacts of the August closure, and also in light of the limited information on 2014 recreational catches so far in California and limited progress on allocation. In fact, they questioned the need to continue the full closure of August in 2015 in light of the suggestion from the IPHC survey that 14 percent of the survey take could be attributed to California waters.

During the call, the CDFW staff also discussed the proposed alternatives for allocation changes in the September Tri-State report. Most constituents recognized the challenge of fairly and equitably modifying the current allocations and expressed appreciation for the efforts by the three states to take this step to increase the allocation for the California subarea. However, all participants expressed frustration that the proposed alternatives still do not provide the California Subarea with an amount of Pacific halibut they considered appropriate relative to the apparent local abundance. Almost none of the participants were supportive of any of the report alternatives. Several individuals proposed that a more appropriate allocation percentage for the California Subarea should be seven percent of the non-tribal allocation, or approximately 50,000 net pounds. Stakeholders did not propose which sectors would take reductions in order to accommodate this California Subarea increase.

CDFW supports the alternatives designed for 2015 to provide a greater allocation to the California subarea as described in the Tri-State report (September PFMC, Agenda Item K.1.b). CDFW views the progress towards achieving a fully equitable allocation as a successive, step-wise process, which is partly dependent on continued International

Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) research surveys in California waters. CDFW also acknowledges that the first step was taken in 2014, when the month of August was closed in order to reduce catches in light of recent expansions of catch of California. CDFW looks forward to future discussions regarding allocation that consider what California is contributing towards the overall Area 2A biomass.

In response to a CDFW survey over the summer, stakeholders also proposed a punch card system whereby each angler is allowed a pre-determined number of Pacific halibut to take during the fishing season. However, CDFW determined it is not feasible to implement such a system at this time for a variety of administrative and programmatic constraints. Further, CDFW believes that the current recreational catch survey program is adequate to estimate take of Pacific halibut off California, and a punch card reporting system would not add substantial new information on catch.

The CDFW would like to extend our continued appreciation to the IPHC for a second year of conducting the research survey off California, and coordination with CDFW staff on the state permitting processes required to conduct scientific research in California waters. The CDFW is fully supportive of future survey efforts off California to better understand the full status of the stock, and as a mechanism to inform future Council discussions on allocation.