

## WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CATCH SHARING PLAN AND 2015 ANNUAL REGULATIONS

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) held a recreational halibut meeting to discuss proposed changes to the Pacific Fishery Management Council's Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for 2015, in Montesano, on August 8, 2014. A couple of stakeholders representing Washington's coastal recreational halibut fisheries attended the meeting and provided their input on potential changes to the CSP.

Stakeholders from the Washington portion of the Columbia River subarea, which includes Ilwaco and Chinook, proposed changes that are addressed in detail below. There were no proposed changes to the CSP for the North Coast or South Coast subareas.

WDFW recommends approving the following changes to the 2015 Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan CSP for Area 2A, section (f) SPORT FISHERIES, for public review. We do note that stakeholder attendance was very low at our meeting and hope that sending these proposed changes out for review will elicit additional public input and comment.

### **Proposed Season Changes to the Columbia River Subarea:**

1. Reduce the nearshore set aside from 1,500 pounds to 500 pounds.

Rationale: The amount of halibut caught in the nearshore fishery has been very low in 2014. This change would maintain the nearshore set aside at an amount that would accommodate catches in the nearshore area on days when the all-depth fishery is closed.

2. Retain the current opening date and manage the fishery to one season (i.e., remove the split season structure that splits the subarea quota between the early (80 percent) and late seasons (20 percent).

Rationale: Since 2008, fishing effort has significantly declined during the late season off Washington and Oregon. Managing to one season in the early period will ensure the quota is available during the peak of halibut fishing effort and allow the all-depth fishery to continue uninterrupted.

3. Increase the number of days that the nearshore area is open from Monday through Wednesday to Monday through Friday. This would include two days of overlap (Thursday and Friday) between the nearshore and all-depth fisheries.

Rationale: Currently, on days that the nearshore is open (Monday-Wednesday) anglers may retain all groundfish, including lingcod, with halibut onboard. On all-depth days (Thursday-Sunday), anglers may not retain any groundfish, except Pacific cod and sablefish, with halibut onboard regardless of area fished (i.e., nearshore or offshore). One previously stated reason for restricting the nearshore opportunity to Monday-Wednesday only is that enforcement of differing regulations between the nearshore and offshore areas would need to occur at sea. However, enforcement to ensure anglers are not fishing

seaward of the nearshore area on Monday-Wednesday to target halibut also needs to occur at sea, and we note that all three states have recreational groundfish fisheries with area and depth restrictions with effective enforcement. That being said, we are proposing to extend the nearshore opportunity during the two remaining weekdays as effort, in general, tends to be lower than on weekends.

We note that there may be concerns about yelloweye rockfish bycatch associated with anglers targeting lingcod; however, we believe this is more likely in the offshore area (i.e., seaward of 30 fathoms). We have heard that some anglers may have found areas to target lingcod without yelloweye bycatch in the nearshore area. We would also note that yelloweye rockfish released with a descending device at 30 fathoms or less have a much higher survival rate, so this could result in reduced yelloweye rockfish bycatch if lingcod-targeted effort shifted from the offshore to the nearshore area.

A draft of how these changes, if adopted, may be incorporated into the CSP language is on the following page.

#### **Alternatives Considered, But Rejected For Further Analysis:**

Stakeholders from the Columbia River subarea also proposed allowing lingcod retention with halibut onboard in the offshore area during the all-depth season. However, as mentioned above, we are concerned that allowing lingcod retention in the offshore area would likely result in increased encounters with yelloweye rockfish, and that the survivability of released rockfish at depths greater than 30 fathoms would be higher.

## Draft Suggested Changes to Catch Sharing Plan Language:

### (f) (1) (iv) Columbia River subarea.

...The Columbia River subarea seasons are as follows:

A nearshore fishery is allocated ~~10 percent or 1,500-500~~ pounds of the Columbia River subarea allocation, ~~whichever is less,~~ to allow ~~incidental~~ halibut retention on groundfish trips in the area shoreward of the boundary line approximating the 30 fathom (55 m) depth contour extending from Leadbetter Point, WA (46°38.17' N. lat., 124°15.88' W. long.) to the Washington-Oregon border (46°16.00' N. lat., 124°15.88' W. long.) and from there, connecting to the boundary line approximating the 40 fathom (73 m) depth contour in Oregon. Coordinates will be specifically defined at 50 CFR 660.71 through 660.74. The nearshore fishery will be open Monday through ~~Wednesday-Friday~~ following the opening of the ~~early season~~ all-depth fishery, until the nearshore allocation is taken or September 30, whichever is earlier. Taking, retaining, possessing or landing halibut on groundfish trips is ~~only~~ allowed in the nearshore area, except on Saturday and Sunday on days not open to all-depth Pacific halibut fisheries. The daily bag limit is one halibut per person, with no size limit.

The remaining Columbia River subarea allocation will be allocated ~~such that 80 percent is reserved for an early season to the~~ all-depth fishery beginning in May ~~and 20 percent reserved for a late season all-depth fishery beginning in August.~~ The ~~early season~~ all-depth fishery will open on the first Thursday in May or May 1 if it is a Friday, Saturday or Sunday, 4 days per week, Thursday through Sunday until the ~~early season portion of the subarea allocation is taken. The fishery will reopen for the late season all-depth fishery on the first Thursday in August and continue 4 days per week, Thursday-Sunday until the~~ remainder of the subarea quota has been taken, or until September 30, whichever is earlier. ~~The early and late seasons will run continuously, unless closed due to quota attainment. Any remaining early season all depth quota will automatically be available to the late season all depth fishery.~~ Subsequent to the closure, if there is insufficient quota remaining in the Columbia River subarea for another fishing day, then any remaining quota may be transferred inseason to another Washington and/or Oregon subarea by NMFS via an update to the recreational halibut hotline. Any remaining quota would be transferred to each state in proportion to its contribution. The daily bag limit is one halibut per person, with no size limit. No groundfish may be taken and retained, possessed or landed, except sablefish and Pacific cod when allowed by groundfish regulations, if halibut are on board the vessel.