

COUNCIL NEWS BRIEF ARTICLE ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE
AREA 2A PACIFIC HALIBUT CATCH SHARING PLAN.

At the September meeting, the Council adopted several proposed changes to the Area 2A Pacific halibut catch-sharing plan (CSP) for public review. The proposals affect Oregon and Washington sport fisheries. Final adoption of the proposed changes to the CSP will take place at the Council's meeting in San Diego, California, October 31-November 4, 2005. Comments on the proposals can be emailed (pfmc.comments@noaa.gov), faxed (503-820-2299) or mailed to the Council office (7700 NE Ambassador Place, Ste 200, Portland, Oregon, 97220-1384). Comments will also be taken at the Council meeting in San Diego.

Additional detail on the substance and rationale for the following proposals is available on the following web sites:

WDFW: <http://www.wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/halibut/>

ODFW: www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP

Washington Statewide

1. Implement an annual bag limit of five halibut per angler, which would apply to halibut caught in U.S. waters only.

Rationale – The annual bag limit would provide an opportunity for more anglers to participate in halibut fisheries. Additionally, selecting an annual bag limit less than the number of days open to fishing could extend the season. This requirement will also be considered through the Washington sport fishing rule making process, which requires approval by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Washington North Coast Subarea

2. For the May fishery, reduce the number of days open per week from five consecutive days (Tuesday through Saturday) to three staggered days (Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday).

Rationale – The objective of this proposal is to lengthen the north coast halibut season by reducing the incentive for anglers who fish several days in a row to not stay over, reducing effort and allowing other anglers the opportunity to fish.

3. For the June fishery, specify the opening date as the 1st Thursday after June 17.

Rationale – To provide a fishing opportunity after school has ended for the year and to reduce confusion with the current wording of “opening the third week in June”.

4. For the June fishery, reduce the number of days open per week from five to two staggered days (Thursday and Saturday).

Rationale – To extend the number of days open in June, similar to the May fishery.

Washington South Coast Subarea

5. Remove the reference to the automatic seven days per week season beginning July 1, and specify that the northern nearshore area will reopen to accommodate incidental halibut catch on Fridays and Saturdays only.

Rationale – To extend nearshore opportunity into the salmon fishery time frame, and facilitate monitoring of the relative small quota.

6. Modify the definition of the northern nearshore area to: from 47° 25.00' N. Latitude south to 46° 58.00' N. Latitude, and east of 124° 35.00' W. Longitude

Rationale – To include a few areas south of the currently defined northern nearshore area (which ends at 47° 00.00' N. Latitude) where halibut are caught incidentally on targeted groundfish trips, while excluding “targetable” halibut areas to maintain the integrity of the offshore fishery, and to facilitate monitoring of the relative small quota.

Washington and Oregon Columbia River Subarea

7. Prohibit the retention of rockfish with a halibut onboard a vessel in the Columbia River subarea (from Leadbetter Pt., WA to Cape Falcon, OR).

Rationale – To reduce impacts on depressed canary and yelloweye rockfish stocks while allowing anglers to retain healthier groundfish species such as arrowtooth flounder, Pacific cod, and lingcod.

8. Increase the allocation to the Columbia River subarea from 2.6 percent to five percent of the total Oregon/California sport allocation. This would reduce the allocation in the Central Oregon subarea from 94.4% to 92%.

Rationale - To provide additional angler opportunity in the Columbia River subarea.

9. Provide for the possibility of a split season, with the primary (early) season having the traditional structure, and the secondary (late) season(s) (if any) managed under separate quotas in the Washington and Oregon portions of the subarea.

Description – The initial allocation for this subarea is 2.0 percent of the first 130,845 lbs (59.4 mt) allocated to the Washington sport fishery, and 4.0 percent of the Washington sport allocation between 130,845 lbs (59.4 mt) and 224,110 lbs (101.7 mt) (except for that provided to the fixed gear sablefish fishery), and 5.0 percent of the Oregon/California sport allocation. The primary season is allocated the full amount of the Washington contribution and, from the Oregon-California sport allocation, the number of pounds equal to the Washington contribution. The primary season would

open May 1 and continue seven days per week until the allocation for the primary season has been taken, or July 20, whichever is earlier. The secondary season(s) (if any) will reopen the first Friday in August, by NMFS via an update to the recreational halibut hotline. The secondary seasons will be managed under separate quotas for Oregon ports and Washington ports. The Oregon ports in the area from Cape Falcon north to the Washington/Oregon border would be allocated 50% of the remaining allocation from the primary season, plus the difference between the Oregon contribution to the primary season and 5.0 percent of the Oregon/California sport allocation, plus any additional quota transferred from other Oregon subareas. The Oregon ports north of Cape Falcon will remain open three days per week (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday) until the Oregon secondary season allocation has been taken, or September 30, whichever is earlier. The Washington ports between the Oregon/Washington border and Leadbetter Point, WA would be allocated the remaining 50% of the primary season allocation, plus any additional quota transferred from other Washington subareas. The Washington ports south of Leadbetter Point would remain open three days per week (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday) until the Washington secondary season allocation has been taken, or September 30, whichever is earlier. Subsequent to the closure of a secondary season, if there was insufficient quota remaining for another fishing day, then any remaining quota could 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.

Rationale – To provide additional opportunity in the Columbia River subarea and maintaining benefits proportional to the respective states’ quota contribution to the subarea quota.

Oregon Statewide

10. Increase the possession limit on land in Oregon from two daily limits to three daily limits.

Rationale – To allow anglers to fish all three open days during all-depth weeks in the central coast and legally transport the fish on land.

Oregon Central Coast Subarea

All-Depth Fisheries

11. All open periods to occur on consecutive weeks rather than every other week.

12. Change allocation between Spring and Summer seasons from 75%/25% to 80%/20%

Rationale – The above proposals (10 and 11) are intended to increase the number of angler days to provide sufficient opportunity to harvest the entire allocation, which has not been taken in recent years.

13. If after the Labor Day weekend 25,000 pounds or more remain available for harvest on the combined all-depth and nearshore fishery catch limit, the daily-bag-limit increases to two fish.

14. After the Labor Day weekend the IPHC, NMFS, and ODFW will consult to determine whether increasing the central Oregon coast Pacific halibut bag limit is warranted.

Rationale – The above proposals (13 and 14) are alternative ways to increase the bag limit to two fish to allow the quota for the subarea to be taken by September 30, before bad weather precludes opportunity. If the quota is not attained by September 30, the season will remain open, maintaining the bag limit in effect at that time, through October 31 or quota attainment, whichever occurs first.

15. Prohibit the retention of rockfish with a halibut onboard the vessel during all-depth openings (see exception for the Nearshore Fishery Central Coast Subarea as discussed below).

Rationale – To reduce impacts on depressed canary and yelloweye rockfish stocks while allowing anglers to retain healthier groundfish species such as flatfish and lingcod.

Nearshore Fishery

16. Allow no more than 1 halibut per vessel on all-depth days if rockfish are onboard vessel.

Rationale – Presently on all-depth days no groundfish, except sablefish, are allowed if a halibut is on the vessel no matter what depth the fishing occurs. The purpose of the groundfish retention prohibition on all-depth dates is to reduce yelloweye and canary rockfish impacts in the offshore fishery. The existing provision prevents the incidental take of halibut in nearshore fisheries on all-depth dates, which is contrary to the objective of the nearshore fishery.

PFMC
10/13/05