

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON CHANGES TO ROUTINE MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has been exploring management alternatives for its recreational albacore fishery that would meet the intent of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission's (IATTC) resolution to not increase current effort in the albacore tuna fishery. WDFW has met with charter boat industry members to discuss different alternatives to limit further expansion of the recreational albacore tuna fishery. There was a considerable amount of discussion as to whether a bag limit or trip limit was needed for Washington's recreational fishery and, if so, what the appropriate amount would be. Washington's recreational albacore harvest ranges from 6,000 to 12,000 fish annually; the amount of albacore effort primarily depends on the availability of albacore (i.e., how close the schools are to shore and how long they stay in the area) as well as fishing opportunities for other species. The vast majority (over 90%) of Washington's recreational albacore catch occurs on charter boats. Washington's annual recreational harvest amount represents about 0.3-0.8% of the U.S. total albacore harvest, and about 0.05% of the pan-Pacific harvest—essentially a “drop in the bucket” relative to the overall amount of albacore being harvested on the West Coast and Pacific-wide.

WDFW's preliminary bag limit analysis indicates that a trip limit of 25 albacore per angler could affect about 2.7% of Washington's albacore anglers. A bag limit or trip limit for a recreational fishery that harvests a significant amount of albacore may be a valid approach toward implementing the intent of the Resolution; however, as noted above, Washington's recreational albacore harvest represents a small portion of the total catch. Therefore, given the low amount of harvest in our fishery and the fact that the most liberal alternative could result in a catch reduction, WDFW does not support an albacore bag or trip limit for Washington's recreational fishery as a means of capping our current effort at this time.

Instead, WDFW will be working with the Westport and Ilwaco Charterboat Associations to pursue legislation, which would place a moratorium on the issuance of new non-salmon charter licenses. Currently, WDFW has a limit on the number of salmon charter licenses issued annually, and a non-salmon charter license is all that is required to fish for albacore. WDFW believes that placing a moratorium on non-salmon charter licenses would satisfy the intent of the IATTC Albacore Resolution relative to Washington's recreational fishery. WDFW will keep the Council informed as we progress through the next state legislative session.