

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED
CHANGES TO CATCH SHARING PLAN AND 2008 ANNUAL REGULATIONS

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) held a recreational halibut meeting to develop and consider proposed changes to the Pacific Fishery Management Council's catch sharing plan for 2008, in Montesano, on August 14, 2007.

Based on the public input we received, we would support the following changes to the 2008 Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan for Area 2A, section (f) SPORT FISHERIES, be approved for public review, in addition to the status quo alternative. Suggested revisions to the Catch Sharing Plan language to incorporate the changes are provided on page 3.

Washington North Coast Subarea

- 1. For the June fishery, implement the following changes: a) revise the opening date to the first Tuesday following June 16; b) specify that the Saturday offshore opener is contingent upon available quota; and c) provide flexibility in the date that the late June fishery reopens.**

Rationale – a) For ease of sampling the recreational halibut fishery, it would be beneficial if the halibut season did not overlap with the salmon season, which typically begins around July 1 in this area. With the current opening day scheduled as the first Tuesday following June 17, in 2008, the fishery would open on June 24 (as the 17th is a Tuesday); this could easily result in the fishery extending beyond June 30, which could conflict with the salmon season. By changing the date to June 16, the fishery could open as early as June 17, or as late as June 23.

b) This is more of a “housekeeping” measure. We do not anticipate that the fishery would be open unless it had been determined that there was sufficient quota remaining beforehand; however, adding this language clarifies that understanding.

c) The current Catch Sharing Plan specifies that, if sufficient quota remains, the fishery will reopen on the first Thursday following June 24. However, given our catch accounting system, we will not have the data for the first June opener available until the following Tuesday or Wednesday, which does not provide much notice to the public. This proposal would retain the June 24 date, but allow the fishery to reopen on any day following that date, rather than specify the “first Thursday.”

Washington South Coast Subarea

2. **For the primary season, implement the following changes: a) in 2008, retain the opening date of May 1. Beginning in 2009, open the fishery on May 1, if it is a Sunday; otherwise, open on the first Sunday following May 1; and b) specify that the fishery will be open two days per week—Sunday and Monday.**

Rationale – a) In 2008, May 1 falls on a Thursday; however, several charterboats have already booked trips for May 1, 2008, as the traditional opening date. Therefore, changing the opening date now would result in cancelling and/or rescheduling of those trips, which may be difficult to do, especially as subsequent open days are also rapidly filling up. This would provide the fishery with advance notice of changing the opening date, beginning in 2009, to align with the days of the week that the fishery would be open (i.e., Sunday and Monday).

b) The south coast halibut season in 2007 lasted six days and, because the fishery was open five days per week, we had to close the fishery with only a 24-hour notice. Anglers were already in port or on their way by the time they received the notice. Reducing the number of days per week that the fishery will be open from five to two would provide more time between openings, during which the catch could be tallied and a reopening scheduled.

3. **For the nearshore fishery, implement the following changes: a) revise the set aside to 10% or 15% of the South Coast quota, which would be used to provide a northern nearshore fishery after the offshore fishery has closed; and b) specify that the nearshore-only fishery would be open on Fridays and Saturdays, even during the primary season.**

Rationale – a) For the past three years (2005-07), the South Coast fishery has exceeded its quota during the primary season thereby precluding the northern nearshore area from reopening. In the past, the northern nearshore area has either remained open or reopened following the offshore closure; this allows anglers to keep halibut incidentally caught while targeting bottomfish or salmon in the nearshore area. The northern nearshore area does not contain any known halibut “hot spots,” so the catch rate in this area is low, which allows us to monitor catches against fairly small amounts of remaining quota. A 5% set aside was implemented in 2007; however, higher than anticipated catches and a higher average weight resulted in the entire quota being taken in the primary fishery. A higher set aside of 10% or 15% could provide greater insurance (i.e., a “buffer”) against this.

b) When the primary season was open five days per week, there were only two days per week that the nearshore fishery was open with the offshore area closed (Friday and Saturday). With the revised primary season days (Sunday and Monday), it could be more difficult to monitor nearshore fishing activity. This change would keep the nearshore area open on days that the offshore is open and on Fridays and Saturdays (open Friday-Monday, closed Tuesday-Thursday).

WDFW SUGGESTED CATCH SHARING PLAN LANGUAGE CHANGES

Modify the language in Section (f) SPORT FISHERIES as follows:

(ii) Washington north coast subarea.

“This sport fishery subarea is allocated...until the May allocation is projected to be taken. The fishery will reopen for two days on the first Tuesday and Thursday following June ~~17~~ **16**, in the following nearshore areas only...**If there is sufficient quota,** the fishery will reopen for one day on the first Saturday following June ~~17~~ **16** in the entire north coast subarea. If sufficient quota remains, the fishery would reopen, as a first priority, in the entire north coast subarea for one day ~~on the first Thursday~~ following June 24. If there is insufficient quota remaining to reopen the entire north coast subarea for another day, then the nearshore areas described above would reopen ~~on the first Thursday~~ following June 24, up to four days per week (Thursday-Sunday), until the remaining subarea quota is projected to be taken....”

(iii) Washington south coast subarea.

“...The structuring objective for this subarea is to maximize season length, while maintaining a quality fishing experience. The south coast subarea quota will be allocated as follows: 95% **(or 90% or 85%)** for the primary fishery, and 5% **(or 10% or 15%)** for the nearshore fishery, once the primary fishery has closed. **In 2008,** the fishery will open on May 1. ~~If May 1 falls on a Friday or Saturday~~ **Beginning in 2009,** the fishery will open **on May 1, if it is a Sunday; otherwise, the fishery will open on the first Sunday** following ~~Sunday~~ **May 1.** The primary fishery will be open **two days per week,** Sunday ~~through Thursday~~ **and Monday,** in all areas, except where prohibited, and the nearshore fishery will be ~~open 7 days per week~~ **closed on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday....”**