

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CATCH SHARING PLAN AND 2016 ANNUAL REGULATIONS

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has identified the following proposed changes to the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (PFMC) Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) and recommends that they be adopted for public review.

Proposed Changes to the North Coast Subarea:

1. Revise the season opening date in the north coast subarea to be either the:

- Option a. First Thursday in May, or
- Option b. First Saturday in May

Rationale: The status quo opening date in the CSP is the Thursday between May 9 and 15. In 2015, the recreational halibut season lasted only three days in this subarea, and had only been four days long in 2013 and 2014. In the current CSP, the fishery is scheduled to be open for four days (Thursday and Saturday for two weeks) before the "catch accounting closure" is scheduled, which is during the third week in May.

This year, because preliminary data from our sampling program indicated that catch and effort were considerably higher than anticipated during the first two days of the fishery, action was taken to close the fishery after a three-day season with very short notice provided to anglers. By opening the fishery a week earlier than currently scheduled and only providing one open day during the initial week, WDFW would have three days of fishery data available during the scheduled closed week to review, anglers would know in advance that they fishery may not be open for a fourth day and, if there was sufficient quota to reopen the fishery for a fourth day during the fourth week of May, there would be adequate notice provided to anglers to make those plans.

Following the September Council meeting, WDFW will discuss these options with halibut stakeholders to develop a season structure recommendation that is intended to provide for a meaningful fishing opportunity for recreational anglers in the north coast subarea. We do not have any proposed changes to the south coast, Columbia River, or Puget Sound subareas.

Proposed Changes to Non-Indian Commercial Fisheries:

1. Recommend that the National Marine Fisheries Service revise the CSP language and organization of Section (e) to clarify that NMFS has the authority to make inseason adjustments to keep halibut catches within the commercial sector allocations for the directed fishery targeting halibut and incidental catch in the sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis, similar to what is described under Subsection (e)(2) for the incidental halibut catch in the salmon troll fishery.

Rationale: This would clarify that NMFS has this authority for all non-Indian commercial halibut fisheries.

2. Recommend revising the language in Subsection (e)(3) for the incidental catch in the sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis to simplify the description of the allocation as it relates to the Area 2A TAC. WDFW recommends the following edit to the first sentence of this section:

~~If the Area 2A TAC is greater than 900,000 lb (408.2 mt),~~ ~~+~~ The primary directed sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis will be allocated the Washington sport allocation that is in excess of 214,110 lb (97.1 mt), provided a minimum of 10,000 lb (4.5 mt) is available (i.e., the Washington sport allocation is 224,110 lb (101.7 mt) or greater.

Rationale: As a result of the changes approved by the Council to the CSP Area 2A allocation structure, the 900,000 lb TAC level no longer applies. Therefore, removing a reference to this poundage is consistent with the new allocation structure and maintains the intent of providing for incidental halibut retention in the sablefish fishery, bracketed by minimum and maximum amounts, when the Washington sport allocation reaches a minimum level.