

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CATCH SHARING PLAN AND 2017 ANNUAL REGULATIONS

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has held a few recreational halibut meetings to discuss proposed changes to the Pacific Fishery Management Council’s (PFMC’s) Catch Sharing Plan (CSP), and most recently met in Montesano, on September 1, 2016. Stakeholders from the coastal and Puget Sound management areas provided their input on the season structure and management measures for the recreational halibut fishery for 2017, which formed the basis for the proposals described below that we recommend the Council adopt for public review.

1. Statewide Season Dates

Revise the CSP language for all of the Washington subareas, except the Columbia River subarea, to have consistent season dates that are established through an annual public process to gather stakeholder input and provide recommendations to NMFS. The season setting process and season structure would be guided by the following principles:

- Seasons would be developed by the end of November each year for the following year
- Seasons would open in early May
- Provide up to two days per week—one weekday and one weekend day—with a minimum of two closed days between open days
- Schedule a “management closure” in mid-May to assess the remaining quota for each subarea
- If sufficient quota remains, then the general season structure would be followed (e.g., Tuesday/Saturday or Sunday/Thursday) for additional openings

Specific proposals for the 2017 South Coast, North Coast, and Puget Sound halibut season:

Option A:	Tue, May 2	Option B:	Thur, May 4
	Sat, May 6		Sun, May 7
	Tue, May 9		Thur, May 11
	Sat, May 20		Sun, May 21
	Tue, May 23		Thur, May 25

If sufficient quota remains, then the seasons would continue as follows:

Sat, June 3	Sun, June 4
Tue, June 6	Thur, June 8

Rationale: The primary objective is to have consistent dates where seasons have been significantly reduced as a result of increased effort, which has resulted in increased catch. Those areas have been Washington Marine Catch Areas 2, 3, 4 and throughout Puget Sound. The intent is for anglers to choose where they want to fish for halibut, rather than fish multiple areas during staggered seasons, thereby potentially maximizing each area’s halibut opportunity.

2. Manage the Puget Sound Subarea through inseason quota-monitoring

Revise the CSP language to reflect changes to the WDFW sampling approach for the Puget Sound region that will allow for inseason quota-monitoring.

Rationale: Beginning in 2017, the WDFW Puget Sound Sampling Program will begin an intensive sampling program in the Puget Sound region, similar to what is in place in the coastal subareas. Through this sampling approach, halibut catch and effort will be available on a weekly basis. Inseason quota management will improve WDFW's ability to track catch and recommend season closures upon projected quota attainment.

3. Allow the retention of lingcod on halibut trips in the Columbia River Subarea

Revise the CSP to allow lingcod retention on halibut trips in the Columbia River subarea north of the Washington-Oregon border only. Specific proposals:

Option A: Allow lingcod retention when halibut are onboard until the Columbia River subarea halibut quota for the all-depth fishery is taken.

Option B: Allow lingcod retention when halibut are onboard until the Columbia River subarea halibut quota is taken in the all-depth fishery or until a maximum of 1,500 lingcod have been landed on halibut trips, whichever occurs first.

Rationale: The intent is to attract anglers to fish for halibut from Ilwaco. Lingcod retention on halibut trips is allowed in other Washington subareas creating an inequity in fishing opportunity along the coast. Currently lingcod that are caught during the all-depth fishery when halibut are onboard are discarded; this change would reduce lingcod bycatch. Note: A similar proposal was considered in 2013 (for the 2014 season) for the entire Columbia River subarea, but was not approved by the Council due to concerns about increased encounters with yelloweye rockfish in the waters off Oregon.

4. Shift the nearshore opportunity in the South Coast Subarea to after the primary (i.e., all-depth) season has closed

Revise the CSP language for the South Coast subarea to specify that the nearshore area will open after the quota for the primary season has been obtained.

Rationale: A portion of the south coast subarea allocation is set aside to allow for incidental halibut retention when halibut are caught in the nearshore area while anglers are targeting other fish, such as bottomfish or salmon. Currently, the nearshore fishery is open seven days per week starting when the primary fishery opens. In recent years, halibut have been caught in the nearshore area on days the when the primary season is not open, which has resulted in early attainment of the nearshore set aside. This revision would preserve the original intent of the nearshore fishery as an incidental allowance when anglers are targeting other species.