

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON  
PACIFIC HALIBUT CATCH SHARING PLAN CHANGES FOR 2018

In June, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) recommended the initial scoping of several Pacific halibut allocation alternatives as part of their consideration of proposed changes to the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for 2018. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has done a preliminary analysis of the potential impacts of those allocation alternatives on Washington recreational and commercial fisheries and would like to offer our initial thoughts. WDFW will provide a separate report on proposed changes to the CSP for 2018 that are focused on season structure and management measures following completion of stakeholder meetings in late August.

As we have noted several times in the past, the Washington recreational fishery has become increasingly popular with more fishing effort directed at a relatively stable quota. The result has been recreational halibut seasons that last from three to five days in recent years. In response, WDFW has worked extensively over the past several years to improve inseason sampling methods, consider stakeholder input, and construct seasons that provide meaningful recreational fishing opportunity and maximize the season length. 2017 was the first year that we implemented a statewide season and an inseason quota monitoring system for Puget Sound. While it was not ideal, we believe it was a success as the North Coast and Puget Sound season lasted nine days and stayed within its quota. Given where the fishery has been and how long it has taken to get to where it is now, we are reluctant to consider any allocation changes that would affect the Washington recreational fishery.

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) recommended an allocation alternative that would reduce the Washington and Oregon recreational quota shares by one percent each to increase the California recreational allocation share by two percent. While a one percent reduction in the Washington sport allocation may not seem like a significant amount, the impact could be the loss of at least one fishing day in each of the Washington subareas, depending on the Area 2A Total Allowable Catch. With seasons that are already less than ten days long, it would be difficult to justify shifting any quota to an area that already has a considerably longer season (i.e., 50 days in California compared to the 5-9 days in Washington in 2017).

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) proposed two additional allocation alternatives that would reduce the Area 2A commercial allocation and provide more to California. As WDFW mentioned in June, our preference would be to maintain the status quo incidental allocation for the salmon troll fishery, which is a coastwide allowance. The directed fishery south of Point Chehalis, Washington, is another fishery where the quota is achieved in a short time frame (i.e., two to three days). In June, the International Pacific Halibut Commission suggested the Council consider mechanisms to address this derby-style fishery; absent such changes, it seems like reducing their allocation would likely make things worse, not better.

Again, the purpose of this report is to share our initial thoughts with regard to the allocation alternatives identified by the GAP and CDFW in June. We look forward to hearing from the Council's advisory bodies and the public on these alternatives, and continuing the Council's discussion.