

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON THE DIRECTED COMMERCIAL PACIFIC HALIBUT FISHERY REGULATIONS FOR 2020

At the September Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC or Council) meeting, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) volunteered staff time to develop estimates of what the potential vessel-size-based trip limits might be under a five-day open period in 2020, in order to make this information readily available to inform public review and comment on the Council's 2020 season recommendations. This report provides some background on the issue and outlines how the potential trip limits were estimated.

Background

Since 2017, the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) has been recommending longer open periods for the Area 2A (Washington, Oregon, and California) non-tribal directed commercial halibut fishery. IPHC cites safety as the primary concern with the current 10-hour "derby" openings. Additionally, IPHC has suggested that longer open periods may reduce regulatory discards and allow flexibility for fishers and processors. The Council has discussed the issue on several occasions and recognizes a number of pros and cons associated with longer fishing periods. At its November 2019 meeting, the Council will finalize its recommendations to the IPHC on the 2020 non-tribal commercial directed fishing season.

In 2018 IPHC sent a survey to directed commercial halibut fishery participants (between 2016 and 2018) asking if they would prefer a longer season. Of those who responded, 86 percent said they would prefer a long season. When asked about season length, 19 percent preferred a season shorter than five days, while 26 percent preferred five days, 35 percent preferred ten days, and 20 percent preferred longer than ten days. However, the IPHC survey did not show any information on how changes in the open period(s) would impact the vessel-size-based trip limits, although a link was provided to the IPHC proposal that included potential trip limits under various season length scenarios. Had the survey more clearly highlighted the potential trip limit reductions, it may have changed how respondents answered the survey. During August of 2019, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) held a series of public meetings with commercial fishery participants to gather input on this topic ([Agenda Item G.2.a, ODFW Report 1, September 2019](#)). By a large majority, those who participated in the ODFW meetings were not in favor of changing the length of the season for 2020, if it would decrease trip limits.

The International Pacific Halibut Commission sets trip limits based on the expected number of participants and anticipated per-vessel trip limit attainment. If fishing periods were open longer, it is assumed that more vessels would participate, and more would get closer to the trip limits. Therefore, to prevent the directed commercial fishery allocation from being exceeded, the trip limits would need to be set more conservatively. In a report from December 2018¹, IPHC indicated that under a 5-day opening, the trip limits would be set at approximately 2/3 of what they would be for a 10-hour opening. Table 1 is a copy of Table 3 in the December 2018 IPHC report, showing what estimated trip limits would be under a 2-day and 5-day fishing period scenario. The estimates

¹ <https://iphc.int/uploads/pdf/am/2019am/iphc-2019-am095-propa2.pdf>

were made using a 9,000 pound limit for H-Class vessels under a 2-day opening, and calculating from that starting point.

Table 1. Copy of Table 3 from the IPHC’s December 2018 report. Estimated 2-day and 5-day fishing period limits by vessel size class for IPHC regulatory Area 2A using 2017 allocation and number of licenses.

<i>Vessel size class</i>		2-day		5-day	
		Vessel Limit (net wt)			
Feet	Letter	pounds	mt	pounds	mt
1-25	A	755	0.34	505	0.23
26-30	B	945	0.43	630	0.29
31-35	C	1,510	0.68	1,010	0.46
36-40	D	4,165	1.89	2,780	1.26
41-45	E	4,480	2.03	2,990	1.36
46-50	F	5,365	2.43	3,575	1.62
51-55	G	5,985	2.71	3,990	1.81
56+	H	9,000	4.08	6,000	2.72

In 2019, the Area 2A allocation was 1.5 million pounds, 12.8 percent higher than the 1.33 million pound 2017 allocation used in the IPHC report. The IPHC Commissioners indicated that barring conservation concerns, the allocation would remain at that level for four years (2019-2022). With the higher Area 2A quota, allocations for all sectors increase proportionally. The non-tribal directed commercial fishery allocation was 225,591 pounds in 2017, and 254,426 pounds in 2019 (and tentatively the same in 2020).

With that higher allocation, and given recent history of number of licenses issued (Table 2), participation, and trip limit attainments, for 2019 IPHC adjusted the trip limits for the smaller vessel size classes².

Table 3 shows the 2018³ and 2019 vessel limit ratios applied by IPHC.

² <https://iphc.int/uploads/pdf/nr/2019/iphc-2019-nr009.pdf>

³ <https://iphc.int/uploads/pdf/nr/2018/iphc-2018-nr011.pdf>

Table 2. Number of licenses issued by IPHC for the Area 2A directed commercial fishery by vessel size class and year, 2015-2019. This includes vessels that had a license for the directed commercial fishery and those that had license for both the directed fishery and the incidental with sablefish north of Pt. Chehalis fishery.

Feet	Letter	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	5-year avg.
1-25	A	12	8	15	11	16	12
26-30	B	6	9	11	10	12	10
31-35	C	14	15	19	19	20	17
36-40	D	18	29	39	44	41	34
41-45	E	16	27	43	36	39	32
46-50	F	31	36	36	34	36	35
51-55	G	9	11	14	14	13	12
56+	H	35	35	31	33	36	34
Total		141	170	208	201	213	187

Table 3. IPHC vessel-size-based trip limit ratios for the 2018 and 2019 Area 2A directed commercial halibut fishery.

Feet	Letter	2018 Vessel Limit Ratios	2019 Vessel Limit Ratios
1-25	A	0.084	0.443
26-30	B	0.105	0.443
31-35	C	0.168	0.444
36-40	D	0.463	0.667
41-45	E	0.498	0.667
46-50	F	0.596	0.889
51-55	G	0.673	0.889
56+	H	1.000	1.000

Methodology for Estimating 2020 Trip Limits in This Report

To provide information on what potential 2020 vessel-sized-based trip limits might be, ODFW assumed that the IPHC would use the 2019 vessel limit ratios (Table 3), and calculated trip limits using those ratios and the presumed 2020 non-tribal directed commercial fishery allocation. Table 4 shows the resulting estimated trip limits under two fishing period alternatives, 10 hours and 5 days. In recent years, there have been two 10-hour openings at the initial trip limit level, followed up by one or more “mop-up” openings with reduced trip limits. This is likely to be the same in 2020 if fishing periods are 10 hours. Under a 5-day fishing period, there would likely only be one opening, possibly followed by one or more “mop-up” openings. Based on public input from fishery participants, a five-day period would likely draw additional vessels to apply for licenses and participate in the fishery. Additionally, as IPHC noted, the number of vessels that would approach their vessel-size-based trip limit would be greater. Therefore, to be conservative, IPHC

has estimated that the trip limits for a 5-day opening would be set at 2/3 of the current 10-hour openings.

To develop the estimated 2020 trip limits for a 5-day opening in the table below, the vessel-size-based trip limits from the first two 2019 openings were scaled based on that 2/3 reduction. As an example, for H-Class vessels, 10,225 pounds for a 10-hour opening would be reduced to 2/3 of that amount, or 6,817 pounds, for a 5-day opening.

Table 4. Estimated 2020 vessel-size-based trip limits for 2-10 hour openings and a 5-day opening, based on the 2019 allocation and the 2019 vessel limit ratio.

2019 allocation = 254,426 pounds			2 10-hr openings ^a	One 5-day opening ^a
			status quo	
Vessel size class		2019 Vessel Limit Ratio	Estimated 2020 vessel limit ^b	Estimated 2020 vessel limit
Feet	Letter			
1-25	A	0.443	4,525	3,017
26-30	B	0.443	4,525	3,017
31-35	C	0.444	4,545	3,030
36-40	D	0.667	6,820	4,547
41-45	E	0.667	6,820	4,547
46-50	F	0.889	9,090	6,060
51-55	G	0.889	9,090	6,060
56+	H	1	10,225	6,817

^a estimate for the initial opening(s), with the potential for “mop-up” opening(s) with lower trip limits

^b fromIPHC news release <https://iphc.int/uploads/pdf/nr/2019/iphc-2019-nr009.pdf>

As a reminder, the IPHC (not the Council) will determine the trip limit methodology and values for 2020, and the results may be different than shown here. The information in this report is intended only to facilitate public awareness of the potential change in trip limits with a 5-day season, in order to inform public comment to the Council.