

## WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON 2021 DIRECTED COMMERCIAL HALIBUT FISHERY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) held a public meeting with Washington based participants in the directed commercial halibut fishery south of Point Chehalis, Washington via webinar, on August 21, 2020 to get input on regulations for the directed fishery for the 2021 season.

The directed fishery is a small but important fishing opportunity for commercial fishery participants in Washington. In 2019, twenty vessels made 47 landings totaling 86,263 pounds, or 34 percent of the Area 2A directed fishery allocation into Washington ports. The meeting was focused on gathering input on fishing periods, the season start date, and the trip limit structure to provide recommendations that would be within the scope of what would be considered by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) for the 2021 season.

In general, Washington stakeholders thought that the fishery went well with the issue of small landing limits, particularly at the beginning of the season, identified as common problem by all webinar participants. There was a preference for keeping the start date on the fourth Monday in June, rather than an earlier start that might overlap with the recreational fishery. The three day fishing period allowed more time for participants to move and find productive fishing grounds and was preferable to the 10-hour openers which were identified as chaotic.

There was a proposal to revise the three-day opener so that the fishery would be open Tuesday through Thursday rather than Monday through Wednesday. Fishery participants explained that getting ice it on Sundays can be challenging and that a Tuesday through Thursday open period would provide easier access to ice on Monday. In addition, concluding the fishing period on Thursday, as opposed to Wednesday, would make it easier for participants to sell directly to the public starting on Fridays when the public are more likely to be in coastal ports. While fishery participants spoke in favor of a Tuesday through Thursday opener, a representative from the processing sector said that delivery on Thursday could result in challenges from the processing point of view. For example, it could be difficult to fill a truck for larger buyers on Friday and could result in halibut sitting on ice over the weekend. This issue could be particularly problematic early in the fishery if individual landing limits are as low as they were at the start of the 2020 season. Washington stakeholders would like to see the discussion of days per week that the fishing period covers be approved for public review to allow for a broader discussion of the pros and cons.

The group had a productive discussion about ideas to address the low landing limit issue, some, which might be best considered after management transition is complete. However, ideas such as requiring a confirmation that license applicants plan to participate, prior to calculating the landing limits might be an effective short-term solution.

Stakeholders in Washington also spoke in support of allowing deliveries to be split between multiple buyers to increase flexibility and maximize the economic value from their deliveries. While it was acknowledged that this might pose additional challenges for enforcement and sampling programs to track weekly landing limits and ensure that fishery and biological data is collected, webinar participants hoped that this idea could be part of the ongoing discussion on management of the directed commercial halibut fishery.