

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON FINAL CHANGES TO  
THE 2021 PACIFIC HALIBUT CATCH SHARING PLAN AND FINAL UPDATE ON 2020  
RECREATIONAL FISHERY

**2021 Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) Changes to Sport Season Structure**

As part of routine changes to the CSP for 2021, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) proposal ([Agenda Item I.1.a. CDFW Supplemental Report 2, September 2020](#)) to extend the ending season date of the sport fishery in California beyond October 31 was forwarded for public review by recommendation of the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) at its September 2020 meeting.

CDFW supports an end date to the California sport fishery no later than November 15 which is based on the availability provided in International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) regulations for the non-tribal commercial fisheries in other management areas to routinely operate past October 31 to meet management objectives. These dates would not be guaranteed fishing days but would provide maximum flexibility in the fishery. All other season structure and management provisions would remain the same.

Extending the season length can provide additional management flexibility given that over the last several years the sport fishery performance in California has been highly variable. In 2019, the sport fishery was open seven days per week from May 1 through October 31, but less than half of the quota (39,000 net pounds) was achieved. In 2020, with the same quota and season dates in regulation as in 2019, the quota was projected to be met by mid-August and the fishery closed for the year on August 11. Extension of the fishery beyond October 31 would allow additional time for the quota to be caught in years like 2019 where there are fewer successful fishing trips.

**Proposed modification to the 2021 CSP language:**

“6.12.d. Season structure

The fishery will be structured to provide recreational fishing opportunity seven days per week, from May 1 until the quota is projected to be taken, or until ~~October 31~~ November 15, whichever is earlier. Additional closed periods during this season, such as closed weeks or months and including a later opening date, may be established pre-season by NMFS based on the subarea quota and projected catch.”

**Update on 2020 Recreational Catch**

The 2020 recreational Pacific halibut fishery in California was open May 1-August 11. The fishery closed for the year on August 11 at 11:59 p.m., due to projected attainment of the quota (see [Agenda Item I.1.a. CDFW Report 1, September 2020](#) for additional information on catch tracking and monitoring from the 2020 season). CDFW coordinated in-season with the National Marine

Fisheries Service, IPHC, and Council staff to take action to close the fishery once the quota was projected to be attained.

Total preliminary monthly projections and catch estimates are provided for 2020 (Table 1). CDFW’s 2020 preliminary season catch estimate is 64,107 net pounds, or 164 percent of the 39,000 net pound quota.

Table 1. 2020 Pacific halibut catch estimates in California by month. CDFW projection values are provided in ~~strikeout~~ to illustrate the process of replacing the projections with catch estimates when those estimates became available approximately six weeks following the end of the month. Data are from CRFS and are preliminary and subject to change.

Month	Net Pounds Accrued	
	CDFW Projection	Preliminary CRFS Estimate
May	NA	2,521
June	NA	2,356
July	<del>26,064</del>	35,127
August	<del>22,154</del>	24,103
September	CLOSED	CLOSED
October	CLOSED	CLOSED
<b>Total</b>	<b>64,107</b>	

Anecdotal reports from the recreational and commercial fisheries this year indicated many fish caught off California were significantly smaller than the average size seen in prior years (20-25 pounds) with this year’s fish potentially being in the 10-pound range. However, there were some reports, including from local media, of fish larger than that. CDFW field samplers did not examine (measure/weigh) fish this year due to physical distancing requirements necessary to maintain staff health and safety during the COVID pandemic. Following standard estimation methods, in the absence of weight data, CDFW used prior year average fish sizes when calculating monthly catch estimates for this year.

CDFW experienced an unprecedented record high number of 353 angler reported fish caught over 16 days at the end of July and beginning of August, as described in CDFW’s September 2020 report. With this sudden shift in successful fishing effort over a very short period of time, CDFW is exploring enhancements or modifications to our inseason catching tracking and monitoring approaches beginning in 2021, including increasing the frequency of reporting from weekly to daily or bi-weekly during peak months to prevent future quota overages.