

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON 2021 NON-INDIAN COMMERCIAL DIRECTED FISHERY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) held two public meetings with Washington-based participants in the directed commercial Pacific halibut fishery south of Point Chehalis, Washington. Input from stakeholders focused on fishing period lengths, the season start date, and the trip limit structure for the 2021 directed commercial halibut fishery. [Agenda Item I.3.a, Supplemental WDFW Report 1, September 2020](#) summarizes the initial input provided by Washington stakeholders during the first public meeting held on August 21, 2020. The second meeting, held via webinar on October 21, 2020, was focused on the range of alternatives adopted for public review by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) at their September meeting.

Stakeholders continued to highlight low landing limits, especially in the beginning of the season, as a main concern with the 2020 fishery, possibly driven by a large number of licenses purchased that wasn't in line with the actual number of participants. Washington stakeholders also noted unseasonably low market prices this year compared to previous years, particularly when selling to canneries, driving some participants to instead sell directly to the public given the higher price point.

Regarding the request in the September WDFW report to allow deliveries to be split between multiple buyers, attendees of the October WDFW webinar heard clarification from an enforcement representative that the current rule requiring continuous offloading only requires that all fish on the boat be landed at the same time. Under the rule as it stands, vessels may then split their load by, for example, creating a fish ticket for the fish to be sold at a cannery and a separate transportation ticket for the fish they want to sell directly from the boat or keep for other purposes. Therefore, WDFW is not making a recommendation regarding this rule.

Recommendations

Recommendation: Avoid a fishing period that starts on Monday.

Washington participants continued to express a preference for avoiding a fishing period that starts on Monday due to the difficulty of purchasing ice and loading gear on Sunday which was described as one of the primary challenges limiting efficiency.

Recommendation: Adopt a two-day (34-hour) fishing period beginning 8:00 AM Tuesday and ending 6:00 PM Wednesday.

Washington stakeholders commented that having additional time under the longer, 58-hour fishing period was helpful by allowing a vessel to move to different spots to find productive fishing grounds, particularly compared to the former 10-hour period. However, there were also comments that under a 58-hour fishing period, the third day is not as lucrative as the first two days.

In September, Washington stakeholders supported a 58-hour fishing period but recommended that the period start on Tuesday and end on Thursday. However, based on buyer limitations, which requires some buyers to load their trucks and deliver halibut to markets on Fridays, there was some

concern that buyers may only purchase halibut through Wednesday to meet this market demand which could effectively result in a two day fishing period.

In addition to acknowledging the Enforcement Consultants' recommendation for a two-day fishing period ([Agenda Item I.3.a, Supplemental EC Report 1, September 2020](#)), Washington stakeholders saw the potential for a shorter, two-day (Tuesday through Wednesday) fishing period to reduce yelloweye rockfish impacts. Reducing the time that vessels are on the water from 58 hours to 36 hours per fishing period may reduce impacts to yelloweye rockfish bycatch which jumped from an estimated mortality of 0.7 mt in 2018 to 7.42 mt in 2019 ([Agenda Item C.1.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, September 2020](#)). Based on the new information, the 2020 rebuilding species scorecard was revised, increasing projected total catch in 2020 to 28.5 mt out of the 43 mt Annual Catch Target (ACT) ([Agenda Item D.5.a, Supplemental GMT Report 1, September 2020](#)).

While there was broad support among Washington stakeholders for a two-day fishing period beginning on Tuesday and ending on Wednesday, it does not address the preferences some expressed during the August webinar for a fishing period that ends on Thursday so that participants who sell their fish directly off the boat to the public during the weekend can ensure freshly caught fish is sold. However, many webinar participants noted that the difficulty of purchasing ice on Sunday is a more pressing challenge, particularly because when properly iced, halibut landed on Wednesday can still provide a fresh product to sell directly to the public on the weekend.

General input to the International Pacific Halibut Commission: Improve the way landing limits are established to address the issue of non-participating license holders driving down landing limits.

As noted previously, webinar participants expressed concern that the recent increase in license purchases is driving down the landing limits and does not accurately reflect the level of vessel participation. There was general agreement among Washington stakeholders that continuing down this path may not make the fishery worthwhile for those who have historically participated and who rely on this fishery as an important source of income in the summer. As stated in the September WDFW report, this issue may be best considered after management transition is complete; however, there may be some short-term solutions worth exploring such as a way to verify participation.