

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON 2022 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, via webinar, on September 2, 2021, to get input on regulations for the directed fishery for the 2022 season.

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 2022 season.

Washington stakeholders spoke very positively in support of the changes adopted for the 2021 season. These involved a three day, 58-hour period structure running Tuesday through Thursday. However, stakeholders continued to express frustration with the issue of small landing limits, particularly at the beginning of the season. As discussed last year, it was acknowledged that this issue might be best considered after management transition from IPHC to the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) is complete. However, with the delay in that transition, many are hopeful that short term ideas to address the landing limit would be considered by the IPHC. For example, requiring a confirmation that license applicants plan to participate prior to calculating the landing limits might be an effective short-term solution.

In contrast to the small landing limits at the beginning of the season, Washington stakeholders expressed support for smaller landing limits at the end of the season to provide access to remaining quota and avoid leaving large amounts of directed halibut allocation unharvested. Given the high value of halibut, even small landings during a “mop up” fishery would provide meaningful opportunity to participants.

WDFW also discussed the streamer line requirement for participants in the directed fishery. Streamer lines are required in the groundfish hook and line fisheries, with some exceptions, and serve to reduce the chances of encounters with the endangered short-tailed albatross and other seabirds. There is a gap in protection in the directed halibut fishery when boats do not retain groundfish. Stakeholder input during the webinar suggested that nearly all of Washington participants use streamer lines already and that only a few would be impacted if the requirement were expanded. This issue was raised at the June meeting during Council discussion of Agenda Item G.4 and the CSP was identified as the appropriate place to consider applying the groundfish streamer line regulations to the directed halibut fishery. WDFW anticipates recommending that the Council propose this change for public review.