CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT
ON CATCH SHARING PLAN CHANGES FOR 2024

Contents

California Recreational Fishery Management

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) provides the following summary of Pacific halibut management in the California recreational fishery to counter the assertions that California does not manage its Pacific halibut fishery. The season structure and inseason management processes in California are different from those present in some of the recreational sub-areas off Washington and Oregon.

Management Structure

The recreational Pacific halibut fishery off California is managed as one sub-area within the Area 2A Catch Sharing Plan (CSP), and since 2015 has received a four percent allocation of the non-tribal Area 2A FCEY. Season dates for this fishery are determined pre-season following the conclusion of the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) Annual Meeting. The fishery begins May 1, and generally continues seven-days per week until October 31 from 2015 through 2019, or November 15 beginning in 2020, or until the quota has been met, whichever comes first. Between 2015 and 2018, the season also included scheduled two-week block closures during the second half of May through August, which were intended to space out the catch and allow the fishery to continue further into the summer and fall months. The fishery was open the full season in 2019, which is also the only year the fishery has remained open uninterrupted through the Labor Day holiday weekend. There is a daily bag and possession limit of one fish per angler, and no minimum size limit. Depth based management is not currently part of the management scheme for Pacific halibut, but anglers must abide by state Marine Protected Area closures along the coast.

Fishery Trends

CDFW works closely with constituents each year to develop a season structure and season dates that allow the most opportunity possible throughout the fishing season while also avoiding exceeding the quota. From 2015-2023, the California recreational quota has ranged from a low of 25,220 net pounds in 2015, to a high of 39,520 net pounds in 2023 (Figure 1). Despite the relatively stable quota amount from 2019-2023, the season length has differed each year, with the full May 1-October 31 fishery open in 2019, to a minimum of 96 days open in 2023 due to quota attainment. Fishery data collection and resulting catch estimates for 2020 and 2021 were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

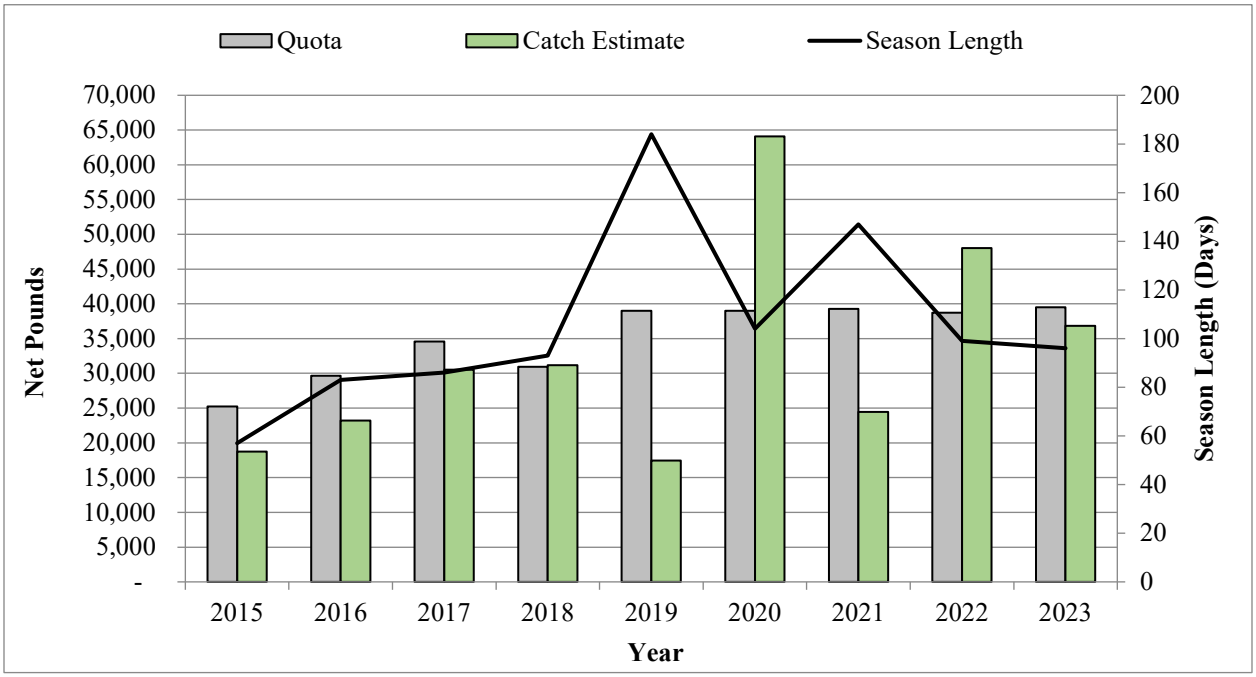

Figure 1. Annual California subarea quota amount (net pounds) and catch estimate (net pounds) with number of days the fishery was open in each year from 2015-2023. In six of the nine years since CDFW implemented active quota management the catch estimate has been less than the quota, suggesting the inseason monitoring and management response processes are successful. Data from 2023 are preliminary and subject to change. Data are from CDFW.

From 2008 to 2014, an average of 60 to 200 pounds of Pacific halibut was caught per day, and the fishery was open seven days per week from May 1 through October 31, except for 2014 when the month of August was closed as a way to slow down catch accrual. During this time the quota was not actively tracked, and no mechanism for inseason action existed. In 2015, active quota management began and the season length was further reduced to only 57 days due to quota attainment. The average daily catch in 2015 rose steeply to over 400 pounds per day, and anglers began exhibiting derby fishery behaviors similar to those seen in many areas of Oregon and Washington's recreational Pacific halibut fisheries. Average daily estimated catch by month from 2019-2023 (Table 1) indicates between 27 and 449 net pounds were taken each day the fishery is open, with the higher values occurring in June, July, and August. The average daily estimated catch in California's fishery is less than what is expected in some of the sport fisheries in Washington and Oregon and is why the California fishery length is generally longer than the season lengths in

Washington and Oregon fisheries. Additionally, catch estimates represent all catch and effort within a calendar month timeframe; the average daily catch estimates discussed here are just that – averages. It is assumed that within a month timeframe, there will be days with no or below average catch and effort, and days with above average catch and effort. For discussion and a visualization of how the sample data illustrate this point see the Days of the Week section (pages 3-4) from Agenda Item D.1. Supplemental CDFW Report 1, September 2023.

Table 1. Average estimated catch (net pounds) per day by month. Averages generated using monthly catch estimates from 2019-2023 (excepting 2020 where estimates are incomplete due to COVID-19 pandemic), for times the fishery was open. Data from CDFW.

Month	Avg Net Pounds/Day
May	143
June	333
July	449
Aug	327
Sept	105
Oct	27
Nov	37

CDFW's California Recreational Fishery Survey (CRFS) program produces catch estimates on a District-wide basis in California and catch estimates for Pacific halibut by individual port are not available. To look at small scale geographic catch trends by port, raw sample data from the CRFS creel survey must be used. A total of 437 Pacific halibut were examined by CRFS samplers in the 2023 season. The greatest number of Pacific halibut observed by samplers (291 fish), were encountered in Eureka followed by Crescent City (54 fish) and Trinidad (51 fish) (Figure 2). Of note in 2023, anglers out of Fort Bragg successfully targeted Pacific halibut with the highest number of sampled fish from that port on record, possibly as a result of no salmon opportunities, and reduced groundfish opportunities in the nearshore waters.

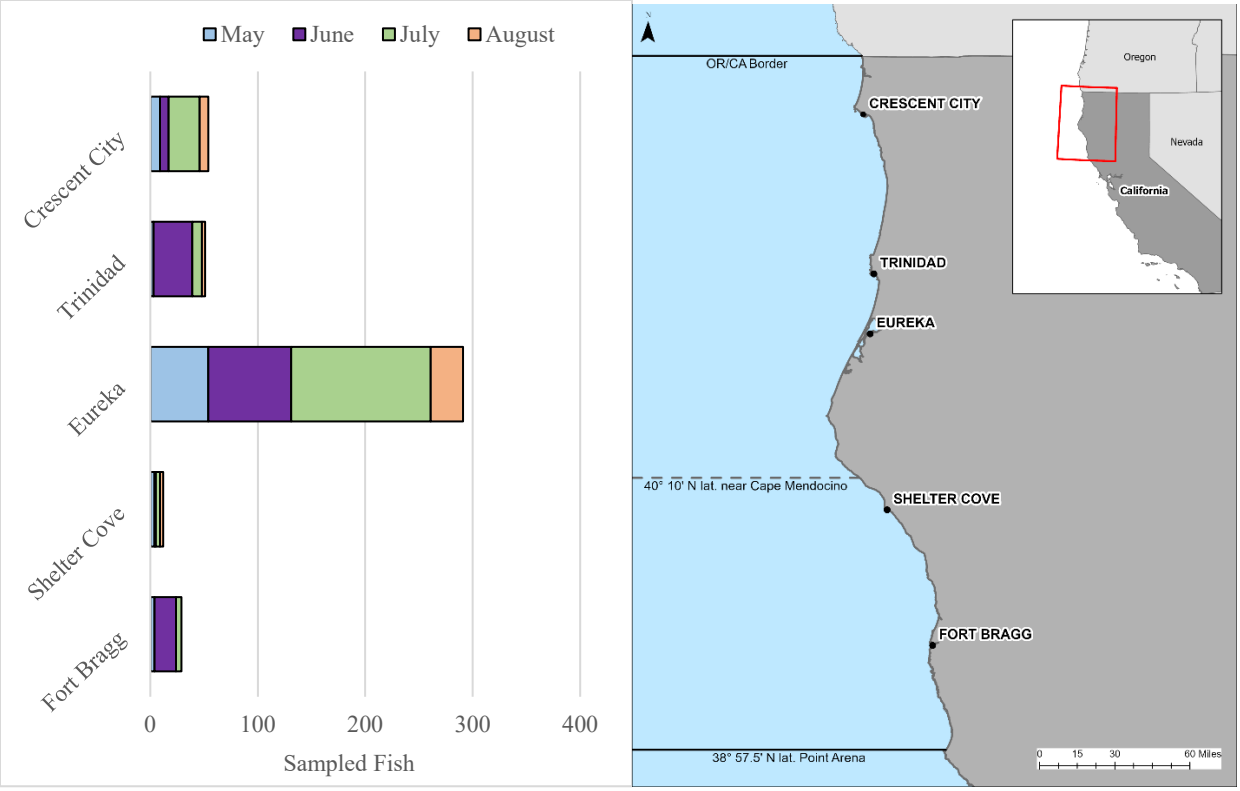

Figure 2. Northern California port areas where Pacific halibut are most frequently encountered and number of sampler examined Pacific halibut by month and port area during 2023. Also shown is the location of Point Arena (38°57.5' N. lat.).

Inseason Tracking and Monitoring

CDFW conducts active quota tracking and management inseason so that when the quota is projected to be reached the fishery closes. In order to provide preliminary estimates of catch, CDFW uses a regression to determine approximately how many pounds of estimated catch are equivalent to one sampled fish. Using data collected and generated by the CRFS program, CDFW examined the number of sampled fish in each month/year against the corresponding catch estimate for each month/year (Figure 3) to generate a regression coefficient. This coefficient works to represent average weight of fish and average effort that are required to generate monthly estimates of catch (net pounds). Since 2015, CDFW has used this regression relationship method, updating the base year data each year (Table 2) to reflect recent year catch trends.

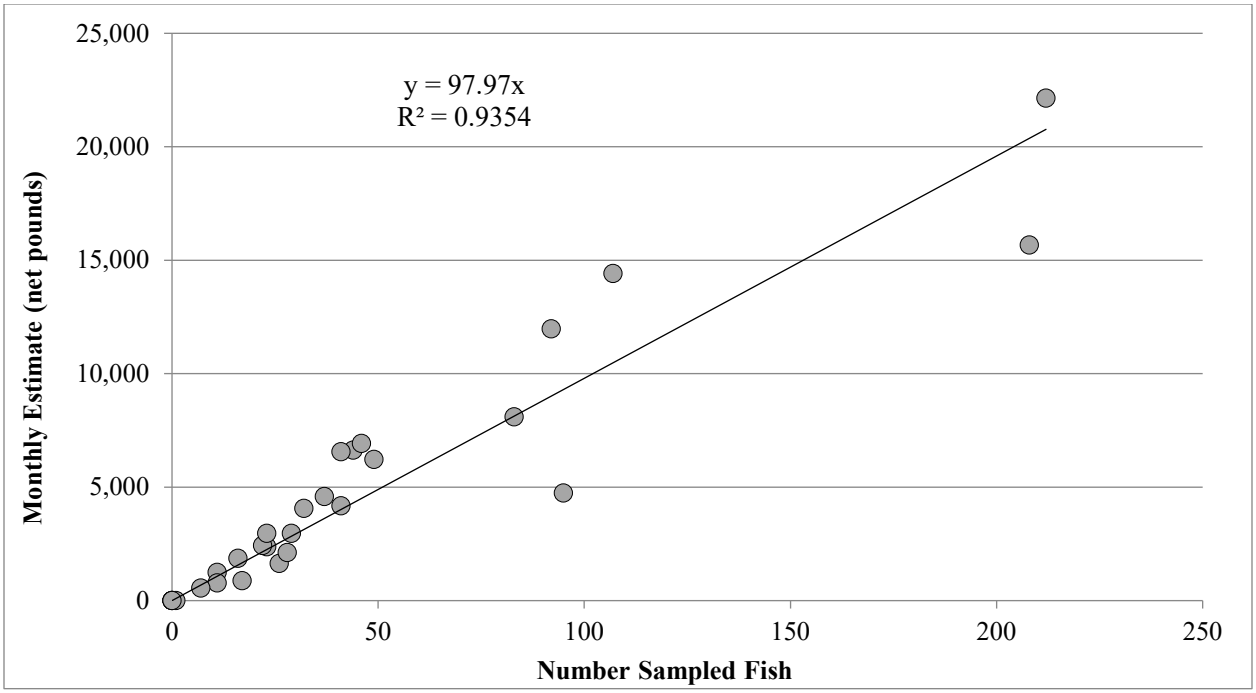

Figure 3. Regression of sampled (sampler examined and angler reported kept) Pacific halibut and monthly catch estimates from 2017-2019, and 2021-2022 for PR and PC modes used to generate the coefficient of 97.97 pounds per one retained Pacific halibut used for inseason management in 2023. An r^2 value of 0.9354 indicates a strong relationship between the number of sampled fish in a month and the resulting catch estimate in net pounds. Data from CDFW/CRFS.

Table 2. Pacific halibut recreational inseason tracking regression coefficient used in management in each year from 2015-2023, and the base-year data used to calculate the coefficients. Data from 2020 are not used in any regression calculation due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on data collection and catch estimates. Data are from CDFW.

Fishery Year	Years of Data Used in Regression:	Regression coefficient
2015	2008-2014	103.4
2016	2010-2015	108.4
2017	2013-2016	111.9
2018	2015-2017	106.32
2019	2016-2018	116
2020	2015-2019	108.6
2021	2015-2019	108.6
2022	2017-2019, 2021	74.97
2023	2017-2019, 2021-2022	97.97

During the open season, CDFW tallies daily observations of sampler examined and angler reported kept fish and multiplies this number by the catch projection regression coefficient to generate a preliminary projected catch. This preliminary projection is provided weekly, or more frequently when catches are getting close to the quota, by CDFW to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the Council, and the IPHC.

Meanwhile, the CRFS program generates monthly estimates of catch for all species approximately six weeks after a month has ended, incorporating effort and weight information from all fishing modes. Once a Pacific halibut monthly estimate is determined, this value replaces the weekly projected preliminary estimates. Any significant differences between catch estimates and weekly projections are also investigated and reported.

Inseason action to close the fishery is taken based on the projections added to any available monthly CRFS estimates. While production of final monthly catch estimates does involve that six-week lag time, the projections are used to estimate catch for any weeks for which monthly CRFS estimates are not yet available, allowing for very timely estimation of cumulative catch during the season (i.e., with as little as one day lag time rather than six weeks). This method of catch tracking and estimation involves use of the best available science as it becomes available during the season, combining both the final monthly CRFS estimates with the daily/weekly projections. This near real-time information allows CDFW, NMFS, the Council, and IPHC to coordinate on projection and determination of a closure date during the season. Throughout the season the public can track the progress of catch against the quota on CDFW Inseason Tracking webpage.

Management Objectives and Fishery Flexibility

CDFW supports the changes to the CSP as proposed in Agenda Item G.1 Attachment 3, September 2023 with implementation as part of the 2024 CSP.

Proposed Changes to Non-Tribal Sport Allocations

CDFW supports adopting an allocation shift to the California sport fishery for implementation as part of the 2024 CSP.

Inseason Flexibility Provisions

CDFW supports continuing work during 2024 on inseason flexibility provisions as described in Agenda Item G.1. Attachment 5, September 2023 with the intent to bring proposals back in front of the Council at the September 2024 meeting for consideration for the 2025 CSP.

California Sub-Area Management

New Management Line at Pt. Arena

CDFW recommends implementing a new management line at Pt. Arena (Figure 4). The boundary change and formation of a new management area would facilitate greater management of the resource, and better meet needs in different areas of the state. The area north of Pt. Arena would be called the Northern California subarea. The area south of Pt. Arena would be called the South of Pt. Arena subarea. The South of Pt. Arena subarea would be structured to accommodate de-minimis catch that occurs in other fisheries; Pacific halibut are not directly targeted in this area and are a rare and insignificant contributor to total mortality. The area would be open year-round with a 1-fish daily bag and possession limit. The quota for the area south of Pt. Arena would be a set poundage (up to a maximum of 1,000 net pounds annually) to be subtracted from the California area quota, with the remainder available for the directed recreational fishery that is well established north of Pt. Arena. The IPHC surveyed California waters in 2013, 2014, and again in 2017. The

2017 survey reached as far south as waters off San Francisco, however, for the area between Cape Mendocino and San Francisco only trace amounts of Pacific halibut were caught.

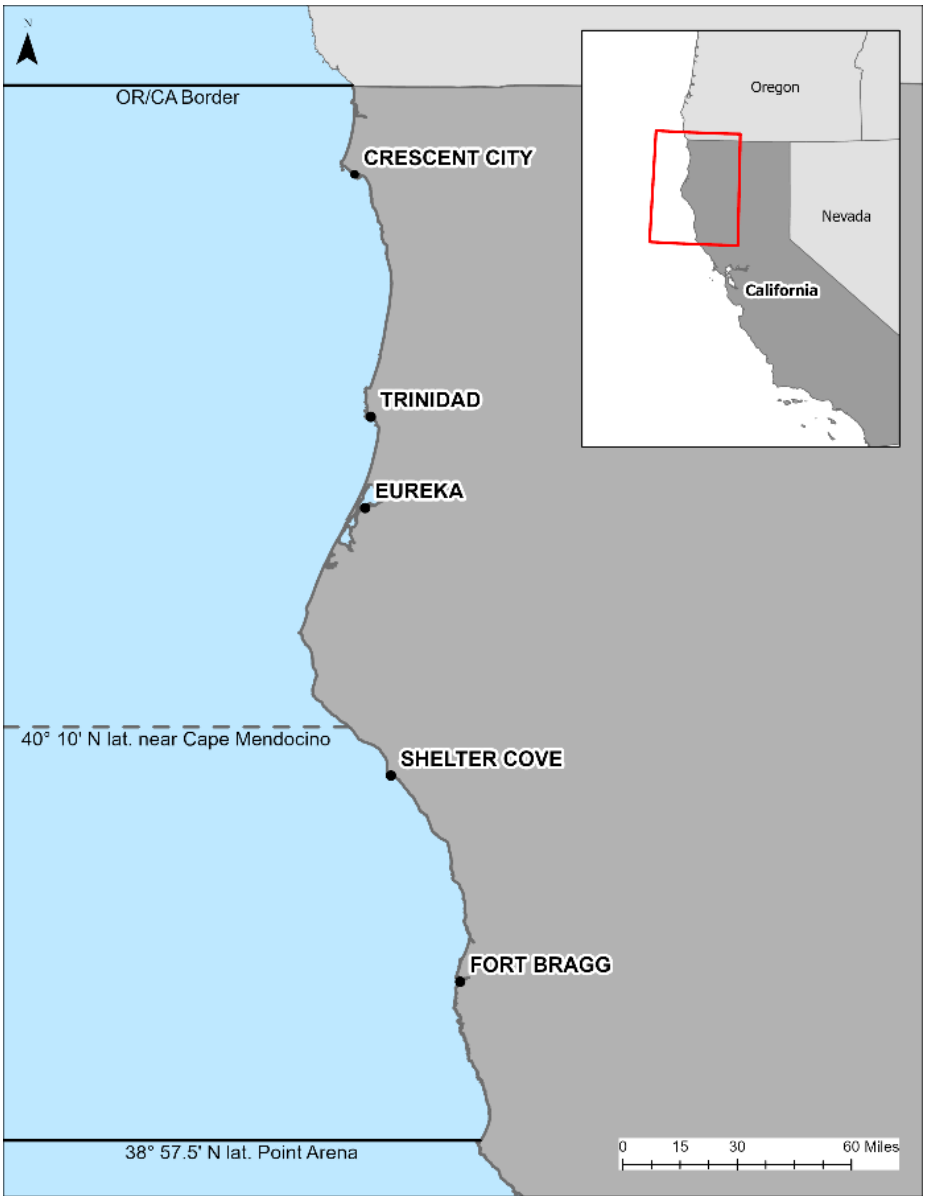

Figure 4. Map of northern California coastline and five port areas where Pacific halibut are directly targeted. Current groundfish management lines at 40°10' N. lat. (near Cape Mendocino) and 38° 57.5' N. lat. (Point Arena) are shown.

A review of CRFS field intercept data from 2008-2023 for the area south of Pt. Arena indicate in most years one or fewer Pacific halibut are reported caught (kept/released) (Table 3). In the 16 years analyzed, seven years had no reported encounters with Pacific halibut in the area south of Pt Arena. An increase in encounters in 2022 was observed and may be due to anglers exploring areas that were previously closed to groundfish fishing. However, realized mortality from this area continues to be a minor contributor to total recreational landings off California. The highest year

total of estimated mortality for the area south of Pt. Arena is 391 net pounds and occurred in 2022. CDFW recommends setting the south of Pt. Arena limit at 500 pounds for 2024.

Table 3. CRFS sample data of number of kept and released and estimates (net pounds) and total mortality of Pacific halibut by year in the area south of Pt. Arena. Data for 2023 are preliminary and subject to change. Catch estimates prior to 2015 are not available broken out north and south of Pt. Arena and are not presented here. Data are from CDFW/CRFS.

Year	Number Kept Fish	Number Released Fish	Estimated Mortality (net pounds)
2008	0	0	*
2009	0	0	*
2010	0	0	*
2011	1	0	*
2012	1	0	*
2013	1	0	*
2014	0	0	*
2015	0	0	0
2016	1	0	0
2017	0	0	0
2018	0	0	0
2019	0	1	7
2020	0	1	4
2021	1	0	58
2022	4	4	391
2023	0	4	6

CDFW provides proposed CSP language to describe the California sub-areas created by implementing a management line at Pt. Arena at the end of this report.

Depth Based Management

It is expected recreational groundfish regulations in 2024 and beyond will limit fishing depths to shallower than 20 fm and/or seaward of the 50 fm Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) line to limit interactions with quillback rockfish which are most commonly encountered between 20 and 50 fm in depth. Since no depth-based management currently applies to the recreational Pacific halibut fishery off California, anglers targeting Pacific halibut could fish in depths that are otherwise closed to fishing for groundfish and encounter quillback rockfish which would add to total mortality of the species.

Following the September 2023 Council meeting, CDFW conducted a preliminary review of CRFS intercept data from the 2023 season when Pacific halibut and groundfish were both open with no depth constraints in the northern area of the state for records of quillback rockfish and Pacific halibut being caught on the same trip and in the same water depth. This preliminary analysis indicates that of the 437 Pacific halibut that were sampled in 2023, only three of those fish had co-occurring quillback rockfish. Due to the limited co-occurrence between these species, CDFW does not expect the recreational Pacific halibut fishery to be a significant source of quillback rockfish bycatch mortality.

Additionally, discussions with NMFS between the September and November Council meetings about implementing federal regulations for depth-based management in the recreational Pacific halibut fishery off California revealed it is not as simple as turning on or off an RCA line. Additional analytical work would be needed, including identification of which specific line or lines are intended for use in the following year's fishery, timing of when line(s) would be effective, consideration of how the fishery would operate with depth-based management, and how these rules could impact the Pacific halibut resource, angler behavior, and enforceability. Given the timing of the annual management process for Pacific halibut, and the biennial management process for groundfish (which includes quillback rockfish), CDFW will continue to investigate the need and paths toward implementation of depth-based management in the recreational Pacific halibut fishery off California for the 2025 fishery and beyond in federal regulations, and/or may take actions in state regulations in 2024 to implement depth limits for the fishery in state waters (0-3 miles) if necessary.

Proposed Changes to the CSP Language for New California Sub-Area

6.12 California Coast California sport fisheries are allocated 4.0[5.0-7] percent of the total non-tribal FCEY~~, which is distributed along the entire California coast~~. This allocation is shared between two subareas within the State divided at Pt. Arena (38°57.5' N. lat.), with the area south of Pt. Arena receiving a set amount of 500 lbs of the California quota to accommodate de minimis bycatch in that area. ~~Based on the subarea quota, and considering stakeholder input, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) will provide recommendations to NMFS each year as soon as possible following the determination of the Area 2A FCEY on the opening date and other closure dates, such as closed weeks or months that would apply during the fishing season that year.~~

Northern California subarea

a. Subarea allocation

This sport fishery subarea is allocated 4.0[5.0- 7] percent of the non-tribal allocation, minus 500 lbs to be subtracted from the Northern California subarea quota to accommodate de minimis bycatch in the South of Pt. Arena subarea.

b. Geographic location

This area is defined as the area south of the OR/CA Border (42° 00.00' N. lat.) to Pt Arena (38°57.5' N. lat.)~~, including all California waters~~.

c. Management objectives

~~None identified in this document.~~ Maximize fishing opportunity and achieve but not exceed the California sport quota. Flexibility through timely inseason action may be necessary to achieve but not exceed the Area 2A FCEY.

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 November 15, whichever is earlier. ~~Additional closed periods during this season, such as closed weeks or months and including a later opening date, be established preseason by NM5FS based on the subarea quota and projected catch~~. Based on the subarea quota, and considering stakeholder input, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) will provide recommendations to NMFS each year as soon as

possible following the determination of the Area 2A FCEY on the opening date and other closure dates, such as closed weeks or months that would apply during the fishing season that year.
e. Landing restrictions
The daily bag limit is one halibut per person, with no size limit.
f. Inseason adjustments
Consistent with section 6.8.
Closure of the fishery or other inseason adjustments will be made by NMFS via an update to the recreational halibut hotline.
g. Groundfish regulations
None identified in this document.
h. Closed conservation areas
None identified in this document.

South of Pt. Arena subarea
a. Subarea allocation
This sport fishery subarea receives 500 lbs of the California Coast quota to accommodate bycatch of Pacific halibut in the areas south of Pt. Arena.
b. Geographic location
This area is defined as the area south Pt Arena (38°57.5' N. lat.) to the US/Mexico border.
c. Management objectives
To allow year-round de minimis bycatch and reduce regulatory discarding of Pacific halibut in the southern-most extent of the species range.
d. Season structure
The season will be open year-round.
e. Landing restrictions
The daily bag limit is one halibut per person, with no size limit.
f. Inseason adjustments
Consistent with section 6.8.
Closure of the fishery or other inseason adjustments will be made by NMFS via an update to the recreational halibut hotline.
g. Groundfish regulations
None identified in this document.
h. Closed conservation areas
None identified in this document.