

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON 2024 PACIFIC HALIBUT CATCH SHARING PLAN AND REGULATIONS - FINAL

Proposed changes to management objectives and fishery flexibility

Referencing [Attachment 3](#) under this agenda item, the Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) supports the changes proposed to reflect the current nature of the fishery and its management more accurately.

Proposed changes to non-tribal sport allocations

Referencing [Attachment 4](#), the GAP had significant discussions surrounding allocation changes in the Catch Sharing Plan for 2024.

Recreational fishermen on the GAP identified differences between fishing behaviors along the West Coast due to weather, season structures of related fisheries (e.g., salmon) and restrictions. For example, Washington charter boat fishermen indicated their halibut seasons developed over years in response to declining salmon seasons – a similar situation California recreational fishermen are facing now. It may be difficult to imagine fishing season adjustments that work for one fishery and how it would work in another state’s recreational fishery.

The GAP agreed that use of the Area 2A allocation, through the various sectors in Area 2A, should continue to be utilized to demonstrate the need for the Area 2A allocation to remain as close to status quo as possible. The GAP also agreed that retaining community infrastructure and decreasing negative community economic impacts is inherent to requests for changes to season structures.

The GAP recommends the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) remove Option 1 (see section 3 in Attachment 4) from the range of options for allocation changes (Move 2 percent of the Oregon sport allocation and 1 percent of the Washington sport allocation to the California sport allocation). California and Oregon members of the GAP agreed on the recommendation for Option 3 (Move 0.6 percent of the Oregon sport allocation and 0.4 percent of the Washington sport allocation to the California sport allocation) for 2024 *only*. Washington recreational members, however, do not support this option at this time.

The GAP recommends that discussions for 2025 and beyond resume in June 2024 and the Council consider Options 2 and 3 at that time. We hope that more analysis, specifically on socio-economic impacts, can be done over the winter/spring to help inform those discussions for 2025 and beyond. Additionally, we continue to recommend that more surveys be conducted to better assess the halibut stock on the West Coast.

Proposed changes to inseason flexibility provisions for sport fisheries

Referencing [Attachment 5](#), the GAP agreed that Option 1 (below) would provide flexibility to allow some additional fishing opportunities to communities that may need it, particularly those in California, after primary seasons have ended in other states. This mechanism has been used in the

non-tribal Pacific whiting fishery for reapportioning projected unused fish. It is efficient and the GAP recommends it be implemented in 2024 to provide necessary flexibility to sport halibut fisheries. Additionally, the GAP urges the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to ensure the reapportionment can be done in three to five days after August 15, to better afford fishermen additional opportunity and efficiency.

Option 1: Annually August 15, each coastal state will provide a catch report via email to NMFS, PFMC, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), Washington Department of Fish Wildlife and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). The catch report would include actual and projected catch (in net pounds) for each subarea and the total projected amount of unused quota for the state sport allocation. If one or more state report projects an excess of quota that is available for transfer to another state(s), then NMFS will reapportion the pounds available to the other state(s) using the percentages initially prescribed in the CSP to WA, OR and CA sport fisheries, as appropriate. NMFS will announce any such reapportionment in the Federal Register and concurrent publication on the hotline, consistent with language described in Section 6.8 of the CSP.

In addition, if excess quota is available for transfer through reapportionment, the receiving state could accept the additional pounds in whole or in part. If a receiving state determined only a portion of the additional pounds were needed to conduct their season, then after communication with NMFS the 'declined' portion could be made available to the other receiving state, as appropriate.

Sport Fisheries for 2024

For Washington sport fisheries, Supplemental [WDFW Report 2](#) identifies several recommendations regarding subarea options and season dates. The GAP fully supports these recommendations.

Relative to the [Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Report 1v](#), The GAP supports alternative 1 (ODFW recommendation): Oregon Central Coast Spring All-depth Backup dates may be established every week, except week(s) may be skipped to avoid adverse tidal conditions. The potential back-up dates will be identified preseason.

For California, the GAP supports the new management line at Pt. Arena, as outlined in the [Supplemental California Department of Fish and Wildlife Report 1](#). As CDFW pointed out, “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.”

Proposed changes to regulatory items

Referencing [Attachment 6](#), the GAP supports moving all three items and the proposed options under this agenda item forward in the process. That is:

1. Vessel Monitoring System (VMS): require all vessels participating in the non-tribal commercial directed halibut fishery to carry VMS;

2. Fish receiving ticket forms: require all non-tribal commercial landing tickets that report halibut to include the number of individual halibut landed; and
3. Seabird avoidance measures: require all vessels participating in the non-tribal commercial directed halibut fishery to deploy seabird avoidance gear.

The GAP has supported these items in the past ([Agenda Item D.1.a, Supplemental GAP Report, September 2023](#)) and continues to support moving these items forward for consideration.

Commercial Directed Halibut Fishery in 2024

The GAP recommends the following season structure for the commercial non-tribal directed halibut fishery in 2024:

The 2024 season will consist of a series of three-day openings beginning at 8 a.m. on the fourth Tuesday in June, ending at 6 p.m. on the Thursday of that week.

The second three-day opening would occur on Tuesday through Thursday, two weeks after the first opener. The third three-day opening would occur on Tuesday through Thursday three weeks after the second opener (this is a modification of Option 1 adopted by the Council in September 2023 ([decision summary](#))). Any subsequent openings would occur as soon as possible. Notice of the dates for the first three openers would be announced in the Federal Register prior to the start of the season.

The primary purpose for this option, compared to status quo, would be to have dates for the third and subsequent openers defined earlier for participants to allow more efficient business planning.

PFMC
11/04/23