

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON
PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CATCH SHARING PLAN AND 2024 ANNUAL REGULATIONS

Inseason Flexibility Provisions (Section 6.8.1.f)

CDFW supports continued work to build upon the inseason flexibility provisions that were first incorporated into the 2024 Catch Sharing Plan (CSP). The initial steps taken in 2024 under this new process appear to have functioned largely as intended and allowed for re-assignment of pounds from one fishery to another mid-season through the end of the year, enabling planned open dates in Washington to continue without interruption. CDFW is mindful of our goal to fully utilize the 2A fishery constant exploitable yield (FCEY) and is hopeful that improvements can be made to increase the mechanisms and methods used to allow for inseason sharing of pounds across recreational sectors. CDFW also supports work to improve the CSP and regulatory language to minimize or streamline rulemaking obligations that come with these inseason flexibilities.

California Coast Recreational Fishery

Starting in 2024, the recreational California coast subarea was divided into two subareas split at Point Arena (38° 57.5' N. lat.). CDFW recommends minor modifications to the CSP regulatory language for 2025 that would clarify the use of the 500 pounds assigned to the South of Point Arena subarea identified in Section 6.12.2 of the CSP.

In 2024, the CSP was modified to set aside 500 pounds for de minimis catch that may occur at the southern extent of the Pacific halibut range. Pacific halibut are typically not directly targeted in this area and are an infrequent and insignificant contributor to total mortality. The highest-recorded catch to date was estimated at 391 net pounds from this area in 2022 ([Table 3, Agenda Item G.1.a, CDFW Supplemental Report, November 2023](#)). While unlikely and unprecedented, it is possible that expansions of small numbers of retained fish could result in catch estimates produced by CDFW's California Recreational Fishery Survey (CRFS) program that exceed 500 pounds in a year. As an example, to date, two fish have been encountered by CRFS field staff in this region in 2024, which results in a preliminary catch estimate of 148 net pounds. The fishery remains open statewide and CDFW does not anticipate attaining the statewide quota this year. However, in the event additional fish are encountered by CRFS samplers south of Point Arena resulting in catch estimates greater than 500 pounds, CDFW recommends including an inseason flexibility mechanism that would allow this area to remain open, given the total California Coast subarea quota has yet to be attained.

Similar to language in subsections 6.8.1.c and 6.8.1.d allowing transfer of unused quota from a subarea within a state to another subarea within that same state for Washington and Oregon, CDFW proposes the addition of language to the CSP (in Sections 6.8.1 and 6.12.1) to allow unused quota from the Northern California subarea to be transferred to and utilized to cover any catch in the South of Point Arena subarea that exceeds the 500 pounds, allowing the South of Point Arena subarea fishery to extend through the December 31 fishery end date. This modification will increase flexibility within the California subarea and allow for greater utilization of the quota while ensuring catch stays within the California subarea quota.

CDFW looks forward to working with NMFS and Council staff to refine and finalize the wording for inclusion in the draft 2025 CSP released for public review and the 2025 implementing regulations and offers an initial draft of CSP amendments below for consideration.

CSP section 6.8.1.f Protocol for inseason modifications (new subsection f for California sport fishery; current subsection f would be renumbered)

If the Northern California subarea sport fishery is not projected to utilize its respective quota by the season ending date, NMFS may take inseason action to transfer any projected unused quota to the South of Point Arena subarea.

CSP section 6.12.1.f Inseason adjustments

Consistent with section 6.8.

If inseason, it is determined via joint consultation between IPHC, NMFS, PFMC, and CDFW, that the Northern California subarea will not harvest the entire quota allocated to that area, quota may be transferred inseason to the South of Point Arena subarea by NMFS.

Closure of the fishery or other inseason adjustments will be made by NMFS. See section 6.8.2 for Notice Procedures.

CSP section 6.12.2.a Subarea allocation

This sport fishery subarea is ~~allocated~~assigned 500 pounds of the California sport allocation.

CSP section 6.12.2.d Season structure

Season may be open May 1 through December 31, or until subarea ~~allocation~~limit is met.

Area 2A Commercial Discard Mortality Estimate Calculation

Following the 2024 International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) Annual Meeting it became apparent that increased transparency is vital in how the North West Fishery Science Center (NWFSC) and the IPHC calculate the commercial discard mortality estimates in Area 2A which are then used by the IPHC to calculate the FCEY from the total constant exploitable yield (TCEY). The sudden increase in the Area 2A commercial discard mortality estimate for 2023 to 100,000 pounds (annual average from 2017-2022 was just over 34,000 pounds) is concerning as it resulted in a significant decrease to the 2024 FCEY resulting in reduced sector quotas for the 2024 fisheries. The Council and industry should be wary of implications that may arise with a near-tripling of bycatch estimates in 2024, and potentially into the future.

Discard mortality in commercial fisheries has long been an important topic and fisheries in Area 2A incorporated numerous management changes (IBQ, bycatch reduction devices, updated discard mortality rates etc.) over the last two decades to reduce commercial discards to consistently low levels. A detailed review of the process used to estimate and set aside the 100,000 pounds in 2024 for Area 2A would be beneficial to determine if additional changes to management measures are appropriate or warranted, or if additional follow-up with IPHC would be beneficial.

CDFW appreciates the report the IPHC provided following the Council's request at the March 2024 meeting. After reviewing the IPHC report included in [Agenda Item F.1.a. NMFS Report 1, September 2024](#), CDFW is interested in understanding the specific calculations from 2023, and how the variables included in the calculation for the 2024 FCEY may have differed from prior years. Further refinement of the commercial landings and discards columns in Table 1 would be useful, including the source poundage and application of the multipliers used to determine total discards. Some questions that may help guide additional discussions with the NWFSC and the IPHC include:

- Which commercial fishery sectors from the WCGOP Pacific halibut bycatch report contribute to the discard mortality estimate used by the IPHC?

- Can the public facing IPHC calculation table and/or documents provided at the IPHC's Interim and Annual Meetings show the steps from TCEY to FCEY to include more source specific line items for the commercial fishery? This would assist in differentiating mortality attributed to the IFQ/IBQ program, directed and non-directed non-treaty discard mortality, treaty fishery discard mortality, and other mortality sources.
- IPHC reports there was an increase in the proportion of sub-legal/legal size fish from the FISS survey in 2023, a year when the number of FISS stations in Area 2A was reduced compared to prior years. What does a direct comparison of the Area 2A stations fished in 2023 to those same stations in prior years result in when looking at the proportion of sub-legal/legal size fish? How will the lack of FISS sampling in 2024 in Area 2A be accounted for in determining the 2A discard estimate calculated for 2024, for use in 2025?