

## **Implement Trip Bag Limits for North Pacific Albacore Caught by Recreational Anglers in Federal Exclusive Economic Zone Waters Adjacent to Washington**

(Action Pursuant to Modification of Routine Management Measures Under the Framework in the Fishery Management Plan For U.S. West Coast Fisheries For Highly Migratory Species)

### **Decision Support Document**

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#### **1.0 THE PROPOSED ACTION, PURPOSE, AND NEED**

*The proposed action* is to implement a bag limit per trip for North Pacific albacore (*Thunnus alalunga*) caught by recreational anglers in Federal Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) waters (3-200 nm) adjacent to the State of Washington. Currently, recreational anglers are not limited in their take of albacore tuna in EEZ waters between the US-Canada and the Washington-Oregon borders. This is the geographic scope for the proposed action. Implementation of this proposed action falls within the concept of the “framework adjustment” approach described in the Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for establishing or adjusting routine management measures on a biennial cycle, without amending the FMP. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA’s) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is the action agency for the purpose of implementing any Federal regulation pursuant to Council action. Any change in the regulations would become effective April 2011, and stay in effect for at least two years.

If recreational bag limits per trip are adopted for Federal waters, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife would adopt regulations that apply to state waters (0-3 nm), to ensure consistency between Federal and state regulations as a separate action.

*The purpose of the proposed action* is to develop conservation measures consistent with the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission’s (IATTC) 2005 Resolution C-05-02 on North Pacific albacore to avoid increasing current fishing mortality for this species. In addition, the Washington State Legislature describes the recreational fishery as a “personal use” fishery, which is defined as “for the private use of the individual taking the fish” and having a bag limit is consistent with this concept.

*The proposed action is needed* for the sustainable management of this important recreationally and commercially harvested tuna. The best scientific evidence for North Pacific albacore tuna from the IATTC and ISC indicates the species may be experiencing fishing mortality above levels that are sustainable in the long term. Currently, there is no daily bag limit for albacore caught by recreational anglers fishing in EEZ waters adjacent to Washington.

## **1.1 Background to and Purpose of this Document**

The Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for West Coast Fisheries for Highly Migratory Species (HMS) describes a routine biennial management cycle with decision making occurring at the June, September, and November Council meetings to establish or adjust harvest specifications for a 2-year period beginning on April 1 of the following year.

In 2006, a range of alternatives was developed for Washington's recreational fishery but were not approved for public review at the request of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). The WDFW instead indicated that it would seek a moratorium on the issuance of new non-salmon charter vessel permits through the Washington State Legislature, rather than place a limit on the number of albacore per angler on a per trip basis. Accordingly, the WDFW pursued legislation to limit the number charter licenses for albacore; this legislation was accomplished in 2007. A WDFW limited entry salmon charter license is required to take passengers for hire to fish for albacore tuna.

The WDFW re-introduced the concept of placing an albacore tuna per trip limit on the Washington recreational fishery at the June 2010 Council meeting. The most recent albacore stock assessment, conducted in 2006, indicated that overfishing may be occurring; in response, commitments limiting effort to current levels were made by the U.S. in international forums. While discussions are ongoing relative to limiting effort in the commercial albacore fishery, the WDFW believed it prudent for the Council to again consider placing a per angler trip limit on the Washington recreational albacore fishery.

A range of alternatives for this proposal was developed by the WDFW, reviewed by the HMSMT and adopted by the Council for public review at their September, 2010, meeting in Boise, Idaho. The Council is to take final action to adopt their preferred alternative at the November 2010 meeting in Costa Mesa, California. NMFS would then initiate rulemaking and address other statutory requirements in order to implement the preferred alternative by April 1, 2011.

The purpose of this document is to provide sufficient information to support: 1) Council decision-making on what type of bag limit to recommend and 2) a NMFS determination that the proposed action may be categorically excluded from further NEPA analysis.

The assessment of the proposed action provided below indicates that the more liberal bag limits being considered would have a very modest effect on curtailing recreational fishing opportunity and that no significant impacts would therefore occur, whereas the more restrictive bag limits being proposed would reduce opportunity and thus impact the recreational fishery.

## **2.0 DESCRIPTION OF DAILY LIMIT ALTERNATIVES FOR ALBACORE TUNA**

The recreational albacore fishery is the only fishery in Washington that does not currently have any bag limits. In the absence of a species-specific bag limit, Washington recreational fisheries are subject to the general food fish possession limit of two of each species per day. In addition to daily bag limits for other species, there are additional possession limits in place—one daily bag limit on board a vessel, and two daily bag limits while on land. Albacore tuna have been exempt from these general state provisions.

The alternatives described below are presented for consideration as conservation measures consistent with sound fishery management. With multiple fisheries harvesting the same stock, which is the case with albacore, all fisheries involved, regardless of the relative amount they harvest, have a responsibility to contribute to the conservation of the stock. However, given that the Washington recreational fishery represents a very small fraction of the total West Coast albacore catch and effort, having a bag limit which would significantly reduce the catch from recent levels is not warranted.

The Oregon recreational fishery has a daily bag limit of 25 albacore, as a component of a 25-fish aggregate limit for marine fish. The California recreational fishery has a daily bag limit of 25 albacore north of Point Conception and a bag limit of 10 albacore south of Point Conception.

## **2.1 Washington Recreational Trip Limit Alternatives for Albacore Tuna**

Washington recreational angler catch data from 2008 and 2009, including private angler interviews and charter logbooks, were used to analyze the following alternatives. In recent years, the total number of recreational albacore angler trips has increased, particularly by private anglers. Although private anglers comprise a very small component of the albacore fishery, the number of private angler trips has increased six-fold since 2006 (Figure 1). Total catch by charter and private anglers has increased (Figure 2); whereas catch per unit of effort has remained fairly stable, averaging 12 albacore per charter angler and four albacore per private angler (Figure 3). Bag sizes ranged from zero to 34 albacore per charter angler (Figure 4) and from zero to 23 albacore per private angler (Figure 5). Table 1 summarizes pros and cons for each alternative.

**Alternative 1 (Status Quo):** Would maintain current regulations for albacore tuna (i.e., no bag limit).

**Alternative 2:** Implements a statewide limit of 25 albacore per angler per trip.

**Discussion:** Selection of this alternative would remove the unlimited take provision currently in effect in EEZ waters adjacent to Washington. The analysis of recreational catch data from 2008 and 2009 indicates 95 percent of charter anglers and 100 percent of private anglers, landed 25 or fewer albacore per day (Figures 6 and 7). Therefore, a limit of 25 albacore per angler per day would have minimal impact on current fishing practices for albacore and would prohibit unlimited catches during periods of peak abundance in waters adjacent to Washington. This measure would also provide greater consistency with Oregon's daily bag limit for albacore than a lower limit would provide.

**Alternative 3:** Implements an albacore bag limit of 20 fish per angler per trip.

**Discussion:** Selection of this alternative would remove the unlimited take provision currently in effect in EEZ waters adjacent to Washington. The analysis of recreational catch data indicates that 85 and 100 percent of charter anglers and private anglers, respectively, landed 20 or fewer albacore per day (Figures 6 and 7). This measure would set Washington's trip limit lower than Oregon's 25 fish daily bag limit.

**Alternative 4:** Implements an albacore bag limit of 15 fish per angler per trip.

**Discussion:** Selection of this alternative would remove the unlimited take provision currently in effect in EEZ waters adjacent to Washington. The analysis of recreational catch data indicates that 68 and 99 percent of the charter and private anglers, respectively, landed 15 or fewer albacore per day (Figures 6 and 7). As in Alternative 3, this measure would set Washington's trip limit considerably lower than Oregon's 25 fish daily bag limit.

**Alternative 5:** Implements an albacore bag limit of 10 fish per angler per trip.

**Discussion:** Selection of this alternative would remove the unlimited take provision currently in effect in EEZ waters adjacent to Washington. The analysis of recreational catch data indicates that 45 and 96 percent of charter and private anglers, respectively, landed 10 or fewer albacore per day (Figures 6 and 7). As in Alternatives 3 and 4, this measure would set Washington's trip limit to less than half of Oregon's 25 fish daily-bag-limit.

**Table 1. Pros and Cons for albacore tuna trip limit alternatives.**

Alternative	Pros	Cons
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recreational fishermen would experience no regulatory restrictions for albacore harvest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not support the 2005 IATTC resolution and the 2004 ISC recommendations for conservation of albacore</li> <li>• Does not convey a sense of conservation in association with the recreational fishing community</li> <li>• Does not support concept of Washington recreational fishery as being a personal use fishery</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would eliminate opportunity for unlimited catches during periods of peak abundance in waters adjacent to Washington</li> <li>• Supports IATTC resolution and ISC conservation recommendations for albacore</li> <li>• Supports concept of Washington recreational fishery as being a personal use fishery</li> <li>• Provides relative consistency with Oregon’s and Northern California’s daily albacore limits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would potentially affect approximately 5% of Washington charter anglers</li> <li>• Those few individuals who currently harvest more than 25 fish per trip may perceive a reduction from unlimited take to a 25 fish trip limit as not worth the cost of a fishing license, vessel trip fees, and travel expenses.</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would remove the unlimited take provision currently in effect in ocean waters adjacent to Washington</li> <li>• Supports IATTC resolution and ISC conservation recommendations for albacore</li> <li>• Supports concept of Washington recreational fishery as being a personal use fishery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would potentially affect approximately 15% of Washington charter anglers</li> <li>• Would not provide consistency with the current Oregon recreational daily bag limit for albacore, which could place Washington charters at a disadvantage when compared to Oregon charters</li> <li>• Fishermen may perceive a reduction from unlimited take to a 20 fish trip limit not worth the cost of a fishing license, vessel trip fees, and travel expenses.</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would remove the unlimited take provision currently in effect in ocean waters adjacent to Washington</li> <li>• Supports IATTC resolution and ISC conservation recommendations for albacore</li> <li>• Supports concept of Washington recreational fishery as being a personal use fishery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would potentially affect up to 32% of Washington charter anglers</li> <li>• Would not provide consistency with the current Oregon recreational daily bag limit for albacore, which could place Washington charters at a disadvantage when compared to Oregon charters</li> <li>• Fishermen may perceive a reduction from unlimited take to a 15 fish limit as not worth the cost of a fishing license, vessel trip fees, and travel expenses.</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would remove the unlimited take provision currently in effect in ocean waters adjacent to Washington</li> <li>• Supports IATTC resolution and ISC conservation recommendations for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would affect up to 55% of Washington charter anglers</li> <li>• Would not provide consistency with the current Oregon recreational daily bag limit for albacore, which could place</li> </ul>

	<p>albacore</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Supports concept of Washington recreational fishery as being a personal use fishery</li></ul>	<p>Washington charters at a disadvantage when compared to Oregon charters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fishermen may perceive a reduction from unlimited take to a 10 fish trip limit not worth the cost of a fishing license, vessel trip fees, and travel expenses.</li></ul>
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## LITERATURE CITED

- ISC (International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean). 2004a. Report of the 3<sup>rd</sup> ISC Pacific bluefin tuna working group. Intl. Sci. Comm. for Tuna and Tuna-like species in the North Pacific Ocean, ISC/04/Plenary/6.
- IATTC (Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission). 2005. Resolution C-05-02 on northern albacore tuna. <http://www.iattc.org/PDFFiles2/C-05-02-Northern-albacore-tuna.pdf>.
- PFMC (Pacific Fishery Management Council). 2003. Fishery Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for US West Coast Fisheries for Highly Migratory Species. Pacific Fishery Management Council, Portland, OR, August 2003.

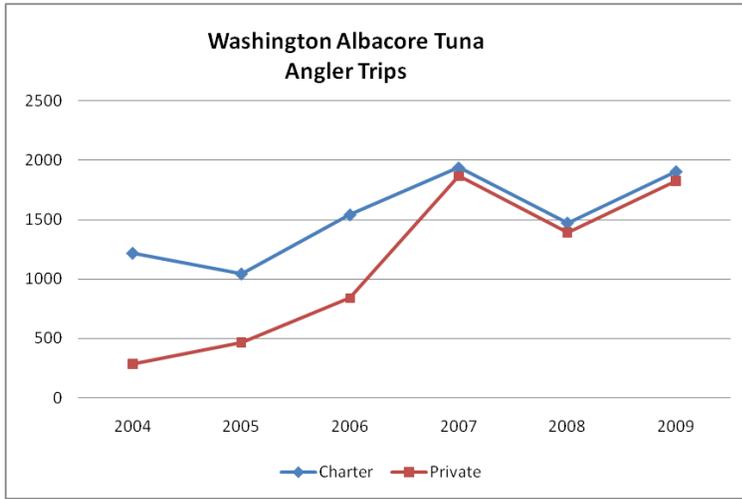


Figure 1. Washington recreational albacore angler trips, by charter and private anglers, 2004-2009.

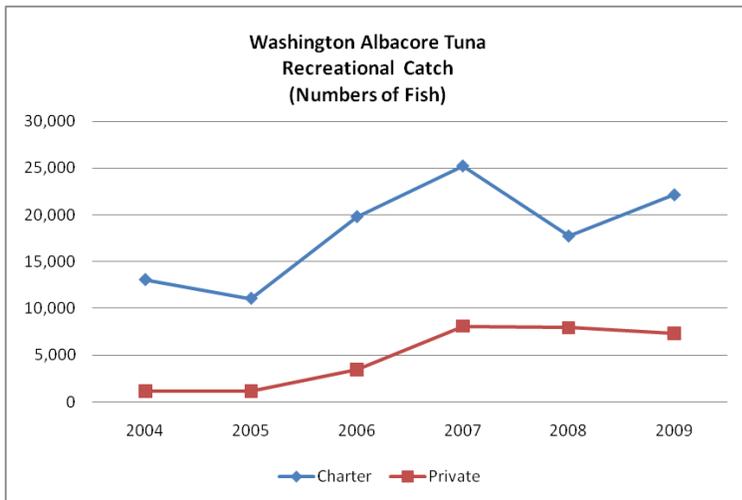


Figure 2. Washington recreational albacore catch (numbers of fish), by charter and private anglers, 2004-2009.

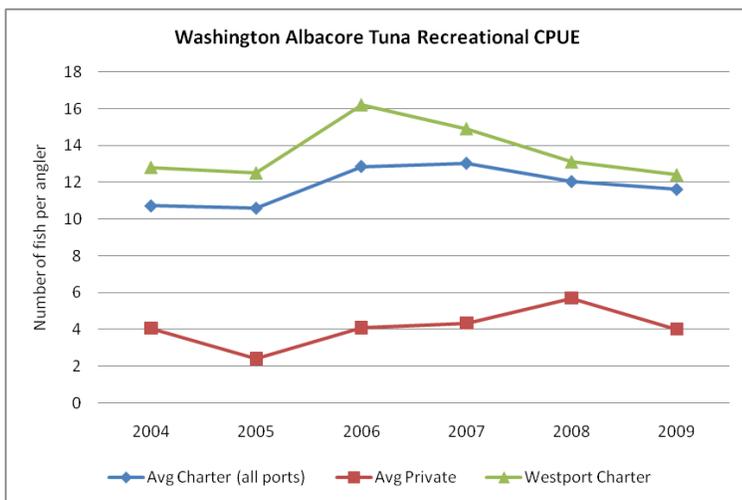


Figure 3. Washington recreational albacore catch per unit of effort (CPUE), by charter for Westport, WA and combined Washington ports, and private anglers, 2004-2009.

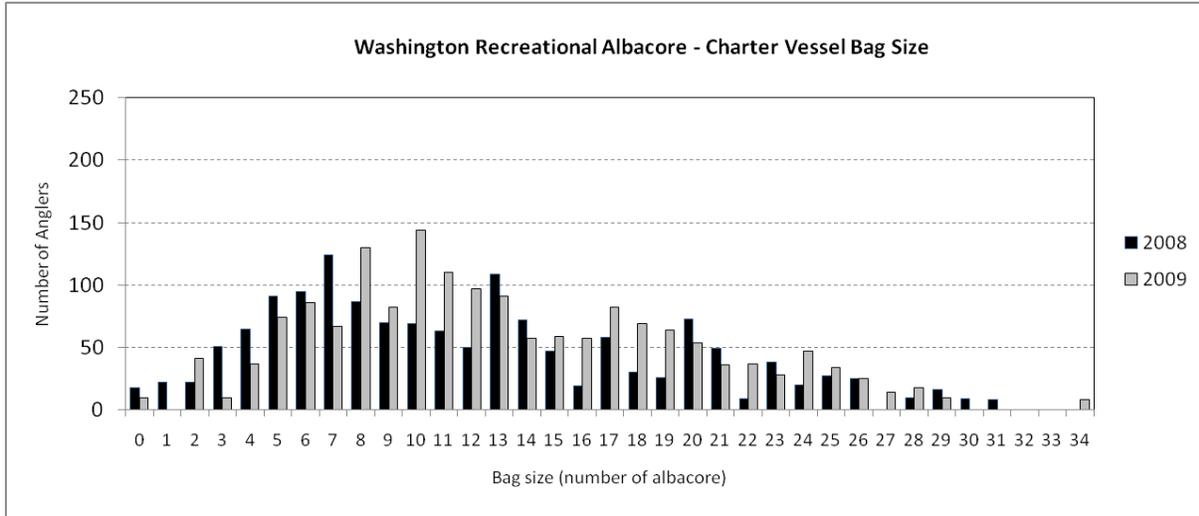


Figure 4. Number of Washington recreational charter vessel anglers and frequency of bag sizes, 2008 and 2009. Data source: Washington charter vessel logbooks.

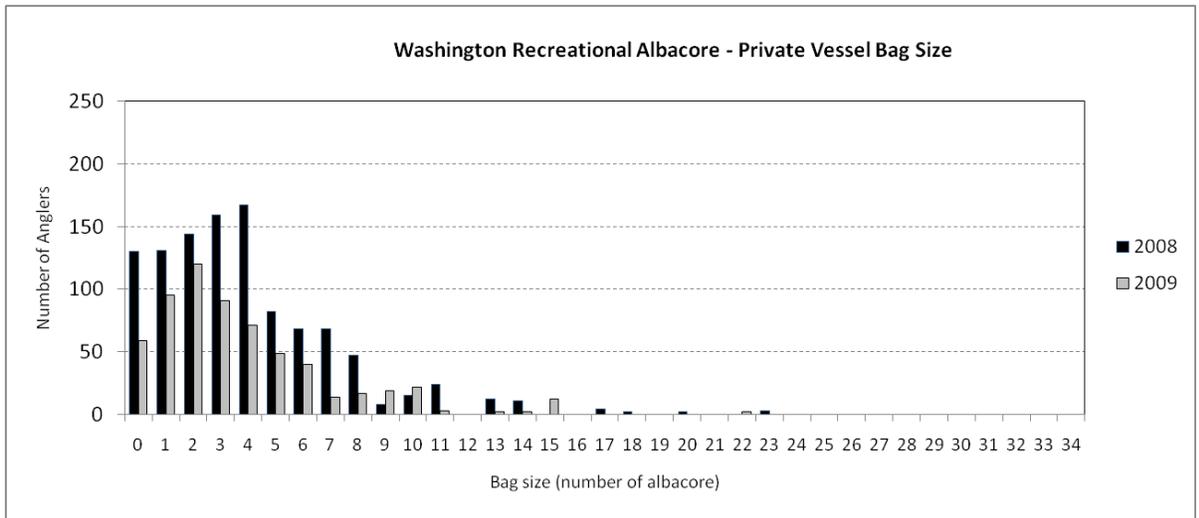


Figure 5. Number of Washington recreational private vessel anglers and frequency of bag sizes, 2008 and 2009. Data source: Washington Ocean Sampling Program – private vessel angler interviews.

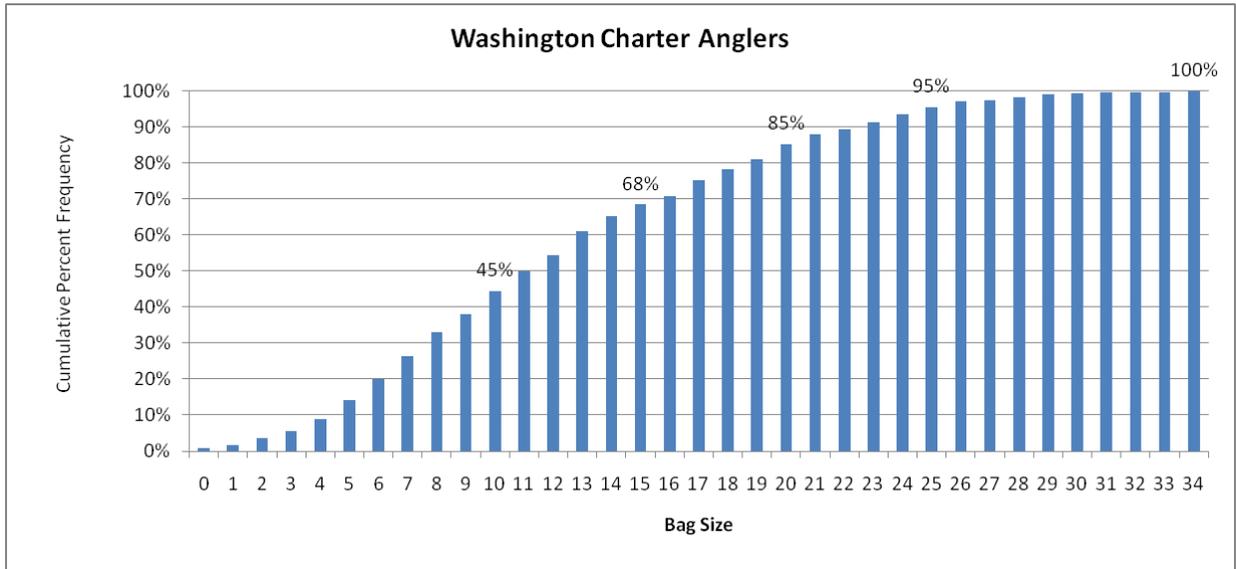


Figure 6. Average frequency of bag sizes for charter vessel anglers, 2008 and 2009.  
Data source: Washington charter vessel logbooks.

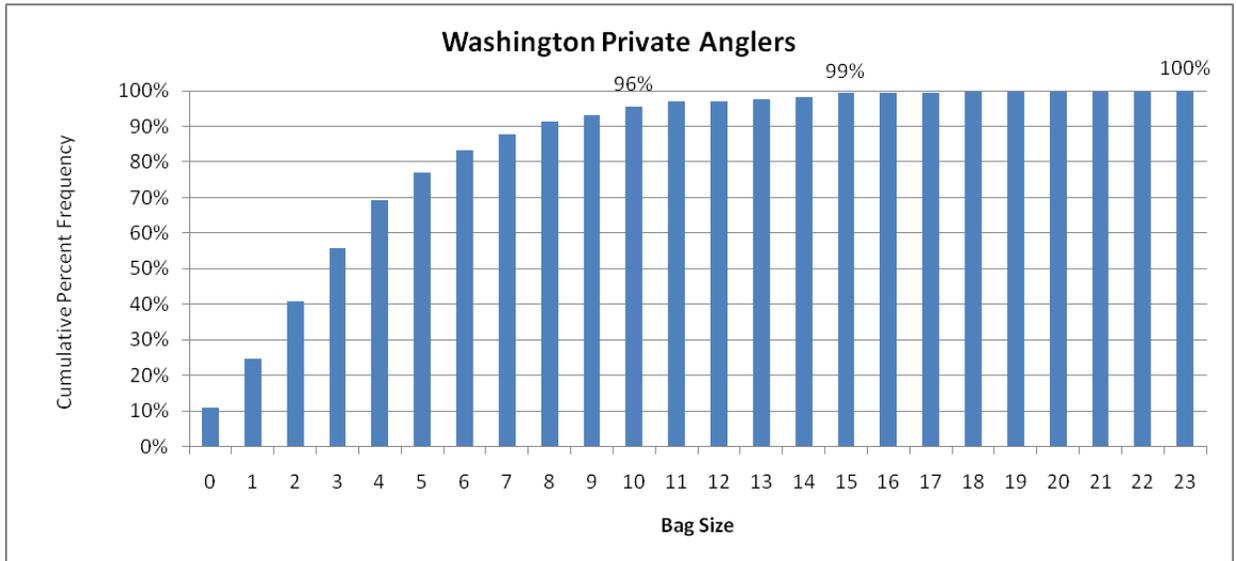


Figure 7. Average frequency of bag sizes for private vessel anglers, 2008 and 2009.  
Data source: Washington Ocean Sampling Program – private vessel angler interviews.

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