

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE (WDFW) REPORT ON
CHANGES TO BIENNIAL MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) held three public meetings to solicit input on and discuss alternatives for a recreational bag limit for albacore tuna. These meetings were held on May 26 (Westport), September 1 (Montesano), and October 19, 2010 (Olympia).

Recommendation

Based on the input received and our discussions with affected stakeholders, WDFW is recommending Alternative 1, or no action, at this time. Our intent is to maintain status quo (i.e., no bag limit and a state limited entry program for Washington-based charter boats) through the next management cycle. We would be prepared to consider a bag limit once the next albacore stock assessment results are available, which is expected to be in 2011.

Rationale

The Washington recreational albacore tuna catch represents about 0.3-0.8% of the U.S. total catch, and about 0.05% of the pan-Pacific total harvest, so implementing a bag limit would have little to no effect on the conservation of the stock. Also, over 80% of the Washington recreational tuna are caught on charter boat trips and, in 2007, we expanded our charter limited entry program to include albacore, so most of our sport effort has already been limited.

In addition, the current composition of the fleet is self-limiting. The Washington albacore charter fleet is comprised of vessels ranging from 43 to 65 feet in length. It is limited by angler permits associated with the limited entry charter licenses, and the charter vessels' hold capacities limit the number of fish per angler that can be retained. The Washington private boat fleet is also self-limited by the size of vessels and weather conditions. The private boat fleet is generally comprised of vessels ranging from 24-32 feet in length carrying 3-5 anglers per trip that retain a total catch of 20-50 albacore tuna per boat.

For these reasons, WDFW does not see the need for an albacore bag limit at this time. Depending on the results of the next assessment, we will be prepared to work with the Council to develop management measures for albacore fisheries to achieve the appropriate conservation action needed.

Future Plans

Beginning in 2011, WDFW plans to expand our efforts of catch reporting in our private boat fleet by using a proven system of voluntary vessel trip reports that will be distributed to and collected from private boat anglers, adding to the data collected by WDFW port samplers. We will continue our successful charter logbook program to estimate our charter catch estimates.