



Charter Halibut Management Committee REPORT

December 6, 2023

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council's Charter Halibut Management Committee held an in person/ online hybrid meeting on Wednesday, December 6, 2023. At this meeting the Committee provided recommendations on a range of charter halibut management measures (e.g., bag limits, size restrictions) for each International Pacific Halibut Commission Area 2C and 3A. All meeting materials are posted to the eAgenda.¹

Committee Members in attendance:

Andy Mezirow (Area 3A; <i>chair</i>)	Seth Bone (Area 2C)	Forrest Braden (Area 2C)
Daniel Donich (Area 3A)	Mike Flores (Area 3A)	Kent Huff (Area 2C)
Matt Kopec (Area 3A)	Stan Malcolm (Area 2C)	Scott McKelvey (Area 2C)
Richard Yamada (Area 2C)	Steve Zernia (Area 3A)	Sarah Marrinan (<i>staff coordinator</i>)

Members absent:

Brian Ritchie (Area 3A)

Others in attendance:

Brianna Bowman	Sarah Webster	Ben Jevons
Karla Bush	Steve Ramp	Tom Gemmell
Ben Cheeseman	Tom Taube	Tom Meyer
Nathan Lagerway	Jim Kearns	Kim Landeen
Maria Davis	Joel Steenstra	Clay Duda
Cory DeCook	Russel Dame	Jim Lindblom
Darryl Bosshardt	Paul Olson	Alex Perry
Kayla Carr		

Committee chair, Andy Mezirow called the meeting to order and members and participants provided introductions.

Analysis of 2024 Charter Halibut Management Measures

The Committee received a presentation of the ADF&G analysis of management options for the Area 2C and 3A charter halibut fisheries for 2024 from Brianna Bowman (ADF&G). This report and the corresponding presentation are linked in the eAgenda. Given the uncertainty around IPHC allocation decisions for 2024, the analysis used the 2023 allocations as a reference, which were **0.800 Mlb for Area 2C** and **1.89 Mlb for Area 3A**.

¹ Link to eAgenda with all meeting materials and written public comment:
<https://meetings.npfmc.org/Meeting/Details/3022>

Public Testimony

In addition to the 11 written public comment letters on the Committee's eAgenda, the Committee received oral public comment from 9 individuals: Joel Steenstra, Jim Lindblom, Paul Olson, James Kearns, Steve Ramp, Tom Gemmell, Clay Duda, Cory DeCook, and Kim Landeen. Most public comment focused on recommending management measures in both Area 2C and 3A, and highlighting which types of management measures may have the greatest negative economic impact on charter operations and anglers. Some testimony also highlighted concerns with the unguided rental boat sector, citing new businesses that have recently started using this halibut fishing model. Relative to this subject, one testifier highlighted steps he would like to see taken to address this issue. Additionally, there was some testimony on moving to a 1-fish bag limit for all recreational halibut anglers rather than differentiating management systems sub-sectors of recreational fishermen.

Recommended Management Measures for 2024

Area 2C

The Charter Halibut Management Committee recommends the following harvest measures for the Area 2C guided recreational halibut fishery in 2024:

A daily bag limit of 1 halibut, with a reverse slot size limit, where the upper limit is fixed at O80 (halibut equal to 80 inches or more may be retained). If the guided sport allocation is:

- a. 0.94 Mlb or above: U40O80 increasing the lower limit as available to reach allocation. (**Table 2C.4**)
- b. Between 0.93 and 0.88 Mlb: U40O80 closing consecutive Fridays as needed from the end of the season to remain within allocation but extending no earlier than July 12th. (**Table 2C.4** in combination with **Table 2C.5f**)
- c. Between 0.87 and 0.80 Mlb: U40O80 transitioning to U36O80 on July 15, closing consecutive Fridays as needed from the end of the season to remain within allocation, but extending no earlier than July 12th. (**Table 2C.6** in combination with **Table 2C.5f**)
- d. 0.79 to 0.74 Mlb: U37O80 closing consecutive Fridays as needed from the end of the season to remain within allocation but extending no earlier than July 12th. If the allocation is not met, reduce the lower limit to U36 and close consecutive Fridays as needed from the end of the season to remain within allocation but extending no earlier than July 12th. (**Table 2C.5.f**)

Rationale and discussion:

Area 2C Committee members emphasized that this persistent low state of halibut abundance has put them in a dire state for management measure options. There was substantial Area 2C testimony received at this December Committee meeting as well as the October Committee meeting. Members reached out to other affected stakeholders when making these recommendations and the impacts of these limited options are not taken lightly.

In determining a hierarchy of measures, Area 2C members focused on staying within their allocations, while looking for measures that would more equitably share the burden. For instance, annual limits were not chosen as they affect only a certain type of operation and angler. In order to generate a meaningful effect for this type of measures in Area 2C, it essentially must go down to a two fish annual

limit. This is the equivalent of day closures for 3-, 4-, 5- day fishing models. This type of measure disproportionately affects these types of multi-day businesses, versus an operation that takes a client out just once, who may be unaffected.

There have also been many comments about the distaste for day of the week closures, but it is one type of measure that affects each operation type. Additionally, there are different needs across ports in Area 2C and that makes it particularly difficult to identify one set of measures to apply to all. For instance, geographic constraints and access to other species vary. Some ports also have access to king salmon or coho, whereas some ports are primarily dependent on halibut opportunity. Therefore, the opportunity to harvest a slightly larger size is very important to these ports. People have also commented about not wanting day of the week closures in particular at the beginning of the season due to limited fishing alternatives. Members sought to address this by having any day of the week closure beginning no earlier than July 12th.

It was noted that the Area 2C Committee members did not have recommendations for a scenario with an allocation lower than 0.74 Mlb. There may only be few options at that point, but members were not willing to identify a preference for those extremely undesirable options.

Area 3A

The Charter Halibut Management Committee recommends the following harvest measures for the Area 3A guided recreational halibut fishery in 2024:

All allocations shown below include, unless otherwise specified: a daily bag limit of 2 halibut; one fish of any size and one fish with a maximum size limit; 1 trip per charter vessel per day with retention of halibut; 1 trip per charter halibut permit per day; and closed Wednesdays.

- 1) If the allocation is greater than or equal to 1.880Mlb:
 - Increase the size of the second fish until the projected charter harvest removals meet the allocation.
- 2) If the allocation is less than 1.880 Mlb, but greater than 1.590 Mlb:
 - In addition to all closed Wednesdays and a second halibut 28 inches or less, close as many Tuesdays as needed to keep the charter harvest removals within the Area 3A allocation, as indicated in **Table 3A.10 (page 32)** of the ADF&G analysis.
- 3) If the allocation is less than 1.590 Mlb, but greater than 1.513 Mlb:
 - In addition to closing all Tuesdays and Wednesdays, lower the size of the second fish to as low as 26 inches, until the projected charter harvest removals meet the allocation as indicated in **Table 3A.11 (page 33)** of the ADF&G analysis.
- 4) If the allocation is less than 1.513 Mlb:
 - Then select a 4-fish annual limit of halibut which then would bring the projected yield to 1.460 Mlb as indicated in **Table 3A.14. (page 36)** of the ADF&G analysis.

Rationale and discussion: Area 3A Committee members noted these options represented the easiest ways to cover the very large range of allocations that could be set at the IPHC. They emphasized that it was alarming to look at the extreme measures and felt optimistic that they would not need to apply for 2024. The 4-fish annual limit would be the least desirable measure and it would only be used as a very last resort. Members stated that providing consistent regulations was a big part of the strategy behind what

was proposed. Consistent management measures allow for better ADF&G projections and is desirable from a business and marketing standpoint.

Preliminary estimates demonstrate Area 3A removals 17.7% under its allocation for 2023. Some affected stakeholders have expressed frustration that this could have afforded additional fishing days this last year which has direct revenue implications for charter businesses. However, it was also highlighted by NMFS staff that both Area 2C and 3A have had some years with overages and the intention of this management system is that the underages and overages will balance out over time. It was demonstrated that since the Catch Sharing Plan was initiated (2014) comparing the total Area 2C charter removals to the allocation demonstrates a total underage of 1.6%. Comparing the total Area 3A charter removals to the allocation in this timeframe demonstrates a total overage of 4.3%. Thus, the analyses have demonstrated remarkable precision overtime given the difficult task of predicting angler behavior.

ADF&G Saltwater eLogbook

Ben Jevons (ADF&G) provided a presentation on the ADF&G eLogbook program, as use of the eLogbook will be mandatory for Area 3A in 2025. The eLogbook (as opposed to the paper logbook) is currently mandatory in Area 2C and the program has been successful. The data received is better quality, available substantially earlier, and more efficient for guides once they have learned the process. Ben explained additional user benefits (e.g., generating summary reports or searchable data for business owners) and the different applications (for guides to enter into and for business owners to review). He explained how data entry does not require Internet connection so trip data can be recorded at sea, out of reception areas and later submitted when back online. ADF&G plans to conduct significant outreach between 2023 and 2025. Anyone with questions or feedback on the application are encouraged to contact Ben (ben.jevons@alaska.gov).

Future Actions and Other Business

Andy spoke to a few topics that have come up at this or other Committee meetings, including the concept of a ‘conservation threshold’ for Pacific halibut. This is a threshold of low abundance at which point all halibut user groups could be restricted in use and allocation, rather than the use from some sectors being deducted off the top of the Fishery Constant Exploitation Yield prior to the commercial and charter halibut allocations. Andy stated he felt if this type of threshold was not identified prior to this situation occurring, it would be difficult to address once the stock entered this state of low abundance. He told Committee members he intended to alert the Council of this concern and underscore the importance of identifying a response before this scenario became an issue. The Charter Halibut Management Committee members also voiced support for the Council’s consideration of a ‘conservation threshold’ for Pacific halibut.

Andy also highlighted that although the Committee did not have time to take on the ‘omnibus’ issues raised at the October Charter Halibut Management Committee meeting, he may raise these issues through staff tasking at this or a near future Council meeting. These issues include the Charter Halibut Permit latency and registration, as well as solutions to the issues around the compressed Charter Halibut management timeline.