



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

Report to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council Recreational Fisheries Roundtable October 2, 2019

Summary

In conjunction with the October Council meeting in Homer, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) sponsored a recreational fishing roundtable event. The meeting was structured as an informal conversation where stakeholders were encouraged to ask questions, and to voice their concerns, their priorities, and their strategies for improving the conservation, management, and business practices of the Alaska halibut sport fishery. The conversations also provided an opportunity for NMFS and Council staff to outline the federal regulatory process, in particular the function of the Council's Charter Halibut Management Committee. Staff emphasized the importance of stakeholder participation.

Roundtable Discussion

The roundtable was held from 5:30 to 7:00pm on Wednesday October 2, at the Baidarka Best Western Hotel in Homer. It was followed by a presentation and overview of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's electronic charter vessel logbook.

The roundtable event was held as part of a commitment by National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for a greater focus on direct, face-to-face engagement with the recreational fishing community. These and other roundtable events are intended to provide an opportunity for charter fishing operators, charter clients, boat owners, and other recreational fishers to ask questions and to present their priorities, concerns, and suggestions for halibut sport fishing in Alaska. The goal is to increase awareness for all participants, and to encourage stakeholders to participate in the management of their fisheries.

The roundtable was well attended by approximately 21 stakeholders. Most attendees indicated they were charter operators who fish out of Homer, but others from Ninilchik, Whittier, Seward, and Southeast Alaska were also present. Executive Directors from the Alaska Charter Association (Jim Martin), the Southeast Alaska Guides Organization (Forrest Braden), and the Halibut Coalition (Tom Gemmell) also attended.

The event allowed stakeholders the opportunity to directly interact with staff from several government agencies. Together with staff from NOAA Fisheries, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG), the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (Council), and the office of U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan, the following leadership staff and Council members were present:



NOAA Fisheries

Sam Rauch, NOAA Fisheries Deputy Assistant Administrator

Dr. Jim Balsinger, Alaska Regional Administrator

Glenn Merrill, Alaska Assistant Regional Administrator

Will Ellis, Assistant Director, Office of Law Enforcement

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Doug Vincent-Lang, Commissioner

Rachel Baker, Deputy Commissioner

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

Bill Tweit

Andy Mezirow

John Jensen

After brief introductions, Deputy Assistant Administrator Rauch opened the meeting with comments on the importance of recreational fisheries, both socially and economically. He cited estimates from a poster provided by the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, where contributions to the Alaska economy were highlighted, with estimates of value-added inputs, such as labor and capital income, business taxes, and employment.

Mr. Rauch spoke to NMFS's commitment to a greater level of engagement with the recreational fishing sector, which was specifically identified by fishermen at a national recreational fishing summit held in 2018. NMFS has responded by developing distinct engagement plans for each NMFS region in the country. An element in each plan includes regular roundtable events. The roundtables are structured as informal discussions that encourage stakeholder input. In turn, the events also provide an opportunity for Council and NMFS staff to provide information on the regulatory process, with an emphasis on stakeholder involvement.

Mr. Rauch and NMFS staff then turned the conversation to the participants, by inviting questions or comments. In summary, the questions, comments, and discussion covered the following topics:

Participants initially had questions about the origin of the differences in halibut sport fishing regulations between guided and unguided fishermen. Mr. Merrill described the history, where the Council's concern in the early 2000s centered on the growth and changing proportion of halibut sport harvest by the charter sector. This led to the Charter Halibut Limited Access Plan and the Catch Sharing Plan that is in place today, where unguided halibut harvest is factored "off the top" before the commercial and charter fleet catches are determined. The differences in harvest restrictions between guided and unguided sectors has become wider as coastwide halibut stocks declined.

Charter operators described some of the effects of the differences in guided and unguided fishing. Some suggested that persons and businesses were circumventing the charter rules by taking "friends" fishing (i.e. illicitly accepting compensation for providing sport fishing services); others pointed to a growth in the private boat sector, and the greater effectiveness the private fleet now has than in the past. An apparent increase in rental boats also appears to

be related to differences in regulations between guided and unguided fishing. One person suggested the private boat fleet and rental boats are a permanent change and would not “go away” or otherwise be diminished if bag, size, and possession limits were the same for guided and unguided anglers.

A charter operator asked if charter angling restrictions had ever been challenged in court. It was also mentioned that persons with disabilities need charter captains and crew to operate a boat to help them access the resource and harvest fish; this could also lead to a court challenge.

Several persons indicated that charter angling restrictions have harmed their businesses. Day-of-the-week closures impact the number of tourists that come to Homer. Additionally, the number of Alaska resident anglers has dropped off as a result of the “one big fish/one small fish” size limits and 4-fish annual limits. Alaska resident anglers no longer consider charters worthwhile under these rules.

One attendee stated that “a sport fisherman is a sport fisherman” and that the congressional delegation should pass a statute to equalize guided and unguided anglers. If restrictions are placed, they should be on businesses, not on individual anglers who fish from charter boats. He indicated that to obtain enough fishing days to keep their businesses viable, charter operators now have to continue to work into the shoulder seasons, which is more dangerous due to worse weather at those times.

There was discussion on the economics of charter fishing. Rod and reel fishing is an inefficient way to harvest fish compared to commercial fishing; however, the economic impact of a relatively few amount of fish allocated to the recreational sector is large. Revenues from charter fishing are widely spread in Homer, including through sales taxes. It was suggested that fisheries that waste halibut should be restricted more heavily, instead of restricting charter businesses. Halibut that are released in halibut charter fishing have a low mortality, especially if circle hooks are used. Bycatch in other fisheries is a big allocative issue, and even small decreases in bycatch could provide significant and positive impacts to the charter sector.

A stakeholder raised his concern over oil development projects in Cook Inlet and its effect on fisheries. He cited seismic testing, inadvertent pollution by leaks and spills, and human disruption on the environment. If and when these effects harm fish stocks, we can expect even more serious allocation issues.

The Recreational Quota Entity (RQE) was discussed, and details of the rules written for the RQE were outlined. Council member Andy Mezirow mentioned ways that the RQE reallocation could move forward, such as an authorization to issue a halibut stamp to collect revenue for the RQE. Mr. Mezirow suggested that implementing the RQE would be a more realistic means for increasing the charter allocation, as opposed to an uncompensated reallocation from the commercial sector, or a realignment of the bag and possession limits between guided and unguided anglers. He suggested that changing unguided angler limits would be unlikely until an abundance-based halibut bycatch mechanism is put in place. He also cited other examples of successful rulemaking at the Council that will benefit charter

fishermen, such as annual Charter Halibut Permit registration, which will eventually help reduce the number of non-transferable CHP holders.

There was also discussion about the need for charter regulations to be more simple and consistent from year to year. An attendee indicated that a benefit of simplicity is that compliance to the rules is much easier. He also suggested a much simpler catch sharing plan mechanism based on a limited number of thresholds that trigger simple management measures. Another attendee produced a copy of the regulations book from the 1980s and compared it with criticism to today's complex regulations. Another operator suggested that more flexible regulations are needed, such as allowing charter captains to choose the stand-down days when halibut retention is not allowed.

A stakeholder asked if there were any other sport fisheries in the country where annual limits were put in place and unique species-specific license tags were required. Staff affirmed that regulations similar to these existed elsewhere; for example, with Bluefin tuna, or in Washington state for steelhead. NMFS staff was asked if it is possible to restrict unguided halibut anglers to only one fish per day; the staff answered yes, it is possible.

A brief discussion of Guided Angler Fish (GAF) regulations indicated that very few of the attendees used GAF. When asked for reasons why they didn't, operators cited the high cost of leasing commercial quota shares and the impractical barriers of passing that cost to client anglers. One attendee mentioned the philosophical and practical effects of leasing quota shares from persons who may not be actively commercial fishing. He indicated that GAF might make sense to some charter operators who already own commercial quota shares, but otherwise, it is too expensive to use. He does not want to see charter captains become a form of "sharecropper" under the GAF rules, by leasing what is a public resource. The attendee critically compared halibut GAF to the leasing of red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico.

NMFS staff asked about comments that come from client anglers; specifically, what positive comments do charter operators consistently hear from their clients? And what criticism or concerns do the clients have? Operators commented that nearly all clients are impressed and excited by being on the ocean in the Alaska environment. Marine mammal sightings, sea birds, eagles, and bear encounters, combined with grand, panoramic scenery were mentioned as consistently appreciated. A common concern among anglers appears to be the catching and retaining of small fish; many clients perceive this as a conservation risk. This was followed by a discussion among roundtable participants as to what constitutes halibut conservation risks.

Council staff provided an overview of charter halibut management measures under the Catch Sharing Plan, with an emphasis on the role of stakeholders on the Charter Halibut Management Committee. A discussion followed of the differences in management measures between Areas 2C and 3A, and the rationale for those differences. A stakeholder commented on these differences, and referenced previous comments about the need for flexibility in the regulations. He pointed out the large size of Area 3A, and how business models for charter fishing varied widely among regions within the area, especially near Kodiak where lodge-based fishing operations are more prevalent. He suggested regulations that addressed the Catch

Sharing Plan and conservation, while still accommodating regional differences, would be more beneficial.

Staff from Senator Sullivan's office indicated the Senator is very invested and respectful of the public process for developing rules. He encourages everyone to take part, to make sure their concerns are heard and considered throughout the process, and not just at the end. Staff mentioned the importance of charter associations, and their ability to concentrate and collectively provide feedback when regulations are considered.

The SEAGO Executive Director mentioned there is an ad hoc IPHC committee formed to discuss the coastwide allocation of halibut. SEAGO is seeking input on the minimum allocation needed to viably function in the face of declining halibut stocks. Information from charter operators is important and needed.

Council member Mezirow outlined charter halibut issues that are currently before the Council. The first is the CHP annual registration mentioned earlier, which is in the NMFS rulemaking stages. The second issue is with unguided rental boats. There has been a large expansion of rental boats, especially in Southeast Alaska. Halibut taken in this manner are subtracted from the total halibut mortalities before the commercial longline and charter halibut fishery catch limits are determined. Eventually, the Council will be making recommendations to the IPHC on these issues.

Council staff outlined the near-term schedule for charter annual management measures: a public meeting of the Charter Halibut Management Committee is scheduled on October 29. At that meeting, the Committee requests from ADFG an analysis of a suite of management measures for the upcoming year. Then, in first week of December at the Council meeting in Anchorage, the Committee meets again to review the results of the analysis and to recommend management measures to the Council for the 2020 fishing year.

At 7:00pm, the roundtable discussion ended. Immediately following, ADFG staff provided an overview of the electronic charter vessel logbook that is available to charter operators as a replacement for paper logbooks. Staff were assisted by charter operators who shared their experiences with the eLogbooks, and endorsed its practicality.

Prior to the roundtable, NMFS staff were contacted by several individuals who could not attend the event but nevertheless asked if they could share their opinions and observations. NMFS received five such communications, which are attached to this report.

Recreational Fishing Regional Roundtable Meeting

Wednesday October 2nd, 2019

Best Western – Homer, AK

575 Sterling Hwy, Homer, AK 99603

Agenda:

<u>Time</u>	<u>Topic</u>
5:30 pm	Welcome and Introductions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Around the room. For charter operators: where is your operation, and which management areas do you fish?
5:40	Sam Rauch, NOAA Fisheries Deputy Assistant Administrator <ul style="list-style-type: none">• NMFS Engagement Strategy and roundtable events
5:15	Constituent input and questions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Questions, concerns, and priorities from the audience. Including, as needed: North Pacific Fishery Management Council Process How are halibut management regulations developed? How can you participate? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• IPHC – Kurt Iverson (NOAA Fisheries)• Charter Halibut Committee - Steve MacLean (NPFMC)• NPFMC - Andy Mezirow (Council member)
7:00	Roundtable Ends; Begin ADFG presentation of the electronic charter logbook



Kurt Iverson - NOAA Federal <kurt.iverson@noaa.gov>

Re: 10/2 Homer meeting

1 message

Kurt Iverson - NOAA Federal <kurt.iverson@noaa.gov>
To: Charles Upicksoun <cpupicksoun@gmail.com>

Tue, Oct 1, 2019 at 4:59 PM

Got it, Charles. Thank you. I'll see that this gets added to the record.
-Kurt

Kurt Iverson
Fishery Management Specialist
National Marine Fisheries Service; Alaska Region
PO Box 21668
Juneau, AK 99802
tel: (907) 586-7210

On Mon, Sep 30, 2019 at 9:33 PM Charles Upicksoun <cpupicksoun@gmail.com> wrote:

I wish I was able to attend the meeting in person but I wouldn't be able to get there until it was too late. I hope I can type this the way I would say it if I were there.
I am Charles Upicksoun, my wife and I are owner/operators of Surreel Saltwaters in Valdez. Our primary business is sport fishing in the Sound and the Gulf. This past season was our first year running halibut charters. I didnt realize how much of a disadvantage the halibut charter anglers had until we started taking clients halibut fishing. The regulations for halibut sport fishing should be the same no matter what type of boat your on. Why do boat owners and friends of boat owners get such a big advantage over people that have neither of those. Private anglers are not limited to an annual harvest, they do not have size restrictions and they dont have closure days. One persons fishing licence should not be more valuable than another persons fishing licence. Sport fishing regulations should be the same for all anglers in the same management area.

On Mon, Sep 30, 2019 at 8:48 AM Charles Upicksoun <cpupicksoun@gmail.com> wrote:

Thank you Kurt. I'll get it typed up and sent to you this evening.

On Mon, Sep 30, 2019, 08:20 Kurt Iverson - NOAA Federal <kurt.iverson@noaa.gov> wrote:

Thanks, Charles.

is email any

gion



Kurt Iverson - NOAA Federal <kurt.iverson@noaa.gov>

Re: Thanks

1 message

Jeff Sanford <salmoncrazy@yahoo.com>
To: Kurt Iverson - NOAA Federal <kurt.iverson@noaa.gov>

Mon, Sep 30, 2019 at 6:42 PM

Jeff Sanford
Salmoncrazy Adventures
993 Hilltop drive
Kodiak, AK 99615

[Kodiak](#) charter fisherman (owner/operator)

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to comment. Sorry if this comes across as, well, too strong. It's not directed to inflame.

On a weekly basis I get to tell tourists from around the globe about the tremendous shortcomings of a management system that restricts the small time, one fish at a time, folks from retaining halibut on Wednesday, and most Tuesday during the best part of our season. All the while, this same tremendous system we employ allows for a fleet of commercial trawlers to ravage the resource to the tune of 6 million pounds last season alone.

What's equally fun to explain to tourists, is why the reef that last week produced limits of fat halibut, now apparently covered in commercial longline gear just a few miles out of town, is now barren of fish, and we must travel on in search of fresh grounds.

Another fun thing to explain is how the USCG guys who just pulled up next to us and threw out a skate of hooks get to also fish with poles and retain more than we do, by orders of magnitude.

These rules are by design to strangle an industry to death.

I understand conservation very well, I practice it everyday.

I would like to see a 30mile radius from the port of Kodiak restricted all together from commercial longline.

I would like to see the USCG guys who get stationed here be restricted in status and barred from the shark program. They abuse the program and have no regard for the resources. Unless I'm somehow misunderstanding the intention of the program? I thought it was a halibut subsistence program, not a resource pillage by interim government employees?

And lastly, please someone stand up to the grotesque abuses the trawling fleet lays waste to these waters. It's such a tremendous waste of the resource.

Good day.

Jeff Sanford
www.salmoncrazyadventures.com

On Sep 30, 2019, at 1:45 PM, Kurt Iverson - NOAA Federal <kurt.iverson@noaa.gov> wrote:

Jeff,



Kurt Iverson - NOAA Federal <kurt.iverson@noaa.gov>

FW: Review to the fishing season

1 message

Mike Keating <mike@bigbluecharters.com>
To: Kurt Iverson - NOAA Federal <kurt.iverson@noaa.gov>

Thu, Sep 26, 2019 at 6:15 AM

Big Blue Charters
Mike & Karen Keating
P.O.Box 2956
Sitka, Alaska 99835
Phone 907-747-5161
www.bigbluecharters.com

From: Bill Kratzenberg [mailto:billkratz@comcast.net]
Sent: Thursday, September 19, 2019 6:57 AM
To: Mike Keating <Mike@bigbluecharters.com>
Subject: Review to the fishing season

My trip to Alaska was the ninth time over twenty years although the first with Big Blue. No displeasure with the accommodations and pleased with the effort with captain Dan. However, over the years the rules dealing with the size and quantities of the different species keep changing and never in the favor of the people fishing with the charters. The only specie that has not changed is the Coho limit. Yellow eyes now excluded, Ling Cod is almost impossible to catch within the minimum and maximum size requirements, Rock Fish limit reduced from 5 to 3 per day and King Salmon limit has ranged from one per day to one per season to elimination this year six days before our trip began. In fact we caught more Kings this year than any of the eight prior trips.

When finding out non charter fisherman can catch Halibut under different rules is the most ridiculous addition to the size and quantity limitations to the customers of a charter. The changing the rules during the season after the license and fees are paid is very much against the customer satisfaction.

I hope you will pass along my comments to the authorities who determine the rules and regulation for the fishing season. However I only am taking the time to pass along me thoughts and feelings in hopes that there is an awareness what will happen to the industry if enough people have my experience. I will express my feelings to anyone who ever talks about or anticipates a Alaska fishing experience. I will not spend any more \$\$ in Alaska. I do fish at least twice a year for 35 years in Canada as well as other fisheries but never again in Alaska.

bill Kratzenberg

10/16/2019

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Mail - FW: Review to the fishing season

Bowling Services

billkratz@comcast.net

770-329-8233

James S Kearns
PO Box 148
Gustavus, AK. 99826

I fish in the Glacier Bay, Icy Straits, Criss Siund areas.

I am a recreational fisherman myself and I am also a charter boat operator with a CHP and a charter business called Fairweather Adventures at Glacier Bay.

We the undersigned, propose the following in order to responsibly manage the recreational halibut fishery in Alaska.

First; create a recreational halibut allocation that includes all recreational fishermen, guided or unguided. This allocation needs to be no less than 40-50% of the annual TAC so that recreational fishermen have a more equitable percentage of the halibut resource harvest.

Second; establish a 1(one) halibut of any size daily bag limit for all recreational fishermen.

Third; establish an annual limit that is based on the recreational halibut allocation for the area, ie. 2C and 3A.

Forth; stop encouraging recreational take of the Big Fat Fecund Female Fish(BFFFFF) to enhance the best reproductive success for the resource by setting a penalty for keeping a fish over 65 inches in length. The penalty would be to reduce the annual limit for a fisherman by 1(one) for every halibut kept that is over 65 inches. And if a fisherman's final fish of his/her annual limit is a fish over 65 inches, the penalty would be applied to the following year.

Fifth; implement a halibut tag or punch card that requires all recreational fishermen to record the location and size(length in inches) of each halibut caught and kept. That punch card or tag would have to

be sent in to ADFG as soon as it was filled or by Jan 15 of the following year. This would give a remarkable accountability of all halibut kept by the recreational sector. The card/tag would be purchased from the state of Alaska online like all licenses and stamps will be in 2020. If the size penalty(fourth item) was in force for an angler, it would show up and be applied when that person wanted to purchase the card/tag.

This proposal does not change the CHP requirement, the guide/guide business registration requirement, or the guided vessel logbook requirement for charter guides and businesses since these are part of managing that limited entry type of business. It does however, make the recreational fishery equitable for all recreational fishermen, recognizes the financial impact of recreational fishermen to the economy, and requires all recreational fishermen to participate in responsible abundance based management of the halibut resource.

James S Kearns