



Charter Halibut Management Committee REPORT

October 25, 2024

Virtual Meeting

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council's Charter Halibut Management Committee held an online public meeting October 25, 2024. At this meeting the Committee developed a list of management measures (e.g., bag limits, size restrictions) to be analyzed for 2024 as well as receiving updates on several charter issues. All meeting materials are posted to the eAgenda.¹

Committee members in attendance:

Brian Ritchie (Area 3A; chair)	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)	Richard Yamada (Area 2C)
Scott McKelvey (Area 2C)	Steve Zernia (Area 3A)	Sarah Murrinan (<i>staff coordinator</i>)

Members absent: none

Others in attendance:

Kurt Iverson	Rachel Baker	Ben Jevons
Adam St. Saviour	Kristen Labrecque	Kayla Buster
Phil Joy	Karla Bush	Tom Meyer
Tom Gemmell	Mel Erikson	Kim Landeen
Heather Mann	Bonnie Millard	

Committee chair, Brian Ritchie, called the meeting to order with introductions and a summary of the proposed agenda.

¹ Link to eAgenda with all meeting materials and written public comment:
<https://meetings.npfmc.org/Meeting/Details/3061>

NMFS Updates

Kurt Iverson (NMFS) provided updates on a number of topics related to the charter halibut. Several slides were presented along with this update which are linked on the eAgenda. Kurt covered the following topics:

Preliminary Guided Angler Fish (GAF) data

- One slide depicted GAF harvest for Area 2C and 3A from 2011 – 2024.
- There has been a steady increase in Area 2C GAF use, with GAF representing almost 15% of the total harvest from the charter sector in this area (charter harvest + GAF removals) in 2024. This demonstrates that GAF is important to many operations in Area 2C. GAF use continues to be low in Area 3A and when it occurs, many times it involves a charter operator who also holds commercial IFQ and transfers the GAF to himself.

Performance of the management measures

- Kurt presented one slide depicting overages and underages across both area since implementation of the Catch Sharing Plan, 2014-2024. Over the time series, these overages and underages have essentially balanced out as intended, with Area 2C on average 0.9% under and Area 3A on average 2.7% over.

Charter Halibut Permit (CHP) renewal statistics and revoked permits

- Since 2020, CHPs have been required to be renewed annually. Kurt provided statistics of the number of transferable and non-transferable CHPs that have been renewed, 2021-2024.
- Some amount of both types of CHPs have not been renewed each year. In particular, this has been non-transferable permits (28 for Area 2C and 22 for Area 3A in 2024). There is no penalty or automatic revocation for not renewing a CHP; it simply cannot be used until it is renewed for the current year. However, the numbers of renewed CHP do not necessarily imply that these permits have been used.
- Some CHPs have been revoked as demonstrated in the table (42 Area 2C CHPs and 61 Area 3A CHPs). These numbers are primarily from the implementation of the program. Revocation may have occurred when people had been issued an interim CHP who were under adjudication to receive a transferable or non-transferable CHP, but they were ultimately not successful in their appeal. Additionally, a non-transferable CHP is no longer valid if the holder passes away or if there is a change in the ownership of a corporations or partnerships, such that there is an addition of any new shareholder(s) or partner(s). The annual renewal process is meant to detect these types of changes in ownership, but they would not be identified if the permit was not renewed. Therefore, it may be that some of the CHPs that have not been renewed are invalid.
- Note that this information fulfills part of the request the Council made in a December 2023 motion.²

Marine Recreation Information Program (MRIP) for Alaska

- Alaska has joined the federal MRIP, through a partnership with NMFS and ADF&G. The objective of this effort is primarily to improve existing data collections, such as modernizing the Statewide Harvest Survey. A copy of the MRIP Implementation Plan is linked in the eAgenda.

² Link to the December 2023 motion: <https://meetings.npfmc.org/CommentReview/DownloadFile?p=6de5efda-993f-4ab8-8fd8-cc21aca54e97.pdf&fileName=E%20Motion%20-%20Charter%20Halibut%20Regs.pdf>

Recreational Quota Entity (RQE) funding mechanism update

- Proposed Rule has been drafted, is being reviewed by NMFS Headquarters, and could publish the first week of November. Details of the program are outlined in the proposed rule, which will open for a 30-day comment period once published. The goal would be to have the program implemented when the fishery opens February 1.
- Ben Jevons (ADF&G Logbook Coordinator) and his team have been working on updates to the eLogbook program to encompass the halibut stamp verification process. He extended an offer/request to any operators that wish to provide user feedback, and suggested they contact him: ben.jevons@alaska.gov and they would provide a test account.

Final 2023 and Preliminary 2024 Charter Halibut Harvest Estimates

Adam St. Saviour (ADF&G) presented the final estimates of total charter mortalities (harvest plus release mortality) for 2023 and preliminary mortality estimates for 2024, which are also summarized in documents posted to the eAgenda. For Area 2C, the final 2023 estimate for total charter halibut removals was 0.832 Milb, 19,000 lbs. more than the preliminary estimate of 0.813 Milb. The allocation was set at 0.800 Milb, which equates to a 4% overage. Between 2022 and 2023, the number of fish harvested in Area 2C increased slightly (from approximately 83,000 fish to 85,000 fish) while the average weight decreased (from 9.74 lb to 9.41 lb). In Area 3A, the final 2023 estimate for total charter halibut mortalities was 1.588 Milb. This was 32,000 lbs. less than the preliminary estimate of 1.556 Milb and 16% under the allocation of 1.890 Milb.

In 2024, preliminary estimates for Area 2C showed a 4% overage of total removals (harvest plus release mortality) relative to the Area 2C allocation of 0.810 Milb. For Area 2C mean weight was less than predicted (9.07 lb, relative to a predicted 9.25 lb); however, more fish were harvested relative to what was predicted (89,303 fish relative to a predicted 84,162 fish) for an estimated total removals of 0.843M lb. For Area 3A in 2024, preliminary estimates of total removals showed a 15% underage relative to the allocation. Relative to what was predicted, there was both a lower number of fish harvested (161,439 fish relative to a predicted 175,579 fish), and a lower mean weight (9.85 lb, relative to a predicted 10.64 lb). The preliminary estimate of total removals for Area 3A was 1.607 Milb relative to an allocation of 1.890 Milb for 2024. It was noted that Area 3A preliminary estimates may change more once they are finalized relative to Area 2C because logbook data is projected forward from August 31 in this area, due to the prevalence of paper logbooks. In contrast, eLogbook data was used through September 27 for Area 2C.

Public Comment

No public comment was provided.

Management Measures for Analysis for 2025

Area 2C

The Committee requested the following harvest measures for analysis for Area 2C for 2025.

- 1) Projected charter removals (Milb, includes release mortality) for Area 2C in 2025 under **reverse slot limits ranging from U32O50 to U50O80 with a 1-fish bag limit**. All values in the table should include corrections for errors in estimation of average weight and inflation factors for release mortality.
- 2) Analysis for #1 confined to reverse slot limits ranging from U35O80 to U40O80 (truncated from tables in request #1) and **a limit of one trip per vessel and one trip per permit per day**.

- 3) Projected charter savings per day (in thousands) for Area 2C in 2025 under **reverse slot limits with lower limits ranging from 32 to 50 inches and an upper limit of 80 inches with a 1-fish bag limit; with days closed between May 15 and September 15 for Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday**. All values in the table include corrections for errors in estimation of average weight and inflation factors for release mortality. The Committee also requests an Excel workbook version of the data be provided in addition to the document tables.
- 4) Analysis for #3 confined to lower limits ranging from 32 to 42 inches (truncated from tables in request #3) with an upper limit of 80 inches, and a **limit of one trip per vessel and one trip per permit per day**.
- 5) Table of projected removals (Mlb) for changing the **lower slot limit from a range of 38-42 inches at the start of the season to 32-38 inches after July 1, July 15, and August 1**. All analyses should assume an upper slot limit of 80 inches and all days of the season open to fishing and include corrections for errors in estimation of average weight and inflation factors for release mortality.
- 6) Analysis for #5 adding a **limit of one trip per vessel and one trip per permit per day**.

It was noted that these requests are similar to what was asked for last year. The primary differences include: asking for all three types of requests (or a truncated version) repeated with a limit of one trip per vessel and one trip per permit per day, the analysis of day-of-the-week closures narrowed to Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, and different ranges for the differential bag limit than were requested last year. In addition, several changes were requested relative to the presentation of information (e.g., displaying whole numbers, dropping the request for discard mortality column).

Members stated that this suite of measures were derived from several years of discussion, to ensure they had all the tools they may need to consider while also considering equity among operations. Area 2C tends to rely on the reverse slot limit, but depending on what the allocation falls they may need to consider additional options such as day-of-the-week closure and/or a differential bag limits.

Area 3A

The Committee requested the following harvest measures for analysis for Area 3A for 2025. Unless otherwise noted, all scenarios include one trip per vessel per day, and one trip per charter halibut permit per day. In addition, the Committee requests analysis of:

- Day of the week closures on Wednesday from June 4 – Sept 3 or for the entire season;
- Day of the week closures on Tuesdays from June 3 – Sept 2 or for the entire season;
- Maximum size limit of 26 – 32 inches on one fish,
- Annual limits of 2 – 4 fish, and
- Any combination of the above management measures.

These requests are consistent with those from last year, with the exception of analysis that looks at relaxing Wednesday day-of-the-week closures. Committee members felt it may be optimistic whether totally removing the day-of-the-week closure would be an option to them, but having it analyzed would provide them that tool if possible, based on the setline survey and IPHC decisions. Members noted that they would likely try to closely align with past regulations to provide stability for the Area 3A operators.

Other Business/ Future Meetings

Sarah Marrinan (staff coordinator; NPFMC) noted that there is one outstanding motion from the Council relevant to charter halibut from December 2023 that has yet to be scheduled. While Kurt's summary of CHP statistics covers a portion of the request, the other part of the discussion paper is focused on ways to change the annual management measure process, such that management measures may be know further ahead of time.³

In addition, there are a number of upcoming meetings of relevance to charter halibut stakeholders, including:

- IPHC Interim Meeting: November 25- 26, 2024; online only.
- NPFMC Meeting: December 2 - 10, 2024; Anchorage, AK Eagan Center.
- NMFS/NPFMC Rec Fish Roundtable: Dec 2, 2024; 1– 3pm; Anchorage, AK Eagan Center.
- IPHC stock assessment presentation: Dec 2, 2024; 5:30- 7pm; Anchorage, AK Eagan Center
- Charter Halibut Management Committee Meeting: Dec 3, 2024; 8am - 12pm; Anchorage, AK NPFMC Office.
- IPHC Annual Meeting: January 27-31, 2025; Vancouver BC Canada.

³ Link to the December 2023 motion: <https://meetings.npfmc.org/CommentReview/DownloadFile?p=6de5efda-993f-4ab8-8fd8-cc21aca54e97.pdf&fileName=E%20Motion%20-%20Charter%20Halibut%20Regs.pdf>