

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council and SSC Members

FROM: Chris Oliver   
Executive Director

ESTIMATED TIME 8 HOURS
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DATE: May 23, 2011

SUBJECT: Catch Sharing Plan

ACTION: Review size limit algorithm

BACKGROUND

NMFS is developing a proposed rule to implement the halibut CSP for Area 2C and Area 3A recommended by the Council in October 2008. The proposed rule is currently scheduled for clearance and publication in June 2011. The CSP would establish an annual process for determining (1) commercial and charter halibut catch limits, and (2) harvest restrictions for charter anglers that are intended to limit harvest to the charter sector catch limit. The CSP includes a suite of charter harvest restrictions that would be specified and implemented by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) prior to the beginning of the halibut fishing season. The most stringent charter harvest restriction under the CSP would limit charter anglers to retaining one halibut per day that is equal to or smaller than a maximum length. The maximum length limit would be calculated according to the method specified by the CSP regulations.

The pre-season determination of charter harvest restrictions, including a maximum length limit, requires the IPHC to use charter harvest projections that account for variability in charter harvest due to (1) normal year-to-year changes in fishing effort or catchability of halibut, and (2) changes in fishing effort attributable to implementation of the CSP harvest restriction. Based on input from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and Council staff, NMFS has identified three potential methods for calculating a maximum length limit under the CSP:

- Method A uses sample data from the previous year's fishery to estimate charter harvest for the upcoming year. Method A may underestimate charter harvest and result in the sector exceeding its catch limit if anglers are able to increase the average size of retained halibut relative to the previous year. Method A is likely the least biologically conservative of the three proposed methods.
- Method B does not use sample data from the previous year's fishery. Instead, method B uses a conservative assumption that all halibut harvested under the maximum length limit would be equal to the maximum length. This is unlikely, however, because not all anglers would be able to do this and some anglers will harvest halibut that are smaller than the maximum length limit. Thus, method B is the most biologically conservative because it is likely to overestimate charter harvest and result in charter harvest not reaching the sector's allocation.

- Method C employs a combination of the assumptions used in methods A and B and would result in projected charter harvests and maximum length limits that are between those calculated using methods A and B. Method C is likely to be less biologically conservative than method B and more biologically conservative than method A.

The IPHC used the method B approach to recommend a 37-inch maximum length limit for the 2011 charter halibut fishery in Area 2C. Following the IPHC's recommendation, charter stakeholders suggested to NMFS that it might be possible to use a less conservative methodology than method B that would result in a relatively larger maximum length limit while limiting charter harvest to target levels under the CSP. While NMFS is proposing to use method B in the CSP proposed rule, NMFS will request public comment on the use of proposed methods A, B, or C, or on other potential methods, to establish maximum length limits under the CSP.

At this meeting, NMFS staff will provide an overview of the CSP proposed rule with respect to the maximum length limit calculations and describe the agency's approach for requesting comments on the maximum length limit calculation. The Council and the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) also will receive a report from ADF&G (attached as Item C-1(a)) on the three proposed calculation methods.