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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 300

[Docket No. 141126999-5235-01]

RIN 0648-BE69

Pacific Halibut Fisheries; Catch Sharing Plan

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: The Assistant Administrator (AA) for Fisheries, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), on behalf of the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC), publishes annual management measures governing the Pacific halibut fishery recommended as regulations by the IPHC and accepted by the Secretary of State. This action is intended to enhance the conservation of Pacific halibut and further the goals and objectives of the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC).

DATES: The IPHC's 2015 annual management measures are effective [*INSERT DATE OF FILING WITH THE OFFICE OF THE FEDERAL REGISTER*]. The 2015 management measures are effective until superseded.

ADDRESSES: Additional requests for information regarding this action may be obtained by contacting the International Pacific Halibut Commission, 2320 W. Commodore Way Suite 300, Seattle, WA 98199-1287; or Sustainable Fisheries Division, NMFS Alaska Region, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802, Attn: Ellen Sebastian, Records Officer; or Sustainable Fisheries Division, NMFS West Coast Region, 7600 Sand Point Way, NE, Seattle, WA 98115. This final rule also is accessible via the Internet at the Federal eRulemaking portal at <http://www.regulations.gov>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For waters off Alaska, Glenn Merrill or Julie Scheurer, 907-586-7228; or, for waters off the U.S. West Coast, Sarah Williams, 206-526-4646.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The IPHC has recommended regulations which would govern the Pacific halibut fishery in 2015, pursuant to the Convention between Canada and the United States for the Preservation of the Halibut Fishery of the North Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea (Convention), signed at Ottawa, Ontario, on March 2, 1953, as amended by a Protocol Amending the Convention (signed at Washington, D.C., on March 29, 1979).

As provided by the Northern Pacific Halibut Act of 1982 (Halibut Act) at 16 U.S.C. 773b, the Secretary of State, with the concurrence of the Secretary of Commerce, may accept or reject, on behalf of the United States, regulations recommended by the IPHC in accordance with the Convention (Halibut Act, Sections 773-773k). The Secretary of State of the United States, with the concurrence of the Secretary of

Commerce, accepted the 2015 IPHC regulations as provided by the Halibut Act at 16 U.S.C. 773-773k.

The Halibut Act provides the Secretary of Commerce with the authority and general responsibility to carry out the requirements of the Convention and the Halibut Act. The Regional Fishery Management Councils may develop, and the Secretary of Commerce may implement, regulations governing harvesting privileges among U.S. fishermen in U.S. waters that are in addition to, and not in conflict with, approved IPHC regulations. The NPFMC has exercised this authority most notably in developing halibut management programs for three fisheries that harvest halibut in Alaska: the subsistence, sport, and commercial fisheries.

Subsistence and sport halibut fishery regulations are codified at 50 CFR part 300. Commercial halibut fisheries in Alaska are subject to the Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program and Community Development Quota (CDQ) Program (50 CFR part 679), and the area-specific catch sharing plans.

The IPHC apportions catch limits for the Pacific halibut fishery among regulatory areas (Figure 1): Area 2A (Oregon, Washington, and California), Area 2B (British Columbia), Area 2C (Southeast Alaska), Area 3A (Central Gulf of Alaska), Area 3B (Western Gulf of Alaska), and Area 4 (subdivided into 5 areas, 4A-4E, in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands of Western Alaska).

The NPFMC implemented a catch sharing plan (CSP) among commercial IFQ and CDQ halibut fisheries in IPHC Areas 4C, 4D and 4E (Area 4, Western Alaska) through rulemaking, and the Secretary of State approved the plan on March 20, 1996 (61

FR 11337). The Area 4 CSP regulations were codified at 50 CFR 300.65, and were amended on March 17, 1998 (63 FR 13000). New annual regulations pertaining to the Area 4 CSP also may be implemented through IPHC action, subject to acceptance by the Secretary of State.

The NPFMC recommended and NMFS implemented through rulemaking a CSP for guided sport (charter) and commercial IFQ halibut fisheries in IPHC Area 2C and Area 3A on January 13, 2014 (78 FR 75844, December 12, 2013). The Area 2C and 3A CSP regulations are codified at 50 CFR 300.65. The CSP defines an annual process for allocating halibut between the commercial and charter fisheries so that each sector's allocation varies in proportion to halibut abundance; specifies a public process for setting annual management measures; and authorizes limited annual leases of commercial IFQ for use in the charter fishery as guided angler fish (GAF).

The IPHC held its annual meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia, January 26-30, 2015, and recommended a number of changes to the previous IPHC regulations (79 FR 13906, March 12, 2014). The Secretary of State accepted the annual management measures, including the following changes to the previous IPHC regulations for 2015:

1. New halibut catch limits in all regulatory areas in Section 11;
2. New commercial halibut fishery opening and closing dates in Section 8;
3. New management measures for Area 2C and Area 3A guided sport fisheries in Section 28, and in Figure 3 and Figure 4; and
4. Addition of California Division of Fish and Wildlife to the list of officers authorized to enforce these regulations in Section 3.

Pursuant to regulations at 50 CFR 300.62, the 2015 IPHC annual management measures are published in the **Federal Register** to provide notice of their immediate regulatory effectiveness and to inform persons subject to the regulations of their restrictions and requirements. Because NMFS publishes the regulations applicable to the entire Convention area, these regulations include some provisions relating to and affecting Canadian fishing and fisheries. NMFS could implement more restrictive regulations for the sport fishery for halibut or components of it; therefore, anglers are advised to check the current Federal or IPHC regulations prior to fishing.

Catch Limits

The IPHC recommended to the governments of Canada and the United States catch limits for 2015 totaling 29,223,000 lb (13,255 mt). The IPHC recommended area-specific catch limits for 2015 that were higher than 2014 in most of its management areas except Area 3B, where catch limits were reduced, and Areas 4B and 4CDE where catch limits remained at the same level as in 2014. The IPHC is responding to stock challenges with a risk-based precautionary approach and a review of the current harvest policy to ensure the best possible advice. A description of the process the IPHC used to set these catch limits follows.

As in 2012 and 2013, the 2014 stock assessment was based on an ensemble of models incorporating the uncertainty within each model as well as the uncertainty among models. This approach provides a stronger basis for risk assessment of specific management measures that may be recommended by the IPHC. There were two new additions to this year's ensemble of models: the use of long and short time-series models

treating Areas As Fleets (AAF). The two AAF models considered this year assess the halibut population as a coastwide stock, while allowing for region-specific variations in the selectivity and catchability in the treatment of survey and fishery information. The AAF approach is a commonly applied stock assessment method for dealing with populations showing evidence of spatial structure, but without explicitly modeling different recruitment distribution and migration rates among areas. Spatially explicit approaches are currently being developed for future evaluation; however, there is no comprehensive information available on juvenile distribution and movement. For 2014, the stock assessment ensemble included short and long time-series models based on both the coastwide and the AAF approaches. This combination of models included uncertainty in natural mortality rates, environmental effects on recruitment, and uncertainty in other model parameters.

The assessment indicates that the Pacific halibut stock declined continuously from the late 1990s to around 2010. That trend is estimated to have been a result of decreasing size at age as well as smaller recruitments than those observed through the 1980s and 1990s. In recent years, the estimated female spawning biomass appears to have stabilized near 200 million pounds. Overall, the ensemble models project a stable halibut biomass in the next 3 years at current harvest rates. The AAF models project a slight increase in halibut biomass in the next 3 years at current harvest rates.

As in 2014, and as part of an ongoing effort to provide Commissioners with greater flexibility when selecting catch limits, in January 2015 IPHC staff provided a decision table that estimates the consequences to stock and fishery status and trends from

different levels of harvest. This decision table more fully accommodates uncertainty in the stock status and allowed the Commissioners to weigh the risk and benefits of management choices as they set the annual catch limits. After considering harvest advice for 2015 from its scientific staff, Canadian and U.S. harvesters and processors, and other fishery agencies, the IPHC recommended catch limits for 2015 to the U.S. and Canadian governments (see Table 1 below).

The IPHC recommended higher catch limits than 2014 for Areas 2A, 2B, and 2C because the stock assessment survey and fishery weight per unit effort (WPUE) estimates indicate a stable and upward trend in exploitable biomass in these areas. The IPHC recommended the higher catch limits in Areas 2A, 2B, and 2C than would result from the application of the IPHC's adopted harvest policy. The IPHC made these catch limit recommendations after considering the low risk of an adverse impact on the halibut stock from the recommended catch limits in Areas 2A, 2B, and 2C, and the favorable survey and fishery trends in these areas.

The IPHC recommended a more precautionary approach to their catch limit recommendations for Areas 3A and 3B relative to Areas 2A, 2B, and 2C. The IPHC recommended catch limits that were consistent with the IPHC's adopted harvest policy in Areas 3A and 3B. The IPHC noted that the catch limit recommendations in Areas 3A and 3B are precautionary and catch limits greater than the adopted harvest policy were not warranted given downward trends in exploitable biomass and WPUE in these areas. The catch limit in Area 3A increased slightly relative to 2014 due to increased biomass

estimates in Area 3A. The catch limit in Area 3B decreased slightly relative to 2014 due to decreased biomass estimates in Area 3B.

The IPHC recommended a catch limit for Area 4A that was higher than the 2014 limit. The IPHC-recommended catch limit in Area 4A is consistent with the IPHC's adopted harvest policy in this area. The IPHC did not recommend a catch limit amount in Area 4A greater than its adopted harvest policy in this area because the stock trends in this area are uncertain and a more precautionary approach to management is appropriate. Specifically, the survey trends in Area 4A show an increased biomass, but the commercial WPUE decreased in 2014.

The IPHC recommended a catch limit for Area 4B that was the same as that adopted in 2014. The IPHC recommended a catch limit in Area 4B that is slightly higher than that which would result from application of its adopted harvest policy in Area 4B. The IPHC made this catch limit recommendation after considering the low risk of an adverse impact on the halibut stock from the recommended catch limit in Area 4B, and the after considering the adverse socioeconomic impact that could result from a catch limit that was lower than that provided in 2014.

Similarly, the IPHC recommended a catch limit for Areas 4CDE that is the same as that adopted in 2014. The IPHC recommended a catch limit in Areas 4CDE that is higher than that which would result from application of its adopted harvest policy in Areas 4CDE. The IPHC made this catch limit recommendation after considering the low risk of an adverse impact on the halibut stock from the recommended catch limit in Areas 4CDE, and the after considering the adverse socioeconomic impact that could result from

a catch limit that was lower than that provided in 2014. The IPHC also noted that overall stock trends in Area 4CDE from the fishery survey show an increasing biomass. The IPHC also considered ongoing efforts by the North Pacific groundfish fleet to reduce the amount of halibut mortality from bycatch, particularly in Areas 4CDE, during 2014 and 2015. The IPHC noted that reduced bycatch mortality in 2015 is likely to provide additional harvest opportunities for the commercial fishery in the future. Overall, the IPHC's catch limit recommendations for 2015 are projected to result in a stable or slightly increasing halibut stock in the future.

Table 1. Percent Change in Catch Limits from 2014 to 2015 by IPHC Regulatory Area

Regulatory Area	2015 IPHC Recommended Catch Limit (lb)	2014 Catch Limit (lb)	Percent Change from 2014
2A ¹	970,000	960,000	1.0
2B ²	7,038,000	6,850,000	2.7
2C ³	4,650,000	4,160,000	11.8
3A ³	10,100,000	9,430,000	7.1
3B	2,650,000	2,840,000	-6.7
4A	1,390,000	850,000	63.5
4B	1,140,000	1,140,000	0
4CDE	1,285,000	1,285,000	0
Coastwide	29,223,000	27,515,000	6.2

¹Area 2A catch limit includes sport, commercial, and tribal catch limits.

²Area 2B catch limit includes sport and commercial catch limits.

³Shown is the combined commercial and charter allocation under the Area 2C and Area 3A CSP. This value includes allocations to the charter sector, and an amount for commercial wastage. The commercial catch limits after deducting wastage are 3,679,000 lb in Area 2C and 7,790,000 lb in Area 3A.

Commercial Halibut Fishery Opening Dates

The opening date for the tribal commercial fishery in Area 2A and for the commercial halibut fisheries in Areas 2B through 4E is March 14, 2015. The date takes into account a number of factors, including the timing of halibut migration and spawning, marketing for seasonal holidays, and interest in getting product to processing plants before the herring season opens. The closing date for the halibut fisheries is November 7, 2015. This date takes into account the anticipated time required to fully harvest the commercial halibut catch limits while providing adequate time for IPHC staff to review the complete record of 2015 commercial catch data for use in the 2016 stock assessment process.

In the Area 2A non-treaty directed commercial fishery the IPHC recommended seven 10-hour fishing periods. Each fishing period shall begin at 0800 hours and terminate at 1800 hours local time on June 24, July 8, July 22, August 5, August 19, September 2, and September 16, 2015, unless the IPHC specifies otherwise. These 10-hour openings will occur until the quota is taken and the fishery is closed.

Area 2A Catch Sharing Plan

The NMFS West Coast Region published a proposed rule for changes to the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan for Area 2A off Washington, Oregon, and California on February 3, 2015 (80 FR 5719), with public comments accepted through March 5, 2015. A separate final rule will be published to approve changes to the Area 2A CSP and to implement the portions of the CSP and management measures that are not implemented through the IPHC annual management measures that are published in this final rule. These measures include the sport fishery allocations and management

measures for Area 2A. Once published, the final rule implementing the Area 2A CSP will be available on the NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region's website at http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/management/pacific_halibut_management.html, and under FDMS Docket Number NOAA–NMFS–2014–0159 at www.regulations.gov.

Catch Sharing Plan for Area 2C and Area 3A

In 2014, NMFS implemented a CSP for Area 2C and Area 3A. The CSP defines an annual process for allocating halibut between the charter and commercial fisheries in Area 2C and Area 3A, and establishes allocations for each fishery. To allow flexibility for individual commercial and charter fishery participants, the CSP also authorizes annual transfers of commercial halibut IFQ as guided angler fish (GAF) to charter halibut permit holders for harvest in the charter fishery. Under the CSP, the IPHC recommends combined catch limits (CCLs) for the charter and commercial halibut fisheries in Area 2C and Area 3A. Each CCL includes estimates of discard mortality (wastage) for each fishery. The CSP was implemented to achieve the halibut fishery management goals of the NPFMC. More information is provided in the proposed (78 FR 39122, June, 28, 2013) and final (78 FR 75844, December 12, 2013) rules implementing the CSP. Implementing regulations for the CSP are at 50 CFR 300.65. The Area 2C and Area 3A CSP allocation tables are located in Tables 1 through 4 of subpart E of 50 CFR part 300.

The IPHC recommended a CCL of 4,650,000 lb (2,109.2 mt) for Area 2C. Following the CSP allocations in Tables 1 and 3 of subpart E of 50 CFR part 300, the commercial fishery is allocated 81.7 percent or 3,799,000 lb (1,723.2 mt), and the charter

fishery is allocated 18.3 percent or 851,000 lb (386.0 mt) of the CCL (rounded to the nearest 1,000 lb). Wastage in the amount of 120,000 lb (54.4 mt) was deducted from the commercial allocation to obtain the commercial catch limit of 3,679,000 lb (1,668.8 mt). The charter allocation for 2015 is about 90,000 lb (40.8 mt), or 11.8 percent greater than the charter sector allocation of 761,000 lb (345.2 mt) in 2014.

The IPHC recommended a CCL of 10,100,000 lb (4,581.3 mt) for Area 3A. Following the CSP allocations in Tables 2 and 4 of subpart E of 50 CFR part 300, the commercial fishery is allocated the difference of the CCL and a fixed 1,890,000 lb (857.3 mt) for the charter fishery. The commercial fishery is therefore allocated 8,210,000 lb (3,724.0 mt), and the charter fishery is allocated 1,890,000 lb (857.3 mt). Discard mortality in the amount of 420,000 lb (190.5 mt) was deducted from the commercial allocation to obtain the commercial catch limit of 7,790,000 lb (3,533.5 mt). The charter allocation increased by about 108,000 lb (49.0 mt), or 6.1 percent, from the 2014 allocation of 1,782,000 lb (808.3 mt).

Charter Halibut Management Measures for Area 2C and Area 3A

The NPFMC formed the Charter Halibut Management Implementation Committee to provide it with recommendations for annual management measures intended to limit charter harvest to the charter catch limit while minimizing negative economic impacts to the charter fishery participants in times of low halibut abundance. The committee is composed of representatives from the charter fishing industry in Areas 2C and 3A. The committee selected management measures for further analysis from a suite of alternatives that were presented in October 2014. After reviewing an analysis of

the effects of the alternative measures on estimated charter removals, the committee recommended its preferred management measures to the NPFMC for 2015. The NPFMC recommended the committee's preferred measures to recommend to the IPHC, and the IPHC took action consistent with the NPFMC's recommendations. The NPFMC has used this process to select and recommend annual management measures to the IPHC since 2012.

The IPHC recognizes the role of the NPFMC to develop policy and regulations that allocate the Pacific halibut resource among fishermen in and off Alaska, and that NMFS has developed numerous regulations to support the NPFMC's goals of limiting charter harvests over the past several years. The IPHC concluded that additional restrictions were necessary for 2015 to limit the Area 2C and Area 3A charter halibut fisheries to their charter catch limits under the CSP, to achieve the IPHC's overall conservation objective to limit total halibut harvests to established catch limits, and to meet the NPFMC's allocation objectives for these areas. The IPHC determined that limiting charter harvests by implementing the management measures discussed below would meet these objectives.

Reverse Slot Limit for Halibut Retained on a Charter Vessel Fishing in Area 2C

Total charter removals in Area 2C exceeded the 2014 charter allocation by about 109,677 lb (49.7 mt) or 14 percent. The method used to forecast harvest for 2015 was changed to better account for trends, and the harvest forecast for 2015 is higher than the preliminary estimate for 2014.

The preliminary estimate of charter wastage (release mortality) in 2014 represented about 5.5 percent of the directed harvest amount. Therefore, projected charter harvest for 2015 was inflated by 5.5 percent to account for all charter removals in the selection of annual management measures for Area 2C.

Changes in management measures are required to manage total charter removals, including wastage, in Area 2C within the 2015 allocation. Therefore, the 2015 reverse slot limit is more restrictive to limit charter removals in Area 2C within the allocation under the CSP of 851,000 lb (386.0 mt). This final rule amends the 2014 measures applicable to the charter vessel fishery in Area 2C.

For 2015, the IPHC recommended a management measure that prohibits a person on board a charter vessel referred to in 50 CFR 300.65 and fishing in Area 2C from taking or possessing any halibut, with head on, that is greater than 42 inches (107 cm) and less than 80 inches (203 cm), as measured in a straight line, passing over the pectoral fin from the tip of the lower jaw with mouth closed, to the extreme end of the middle of the tail. This type of restriction is referred to as a “reverse slot limit.” The 2014 reverse slot limit prohibited retention by charter anglers of halibut that were greater than 44 inches (112 cm) and less than 76 inches (193 cm).

Management Measures for Charter Vessel Fishing in Area 3A

Charter removals in Area 3A in 2014 exceeded the charter allocation by 413,374 lb (187.5 mt), or 23 percent, primarily because the halibut that were caught and retained by charter anglers were larger on average than predicted for the size limit. The

estimation error for average weight was factored into the analysis of potential management measures for 2015.

The preliminary estimate of charter wastage in 2014 represented less than 2 percent of the directed harvest amount. The projected charter harvest for 2015 was increased by 2 percent to account for total charter removals in the selection of appropriate annual management measures for Area 3A for 2015.

This final rule amends the 2014 management measures applicable to the charter halibut fishery in Area 3A. The NPFMC and IPHC considered 2014 information on charter removals and the projections of charter harvest for 2015. Despite the increased allocation for 2015, the NPFMC and IPHC determined that changes to the 2014 Area 3A management measures are necessary to manage total charter removals, including wastage, within the 2015 allocation.

For 2015, the IPHC recommended the following management measures for Area 3A: 1) a two-fish bag limit with a 29-inch size limit on one of the halibut; 2) a one trip per day limit; 3) a day-of-week closure; and 4) an annual limit. Each of these management measures is described in more detail below. The size and trip limit regulations were in place in 2014, but the day-of-week closure and annual limit measures are new for 2015.

Size Limit for Halibut Retained on a Charter Vessel in Area 3A

The 2015 charter halibut fishery in Area 3A will be managed under a two-fish daily bag limit in which one of the retained halibut may be of any size and one of the retained halibut must be 29 inches (74 cm) total length or less. The NPFMC and the

IPHC recommended the 2014 daily bag and size limit in Area 3A for 2015 to maintain similar angling opportunities to previous years. This daily bag and size limit will be combined with additional restrictions to limit charter halibut removals to the 2015 allocation.

Trip Limit for Charter Vessels Harvesting Halibut in Area 3A

In 2014, charter vessels were limited to one charter halibut fishing trip in which halibut were retained per calendar day in Area 3A. The one-trip per day limit will remain in place in Area 3A for 2015. If no halibut are retained during a charter vessel fishing trip, the vessel may take an additional trip to catch and retain halibut that day. The trip limit applies to vessels only, not to charter halibut permits. A charter operator may use more than one vessel to take more than one charter vessel fishing trip using the same charter halibut permit per day. Trip limits will affect only a small number of charter operators and allows the size of the size-restricted fish in the daily bag limit to be maximized for the entire charter fleet in Area 3A. Without a trip limit, a more restrictive size or bag limit might have been necessary to achieve harvest targets.

Currently, charter operators in Area 3A are able to conduct a single trip over two calendar days by remaining at sea overnight because, according to the Federal definition at 50 CFR 300.61, a charter vessel fishing trip does not end until clients or halibut are offloaded. This practice allows retention of two daily halibut limits on a single trip. Additionally, the charter operator could start another trip on the same day that the previous trip ended because a complete trip had not occurred on a single calendar day; thereby circumventing the trip limit. The committee and the NPFMC requested that the

trip limit annual management measures recommended by the IPHC and implemented in this regulation be reworded to reflect their original intent for this measure. This regulation provides that clarification.

For purposes of the trip limit in Area 3A in 2015, a charter vessel fishing trip will end when anglers or halibut are offloaded, or at the end of the calendar day, whichever occurs first. Charter operators will still be able to conduct overnight trips and harvest a bag limit of halibut on each calendar day, but they will not be allowed to begin another overnight trip until the day after the trip ended. For example, if an overnight trip started on a Monday and ended on a Tuesday, and charter vessel anglers harvested halibut on Monday and Tuesday, the charter operator would not be able to start another charter vessel fishing trip on that vessel until Wednesday. Alternatively, charter anglers could harvest halibut on the first calendar day of an overnight trip, but not the second, allowing the guide to embark on another overnight trip on the second day. GAF halibut are exempt from the trip limit; therefore, GAF could be used to harvest halibut on a second trip in a day, but only if exclusively GAF halibut were harvested on that trip. For example, if an overnight trip started on a Monday and anglers harvested halibut on Monday, they could harvest GAF on Tuesday, allowing the charter operator to start another charter vessel fishing trip on Tuesday on the same charter vessel and charter vessel anglers to harvest halibut on Tuesday.

Day-of-Week Closure in Area 3A

The NPFMC and the IPHC recommended a day-of-week closure for Area 3A in 2015. No retention of halibut by charter vessel anglers will be allowed in Area 3A on

Thursdays beginning June 15 through August 31 (i.e., June 18 and 25, July 2, 9, 16, 23, and 30, and August 6 and 13). Retention of only GAF halibut will be allowed on charter vessels on Thursdays during these dates; all other halibut that are caught while fishing on a charter vessel must be released. Thursday was selected as the closure day because it was estimated to have the largest potential effect on reducing charter harvest in Area 3A.

Annual Limit of Five Fish for Charter Vessels Anglers in Area 3A

Charter vessel anglers will be limited to harvesting no more than five halibut on charter vessel fishing trips in Area 3A during a calendar year. This limit applies only to halibut caught aboard charter vessels in Area 3A. Halibut harvested while unguided fishing, fishing in other IPHC regulatory areas, or harvested as GAF will not accrue toward the annual limit.

Final Rule to Change the Definition of Sport Fishing Guide Services in Federal Regulations

NMFS published a proposed rule on December 3, 2014 (79 FR 71729), to revise Federal regulations for charter halibut fishing in Areas 2C and 3A. The proposed revisions were recommended by the NPFMC under authority of the Northern Pacific Halibut Act of 1982 at 16 U.S.C. 773b. The proposed rule would align Federal regulations with State of Alaska regulations, would clarify the intent of the NPFMC and NMFS for management of charter halibut fisheries in Alaska, and would facilitate enforcement and clarify recordkeeping and reporting requirements for the charter halibut fishery. The proposed rule is available on the NMFS Alaska Region web site at <http://www.alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/prules/79fr71729.pdf>.

Current Federal charter fishing regulations do not apply to a small number of businesses that offer guide-assisted sport fishing services in which guides provide assistance to halibut anglers, likely for compensation, from adjacent vessels or shore. Under current Federal regulations, a person providing assistance to an angler during a fishing trip, and who is not on board the vessel with the anglers, is not providing sport fishing guide services. As a result, persons providing guide-assisted sport fishing services are not required to have charter halibut permits as required by the charter halibut limited access program regulations at 50 CFR 300.67. In addition, anglers receiving assistance during the fishing trip from a guide who is not on board the same vessel are not subject to regulations that limit guided anglers to more restrictive daily bag and size limits that are intended to limit charter removals to allocations specified by the NPFMC's CSP for Area 2C and Area 3A. The proposed rule is primarily intended to clarify that 1) "guide-assisted" sport fishing services for halibut would be managed under Federal charter fishery regulations, and 2) halibut harvested by a guide-assisted angler would accrue toward charter allocations.

In recommending the proposed revisions to Federal regulations, the NPFMC specified that guide-assisted sport fishing services for halibut are a *de facto* form of charter fishing and should be managed under charter fishing regulations. A guide who is not on the same vessel with an angler and who provides assistance for compensation to an angler meets the NPFMC's definition of guided fishing. For example, the guide may accompany the anglers from a separate vessel, lead them to the fishing location, and assist in landing and filleting the halibut from a separate vessel. The proposed rule would

implement the NPFMC's intent for managing these types of activities by establishing clear and consistent regulations that apply to all businesses providing, and all anglers receiving, sport fishing guide services for halibut fishing.

Once implemented, this rule will revise several Federal regulations and definitions pertaining to charter fishing for halibut. Some revisions to the IPHC annual management measures are also necessary to facilitate compliance and enforcement. First, NMFS proposed adding an annual management measures to section 28(1) to require all halibut harvested on a charter vessel fishing trip to be retained on board the vessel on which it was caught until the end of a charter vessel fishing trip. This requirement will prevent charter vessel anglers without a guide on board the vessel from transferring their catch to another vessel for processing, and is necessary for enforcement of bag and size limits. Second, NMFS proposed revising the IPHC definition of "charter vessel" at Section 3 to specify that, for Alaska, a charter vessel means a vessel used while providing or receiving sport fishing guide services for halibut. This change does not alter the definition of charter vessel as it applies to other IPHC regulatory areas, while making the definition more consistent with the proposed Federal definition for Alaska. Third, minor technical revisions would be made to maintain consistency with Federal and State of Alaska sport fishing regulations. Fourth, section 25(7) will be revised to clarify that the charter vessel guide shall be held liable for any violations of annual management measures committed by an angler on a charter vessel, whether the guide is on board the vessel with the angler or on a separate vessel. And finally, this rule would implement a Federal regulation requiring carcass-retention that duplicates annual management

measures at 28(2)(d) and 28(3)(d). This change is discussed in the next section. The IPHC recommended that these changes be made to the annual management measures.

Areas 2C and 3A Carcass-Retention

Current IPHC regulations prohibit the filleting, mutilation, or other disfigurement of sport-caught halibut that would prevent the determination of the size or number of halibut possessed or landed. The IPHC first implemented a carcass-retention requirement in 2011 for Area 2C at section 28(2)(b) requiring that a person on board a charter vessel who possesses filleted halibut must also retain the entire carcass, with head and tail connected as a single piece, on board the vessel until all the fillets are offloaded. This regulation was implemented in Area 2C to facilitate enforcement of maximum size limits and reverse slot limits in that area. The IPHC recommended a carcass-retention requirement in Area 3A in 2014 at section 28(3)(d) to facilitate enforcement of the 29-inch maximum size limit on one of the two fish. In 2015, anglers in Area 3A are required to retain only the carcass of the halibut that is less than the 29-inch maximum size limit if two halibut are retained. If an angler only retained one halibut in a day, the carcass need not be retained.

The IPHC recommended removing the carcass-retention requirements from the IPHC annual management measures when a carcass-retention requirement is implemented through Federal regulations. NMFS has proposed a carcass-retention requirement through Federal regulation in the sport fishing guide services proposed rule (79 FR 71729, December 3, 2014). This Federal regulation would be effective upon publication of the sport fishing guide services final rule. Because the final rule affecting

sport fishing guide services has not yet been published and will not be effective prior to the publication of these annual management measures, the carcass-retention requirements will be retained in these IPHC management measures for 2015, and will be removed next year, if applicable, after the sport fishing guide services final rule has become effective. This will ensure that the carcass-retention requirement is in effect for the 2015 charter fishing season.

Annual Halibut Management Measures

The following annual management measures for the 2015 Pacific halibut fishery are those recommended by the IPHC and accepted by the Secretary of State, with the concurrence of the Secretary.

1. Short Title

These Regulations may be cited as the Pacific Halibut Fishery Regulations.

2. Application

(1) These Regulations apply to persons and vessels fishing for halibut in, or possessing halibut taken from, the maritime area as defined in Section 3.

(2) Sections 3 to 6 apply generally to all halibut fishing.

(3) Sections 7 to 20 apply to commercial fishing for halibut.

(4) Section 21 applies to tagged halibut caught by any vessel.

(5) Section 22 applies to the United States treaty Indian fishery in Subarea 2A-1.

(6) Section 23 applies to customary and traditional fishing in Alaska.

(7) Section 24 applies to Aboriginal groups fishing for food, social and ceremonial purposes in British Columbia.

(8) Sections 25 to 28 apply to sport fishing for halibut.

(9) These Regulations do not apply to fishing operations authorized or conducted by the Commission for research purposes.

3. Definitions

(1) In these Regulations,

(a) “authorized officer” means any State, Federal, or Provincial officer authorized to enforce these Regulations including, but not limited to, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Canada’s Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), Alaska Wildlife Troopers (AWT), United States Coast Guard (USCG), Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), the Oregon State Police (OSP), and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW);

(b) “authorized clearance personnel” means an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish processor;

(c) “charter vessel” outside of Alaska waters means a vessel used for hire in sport fishing for halibut, but not including a vessel without a hired operator, and in Alaska waters means a vessel used while providing or receiving sport fishing guide services for halibut;

(d) “commercial fishing” means fishing, the resulting catch of which is sold or bartered; or is intended to be sold or bartered, other than i) sport fishing, ii) treaty Indian ceremonial and subsistence fishing as referred to in section 22, iii) customary and

traditional fishing as referred to in section 23 and defined by and regulated pursuant to NMFS regulations published at 50 CFR Part 300, and iv) Aboriginal groups fishing in British Columbia as referred to in section 24;

(e) “Commission” means the International Pacific Halibut Commission;

(f) “daily bag limit” means the maximum number of halibut a person may take in any calendar day from Convention waters;

(g) “fishing” means the taking, harvesting, or catching of fish, or any activity that can reasonably be expected to result in the taking, harvesting, or catching of fish, including specifically the deployment of any amount or component part of setline gear anywhere in the maritime area;

(h) “fishing period limit” means the maximum amount of halibut that may be retained and landed by a vessel during one fishing period;

(i) “land” or “offload” with respect to halibut, means the removal of halibut from the catching vessel;

(j) “license” means a halibut fishing license issued by the Commission pursuant to section 4;

(k) “maritime area”, in respect of the fisheries jurisdiction of a Contracting Party, includes without distinction areas within and seaward of the territorial sea and internal waters of that Party;

(l) “net weight” of a halibut means the weight of halibut that is without gills and entrails, head-off, washed, and without ice and slime. If a halibut is weighed with the

head on or with ice and slime, the required conversion factors for calculating net weight are a 2 percent deduction for ice and slime and a 10 percent deduction for the head;

(m) “operator”, with respect to any vessel, means the owner and/or the master or other individual on board and in charge of that vessel;

(n) “overall length” of a vessel means the horizontal distance, rounded to the nearest foot, between the foremost part of the stem and the aftermost part of the stern (excluding bowsprits, rudders, outboard motor brackets, and similar fittings or attachments);

(o) “person” includes an individual, corporation, firm, or association;

(p) “regulatory area” means an area referred to in section 6;

(q) “setline gear” means one or more stationary, buoyed, and anchored lines with hooks attached;

(r) “sport fishing” means all fishing other than i) commercial fishing, ii) treaty Indian ceremonial and subsistence fishing as referred to in section 22, iii) customary and traditional fishing as referred to in section 23 and defined in and regulated pursuant to NMFS regulations published in 50 CFR Part 300, and iv) Aboriginal groups fishing in British Columbia as referred to in section 24;

(s) “tender” means any vessel that buys or obtains fish directly from a catching vessel and transports it to a port of landing or fish processor;

(t) “VMS transmitter” means a NMFS-approved vessel monitoring system transmitter that automatically determines a vessel’s position and transmits it to a NMFS-approved communications service provider.¹

(2) In these Regulations, all bearings are true and all positions are determined by the most recent charts issued by the United States National Ocean Service or the Canadian Hydrographic Service.

4. Licensing Vessels for Area 2A

(1) No person shall fish for halibut from a vessel, nor possess halibut on board a vessel, used either for commercial fishing or as a charter vessel in Area 2A, unless the Commission has issued a license valid for fishing in Area 2A in respect of that vessel.

(2) A license issued for a vessel operating in Area 2A shall be valid only for operating either as a charter vessel or a commercial vessel, but not both.

(3) A vessel with a valid Area 2A commercial license cannot be used to sport fish for Pacific halibut in Area 2A.

(4) A license issued for a vessel operating in the commercial fishery in Area 2A shall be valid for one of the following:

(a) the directed commercial fishery during the fishing periods specified in paragraph (2) of section 8 and the incidental commercial fishery during the sablefish fishery specified in paragraph (3) of section 8;

¹ Call NOAA Enforcement Division, Alaska Region, at 907-586-7225 between the hours of 0800 and 1600 local time for a list of NMFS-approved VMS transmitters and communications service providers.

(b) the incidental catch fishery during the sablefish fishery specified in paragraph (3) of section 8; or

(c) the incidental catch fishery during the salmon troll fishery specified in paragraph (4) of section 8.

(5) No person may apply for or be issued a license for a vessel operating in the incidental catch fishery during the salmon troll fishery in paragraph (4)(c), if that vessel was previously issued a license for either the directed commercial fishery in paragraph (4)(a) or the incidental catch fishery during the sablefish fishery in paragraph (4)(b).

(6) A license issued in respect to a vessel referred to in paragraph (1) of this section must be carried on board that vessel at all times and the vessel operator shall permit its inspection by any authorized officer.

(7) The Commission shall issue a license in respect to a vessel, without fee, from its office in Seattle, Washington, upon receipt of a completed, written, and signed “Application for Vessel License for the Halibut Fishery” form.

(8) A vessel operating in the directed commercial fishery in Area 2A must have its “Application for Vessel License for the Halibut Fishery” form postmarked no later than 11:59 p.m. on April 30, or on the first weekday in May if April 30 is a Saturday or Sunday.

(9) A vessel operating in the incidental catch fishery during the sablefish fishery in Area 2A must have its “Application for Vessel License for the Halibut Fishery”

form postmarked no later than 11:59 p.m. on March 15, or the next weekday in March if March 15 is a Saturday or Sunday.

(10) A vessel operating in the incidental catch fishery during the salmon troll fishery in Area 2A must have its “Application for Vessel License for the Halibut Fishery” form postmarked no later than 11:59 p.m. on March 15, or the next weekday in March if March 15 is a Saturday or Sunday.

(11) Application forms may be obtained from any authorized officer or from the Commission.

(12) Information on “Application for Vessel License for the Halibut Fishery” form must be accurate.

(13) The “Application for Vessel License for the Halibut Fishery” form shall be completed and signed by the vessel owner.

(14) Licenses issued under this section shall be valid only during the year in which they are issued.

(15) A new license is required for a vessel that is sold, transferred, renamed, or the documentation is changed.

(16) The license required under this section is in addition to any license, however designated, that is required under the laws of the United States or any of its States.

(17) The United States may suspend, revoke, or modify any license issued under this section under policies and procedures in Title 15, CFR Part 904.

5. In-Season Actions

(1) The Commission is authorized to establish or modify regulations during the season after determining that such action:

(a) will not result in exceeding the catch limit established preseason for each regulatory area;

(b) is consistent with the Convention between Canada and the United States of America for the Preservation of the Halibut Fishery of the Northern Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea, and applicable domestic law of either Canada or the United States; and

(c) is consistent, to the maximum extent practicable, with any domestic catch sharing plans or other domestic allocation programs developed by the United States or Canadian governments.

(2) In-season actions may include, but are not limited to, establishment or modification of the following:

(a) closed areas;

(b) fishing periods;

(c) fishing period limits;

(d) gear restrictions;

(e) recreational bag limits;

(f) size limits; or

(g) vessel clearances.

(3) In-season changes will be effective at the time and date specified by the Commission.

(4) The Commission will announce in-season actions under this section by providing notice to major halibut processors; Federal, State, United States treaty Indian, and Provincial fishery officials; and the media.

6. Regulatory Areas

The following areas shall be regulatory areas (see Figure 1) for the purposes of the Convention:

(1) Area 2A includes all waters off the states of California, Oregon, and Washington;

(2) Area 2B includes all waters off British Columbia;

(3) Area 2C includes all waters off Alaska that are east of a line running 340° true from Cape Spencer Light ($58^{\circ}11'56''$ N. latitude, $136^{\circ}38'26''$ W. longitude) and south and east of a line running 205° true from said light;

(4) Area 3A includes all waters between Area 2C and a line extending from the most northerly point on Cape Aklek ($57^{\circ}41'15''$ N. latitude, $155^{\circ}35'00''$ W. longitude) to Cape Ikolik ($57^{\circ}17'17''$ N. latitude, $154^{\circ}47'18''$ W. longitude), then along the Kodiak Island coastline to Cape Trinity ($56^{\circ}44'50''$ N. latitude, $154^{\circ}08'44''$ W. longitude), then 140° true;

(5) Area 3B includes all waters between Area 3A and a line extending 150° true from Cape Lutke ($54^{\circ}29'00''$ N. latitude, $164^{\circ}20'00''$ W. longitude) and south of $54^{\circ}49'00''$ N. latitude in Isanotski Strait;

(6) Area 4A includes all waters in the Gulf of Alaska west of Area 3B and in the Bering Sea west of the closed area defined in section 10 that are east of 172°00'00'' W. longitude and south of 56°20'00'' N. latitude;

(7) Area 4B includes all waters in the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska west of Area 4A and south of 56°20'00'' N. latitude;

(8) Area 4C includes all waters in the Bering Sea north of Area 4A and north of the closed area defined in section 10 which are east of 171°00'00'' W. longitude, south of 58°00'00'' N. latitude, and west of 168°00'00'' W. longitude;

(9) Area 4D includes all waters in the Bering Sea north of Areas 4A and 4B, north and west of Area 4C, and west of 168°00'00'' W. longitude; and

(10) Area 4E includes all waters in the Bering Sea north and east of the closed area defined in section 10, east of 168°00'00'' W. longitude, and south of 65°34'00'' N. latitude.

7. Fishing in Regulatory Area 4E and 4D

(1) Section 7 applies only to any person fishing, or vessel that is used to fish for, Area 4E Community Development Quota (CDQ) or Area 4D CDQ halibut, provided that the total annual halibut catch of that person or vessel is landed at a port within Area 4E or 4D.

(2) A person may retain halibut taken with setline gear in Area 4E CDQ and 4D CDQ fishery that are smaller than the size limit specified in section 13, provided that no person may sell or barter such halibut.

(3) The manager of a CDQ organization that authorizes persons to harvest halibut in the Area 4E or 4D CDQ fisheries must report to the Commission the total number and weight of undersized halibut taken and retained by such persons pursuant to section 7, paragraph (2). This report, which shall include data and methodology used to collect the data, must be received by the Commission prior to November 1 of the year in which such halibut were harvested.

8. Fishing Periods

(1) The fishing periods for each regulatory area apply where the catch limits specified in section 11 have not been taken.

(2) Each fishing period in the Area 2A directed commercial fishery² shall begin at 0800 hours and terminate at 1800 hours local time on June 24, July 8, July 22, August 5, August 19, September 2, and September 16 unless the Commission specifies otherwise.

(3) Notwithstanding paragraph (7) of section 11, an incidental catch fishery³ is authorized during the sablefish seasons in Area 2A in accordance with regulations promulgated by NMFS. This fishery will occur between 1200 hours local time on March 14 and 1200 hours local time on November 7.

² The directed fishery is restricted to waters that are south of Point Chehalis, Washington (46°53'18'' N. latitude) under regulations promulgated by NMFS and published in the **Federal Register**.

³ The incidental fishery during the directed, fixed gear sablefish season is restricted to waters that are north of Point Chehalis, Washington (46°53'18'' N. latitude) under regulations promulgated by NMFS at 50 CFR 300.63. Landing restrictions for halibut retention in the fixed gear sablefish fishery can be found at 50 CFR 660.231.

(4) Notwithstanding paragraph (2), and paragraph (7) of section 11, an incidental catch fishery is authorized during salmon troll seasons in Area 2A in accordance with regulations promulgated by NMFS. This fishery will occur between 1200 hours local time on March 14 and 1200 hours local time on November 7.

(5) The fishing period in Areas 2B, 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E shall begin at 1200 hours local time on March 14 and terminate at 1200 hours local time on November 7, unless the Commission specifies otherwise.

(6) All commercial fishing for halibut in Areas 2A, 2B, 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E shall cease at 1200 hours local time on November 7.

9. Closed Periods

(1) No person shall engage in fishing for halibut in any regulatory area other than during the fishing periods set out in section 8 in respect of that area.

(2) No person shall land or otherwise retain halibut caught outside a fishing period applicable to the regulatory area where the halibut was taken.

(3) Subject to paragraphs (7), (8), (9), and (10) of section 19, these Regulations do not prohibit fishing for any species of fish other than halibut during the closed periods.

(4) Notwithstanding paragraph (3), no person shall have halibut in his/her possession while fishing for any other species of fish during the closed periods.

(5) No vessel shall retrieve any halibut fishing gear during a closed period if the vessel has any halibut on board.

(6) A vessel that has no halibut on board may retrieve any halibut fishing gear during the closed period after the operator notifies an authorized officer or representative of the Commission prior to that retrieval.

(7) After retrieval of halibut gear in accordance with paragraph (6), the vessel shall submit to a hold inspection at the discretion of the authorized officer or representative of the Commission.

(8) No person shall retain any halibut caught on gear retrieved in accordance with paragraph (6).

(9) No person shall possess halibut on board a vessel in a regulatory area during a closed period unless that vessel is in continuous transit to or within a port in which that halibut may be lawfully sold.

10. Closed Area

All waters in the Bering Sea north of 55°00'00'' N. latitude in Isanotski Strait that are enclosed by a line from Cape Sarichef Light (54°36'00'' N. latitude, 164°55'42'' W. longitude) to a point at 56°20'00'' N. latitude, 168°30'00'' W. longitude; thence to a point at 58°21'25'' N. latitude, 163°00'00'' W. longitude; thence to Strogonof Point (56°53'18'' N. latitude, 158°50'37'' W. longitude); and then along the northern coasts of the Alaska Peninsula and Unimak Island to the point of origin at Cape Sarichef Light are closed to halibut fishing and no person shall fish for halibut therein or have halibut in his/her possession while in those waters, except in the course of a continuous transit across those waters. All waters in Isanotski Strait between 55°00'00'' N. latitude and 54°49'00'' N. latitude are closed to halibut fishing.

11. Catch Limits

(1) The total allowable catch of halibut to be taken during the halibut fishing periods specified in section 8 shall be limited to the net weights expressed in pounds or metric tons shown in the following table:

Regulatory Area	Catch Limit - net weight	
	Pounds	Metric tons
2A: directed commercial, and incidental commercial catch during salmon troll fishery	193,564	87.8
2A: incidental commercial during sablefish fishery	10,347	4.7
2B ⁴	7,038,000	3,192.4
2C ⁵	3,679,000	1,668.8
3A ⁶	7,790,000	3,533.5
3B	2,650,000	1,202.0
4A	1,390,000	630.5
4B	1,140,000	517.1
4C	596,600	270.6
4D	596,600	270.6
4E	91,800	41.6

⁴ Area 2B includes combined commercial and sport catch limits that will be allocated by DFO. See section 27 for sport fishing regulations.

⁵ For the commercial fishery in Area 2C, in addition to the catch limit, the estimate of incidental mortality from the commercial fishery is 120,000 pounds. This amount is included in the combined commercial and guided sport sector catch limit set by IPHC and allocated by NMFS by a catch sharing plan.

⁶ For the commercial fishery in Area 3A, in addition to the catch limit, the estimate of incidental mortality from the commercial fishery is 420,000 pounds. This amount is included in the combined commercial and guided sport sector catch limit set by IPHC and allocated by NMFS by a catch sharing plan.

(2) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), regulations pertaining to the division of the Area 2A catch limit between the directed commercial fishery and the incidental catch fishery as described in paragraph (4) of section 8 will be promulgated by NMFS and published in the **Federal Register**.

(3) The Commission shall determine and announce to the public the date on which the catch limit for Area 2A will be taken.

(4) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), the commercial fishing in Area 2B will close only when all Individual Vessel Quotas (IVQs) assigned by DFO are taken, or November 7, whichever is earlier.

(5) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E will each close only when all Individual Fishing Quotas (IFQ) and all CDQs issued by NMFS have been taken, or November 7, whichever is earlier.

(6) If the Commission determines that the catch limit specified for Area 2A in paragraph (1) would be exceeded in an unrestricted 10-hour fishing period as specified in paragraph (2) of section 8, the catch limit for that area shall be considered to have been taken unless fishing period limits are implemented.

(7) When under paragraphs (2), (3), and (6) the Commission has announced a date on which the catch limit for Area 2A will be taken, no person shall fish for halibut in that area after that date for the rest of the year, unless the Commission has announced the reopening of that area for halibut fishing.

(8) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), the total allowable catch of halibut that may be taken in the Area 4E directed commercial fishery is equal to the combined annual catch limits specified for the Area 4D and Area 4E CDQ fisheries. The annual Area 4D CDQ catch limit will decrease by the equivalent amount of halibut CDQ taken in Area 4E in excess of the annual Area 4E CDQ catch limit.

(9) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), the total allowable catch of halibut that may be taken in the Area 4D directed commercial fishery is equal to the combined annual catch limits specified for Area 4C and Area 4D. The annual Area 4C catch limit will decrease by the equivalent amount of halibut taken in Area 4D in excess of the annual Area 4D catch limit.

Area 2B includes combined commercial and sport catch limits that will be allocated by DFO.

12. Fishing Period Limits

(1) It shall be unlawful for any vessel to retain more halibut than authorized by that vessel's license in any fishing period for which the Commission has announced a fishing period limit.

(2) The operator of any vessel that fishes for halibut during a fishing period when fishing period limits are in effect must, upon commencing an offload of halibut to a commercial fish processor, completely offload all halibut on board said vessel to that processor and ensure that all halibut is weighed and reported on State fish tickets.

(3) The operator of any vessel that fishes for halibut during a fishing period when fishing period limits are in effect must, upon commencing an offload of halibut

other than to a commercial fish processor, completely offload all halibut on board said vessel and ensure that all halibut are weighed and reported on State fish tickets.

(4) The provisions of paragraph (3) are not intended to prevent retail over-the-side sales to individual purchasers so long as all the halibut on board is ultimately offloaded and reported.

(5) When fishing period limits are in effect, a vessel's maximum retainable catch will be determined by the Commission based on:

- (a) the vessel's overall length in feet and associated length class;
- (b) the average performance of all vessels within that class; and
- (c) the remaining catch limit.

(6) Length classes are shown in the following table:

<u>Overall Length (in feet)</u>	<u>Vessel Class</u>
1-25	A
26-30	B
31-35	C
36-40	D
41-45	E
46-50	F
51-55	G
56+	H

(7) Fishing period limits in Area 2A apply only to the directed halibut fishery referred to in paragraph (2) of section 8.

13. Size Limits

(1) No person shall take or possess any halibut that:

(a) with the head on, is less than 32 inches (81.3 cm) as measured in a straight line, passing over the pectoral fin from the tip of the lower jaw with the mouth closed, to the extreme end of the middle of the tail, as illustrated in Figure 2; or

(b) with the head removed, is less than 24 inches (61.0 cm) as measured from the base of the pectoral fin at its most anterior point to the extreme end of the middle of the tail, as illustrated in Figure 2.

(2) No person on board a vessel fishing for, or tendering, halibut caught in Area 2A shall possess any halibut that has had its head removed.

14. Careful Release of Halibut

(1) All halibut that are caught and are not retained shall be immediately released outboard of the roller and returned to the sea with a minimum of injury by:

(a) hook straightening;

(b) cutting the gangion near the hook; or

(c) carefully removing the hook by twisting it from the halibut with a gaff.

(2) Except that paragraph (1) shall not prohibit the possession of halibut on board a vessel that has been brought aboard to be measured to determine if the minimum size limit of the halibut is met and, if sublegal-sized, is promptly returned to the sea with a minimum of injury.

15. Vessel Clearance in Area 4

(1) The operator of any vessel that fishes for halibut in Areas 4A, 4B, 4C, or 4D must obtain a vessel clearance before fishing in any of these areas, and before the landing of any halibut caught in any of these areas, unless specifically exempted in paragraphs (10), (13), (14), (15), or (16).

(2) An operator obtaining a vessel clearance required by paragraph (1) must obtain the clearance in person from the authorized clearance personnel and sign the IPHC form documenting that a clearance was obtained, except that when the clearance is obtained via VHF radio referred to in paragraphs (5), (8), and (9), the authorized clearance personnel must sign the IPHC form documenting that the clearance was obtained.

(3) The vessel clearance required under paragraph (1) prior to fishing in Area 4A may be obtained only at Nazan Bay on Atka Island, Dutch Harbor or Akutan, Alaska, from an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish processor.

(4) The vessel clearance required under paragraph (1) prior to fishing in Area 4B may only be obtained at Nazan Bay on Atka Island or Adak, Alaska, from an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish processor.

(5) The vessel clearance required under paragraph (1) prior to fishing in Area 4C or 4D may be obtained only at St. Paul or St. George, Alaska, from an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish

processor by VHF radio and allowing the person contacted to confirm visually the identity of the vessel.

(6) The vessel operator shall specify the specific regulatory area in which fishing will take place.

(7) Before unloading any halibut caught in Area 4A, a vessel operator may obtain the clearance required under paragraph (1) only in Dutch Harbor or Akutan, Alaska, by contacting an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish processor.

(8) Before unloading any halibut caught in Area 4B, a vessel operator may obtain the clearance required under paragraph (1) only in Nazan Bay on Atka Island or Adak, by contacting an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish processor by VHF radio or in person.

(9) Before unloading any halibut caught in Area 4C and 4D, a vessel operator may obtain the clearance required under paragraph (1) only in St. Paul, St. George, Dutch Harbor, or Akutan, Alaska, either in person or by contacting an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish processor. The clearances obtained in St. Paul or St. George, Alaska, can be obtained by VHF radio and allowing the person contacted to confirm visually the identity of the vessel.

(10) Any vessel operator who complies with the requirements in section 18 for possessing halibut on board a vessel that was caught in more than one regulatory area in Area 4 is exempt from the clearance requirements of paragraph (1) of this section, provided that:

(a) the operator of the vessel obtains a vessel clearance prior to fishing in Area 4 in either Dutch Harbor, Akutan, St. Paul, St. George, Adak, or Nazan Bay on Atka Island by contacting an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish processor. The clearance obtained in St. Paul, St. George, Adak, or Nazan Bay on Atka Island can be obtained by VHF radio and allowing the person contacted to confirm visually the identity of the vessel. This clearance will list the areas in which the vessel will fish; and

(b) before unloading any halibut from Area 4, the vessel operator obtains a vessel clearance from Dutch Harbor, Akutan, St. Paul, St. George, Adak, or Nazan Bay on Atka Island by contacting an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish processor. The clearance obtained in St. Paul or St. George can be obtained by VHF radio and allowing the person contacted to confirm visually the identity of the vessel. The clearance obtained in Adak or Nazan Bay on Atka Island can be obtained by VHF radio.

(11) Vessel clearances shall be obtained between 0600 and 1800 hours, local time.

(12) No halibut shall be on board the vessel at the time of the clearances required prior to fishing in Area 4.

(13) Any vessel that is used to fish for halibut only in Area 4A and lands its total annual halibut catch at a port within Area 4A is exempt from the clearance requirements of paragraph (1).

(14) Any vessel that is used to fish for halibut only in Area 4B and lands its total annual halibut catch at a port within Area 4B is exempt from the clearance requirements of paragraph (1).

(15) Any vessel that is used to fish for halibut only in Area 4C or 4D or 4E and lands its total annual halibut catch at a port within Area 4C, 4D, 4E, or the closed area defined in section 10, is exempt from the clearance requirements of paragraph (1).

(16) Any vessel that carries a transmitting VMS transmitter while fishing for halibut in Area 4A, 4B, 4C, or 4D and until all halibut caught in any of these areas is landed, is exempt from the clearance requirements of paragraph (1) of this section, provided that:

(a) the operator of the vessel complies with NMFS' vessel monitoring system regulations published at 50 CFR 679.28(f)(3), (4) and (5); and

(b) the operator of the vessel notifies NOAA Fisheries Office for Law Enforcement at 800-304-4846 (select option 1 to speak to an Enforcement Data Clerk) between the hours of 0600 and 0000 (midnight) local time within 72 hours before fishing for halibut in Area 4A, 4B, 4C, or 4D and receives a VMS confirmation number.

16. Logs

(1) The operator of any U.S. vessel fishing for halibut that has an overall length of 26 feet (7.9 meters) or greater shall maintain an accurate log of halibut fishing operations. The operator of a vessel fishing in waters in and off Alaska must use one of the following logbooks: the Groundfish/IFQ Daily Fishing Longline and Pot Gear Logbook provided by NMFS; the Alaska hook-and-line logbook provided by Petersburg

Vessel Owners Association or Alaska Longline Fisherman's Association; the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) longline-pot logbook; or the logbook provided by IPHC. The operator of a vessel fishing in Area 2A must use either the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Voluntary Sablefish Logbook, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) Fixed Gear Logbook, or the logbook provided by IPHC.

(2) The logbook referred to in paragraph (1) must include the following information:

(a) the name of the vessel and the State (ADF&G, WDFW, ODFW, or California Department of Fish and Game) or Tribal vessel number;

(b) the date(s) upon which the fishing gear is set or retrieved;

(c) the latitude and longitude coordinates or a direction and distance from a point of land for each set or day;

(d) the number of skates deployed or retrieved, and number of skates lost; and

(e) the total weight or number of halibut retained for each set or day.

(3) The logbook referred to in paragraph (1) shall be:

(a) maintained on board the vessel;

(b) updated not later than 24 hours after 0000 (midnight) local time for each day fished and prior to the offloading or sale of halibut taken during that fishing trip;

(c) retained for a period of two years by the owner or operator of the vessel;

(d) open to inspection by an authorized officer or any authorized representative of the Commission upon demand; and

(e) kept on board the vessel when engaged in halibut fishing, during transits to port of landing, and until the offloading of all halibut is completed.

(4) The log referred to in paragraph (1) does not apply to the incidental halibut fishery during the salmon troll season in Area 2A defined in paragraph (4) of section 8.

(5) The operator of any Canadian vessel fishing for halibut shall maintain an accurate log recorded in the British Columbia Integrated Groundfish Fishing Log provided by DFO.

(6) The logbook referred to in paragraph (5) must include the following information:

- (a) the name of the vessel and the DFO vessel registration number;
- (b) the date(s) upon which the fishing gear is set and retrieved;
- (c) the latitude and longitude coordinates for each set;
- (d) the number of skates deployed or retrieved, and number of skates lost; and
- (e) the total weight or number of halibut retained for each set.

(7) The logbook referred to in paragraph (5) shall be:

- (a) maintained on board the vessel;
- (b) retained for a period of two years by the owner or operator of the vessel;
- (c) open to inspection by an authorized officer or any authorized representative of the Commission upon demand;

(d) kept on board the vessel when engaged in halibut fishing, during transits to port of landing, and until the offloading of all halibut is completed;

(e) mailed to the DFO (white copy) within seven days of offloading; and

(f) mailed to the Commission (yellow copy) within seven days of the final offload if not collected by a Commission employee.

(8) No person shall make a false entry in a log referred to in this section.

17. Receipt and Possession of Halibut

(1) No person shall receive halibut caught in Area 2A from a United States vessel that does not have on board the license required by section 4.

(2) No person shall possess on board a vessel a halibut other than whole or with gills and entrails removed, except that this paragraph shall not prohibit the possession on board a vessel of:

(a) halibut cheeks cut from halibut caught by persons authorized to process the halibut on board in accordance with NMFS regulations published at 50 CFR Part 679;

(b) fillets from halibut offloaded in accordance with section 17 that are possessed on board the harvesting vessel in the port of landing up to 1800 hours local time on the calendar day following the offload⁷; and

(c) halibut with their heads removed in accordance with section 13.

(3) No person shall offload halibut from a vessel unless the gills and entrails have been removed prior to offloading⁸.

⁷ DFO has more restrictive regulations; therefore, section 17 paragraph (2)(b) does not apply to fish caught in Area 2B or landed in British Columbia.

⁸ DFO did not adopt this regulation; therefore, section 17 paragraph (3) does not apply to fish caught in Area 2B.

(4) It shall be the responsibility of a vessel operator who lands halibut to continuously and completely offload at a single offload site all halibut on board the vessel.

(5) A registered buyer (as that term is defined in regulations promulgated by NMFS and codified at 50 CFR Part 679) who receives halibut harvested in IFQ and CDQ fisheries in Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E, directly from the vessel operator that harvested such halibut must weigh all the halibut received and record the following information on Federal catch reports: date of offload; name of vessel; vessel number (State, Tribal or Federal, not IPHC vessel number); scale weight obtained at the time of offloading, including the scale weight (in pounds) of halibut purchased by the registered buyer, the scale weight (in pounds) of halibut offloaded in excess of the IFQ or CDQ, the scale weight of halibut (in pounds) retained for personal use or for future sale, and the scale weight (in pounds) of halibut discarded as unfit for human consumption.

(6) The first recipient, commercial fish processor, or buyer in the United States who purchases or receives halibut directly from the vessel operator that harvested such halibut must weigh and record all halibut received and record the following information on State fish tickets: the date of offload; vessel number (State, Tribal or Federal, not IPHC vessel number); total weight obtained at the time of offload including the weight (in pounds) of halibut purchased; the weight (in pounds) of halibut offloaded in excess of the IFQ, CDQ, or fishing period limits; the weight of halibut (in pounds) retained for personal use or for future sale; and the weight (in pounds) of halibut discarded as unfit for human consumption.

(7) The individual completing the State fish tickets for the Area 2A fisheries as referred to in paragraph (6) must additionally record whether the halibut weight is of head-on or head-off fish.

(8) For halibut landings made in Alaska, the requirements as listed in paragraph (5) and (6) can be met by recording the information in the Interagency Electronic Reporting Systems, eLandings in accordance with NMFS regulation published at 50 CFR Part 679.

(9) The master or operator of a Canadian vessel that was engaged in halibut fishing must weigh and record all halibut on board said vessel at the time offloading commences and record on Provincial fish tickets or Federal catch reports the date; locality; name of vessel; the name(s) of the person(s) from whom the halibut was purchased; and the scale weight obtained at the time of offloading of all halibut on board the vessel including the pounds purchased, pounds in excess of IVQs, pounds retained for personal use, and pounds discarded as unfit for human consumption.

(10) No person shall make a false entry on a State or Provincial fish ticket or a Federal catch or landing report referred to in paragraphs (5), (6), and (9) of section 17.

(11) A copy of the fish tickets or catch reports referred to in paragraphs (5), (6), and (9) shall be:

(a) retained by the person making them for a period of three years from the date the fish tickets or catch reports are made; and

(b) open to inspection by an authorized officer or any authorized representative of the Commission.

(12) No person shall possess any halibut taken or retained in contravention of these Regulations.

(13) When halibut are landed to other than a commercial fish processor, the records required by paragraph (6) shall be maintained by the operator of the vessel from which that halibut was caught, in compliance with paragraph (11).

(14) No person shall tag halibut unless the tagging is authorized by IPHC permit or by a Federal or State agency.

18. Fishing Multiple Regulatory Areas

(1) Except as provided in this section, no person shall possess at the same time on board a vessel halibut caught in more than one regulatory area.

(2) Halibut caught in more than one of the Regulatory Areas 2C, 3A, or 3B may be possessed on board a vessel at the same time, provided the operator of the vessel:

(a) has a NMFS-certified observer on board when required by NMFS regulations⁹ published at 50 CFR 679.7(f)(4); and

(b) can identify the regulatory area in which each halibut on board was caught by separating halibut from different areas in the hold, tagging halibut, or by other means.

(3) Halibut caught in more than one of the Regulatory Areas 4A, 4B, 4C, or 4D may be possessed on board a vessel at the same time, provided the operator of the vessel:

⁹ Without an observer, a vessel cannot have on board more halibut than the IFQ for the area that is being fished, even if some of the catch occurred earlier in a different area.

(a) has a NMFS-certified observer on board the vessel as required by NMFS regulations published at 50 CFR 679.7(f)(4); or has an operational VMS on board actively transmitting in all regulatory areas fished and does not possess at any time more halibut on board the vessel than the IFQ permit holders on board the vessel have cumulatively available for any single Area 4 regulatory area fished; and

(b) can identify the regulatory area in which each halibut on board was caught by separating halibut from different areas in the hold, tagging halibut, or by other means.

(4) If halibut from Area 4 are on board the vessel, the vessel can have halibut caught in Regulatory Areas 2C, 3A, and 3B on board if in compliance with paragraph (2).

19. Fishing Gear

(1) No person shall fish for halibut using any gear other than hook and line gear, except that vessels licensed to catch sablefish in Area 2B using sablefish trap gear as defined in the Condition of Sablefish Licence can retain halibut caught as bycatch under regulations promulgated by the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

(2) No person shall possess halibut taken with any gear other than hook and line gear, except that vessels licensed to catch sablefish in Area 2B using sablefish trap gear as defined by the Condition of Sablefish Licence can retain halibut caught as bycatch under regulations promulgated by the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

(3) No person shall possess halibut while on board a vessel carrying any trawl nets or fishing pots capable of catching halibut, except that in Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, or 4E, halibut heads, skin, entrails, bones or fins for use as bait may be possessed

on board a vessel carrying pots capable of catching halibut, provided that a receipt documenting purchase or transfer of these halibut parts is on board the vessel.

(4) All setline or skate marker buoys carried on board or used by any United States vessel used for halibut fishing shall be marked with one of the following:

- (a) the vessel's State license number; or
- (b) the vessel's registration number.

(5) The markings specified in paragraph (4) shall be in characters at least four inches in height and one-half inch in width in a contrasting color visible above the water and shall be maintained in legible condition.

(6) All setline or skate marker buoys carried on board or used by a Canadian vessel used for halibut fishing shall be:

- (a) floating and visible on the surface of the water; and
- (b) legibly marked with the identification plate number of the vessel engaged in commercial fishing from which that setline is being operated.

(7) No person on board a vessel used to fish for any species of fish anywhere in Area 2A during the 72-hour period immediately before the fishing period for the directed commercial fishery shall catch or possess halibut anywhere in those waters during that halibut fishing period unless, prior to the start of the halibut fishing period, the vessel has removed its gear from the water and has either:

- (a) made a landing and completely offloaded its catch of other fish; or
- (b) submitted to a hold inspection by an authorized officer.

(8) No vessel used to fish for any species of fish anywhere in Area 2A during the 72-hour period immediately before the fishing period for the directed commercial fishery may be used to catch or possess halibut anywhere in those waters during that halibut fishing period unless, prior to the start of the halibut fishing period, the vessel has removed its gear from the water and has either:

- (a) made a landing and completely offloaded its catch of other fish; or
- (b) submitted to a hold inspection by an authorized officer.

(9) No person on board a vessel from which setline gear was used to fish for any species of fish anywhere in Areas 2B, 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, or 4E during the 72-hour period immediately before the opening of the halibut fishing season shall catch or possess halibut anywhere in those areas until the vessel has removed all of its setline gear from the water and has either:

- (a) made a landing and completely offloaded its entire catch of other fish; or
- (b) submitted to a hold inspection by an authorized officer.

(10) No vessel from which setline gear was used to fish for any species of fish anywhere in Areas 2B, 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, or 4E during the 72-hour period immediately before the opening of the halibut fishing season may be used to catch or possess halibut anywhere in those areas until the vessel has removed all of its setline gear from the water and has either:

- (a) made a landing and completely offloaded its entire catch of other fish; or
- (b) submitted to a hold inspection by an authorized officer.

(11) Notwithstanding any other provision in these Regulations, a person may retain, possess and dispose of halibut taken with trawl gear only as authorized by Prohibited Species Donation regulations of NMFS.

20. Supervision of Unloading and Weighing

The unloading and weighing of halibut may be subject to the supervision of authorized officers to assure the fulfillment of the provisions of these Regulations.

21. Retention of Tagged Halibut

(1) Nothing contained in these Regulations prohibits any vessel at any time from retaining and landing a halibut that bears a Commission external tag at the time of capture, if the halibut with the tag still attached is reported at the time of landing and made available for examination by a representative of the Commission or by an authorized officer.

(2) After examination and removal of the tag by a representative of the Commission or an authorized officer, the halibut:

(a) may be retained for personal use; or

(b) may be sold only if the halibut is caught during commercial halibut fishing and complies with the other commercial fishing provisions of these Regulations.

(3) Externally tagged fish must count against commercial IVQs, CDQs, IFQs, or daily bag or possession limits unless otherwise exempted by State, Provincial, or Federal regulations.

22. Fishing by United States Treaty Indian Tribes

(1) Halibut fishing in Subarea 2A-1 by members of United States treaty Indian tribes located in the State of Washington shall be regulated under regulations promulgated by NMFS and published in the **Federal Register**.

(2) Subarea 2A-1 includes all waters off the coast of Washington that are north of 46°53'18'' N. latitude and east of 125°44'00'' W. longitude, and all inland marine waters of Washington.

(3) Section 13 (size limits), section 14 (careful release of halibut), section 16 (logs), section 17 (receipt and possession of halibut) and section 19 (fishing gear), except paragraphs (7) and (8) of section 19, apply to commercial fishing for halibut in Subarea 2A-1 by the treaty Indian tribes.

(4) Regulations in paragraph (3) of this section that apply to State fish tickets apply to Tribal tickets that are authorized by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

(5) Section 4 (Licensing Vessels for Area 2A) does not apply to commercial fishing for halibut in Subarea 2A-1 by treaty Indian tribes.

(6) Commercial fishing for halibut in Subarea 2A-1 is permitted with hook and line gear from March 14 through November 7, or until 307,700 pounds (139.6 metric tons) net weight is taken, whichever occurs first.

(7) Ceremonial and subsistence fishing for halibut in Subarea 2A-1 is permitted with hook and line gear from January 1 through December 31, and is estimated to take 31,800 pounds (14.4 metric tons) net weight.

23. Customary and Traditional Fishing in Alaska

(1) Customary and traditional fishing for halibut in Regulatory Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E shall be governed pursuant to regulations promulgated by NMFS and published in 50 CFR Part 300.

(2) Customary and traditional fishing is authorized from January 1 through December 31.

24. Aboriginal Groups Fishing for Food, Social and Ceremonial Purposes in British Columbia

(1) Fishing for halibut for food, social and ceremonial purposes by Aboriginal groups in Regulatory Area 2B shall be governed by the Fisheries Act of Canada and regulations as amended from time to time.

25. Sport Fishing for Halibut—General

(1) No person shall engage in sport fishing for halibut using gear other than a single line with no more than two hooks attached; or a spear.

(2) Any minimum overall size limit promulgated under IPHC or NMFS regulations shall be measured in a straight line passing over the pectoral fin from the tip of the lower jaw with the mouth closed, to the extreme end of the middle of the tail.

(3) Any halibut brought aboard a vessel and not immediately returned to the sea with a minimum of injury will be included in the daily bag limit of the person catching the halibut.

(4) No person may possess halibut on a vessel while fishing in a closed area.

(5) No halibut caught by sport fishing shall be offered for sale, sold, traded, or bartered.

(6) No halibut caught in sport fishing shall be possessed on board a vessel when other fish or shellfish aboard said vessel are destined for commercial use, sale, trade, or barter.

(7) The operator of a charter vessel shall be liable for any violations of these Regulations committed by an angler on board said vessel. In Alaska, the charter vessel guide, as defined in 50 CFR 300.61 and referred to in 50 CFR 300.65, 300.66, and 300.67, shall be liable for any violation of these Regulations committed by an angler on board a charter vessel.

26. Sport Fishing for Halibut—Area 2A

(1) The total allowable catch of halibut shall be limited to:

- (a) 214,110 pounds (97.1 metric tons) net weight in waters off Washington;
- (b) 187,259 pounds (84.9 metric tons) net weight in waters off Oregon; and
- (c) 25,220 pounds (11.4 metric tons) net weight in waters off California.

(2) The Commission shall determine and announce closing dates to the public for any area in which the catch limits promulgated by NMFS are estimated to have been taken.

(3) When the Commission has determined that a subquota under paragraph (8) of this section is estimated to have been taken, and has announced a date on which the season will close, no person shall sport fish for halibut in that area after that date for the rest of the year, unless a reopening of that area for sport halibut fishing is scheduled in accordance with the Catch Sharing Plan for Area 2A, or announced by the Commission.

(4) In California, Oregon, or Washington, no person shall fillet, mutilate, or otherwise disfigure a halibut in any manner that prevents the determination of minimum size or the number of fish caught, possessed, or landed.

(5) The possession limit on a vessel for halibut in the waters off the coast of Washington is the same as the daily bag limit. The possession limit on land in Washington for halibut caught in U.S. waters off the coast of Washington is two halibut.

(6) The possession limit on a vessel for halibut caught in the waters off the coast of Oregon is the same as the daily bag limit. The possession limit for halibut on land in Oregon is three daily bag limits.

(7) The possession limit on a vessel for halibut caught in the waters off the coast of California is one halibut. The possession limit for halibut on land in California is one halibut.

(8) [The Area 2A CSP will be published under a separate final rule that, once published, will be available on the NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region's website at http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/fisheries/management/pacific_halibut_management.html, and under FDMS Docket Number NOAA–NMFS–2014–0159 at www.regulations.gov.]

27. *Sport Fishing for Halibut—Area 2B*

(1) In all waters off British Columbia:^{10,11}

¹⁰ DFO could implement more restrictive regulations for the sport fishery, therefore anglers are advised to check the current Federal or Provincial regulations prior to fishing.

¹¹ For regulations on the experimental recreational fishery implemented by DFO check

(a) the sport fishing season will open on February 1 unless more restrictive regulations are in place;¹⁰

(b) the sport fishing season will close when the sport catch limit allocated by DFO, is taken, or December 31, whichever is earlier; and

(c) the daily bag limit is two halibut of any size per day per person.

(2) In British Columbia, no person shall fillet, mutilate, or otherwise disfigure a halibut in any manner that prevents the determination of minimum size or the number of fish caught, possessed, or landed.

(3) The possession limit for halibut in the waters off the coast of British Columbia is three halibut.^{10,11}

28. *Sport Fishing for Halibut—Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E*

(1) In Convention waters in and off Alaska:^{12,13}

(a) The sport fishing season is from February 1 to December 31.

(b) The daily bag limit is two halibut of any size per day per person unless a more restrictive bag limit applies in Commission regulations or Federal regulations at 50 CFR 300.65.

(c) No person may possess more than two daily bag limits.

the current Federal or Provincial regulations.

¹² NMFS could implement more restrictive regulations for the sport fishery or components of it, therefore, anglers are advised to check the current Federal or State regulations prior to fishing.

¹³ Charter vessels are prohibited from harvesting halibut in Area 2C and 3A during one charter vessel fishing trip under regulations promulgated by NMFS at 50 CFR 300.66.

(d) No person shall possess on board a vessel, including charter vessels and pleasure craft used for fishing, halibut that have been filleted, mutilated, or otherwise disfigured in any manner, except that each halibut may be cut into no more than 2 ventral pieces, 2 dorsal pieces, and 2 cheek pieces, with skin on all pieces.¹⁴

(e) Halibut in excess of the possession limit in paragraph (1)(c) of this section may be possessed on a vessel that does not contain sport fishing gear, fishing rods, hand lines, or gaffs.

(f) All halibut harvested on a charter vessel fishing trip in Area 2C or Area 3A must be retained on board the charter vessel on which the halibut was caught until the end of the charter vessel fishing trip as defined at 50 CFR 300.61.

(g) Guided angler fish (GAF), as described at 50 CFR 300.65, may be used to allow a charter vessel angler to harvest additional halibut up to the limits in place for unguided anglers, and are exempt from the requirements in paragraphs 2 and 3 of this section.¹⁴

(2) For guided sport fishing (as referred to in 50 CFR 300.65) in Regulatory Area 2C:

(a) The total catch allocation, including an estimate of incidental mortality (wastage), is 851,000 pounds (386.0 metric tons).

¹⁴ For halibut caught and retained as GAF, the charter vessel guide must immediately remove the tips of the upper and lower lobes of the caudal (tail) fin, and if the halibut is filleted, the entire carcass, with head and tail connected as a single piece, must be retained on board the vessel until all fillets are offloaded (50 CFR 300.65(c)(5)(iv)(G)). Additional regulations governing use of GAF are at 50 CFR 300.65.

(b) No person on board a charter vessel (as referred to in 50 CFR 300.65) shall catch and retain more than one halibut per calendar day.

(c) No person on board a charter vessel (as referred to in 50 CFR 300.65) shall catch and retain any halibut that with head on that is greater than 42 inches (107 cm) and less than 80 inches (203 cm) as measured in a straight line, passing over the pectoral fin from the tip of the lower jaw with mouth closed, to the extreme end of the middle of the tail, as illustrated in Figure 3.

(d) If the halibut is filleted, the entire carcass, with head and tail connected as a single piece, must be retained on board the vessel until all fillets are offloaded.¹⁴

(3) For guided sport fishing (as referred to in 50 CFR 300.65) in Regulatory Area 3A:

(a) The total catch allocation, including an estimate of incidental mortality (wastage), is 1,890,000 pounds (857.3 metric tons).

(b) No person on board a charter vessel (as referred to in 50 CFR 300.65) shall catch and retain more than two halibut per calendar day.

(c) At least one of the retained halibut must have a head-on length of no more than 29 inches (74 cm) as measured in a straight line, passing over the pectoral fin from the tip of the lower jaw with mouth closed, to the extreme end of the middle of the tail, as illustrated in Figure 4. If a person sport fishing on a charter vessel in Area 3A retains only one halibut in a calendar day, that halibut may be of any length.

(d) If the size-restricted halibut is filleted, the entire carcass, with head and tail connected as a single piece, must be retained on board the vessel until all fillets are offloaded.¹⁴

(e) A charter vessel on which one or more anglers catch and retain halibut may only make one charter vessel fishing trip per calendar day. A charter vessel fishing trip is defined at 50 CFR 300.61 as the time period between the first deployment of fishing gear into the water by a charter vessel angler (as defined at 50 CFR 300.61) and the offloading of one or more charter vessel anglers or any halibut from that vessel. For purposes of this trip limit, a charter vessel fishing trip ends at 11:59 p.m. (Alaska local time) on the same calendar day that the fishing trip began, or when any anglers or halibut are offloaded, whichever comes first.

(f) No person on board a charter vessel may catch and retain halibut on Thursdays between June 15 and August 31. Only GAF halibut, if authorized by 50 CFR 300.65, may be retained by charter vessel anglers in Area 3A on Thursdays between these dates.

(g) Charter vessel anglers may catch and retain no more than five (5) halibut per year on board charter vessels in Area 3A. Halibut that are retained as GAF, retained while on a charter vessel fishing trip in other Commission regulatory areas, or retained while fishing without the services of a guide do not accrue toward the 5-fish annual limit.

29. Previous Regulations Superseded

These Regulations shall supersede all previous regulations of the Commission, and these Regulations shall be effective each succeeding year until superseded.

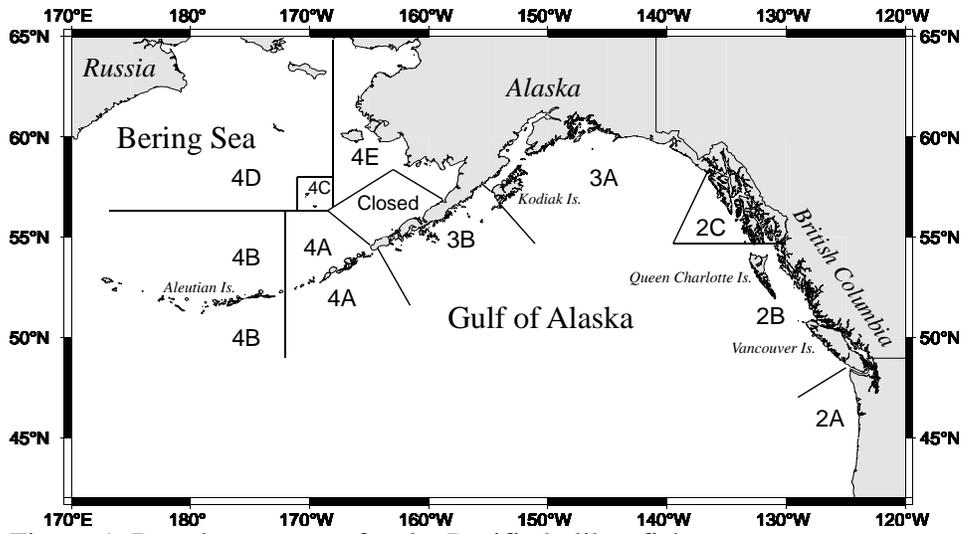


Figure 1. Regulatory areas for the Pacific halibut fishery.

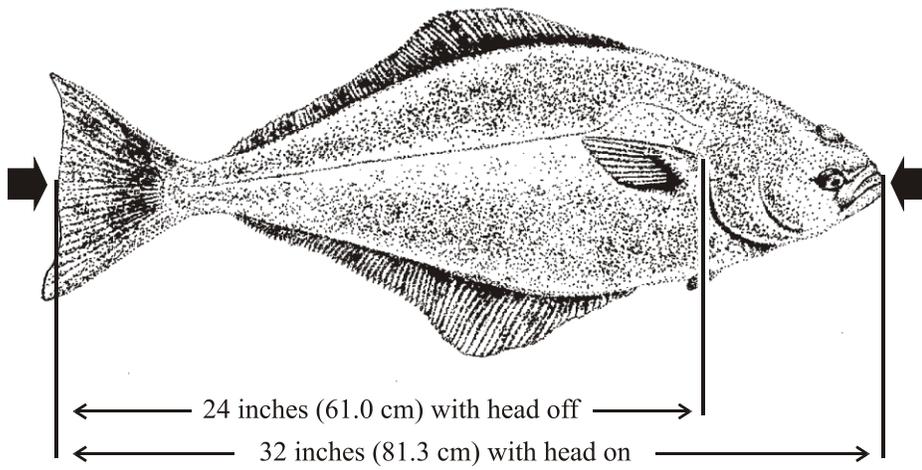


Figure 2. Minimum commercial size.

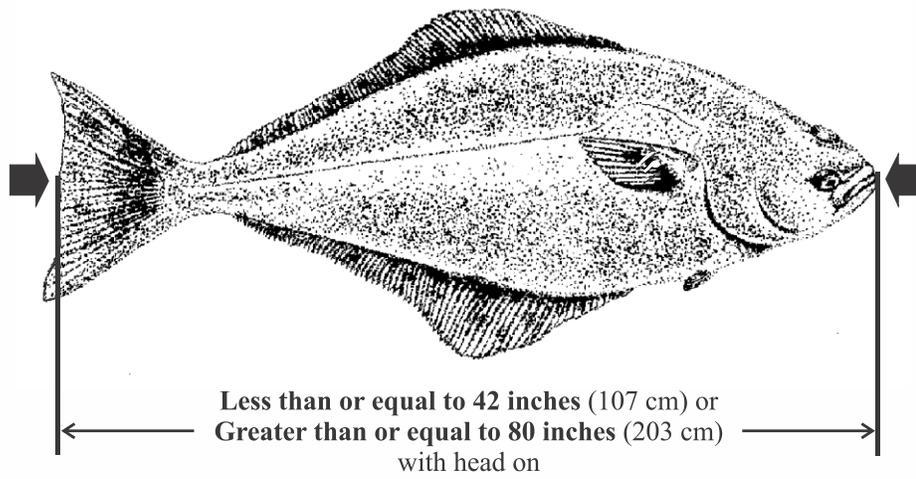


Figure 3. Recreational reverse slot limit for halibut on board a charter vessel referred to in 50 CFR 300.65 and fishing in Regulatory Area 2C (see Section 28 paragraph 2(c)).

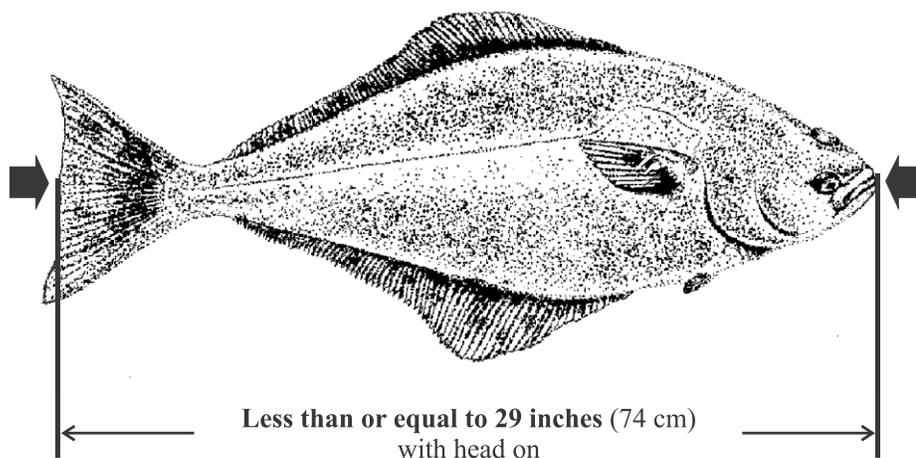


Figure 4. Recreational maximum size limit for one fish in two-fish bag limit for halibut on board a charter vessel referred to in 50 CFR 300.65 and fishing in Regulatory Area 3A (see Section 28 paragraph 3(c)). If only one halibut is retained, it may be of any size.

Classification

IPHC Regulations

These IPHC annual management measures are a product of an agreement between the United States and Canada and are published in the **Federal Register** to provide notice of their effectiveness and content. Pursuant to section 4 of the Northern Pacific Halibut Act of 1982, 16 U.S.C. 773c, the Secretary of State, with the concurrence of the Secretary of Commerce, may “accept or reject” but not modify these recommendations of the IPHC.

The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries finds that the otherwise applicable notice-and-comment and delay-in-effectiveness date provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act (APA), 5 U.S.C. 553(c) and (d), are inapplicable to these IPHC management measures pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(a)(1) because this regulation involves a foreign affairs function of the United States. Once accepted, the measures are non-discretionary and the additional time necessary to comply with the notice-and-comment and delay-in-effectiveness requirements of the APA would disrupt coordinated international conservation and management of the halibut fishery pursuant to the Convention. Furthermore, no other law requires prior notice and public comment for this rule. Because prior notice and an opportunity for public comment are not required to be provided for these portions of this rule by 5 U.S.C. 553, or any

other law, the analytical requirements of the Regulatory Flexibility Act, 5 U.S.C. 601 *et seq.*, are not applicable. Accordingly, no Regulatory Flexibility Analysis is required for this portion of the rule and none has been prepared.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 773 *et seq.*

Dated: March 11, 2015.

Samuel D. Rauch III,

Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2015-06041 Filed: 3/13/2015 04:15 pm; Publication Date: 3/17/2015]