



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Department of Fish and Wildlife

Charleston Field Office
63538 Boat Basin Dr.
P.O. Box 5003
Charleston, OR 97420
(541) 888-5515
FAX (541) 888-6860

Date: February 8, 2018

To: Chris Kern, ODFW Salem; Caren Braby, David Fox, Steve Rumrill and Troy Buell, MRP Newport

From: Scott Groth and Katie Gregory, MRP Charleston

Subject: Summary of Abalone permit holder input from January 2018 questionnaire.

To inform harvesters of management processes regarding Oregon's recreational abalone fishery and to solicit their input to shape the next steps, staff sent out a mailer and questionnaire to each abalone/scallop permit holder

Background:

Since 1996, ODFW has issued a free permit for recreational abalone harvest, information from that permit includes name and address. On January 1, 2018 the recreational abalone fishery was suspended until Commission can consider its future direction. Staff sent all recreational abalone permit holders from 2016 or 2017 a mailer, to inform on current situation and questionnaire and solicit their input (Appendix 1)

We asked permit holders two key questions 1) what management choice they prefer and 2) if they prefer "alternate fishery rules" which ones worked for them best. We used a ranking approach, then binned their responses into "support", "moderate" and "oppose" based on relative rank as they submitted them.

418 mailers were sent out, 358 made it to their destination

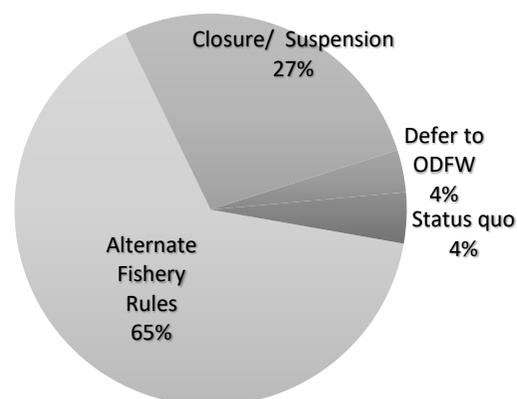
Results:

We received 122 of the 358 mailers back (40% response).

Preferred management approach:

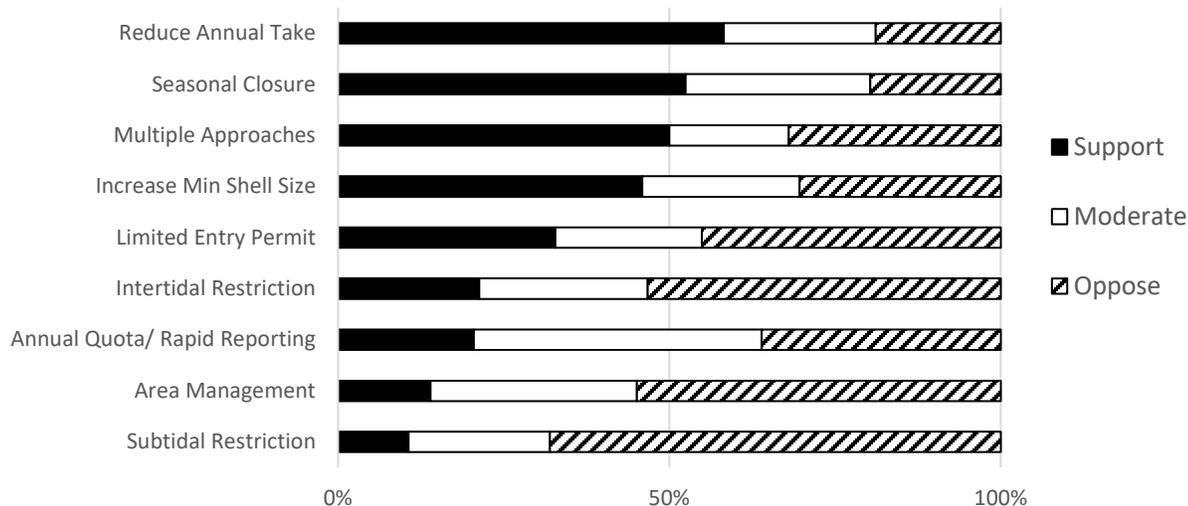
Regarding the "preferred management approach", given a choice between 1) fishery closure, 2) fishery suspension, 3) status quo and 4) alternate fishery rules; respondents strongly preferred (65%)

"Alternate Fishery Rules" (Figure 1), indicating the desire to continue the fishery with new rules to increase its sustainability. Fishery closure and suspension were combined given the similarity of their nature, a small number of respondents wrote in that they "defer to ODFW" choice.



Alternate Fishery Rules:

As anticipated, creation of new fishery rules to increase the fisheries sustainability was a very popular choice among respondents. For this reason, the second part of the question was to rank potential management options in order of preference. Respondents did not always follow the scoring system as presented, but did give clear feedback, we found it effective to categorize their responses into “support”, “moderate”, and “oppose” (Figure 2).



We found a strong preference to reducing annual take, seasonal closure, multiple approaches, and increased minimum shell size. Regarding multiple approaches, this became difficult to characterize since some folks “multiple approach” was a nearly opposite management strategy of someone else with the same selection.

We found strong opposition on a subtidal restriction, areas management, annual quota, and intertidal restriction.

Although staff explicitly stated the reasons why disallowing SCUBA would have no value in management and did not present it as one of the choices for ranking, it was written in quite often. To reiterate, the disallowance of SCUBA would not provide a deep water *de facto* reserve (the management value of CA rules), it is likely to increase bycatch mortalities (bar cuts), and sharply decreases the safety of the fishery.

Comments section:

At the end of the questionnaire, we left room for other comments. We received a tremendous amount of comments and attached them to the Commission exhibit as public correspondence.

Staff note:

Receiving these questionnaires back with their comments was impressive. We really appreciate the care and time permit holders took in responding to this questionnaire. Reading these, it became clear that respondents were passionate, had great amounts of expertise, and cared deeply for this resource and its fishery.

Appendix 1: ODFW mailer and questionnaire sent to each 2016 or 2017 abalone/scallop permit holder



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January 10, 2018

Dear 2016/2017 Oregon abalone/scallop permit holder,

Oregon's recreational red abalone (*Haliotis rufescens*) fishery is temporarily suspended. On March 16, 2018 Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) will bring this issue to Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (OFWC) for a decision on the future of the fishery. ODFW intends to bring four options to OFWC: a) Fishery Closure, b) Fishery Suspension, c) Status Quo, and d) Alternate Fishery Rules. Here, we are surveying your thoughts of which option is preferable, then soliciting your input to develop "alternate fishery rules" to provide as an option for Commission. Prior to submitting your input, we ask you consider the following information.

- 1) Oregon red abalone populations are extremely limited. The northern termination of the range of red abalone is in Coos Bay, OR and suitable habitats (shallow, protected kelp beds) within Oregon are rare, as a result they are only found in a few small areas. In 2015, ODFW performed subtidal belt transects (using similar methods as performed in California) to assess this population. Results of that survey indicated densities of 0.03 red abalone/m² along areas with ideal habitats. While densities are often low near range terminations, these densities were approximately 1/10th of levels expected to be sustainable (see California abalone management plan). As of 2015, Oregon red abalone populations were low density and possibly not sustainable.
- 2) Since 2015, warm waters have dominated the West Coasts nearshore ocean. Principally due to this warm water, kelp beds have been dramatically reduced, causing abalone starvation which lead to the sharply declined densities found in California abalone surveys. While surveys have not been conducted in Oregon in 2016 or 2017, kelp conditions are similarly reduced and evidence of abalone starvation has been found. We suspect that environmental changes have reduced red abalone populations in Oregon.
- 3) Over time, recreational abalone harvest and effort has increased. Since the inception of the permit in 1996, overall permit issuance and harvest has trended up steadily. In recent years, as neighboring California has reduced limits, Oregon permit issuance and harvest has accelerated. As California's robust fishery (>25,000 permits/year) is now suspended, we have seen a spike of interest for Oregon's boutique fishery (~300 permits/year).
- 4) Low pressure has been key to the persistence of Oregon's recreational red abalone fishery. To maintain this, managers have minimized the information and advertising for the red abalone fishery. With the closure of California's fishery and the easy access to trophy fishing information available in modern media, these methods are no longer tenable.

In summary, the problem we are facing today is a combination of 1) low abalone populations, 2) environmental factors reducing populations and 3) increased interest and harvest. In the past this may have been mitigated by low fishery pressure, this is no longer likely. Oregon's recreational red abalone fishery will change and we invite you to participate in its future direction.

Lastly, over many years, I've had a number of conversations with the participants of this fishery. I've enjoyed speaking with you; I admire (and share) your passion for this exciting fishery.

Based on these conversations, I'll offer that you please consider these ten points about abalone and their fisheries in order to best convey reasonable solutions for OFWC's consideration.

- 1) The most important abalone to a population are the ones in tight groups. This fundamental fact and its juxtaposition to fishing behavior is the root of many abalone fishery failures.
- 2) Abalones live long lives and reproduce episodically (i.e. reproductive failure is common).
- 3) Oregon has twice attempted hatchery supplementation of red abalone populations, both efforts were expensive, neither produced much effect. Future efforts aren't likely under the current budget.
- 4) Consider your personal skill in finding abalone when thinking of stock condition. For example if you are an expert and cannot find abalone we would be far beyond recovery. Sustainable fisheries operate on surpluses.
- 5) Poaching can be a serious problem and unenforceable fishery rules are not effective.
- 6) Many abalone fisheries have been attempted, few have had had any success.
- 7) Free dive only WILL NOT provide any *de facto* reserve to Oregon red abalone populations.
- 8) Limited fisheries (e.g. allowing a certain number of permits or overall harvest) are expensive to administer.
- 9) Unlimited fisheries (e.g. no limit to number of permits or overall harvest) are risky and offer NO assurances of sustainability.
- 10) If "Alternate Fishery Rules" can be found that allow continuation of a fishery it will only be by managers and harvesters working cooperatively with open minds.

Please take some time to fill in the enclosed questionnaire indicating your preferences for the various management options. Please return this questionnaire (blue copy) in the included stamped and addressed envelope, before Friday, January 26, 2018.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in brown ink that reads "Scott Groth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Scott Groth
Pink Shrimp/ South Coast Shellfish Project Leader
Marine Resources Program
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
P.O. Box 5003
Charleston, OR 97420

OREGON RECREATIONAL RED ABALONE FISHERY QUESTIONNAIRE

Preferred Management Approach (CIRCLE ONE):

Fishery Closure

Fishery Suspension (until _____)

Status Quo

Alternate Fishery Rules (Fill out below)

*see back for current rules

Preferred Alternate Fishery Rules (please rank your preferred options (1-9) / see back page for current ODFW regulations):

Rank (1 = most preferred option ... 9 = least preferred option)

| RANK | OPTION | MANAGEMENT APPROACH | POTENTIAL REGULATORY ACTIONS |
|------|--------|--------------------------------|---|
| | A | Seasonal Closure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close fishery during peak season for OR (e.g. Jun – Jul) |
| | B | Reduce Annual Take | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease annual take to 1, 2 or 3 per year |
| | C | Increase Minimum Shell Size | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase minimum shell size (e.g. 10") |
| | D | Annual Quota / Rapid Reporting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish annual quota (using surveys) Require notice to ODFW before and after harvest Close fishery when quota is met |
| | E | Subtidal Restriction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intertidal harvest only / Prohibit harvest in the subtidal zone |
| | F | Intertidal Restriction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prohibit harvest by picking along the shore in the intertidal zone |
| | G | Area Management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close high density areas |
| | H | Limited Entry Permit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restrict number of permits (e.g., 150 permits/year) Require payment for special permits at a reasonable level to offset fishery management costs (e.g. \$125.00) |
| | I | Multiple Approaches | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Various combinations of management approaches and regulatory actions, above (please specify on back) |

PLEASE MAIL BACK BEFORE FRIDAY, JANUARY 26 2018

Current ODFW Regulations for Recreational Abalone Fishery: Recreational harvest only; Annual Shellfish License required (open access); special permit required for abalone & scallops (free); daily limit of 1 abalone; possession limit of 1 abalone; annual limit of 5 abalone; annual catch record must be submitted to ODFW to receive permit for next year; abalone may only be taken with abalone iron, 8” minimum shell size; harvesters must carry a caliper with 8” fixed arms/gap; abalone must be brought ashore whole and in condition that size can be determined; abalone must not be removed from their shell in the field.

Note: The recreational scallop fishery is not affected by this process.

Comments: _____
